

JANUARY 2024



Dear Friends,

As I write this, 11 members and friends of FCCOL are preparing to fly to West Africa, where we will visit Ghana, Togo, and Benin. But depending on when you read this, those same individuals may already be on the ground in Ghana. It's an exciting adventure, one that many people at FCCOL have helped to support. But more than that, it opens a new chapter in our history of experiential education and global partnership. FCCOL has been to Africa, of course, but never to West Africa. Our visit grows out of our antiracist work over the past several years, as we seek a fuller understanding of the forces that have shaped the Americas, including New England and Old Lyme. But it also grows from a desire to celebrate and embrace the ritual and religious cultures that have emerged from West Africa, traditions that have upheld the humanity of a people facing immense struggles.

While in Ghana, we will be spending time at some of the old slaving forts on the coast, established by the Portuguese in the late 15th century, pre-dating Columbus' voyage across the Atlantic. We'll be considering the painful history of the Atlantic slave trade, thinking deeply about how that seismic reality continues to shape our world. Along the way, we'll have the opportunity to consider the story of Venture Smith, whose story began in Ghana in 1729. He was kidnapped at the age of 6 and sold into captivity. Soon, he was forced to endure the Middle Passage, where he was transported first to Barbados, and then to New England, where Stonington became the site of his enslavement. Venture Smith was one of the few enslaved individuals who was able to purchase his own freedom, thereafter working to purchase the freedom of the remainder of his family. They were all able to

live in East Haddam, CT, where they built a prosperous life for themselves. Venture Smith's story is one example among many of the ways our region of southern New England has been connected to Africa, and more specifically, to Ghana. In what other ways are those linkages still present? How was the culture of New England shaped by its ties to West Africa, and how much of the music, food, language, spirituality, dress, and movement that we take for granted in the United States emerged from the captives brought to these shores? How much of the justice work that continues to call for our attention, whether in questions of housing, health, prisons, a living wage, or education, to name but a few of the areas of need, emerge from the painful history that began on the shores of West Africa?

CONTINUE ON P. 5

HERE'S WHAT'S HAPPENING AT FCCOL

Diaper Bank Celebrates Xmas

Christmas came early for our guests. They were surprised and most grateful upon receiving a full case of diapers on December 2nd. The smiles didn't end there, however. A friend from Old Saybrook (Beth) offered to knit hats for our babies and toddlers. Over 30 hats, coming in an array of sizes, colors, and patterns made it difficult for our guests to choose their favorite gift. One guest instantly put this red and white striped hat on her toddler.



And yet another surprise, in addition to the staples of baby food and wipes, were the gift of books. A junior/senior youth group project provided a collection of nearly new books for our guest's selection. What a meaningful way to end our year, with the gifts of time and talent offered from unexpected sources.

In 2023, the Diaper Bank:

- Spent a little more than \$7,000 for the purchase of diapers and wipes.



- Received monetary donations (through 11/30) from members and friends in the amount of \$2500.
- Received individual diaper donations totaling 60 cases worth approximately \$2400.
- Received nearly 200 cases of baby food and 75 containers of baby cereal totaling? PRICELESS!
- Was generously supported by the Board of Missions and the Ladies Benevolent Society.

Babies served in 2023

Jan.	51
Feb.	48
March	68
April	85
May	97
June	95
Aug.	53
Sept.	41
Oct.	35
Nov.	48
Dec	38
Total	659

Diapers Distributed by Size

NB	6
1	41
2	78
3	114
4	149
5	105
6	69
7	55
3/4 PU	15
4/5 PU	6
5/6 PU	21
Total	659

A Wonderful Pageant!

Thank you to our extraordinary cast, crew and pageant director, Gavin Lodge. The FCCOL Christmas News Hour was a holy and unconventionally fabulous success!

Senior Choir Schedule

Tis the season for cooking

To all members of the Senior Choir - thank you for your wonderful singing in December especially on Christmas Eve!

Here is the January schedule:

Wednesday, January 3: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Sunday, January 7: Singing at the 10:00 am with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Wednesday, January 10: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Sunday, January 14: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Wednesday, January 17: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Sunday, January 21: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Wednesday, January 24: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Sunday, January 28: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Wednesday, January 31: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Many thanks to all,
Simon

Ladies Who Stitch (LWS)

After a brief and well-deserved holiday break, the LWS will be back at work on Monday, January 8th, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Sheffield Auditorium. The Partnership Shop, offering goods from Haiti, Palestine and Tribal Crafts, as well as our knitted, sewn and crafted creations, is open and we welcome visitors and shoppers during this time.

We had a very busy and productive December. The Partnership Shop was opened during the Elephants in Winter sale, December 2 & 3, then all four partners spread out into the Fellowship Hall for our Holiday Sale on December 9 & 10. We then remained open for business during three senior center lunches - December 12, 13 & 19.

Congratulations to our three raffle winners from the holiday sale:

- Mary Calabrese won the lighted cork Christmas Tree created by Nat Fogg
- Art Paris won the flannel/fleece Cozy Throw made by Mary Russell and Eunice Taylor
- Sue Frost won the felted wool pocketbook made by Lina Tuck and Maria Cunha

In addition to our normal activities, LWS facilitated the donation of multiple bags of winter clothing to the New London Homeless Hospitality Center and to the Alliance for Living. This clothing was the overflow from the young folks' Midnight Run clothing drive. Thanks to all of you who made such generous donations this year. We also donated two bins of yarn and more than two dozen crochet hooks to the Crosby Fund for Haitian Education. These will be used to teach children how to crochet - one of the activities offered during the summer camp session.

We wish you all a happy, peaceful and productive new year.

Questions: Please contact Eunice at eunicetaylor@me.com.

ANNUAL MEETING

On Sunday, January 28, at 11:15 am, the church will hold its annual meeting, during which, among other things, we will elect officers and board members, and approve the church budget for the coming year.

The "2023 Annual Report" available later in the month contains the agenda for the meeting and other informative materials. All Board and Committee chairs, please submit your annual reports by the deadline of Jan. 10.

The purpose of the annual meeting is to:

- receive the reports of the ministers, boards and committees, and church officers for the year 2024;
- receive and approve the report of the nominating committee;
- elect officers and board members for the coming year;
- approve the church budget for the year 2024; and
- conduct such other old or new business as shall properly come before the meeting.

Year-End Giving

We gratefully received 46 shares of Intel stock on 11/28/2023. We do not know who has sent in this gift. Kindly contact the Church office at (860) 434-8686 and leave a message for Bob or Julie to let us know if you have made this contribution. Thank you.

Angels Among Us

I'm writing this during the Christmas season, but it's really a letter of Thanksgiving on behalf of the Deacons to two of our church angels. We all bring many gifts to the church, but this is meant as a thank you to two of our members who have been a special help to the Deacons. Wendy Knight and Dave Roberts give so much of their time and talents each Sunday to help our fellowship hour hosts (Wendy) and our Deacons on Duty (Dave). Wendy can be found most Sundays in the kitchen and fellowship hall, helping to make sure we have enough snacks and supplies to serve during coffee hour, and if we don't, she manages to find them. Dave serves as a Deacon and usher every Sunday that he is able, and chances are he has greeted you each Sunday as you arrive. Wendy and Dave have made it their mission to greet and to serve on Sunday morning, and as Deacons, we are very grateful for their service.

Progressive Bible Study

Bible Study meets on Thursdays, 11-12 in the library.

Wanna read a great book in the New Year? The Bible is chock full of legendary characters, strange plot twists, tricksters and thieves, mystics and musicians as well as, the horror and the holy within its pages. How does it all end up and what's love got to do with it? We're making our way through Genesis and someday we'll get to the book of Revelation. Join us!

Epiphany Party

There is an Epiphany Party during Fellowship Hour on Sunday, January 7th. Cultures all over the world celebrate Three Kings Day and Epiphany. Bring a treat to share and a picture of someone or something that inspires you on the cusp of this new year!

The Old Lyme Ringers

The Old Lyme Ringers begin a new season of ringing at its first rehearsal on Wednesday, January 10, at 6:30 pm. We are a fun group of people who enjoy making music together. If you are interested, or know someone who might be interested, please send Gary Jungkeit an email at gjungkeit@charter.net. Both experienced and new ringers are encouraged to contact Gary!

Writing at the Well

We are an informal writing group that meets monthly at our church. Feel free to join us. No writing experience necessary just a willingness to explore on the page and go deeper with friends along the way. Our next session is Friday, January 12th 10:00-11:30.

I'm looking at a tree. Bare branches reaching up as in an Alleluia.

The light still finds a way to reflect off the branches empty of their leaves.

It is a softer reflection of light. One you have to look closely at and then, "oh, yes" I see it. It's different from the light on summer trees.

More stark, almost silent.

The tree knows of its changing beauty. Looking down on all of us gazing up at her. Searching. For what? She reveals her secrets to each as we lovingly gaze. Beauty, sorrow, loss, joy all rolled up into one great Alleluia as her branches reach for the sky, for the Sun, for life.

-MaryAnn Furlong, new Church member and Writer at the Well.

Sunday School

Happy New Year! We are excited to resume Sunday School again on Sunday, January 14th at our 10 am service. We will deepen our practice of welcoming all kinds of people and our understanding of what and who makes up a loving community. Our older students will be studying a new book called "Holy Troublemakers and Unconventional Saints." We'll be reminded that, "We are made of stories and stardust. We tell the stories of holy troublemakers and unconventional saints, people of faith who have worked for love, justice, and compassion, to inspire us, make us bold, and connect us to each other and the Love that makes us one."

Jolene Brant giving the Children's Message during on Homecoming Sunday.



Also, on January 14th, our Education Coordinator, Jolene Brant, along with other travelers, returns from the FCCOL West Africa Trip! We are very excited to learn from her about the three countries she will have visited (Ghana, Togo and Benin). Stay tuned!

Grief Group

Our monthly Grief Group will meet on January 24th 5-6 pm in the Hoag Parlor.

Memorial

Dick Buel

Interested in Confirmation?

Confirmation classes for 1st, 2nd or 3rd year high school students will begin on Sunday, January 28th from 4-6 pm. Classes will meet January-May and include field trips, films and a service project. Confirmation is offered every other year. For more information contact Laura at 860-304-9096 or lfitz.nager@gmail.com.

Church World Service Blanket Drive

The Ladies Benevolent Society will hold its annual Blanket Drive during the month of February and March. Special envelopes will then be available in the pews. We are hoping for an equally successful year ahead.

Save the Date

Walking in their Footsteps: A Civil Rights Learning Trip for Teens during April vacation. This is a 5-day journey. We'll fly round trip to Atlanta, Georgia and visit sights there and drive to Birmingham, Alabama among other places.

For more information, email Jolene Brant jnbrant2023@gmail.com or Laura Fitzpatrick-Nager at lfitz.nager@gmail.com.

The Sacred Bowl: How have your conversations been going?

"The Sacred Bowl matched us up, and we've met three times so far because we really like each other. We've chosen fun places to meet: outdoors in the garden at the Flo Gris, Ashlawn Farm for pumpkin spice latte, and at Lyme Library's Sweet Spot for music, mingling and more coffee. Seeing my new friend lightens my heart. Knowing I will see her again soon makes going to church even more fun!"

-Marcy Conway and Marta Cone

"Bill and I met over coffee and we clicked. We've met twice in person and even talked over the phone just sharing our lives and what we care about."

-A New, Old friend

DEAR FRIENDS, CONTINUED

Conversely, we'll also be considering the immense cultural and spiritual riches of the African continent. In Togo and Benin, in particular, we'll have the opportunity to study the tradition known as vodun. Enslavers, and later colonizers, sensed the power of that system, as captive and subject peoples relied upon its symbols to retain their dignity and humanity. And so enslavers began a long tradition of misrepresenting this indigenous practice, one that continues to this day in popular films. Our travelers will have the opportunity to consider these practices from a different vantage, seeing in them a healing tradition, a liberation tradition, a gorgeous aesthetic tradition, and a source of life wisdom every bit as powerful as that found in Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Furthermore, we shall have the chance to witness a civilization that is both ancient and modern, one with roots every bit as old as Greece or Rome, and every bit as inventive in its relationship to the modern world as the most cosmopolitan cities on the planet.

Throughout, questions of faith will be paramount: how might we understand the commonalities that are shared between the Psalms of David, say, and the rites of a Vodun community? How

might we understand the shared horizon of the way Jesus proclaimed and the codes practiced among those in the communities we shall visit? What is the relationship between the ecstasy of Spirit experienced by the first followers of Jesus and the ecstasy found in trance states among Vodun practitioners? How is the liberation proclaimed in later Christian theologies, among the poor of Latin America, related to the forms of healing and empowerment discovered among those living in West Africa? And how might this encounter change our own practice of spirituality?

We go to West Africa in order to deepen our understanding of the world we inhabit. We go in order to build bridges of shared humanity. And we go hoping to be transformed by what we shall encounter.

Thank you for supporting this endeavor. Pray for us as we travel. We'll do the same for you, and we'll look forward to sharing what we have learned upon our return.

Stay human...



Our travelers are: Kevin Booker, Jr, Jolene Brant, Lee Carpenter, Dana Dixon, Carleen Gerber, Lecia Harbison, Drew Johnson, Steve Jungkeit, Miriame Kazadi, Cathy Mathis, and Susan Switzer

Reading: *Homegoing*, by Yaa Gyasi; *In the Wake*, by Christina Sharpe; *Sweetness and Power*, by Sidney Mintz; *Teaching to Transgress*, by bell hooks; *Timaeus* and other dialogues, by Plato; *In a Dark Wood: What Dante Taught Me About Grief, Healing, and the Mysteries of Love*, by Joseph Luzzi; *Paradiso*, by Dante (canto by canto!); *Selected Poems of Wallace Stevens*.

Listening: *Ghana Special: Modern High Life Afro-Sounds* (compilation album); *Ghana Soundz* (compilation album); The Pogues, *If I Should Fall From Grace With God*; R.E.M. *Green*; Ambrose Akinmusire, *Owl Song*; Bach, *The Goldberg Variations*, performed by Glenn Gould.

Watching: *Africa's Great Civilizations*, with Henry Louis Gates (PBS); *Rome*, Season 2.

ENVIRONMENT



Rooted in the Future

I get a catalog from a tree company called Chief River Nursery, and I noticed that they offer American Chestnut seedlings! What's not to love about a baby tree of a struggling species? I'm in! After deciding where to put potentially 40-50' tall trees in our garden, I ordered three - they need two to produce seeds. I convinced a friend to order some as well.

What surprised me though, after I pressed 'Place Order', was how much more optimistic and anchored to the future I felt. Chestnuts are fast growing trees, approximately a foot a year under good conditions. Dave was concerned that they would shade our garden - a hard won light space near our house in the woods. I pointed out that by the time these trees were big enough to do that, we would likely be buried beneath them. And THAT was when I really felt I had made a tangible investment in our little section of the woods.

But still, I must be clear-eyed about the prospects for my little trees. While Chief River has an old orchard of unblighted, asymptomatic trees, the likelihood of my trees eventually becoming blighted is high. There is a tremendous amount of work that has been done to bring back this iconic Eastern US tree. I'm not deeply interested in all the details of this work, but if you are curious, google The American Chestnut Foundation, or even visit the little 50+ tree orchard started right here in Essex at their Crosslots park.

I'm just happy to try to diversify the offering for wildlife in our area and create pockets of suitable habitat for it. This includes the fruit trees and native understory trees and shrubs we have planted on the southern side of the space where we beat back the briars and carved out space for our vegetables. Who knows? Maybe someday this little patch will be a vibrant place for little mammals and birds and bugs! I'll keep you posted.

-Mariette Brown

GIVING MATTERS

2023/2024 Financial Update

We are projecting that the church's operating results for 2023 will close with our income and expenses balanced. This past year fully three-quarters, or 75% of our income came from individual pledges and offerings for which we are profoundly grateful. And our contributors continue to increase their generosity. The average pledge for the 2023 stewardship campaign was \$1,912, and so far for the 2024 campaign that has increased to \$2,157. This generosity is not only heartwarming, but very important!

However, our TOTAL revenue for this year was substantially augmented by using remaining funds from the government Payroll Protection Plan 2021/2022 forgiven loans, and from transfers from our balance sheet and earlier anonymous contributions. These sources of additional revenue are not repeatable and will not be available in 2024. Therefore, we are currently projecting a substantial operating deficit for next year. Currently your Boards of Trustees and Stewardship and the Treasurer are working hard to find ways to close this gap.

As a result we are asking all of our members and friends to help with additional contributions or increased pledges for 2024. We need everyone who is able, to "step up", so we can continue the vital missions and ministries of our church.

Thank you everyone for supporting our church!

Bob McCracken, Treasurer

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF OLD LYME

Staff

The Rev. Dr. Steven R. Jungkeit, Senior Minister (860-434-8686)
The Rev. Laura Fitzpatrick-Nager, Senior Associate Minister (860-304-9096)
The Rev. Carleen R. Gerber, Associate Minister (860-304-2070)
Simon D. Holt, Director of Music (860-705-3037)
The Rev. David W. Good, Minister Emeritus
The Rev. Rebecca T. Crosby, Minister for Haitian Outreach
Rebecca A. Francisco, serves as minister to the South Lyme Union Chapel.

Jolene Brant, Director of Christian Education/Junior & Senior Pilgrim Fellowship Leader
Rachael Jungkeit, Director of Children's Music
Robert McCracken, Church Administrator
Paige Pugliese, Church Office Manager
Julie Mardjekaj, Bookkeeper
Sean McCarty, Sexton

Church Office Tel: 860-434-8686
Fax: 860-434-1135
e-mail: fccol@fccol.org
Website: www.fccol.org

Sunday Worship - 10:00 a.m.
South Lyme Union Chapel Worship - 9:00 a.m.

Counseling and Psychotherapy Tel: 860-434-3813
Cary Walker, LCSW

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF OLD LYME,
Member U.C.C.

The reproduction of our Meetinghouse on the back is from a sketch by William Steeves

NEW CHURCH OFFICE MANAGER

We regret to announce that as the end of 2023 Odile Delehant will be leaving her position as Church Office Manager. Odile has been with us for more than four years. During that time she has not only done an exceptional job with the traditional office manager duties, but has contributed well beyond. She has brought new sophistication and capabilities to our digital and online presences, including updating our new website, instituting our capability to livestream our services and other functions for members at home, producing and sending a weekly email to over 400 members and friends, and she has brought new creativity to our monthly newsletter. We will miss her very much.

We are pleased to announce that we have offered the position to Paige Pugliese. Paige resides in New London and brings with her a wealth of experience and capabilities for the position. She also has an engaging personality, and I am sure all our members and friends will enjoy getting to know her. Paige will officially begin her duties on January 16th, right in the middle of one of the busiest months of the year!

Fond farewell and best wishes to Odile, and welcome to Paige!

Bob McCracken, Church Administrator

**THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
2 FERRY ROAD
OLD LYME, CONNECTICUT 06371**

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The next Newsletter will be for February; deadline is January 17.

Please e-mail the church office at fccol@fccol.org if you want to be removed from the newsletter mailing list and read it on the website. Please let us know if you would like an e-mail alert when the new issues are available on our website. Thanks for your help!

