

MARCH 2025



An image of the Virgin of Caridad del Cobre. Travelers to Cuba will be visiting the Basilica dedicated to her, a manifestation of both the Virgin Mary and the Afro-Cuban deity Ochun. The Basilica is one of the holiest sites in Cuba.

Dear Friends,

Nearly two decades ago, I had the opportunity to visit Cuba for the first time with a small group of Presbyterian travelers. We stayed at a seminary in Matanzas, about 50 miles east of Havana. Everyone welcomed us warmly, and we learned about the differences between churches there and in the United States. We heard about how the US embargo, which at that point had been in place for nearly 45 years, had debilitated the lives of ordinary people on the island (“the embargo is a sin,” one pastor told us). We were exposed to the Afro-Cuban religious expressions practiced in Matanzas and elsewhere, practices which, even then, spoke to me. And, from one of the seminary professors, I heard a phrase that I have never forgotten. “We know we have problems in Cuba. We just don’t want your problems in the United States.”

What I took from his words was something I have sensed when visiting our partnership communities around the world, from Palestine to Haiti and beyond. Though materially poor, the people in such places are rich in spirit and culture. By contrast, though materially rich, we in the US tend to be impoverished in matters of spirit and culture. Challenges and difficulties flow from both directions - having too much and having too little - but it was telling to me that of the two, this professor preferred the challenges Cuba was then facing to those we in the US were dealing with.

The intervening years have only heightened those problems - both for Cuba and for the US. Cuba faces grinding poverty and widespread food insecurity, which has prompted a massive exodus of their population over the

HERE'S WHAT'S HAPPENING AT FCCOL



Senior Choir Schedule

To all members of the Senior Choir - Thanks for all your wonderful singing in February!

Here is what March's schedule is looking like:

Sunday, March 2: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Wednesday, March 5: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

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

Wednesday, March 12: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Sunday, March 16: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Wednesday, March 19: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Sunday, March 23: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Wednesday, March 26: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Sunday, March 30: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Many thanks and best wishes to all,
Simon

Handbell Notes

The Old Lyme Ringers have been busy during this past month as they have been preparing music for March 2 and the 30th. The first Sunday of the month happens to be the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. It seems rather appropriate that we ring something joyful before the somber six weeks prior to Easter. We will call the day Mardi Gras Sunday as we ring "Rondo Jubilate" (pronounced *you-bi-lah-tay*) by Douglas Wagner. Our own Simon Holt will accompany on the organ. The piece is joyful and very uplifting!

On March 30, the handbell ringers will be playing "Meditation on Beautiful Savior" by Cathy Moklebust. As the title suggests, the piece is meditative but is a familiar hymn tune ("Fairrest Lord Jesus") that everyone will recognize. Happy listening!

Children's Handbell Choir

The children and youth ringers recently took on the name of ReBELLion, after a vote among themselves. They just didn't want to have the generic name of the Children and Youth Bell Choir (ugh!). After their debut performance in worship in late February,

they are preparing a spirited number for Palm Sunday, April 13. These kids are fantastic, and are some of the most musically talented and intelligent young people with whom this writer has ever worked. They impress me week after week!

Ladies Who Stitch (LWS)

February inspired a few new creations from our talented team. They include: embroidered bookmarks, birthday crowns, special potholders, Easter egg bunnies, crocheted bunnies, fancy neckwear, zippered pouches, Guardian Angels, clothes pin recipe holders, bags featuring frogs, fabric/rope baskets, casserole cozies, and new versions of some of our "regulars." They include new scarves, mittens, hats, pot holders, as well as quilts, sweaters, hats and socks for babies. Three vintage/antique quilt items have been donated to us - an embroidered crib quilt, a full-size antique Star quilt, and a full-size antique Double Wedding Ring quilt top. Everything is available in the Partnership Store and will be on display during the first spring LBS luncheon on March 11th.



The **FCCOL Partnership Store**, across from the Fellowship Hall, features goods from Palestine, Haiti, and Tribal Crafts as well as creations from Ladies Who Stitch. We call it guilt-free shopping since all proceeds go directly to the artisans, or to FCCOL outreach missions. LWS opens the Partnership Store on Sundays after the service, Mondays during our working hours, Wednesday around choir practice, and during most large in-house FCCOL activities. Call the church office 860.434.8686 during working hours, eith Sean or Anne can let you in the store.

Ladies Who Stitch regularly meet on Mondays from 10:00 a.m - 2:00 pm in the Sheffield Auditorium
Visitors, shoppers, and potential new members are always welcome.

Questions: Contact Eunice via email (eunicetaylor@me.com) or stop by on a Monday.

Ladies Benevolent Society Luncheon

Stand up against the cold and icy snow of winter and come join us for some fellowship, delicious food, and an entertaining and heartwarming program at the Ladies Benevolent Society luncheon on Tuesday, March 11th from noon to 2pm. Our chef will be serving a hearty meal of baked spiral ham, sweet potato & apple casserole and seasonal vegetable.....followed by gingerbread. What could be more perfect!

Our first luncheon program of the year begins at 1pm, and, well, here's a story for you! About ten years ago, letters were discovered here in Old Lyme and later gifted to the Old Lyme Historical Society. Based on these writings a children's book, Letters to Popa, was published in 2024. Edie Twining, who illustrated the book with computer designed watercolors and edited the text, will be speaking and presenting her illustrations. The book itself will be read aloud during the program by Mary Bradford.

Suggested donation for the luncheon and program is \$5 per person, plus a nonperishable food item for our food bank or a package of disposable diapers for our diaper bank. If you plan to join us at the luncheon, please call the FCCOL office at (860) 434-8686 by Friday, March 7th to make a reservation so we can be sure to have enough food prepared for all to enjoy.

God's Neighborhood

Food brings people together on all different levels. It's nourishment of the soul and body; it's truly love.
~Giada De Laurentiis

We are so happy to be working with our youth downstairs at church! And in this month of March, we will be working to help our students understand the significance of food and fellowship in the Bible and practice acknowledging and celebrating the ways God provides for us with resources and community.

Mealtimes are great opportunities to remember our connections to one another and practice gratitude for the nurturing food and fellowship that we share with one another. Jesus often teaches in parables and stories that have meaning in our daily lives. Paying attention to our food and the process of growing, harvesting, transporting, and preparing it reminds us that we are part of a global community. Fellowship helps us practice being attentive and present with those around us.

God's Neighborhood is also collecting donations for FCCOL's trip to Cuba from March 11-21st. We're hoping families can assist us in gathering pens, colored pencils, crayons, small writing notebooks and vitamins for children and adults that can be easily packed to add to the list of supplies needed. Thank you!

Additionally, we'll be celebrating International Women's History Month by featuring women from our congregation and community who will offer our Children's Messages. We'll also host special guests in God's Neighborhood throughout the month.

Sunday, March 2nd, Mardi Gras Breakfast, from 8:30 -9:30 am. Join us for our annual Mardi Gras breakfast celebration at FCCOL. Our Middle and High Schoolers will be making breakfast (pancakes anyone?) for our congregation with the assistance of Chef Phil Brant. This annual celebration is also a way for them to raise donations for scholarships for upcoming trips to Ellis Island in April and our trip to Green Grass, South Dakota (June 21st-June 26th). Planning is underway for both of these journeys. Email Jolene for details and to sign up to help.

Sunday, March 9th: Jesus often taught in parables and stories. We'll read and act out two parables from the gospel of Luke. During Jesus' ministry, he explained that the kingdom of God was like a large dinner party where everyone had a place at the table and plenty to eat. Using reader's theater and other games (like musical chairs), we'll act out different stories from the gospels and then share a special snack together. How does it feel to be invited to sit at the best seat at a lunch table? Have you ever been ignored and no one saved you a seat at the table?

Saturday, March 22nd: Sharing Humanity Night (Formerly "Box Night"). Our Middle and high schoolers are invited to sleep overnight on the church lawn and also host a guest who will share their experience of being without shelter. We'll assemble toiletry kits for the Homeless Hospitality Center, share a meal and watch a movie together. The next morning, we'll have breakfast and attend church at 10 am to share our experience during the service.

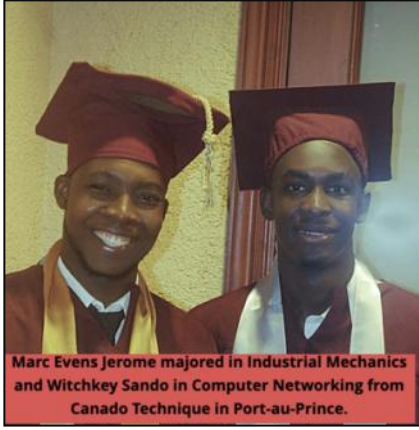
Sunday, March 23rd: We'll have breakfast as a group and attend church at 10 am to share our experience of Sharing Humanity night and learning about the challenges of being without a home during the service.

Sunday, March 30th: Food and fellowship are two things youth already know how to do well. Youth, however, may not be intentional about their practices around food or their socialization habits. We will work with them on centering themselves on the practical and physical aspects of food and fellowship, hoping that it will resonate with them as they become more aware of these daily aspects of their lives.

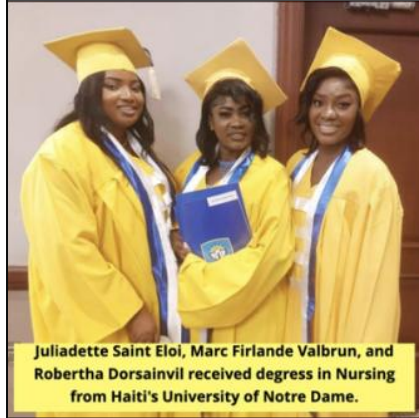
Memorials

Michellee Speirs

The Crosby Fund for Haitian Education



Marc Evens Jerome majored in Industrial Mechanics and Witchkey Sando in Computer Networking from Canado Technique in Port-au-Prince.



Juliadette Saint Eloi, Marc Firlande Valbrun, and Robertha Dorsainvil received degrees in Nursing from Haiti's University of Notre Dame.

To our church community, so supportive of our work in Haiti, we would like to share some happy news. Despite the ongoing gang violence plaguing much of the country, we are happy to announce that twelve of our scholarship students recently earned university and technical school degrees in Medicine, Accounting, Nursing, Industrial Mechanics, Computer Studies, and Medical Tech. In difficult times like these, your generous support continues to bring a brighter future for these hard working young people and their families. With sincere pride and admiration, we would like to present:

Johnson Estinvil, KIPES Institute, Computerized Accounting.
Nerlande Sidort, Jeanne Mance Nursing School in Port-au-Prince
Cidort Marise, Université Bon Samaritain, Medical Laboratory
Valeus Julio, Université Bon Samaritain, Medical Laboratory
Ermithe St. Pierre, École Supérieure, Laboratory Technology
Juliadette Saint Eloi, University of Notre Dame (Haiti), Nursing
Marc Firlande Valbrun, University of Notre Dame (Haiti), Nursing
Robertha Dorsainvil, University of Notre Dame (Haiti), Nursing
Eddy Philius, Université Nissage Saget, Education
Marc Evens Jerome, Canado Technique, Industrial Mechanics
Witchkey Sando, Canado Technique, Computer Networking

Congratulations to all the new graduates!
 As always, and with profound gratitude, we thank you for your support.



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE



Church Service Blanket Drive

CWS was founded in 1946 and is a ministry of 37 Christian denominations, providing compassionated emergency assistance to people who have been affected by disasters from hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, floods and by destitution. CWS does not only provide blankets. In 2024, CWS aside from 27,275 blankets, provided 26,436 kits such as emergency cleanup buckets, school and baby kits, welcome backpacks and hygienic kits. Thanks to our generous congregation, LBS has donated thousands of blankets over the decades. Each blanket costs only \$10. Please make your checks payable to LBS, indicating in the memo space "Blanket Drive," CWS envelopes are available in the pews and can be put in the offering plates or sent to the Church c/o LBS.

Adult Forum Presentation, Let's Get Together by the Wheel Life Theater Troupe

From the Legacy Theater, Branford, CT. Sunday, March 23rd from 11:30-12:15. *Let's Get Together* is an original piece of devised theatre, written and performed by the Wheel Life participants. A show about the evolution of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the brave people in the '80s and '90s who brought it to pass, this entertaining and thought-provoking production boldly looks at how we can all "get together" to improve each other's quality of life -- today and always. Directed by Julie Fitzpatrick (Laura's sister).



DANTE'S PARADISO

On Maundy Thursday, April 17th, we will return to Dante for the third and final part of *The Divine Comedy* - the *Paradiso*. It's an often overlooked and under read section of the poem, as many readers have preferred the creative torments of the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*. But it's actually a beautiful and moving finale to the entire poetic journey - and it's loaded with theological and psychological, as well as social and political insights. Where the *Inferno* demonstrates the violent disorder that besets human lives and societies governed solely by self-interest, and the *Purgatorio* demonstrates what it is to heal from those disorders, the *Paradiso* is bold enough to imagine what flourishing human lives and communities might look like, refracted through the lens of a Divine love.

As in previous years, we'll be reading the entirety of the poem aloud on Maundy Thursday, following our traditional service. We'll begin at 7, and continue well into the night. Individual readers are encouraged to sign up for particular cantos. There are 33, and so we'll need 33 readers. If we have more, some cantos may be shared. Like the previous two years, commemorative posters will be made for the occasion.

The last two years, Prof. Peter Hawkins has guided our efforts. This year we're going to try something different. For seven weeks leading up to Maundy Thursday (and perhaps one or two weeks afterwards - depending on how quickly we read) those who are interested are invited to read and discuss the *Paradiso* together. We'll try to do three or four cantos per session, touching down on some of the highlights within each section. It is a theological, poetic, and a moral education, all in one.

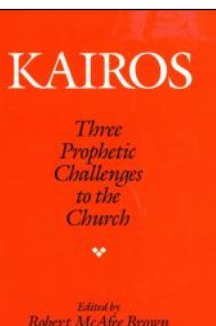
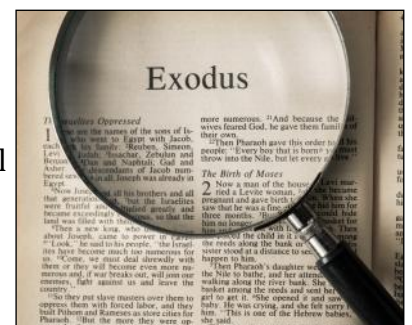
Those sessions will begin on Monday, February 24th, at 6:00, lasting for an hour or so each time. We'll meet in the church library, unless we find a better place. The schedule will look like this:

Feb. 24, March 3, March 10, March 17 (no meeting - Steve's in Cuba!), March 24, March 31, April 7, April 14.

There are any number of worthy translations. The Hollander translation is a favored one, but a brand new edition from Michael Palma has just been released, and it's reputed to be one of the best. But Mandelbaum, Singleton, Musa, Durling/Martinez or any number of others are also great. For supplemental materials, Peter Hawkins' *Dante's Testaments* is highly recommended, as is his lecture on the *Paradiso* found in *Undiscovered Country*. Another brand new resource is a history of the *Commedia* and its influence on the world, written by Joseph Luzzi: *Dante's Divine Comedy: A Biography*.

Adult Bible Study: "Goodness, Greed and Grace: Join us as we will begin reading the Book of Exodus

Curious about what we do in Bible Study? Wondering about the problem of evil and where the heck God might be found on any given day? Bible Study will be every Thursday at 11:00 am in the Hoag Parlor and on Zoom. Email:



Reading the South African Kairos Document

Members and friends are invited to gather for a reading and study group of the South African Kairos Document with Steve. Written at the height of the apartheid struggles in South Africa in 1985, this brief theological statement remains stunningly relevant. We'll meet every Thursday (except March 13th and 20th) at 12:00 noon, in the Hoag Parlor, immediately after the weekly Bible study. Copies of the Document will be available in the church Narthex, on the table at the bottom of the stairs between the Meetinghouse and the Fellowship Hall, and in the church office. Email: fccol@fccol.org for the zoom link.

(continued from the cover)

past two years. The most reliable estimates are that Cuba has lost nearly 18% of its population in those two years alone. Meanwhile, in the US, social inequality, an unraveling civic sphere and a libertarian ethos have produced a far right government breathing threats against even its closest allies.

Gestures of goodwill, friendship, support, and solidarity are therefore crucial in this newly hostile world order. While the United States government is in a full state of withdrawal from international commitments, most notably in regard to USAID and to NATO, it seems likely that it will now fall upon smaller organizations, like relief organizations and churches, to establish and maintain some sense of international alliance. Even as the US reneges on its wider commitments, places like FCCOL - together with a good many others - will be called upon to step into that gap. I would hope that the UCC, the Presbyterians, and a good many other denominations, might find ways to partner in order to meet those urgent needs.

In that spirit, from March 11-21, members and friends of FCCOL will be visiting the eastern portion of Cuba, Oriente, where we will explore communities shaped by Haitian culture. It's a way of retaining our strong commitment to Haiti, and to the gifts that Haiti has given to the world, from its emancipatory revolution to its religion, music, dance, food, and visual culture. We'll be exploring some of the African rituals, ceremonies and lifeways that continue to be practiced in that part of Cuba, building upon what we learned in Africa one year ago. And we'll be thinking about the ways these traditions are connected to southern New England, and to our community in Old Lyme.

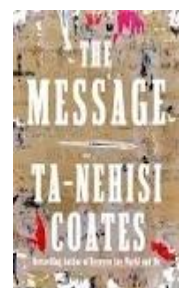
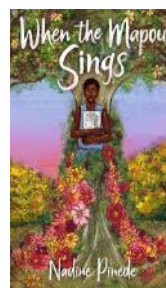
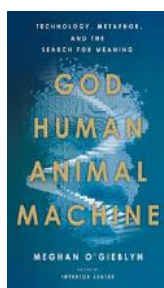
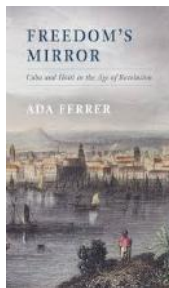
But it's also necessary to respond to the material needs of Cuba. In particular, there is a need for medical supplies and over the counter pharmaceuticals, which are simply unavailable on the island, largely because of the embargo. Our travelers have been asked to pack those supplies with the rest of their luggage. And this is where you come in.

Below, you can find a list of medical supplies that we would like to carry with us. If you have the means and you're able, would you consider purchasing one or more of these items? It's a little like making donations to the Food Pantry, though with different purchases. You simply pick up a little extra at the store, and then drop it in the church office for our travelers. Some of the items have Amazon links that Anne can supply if you contact the church office.

This is a small but meaningful way that we in the US can demonstrate our goodwill. It's a gesture that feels ever more necessary in our fragile world, though it's one that we at FCCOL have practiced for a while now.

Say a prayer for us as we travel. Say a prayer for Cuba, and for Cubans. Say a prayer for Haitians, and for Palestinians. Say a prayer for everyone struggling to find a way forward in this violent and militarized world. Say a prayer for us all.

And stay human.



Reading: *Freedom's Mirror*, by Ada Ferrer; *Sense and Sensibility* (slowly!) by Jane Austen; *God, Human, Animal, Machine*, by Meghan O'Gieblyn; *When the Mapou Sings*, by Nadine Pinede; *Everyone Who Is Gone Is Here*, by Jonathan Blitzer; *I Heard Her Call My Name*, by Lucy Sante; *The Message*, by Ta-Nehisi Coates; *Paradiso* (selections), by Dante; *Capital Vol. 1* (selections), by Karl Marx.

Listening: MJ Lenderman, *Manning Fireworks*; Waxahatchee, *Tiger's Blood*; John Coltrane, *Ascension* and *Interstellar Space*.

Watching: *Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat*; *Anora*; *Triangle of Sadness*; *Dahomey*; *American Fiction*; *Conclave*.

Convergence Workshop

Our church is ready to take the next step to help determine our future and we'd like you to be part of the process.

On Saturday, March 1, from 9:30 am till noon, we will be holding a workshop in the Sheffield Auditorium that will help our congregation visualize the ministries, outreach efforts and issues that we will focus on in the next five years. Light refreshments will be served including lots of coffee.

The workshop is open to all congregation members – and we'd love to have you participate. The workshop will be facilitated by Rev. Gregg Carson from Convergence, the consulting firm we engaged to help our church thrive. Gregg previously updated us on the Convergence work at a November adult forum, and this is a next step in the process.

The goal of the workshop is to help our congregation articulate a clear, concrete vision of how we can best position our church to meet the needs of our members and our Old Lyme community.

Next Week Adult Forum with Convergence

Our adult forum, next week March 2nd, will be a second presentation by Gregg Carlson from the consulting firm Convergence. He will bring us up to date on the work that has been done since his last visit, along with some recommendations for moving forward. We hope many can attend.

Trans Parent Group

For Parents, Caregivers and Family Members of Trans Youth/Young Adults: Our group will provide conversation, support community and education for parents and caregivers around the issues of transgender, nonbinary, and gender-diversity. Join us for an informational meeting held at FCCOL on Wednesday, March 19th at 5:30 in the Hoag Parlor. For more information email us at: fccol@fccol.org.

Writers at the Well

Friday, March 28th at 10:00 am. Join us as we meet once a month to write pages together and share our spiritual journeys as we go. Using informal writing prompts, participants give voice to memories and the stories that make up our lives. No writing experience necessary...just a willingness to pay attention and tap into the wellspring. Meeting in the Hoag Parlor.

Grief Group

This monthly support group is for those who have lost a loved one and those struggling with other losses. Next meeting: Wednesday, March 26th from 5:00-6:00 pm in Hoag Parlor.

2025 Stewardship Campaign Update

Our 2025 campaign, which provides the financial resources for the church to operate every year, is nearing the "home stretch." So far, we have received 255 generous commitments totaling \$585,604 which is very close to our goal of \$600,000. Last year we received 280 commitments. So, we would very much appreciate, for those who have not yet made a commitment to come forward. We would very much like to exceed the goal this year, so that we don't have to rely on a contribution from our Endowment Fund, which we needed to do last year. If you have not yet made a commitment, and/or have misplaced your commitment card, please call the office (860-434-8686) and we will make sure you get one. You can also give us your commitment over the phone.

From your Treasurer, Bob McCracken

Walt's Pottery at FCCOL.

Are you interested in throwing clay on the wheel and getting into some mud up to your elbows? Join instructor, Paul Fitzpatrick-Nager, on Tuesday evenings starting March 11th-April 8th! Open to adults of all levels. Tuesdays 6:00-8:30. Seating is limited.

Cost \$175 plus materials (scholarships available)

Email pfitz.nager@gmail.com to register

Environmental Committee

How are y'all doing?

There is so much anxiety-producing news right now - the onslaught feels like a firehose most days. How are we coping? I am by focusing on one or two areas so I don't get so overwhelmed. We can't be the *whole* fire department! But we do need everyone's help- even if you feel like you're in the bucket brigade.

It is important to remember that all issues are important, and intertwined. At this point, it looks like it will be a long haul. We have to marshall our resources, which includes our capacity to continue working, (aka not burning out). It's permissible to let go of some things in favor of something you care about more. Please trust that others are working on the secondary issue just as passionately as you are working on yours. I believe I am more effective devoting my energies to one or two things instead of frazzing over everything.

I'm also coping by seeking the support of friends and community. There is wonderful energy among friends - which is why it's good to join up with others working on the issue(s) you care about. It can be exhausting to build something from scratch. The strategy of the moment is to join forces with an existing organization, and pitch in. We have an amazing supportive community in this church - which embodies the future I believe many of us are working toward. We may not get to see it, but we are planting the seeds and tending them now so they will grow into the future we wish for *all* of creation.

I've heard it said, and freely repeat: "you can't do it alone, but we can't do it without you!"

And finally, I'm reading encouraging books: I recently finished Jeremy Lent's *Web of Meaning* - highly recommend! Also reading Joanna Macy's reissued *Active Hope* -reimagined for 2022 - and recommend a compilation of essays edited by Rebecca Solnit and Thelma Young Lutunatabua called *Not Too Late*.

Hang in there! -Mariette Brown, for the Env Comm.

White Elephant Sale – 2025

This is just a note to give you the dates of the sale and a calendar for those planning other summer activities. This year's sale days are Friday **July 11** and **Sat July 12** which are a week later because July 4th would have fallen during set-up days causing a scheduling conflict. Intake begins **on June 26th** and lasts six days.

This is our 87th WES which began back in the 1930's. It has been a great success over the years thanks to the support of all the volunteers and ones that donated. Last year we had the **Best 2 day sales ever** topping \$101,000 + and are looking forward to making this year even better.

For those who want to help, there are plenty of opportunities from set-up, intake, sorting, selling and cleanup. It's a great time and you'll meet some real nice folks. If interested, please call the church 434-8686 or any one of the following board members.

Nathalie Fogg: 451-8460, Anita Allen: 227-6850, Roxie Gallagher: 227-4649,
Bob Davis: 884-7568, Jane Marolda: 859-2497

Musical Masterworks Concert at FCCOL

March 22nd, Saturday at 5pm and March 23rd, Sunday at 3pm. The piano was an ideal instrument for Wadsworth's role because it could easily embrace any number or variety of the magnificent instrumental friends he'd invite to the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme. But in March, we will bask in the glory of the piano as a solo instrument, with works by Schubert and Bach as golden-circle-spun by pianist Inon Barnatan, who stunned and delighted in Season 32.



ARC BLOOD DRIVE

There will be an American Red Cross Blood Drive at the First Congregation Church of Old Lyme on Thursday, March 6th, 2025, from 1:00 pm - 6:00 pm.

Donors will receive a \$10 Gift Card by email & successful donations get A1C testing. This is a test for pre-Diabetes and Diabetes

Please see the link below to make an appointment before arriving.

<https://www.redcrossblood.org/give.html/donation-time>

MARCH 2025 CALENDAR

- Food Pantry and Diaper Bank** *Saturday, March 1st at 8:30 am* in Fellowship Hall.
- Workshop with Convergence** *Saturday, March 1st at 9:00 am* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Task Force Meeting** *Sunday, March 2nd at 11:30 am* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Mardi Gras Youth Group Brunch** *Sunday, March 2nd starting at 8:30am* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Adult Forum with Convergence** *Sunday, March 2nd at 11:30 am* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Ladies Who Stitch** *Monday, March 3rd at 10:00 am* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Dante Paradiso Reading Discussion Group** *Monday, March 3rd at 6:30 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Handbell Ringers Rehearsal** *Wednesday, March 5th at 5:30 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Ash Wednesday Service** *Wednesday, March 5th at 6:30 pm* in the Meetinghouse.
- Senior Choir Rehearsal** *Wednesday, March 5th at 7:30 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Bible Study** *Thursday, March 6th at 11:00 am* in the Library.
- Reading the South African Kairos Document** *Thurs, March 6th at 12:00 pm* in the Library.
- ARC Blood Drive** *Thursday, March 6th from 1:00 pm -6:00 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Children's Handbell Choir** *Thursday, March 6th at 4:15 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Food Pantry** *Saturday, March 8th at 8:30 am* in Fellowship Hall.
- Ladies Who Stitch** *Monday, March 10th at 10:00 am* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Dante Paradiso Reading Discussion Group** *Monday, March 10th at 6:30 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- LBS Luncheon** *Tuesday, March 11th at 12:00pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Trip to Cuba** *Tuesday, March 11th through Friday March 21st.*
- Board of Trustees Meeting** *Tuesday, March 11th at 7:00 pm* in the Library.
- Handbell Ringers Rehearsal** *Wednesday, March 12th at 6:30 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Senior Choir Rehearsal** *Wednesday, March 12th at 7:30 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Bible Study** *Thursday, March 13th at 11:00 am* in the Library.
- Children's Handbell Choir** *Thursday, March 13th at 4:15 pm* in Sheffield Auditorium.
- Food Pantry** *Saturday, March 15th at 8:30 am* in Fellowship Hall.
- FCCOL Office Closed** *Monday, March 17th* for President's Day
- Ladies Who Stitch** *Monday, March 17th at 10:00 am* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Parent and Families Trans Youth Care Group** *Wed, March 19th at 5:30 pm* in Hoag Parlor.
- Handbell Ringers Rehearsal** *Wednesday, March 19th at 6:30 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Senior Choir Rehearsal** *Wednesday, March 19th at 7:30 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- April Newsletter Deadline** *Wednesday, March 19th.*
- Bible Study** *Thursday, March 20th at 11:00 am* in the Library.
- Board of Stewardship Meeting** *Thursday, March 20th at 4:00 pm* in the Library.
- Children's Handbell Choir** *Thursday, March 20th at 4:15 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Food Pantry** *Saturday, March 22nd at 8:30 am* in Fellowship Hall.
- Sharing Humanity Night** (Formerly Box Night) *Saturday, March 22nd overnight* at FCCOL.
- Musical Masterworks Concert** *Saturday, March 22nd at 5:00pm* and *Sunday, March 23rd at 3:00 pm* in the Meetinghouse.
- Adult Forum Wheel of Life Theater** *Sunday, March 23rd at 11:15 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- New London Community Meal Center** *Sunday, March 23rd.*
- Ladies Who Stitch** *Monday, March 24th at 10:00 am* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Dante Paradiso Reading Discussion Group** *Monday, March 24th at 6:30 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- April Newsletter Folding** *Tuesday, March 25th*
- Board of Deacons Meeting** *Tuesday, March 25th at 7:00 pm* in the Library.
- Grief Group** *Wednesday, March 26th at 5:30 pm* in the Hoag Parlor.
- Handbell Ringers Rehearsal** *Wednesday, March 26th at 6:30 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Senior Choir Rehearsal** *Wednesday, March 26th at 7:30 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Bible Study** *Thursday, March 27th at 11:00 am* in the Library.
- Reading the South African Kairos Document** *Thurs, March 27th at 12:00 pm* in the Library.
- Children's Handbell Choir** *Thursday, March 27th at 4:15 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Writers at the Well** *Friday, March 28th at 10:00 am* in the Hoag Parlor.
- Dante Paradiso Reading Discussion Group** *Monday, March 31st at 6:30 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.

GIVING MATTERS

Pledging and Pews: *As wealth and families grew, the church “sold” pews...*

Pledging and pews have a close historical relationship. Why? Because for centuries, prior to the adoption of pledging practices in the 1860's, churches sold or rented pews to fund their operations including church construction and maintenance. In the sixteenth century, before the Protestant Reformation, worshipers stood, coped with stone seats or sat on plain wooden benches. Later, some wealthy families occupied elaborate, enclosed wooden boxes. Think of our privilege when sitting through the next service on our lovely red velvet cushioned pews!

But what is the connection between pledging and pews? As pews became common in English and American churches, it was often wealthy congregants who purchased and later rented pews. But what about those who could not afford to buy or rent pews? As told by Marilyn Nelson in her poem *The Meeting House Fire*,¹ ‘The gallery seats, reserved for slaves, were free. But you couldn’t see the pulpit from there.’² So, certain pew locations were more desirable than others. Pew practices fostered a hierarchical system. The wealthier congregants got the best seats in the house, and everyone knew who they were.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, pew ownership or rental became controversial. It contradicted Jesus’ welcoming message. The system didn’t completely disappear in some churches until the mid-twentieth century. However, at FCCOL we moved from “the ‘pew unit’ system . . . [to] the giving of pledges for support of the church” when the church was rebuilt after the destructive 1907 fire. Pledging then became FCCOL’s method for building the budget to maintain the Church and its missions. And it seems that the welcome addition of cushions “covered in crimson Venetian velour” came at the same time.

Certainly contemporary worshipers can celebrate the move away from purchased pews and assigned seats. Even though some seem to have strong seating preferences! So let’s be grateful that all are welcome at FCCOL and that there is a place and a seat with a cushion for everyone. The congregation in 1907 could have chosen to raise funds to rebuild through the sale of pews. They chose not to, despite the fact that the previous structure had been significantly underinsured and that they had to find effective means to raise the substantial rebuilding funds. So, we can think of pledging as a source of worship comfort as well as a source of compassion for our near and far communities. Please pledge and contribute generously each year to FCCOL. Every pledge matters!

Thank You! Board of Stewardship

¹*The Meeting House Fire*, p 24, *The Meeting House*, by FCCOL member, Marilyn Nelson, Antrim House, Simsbury, CT. 2016.

²Ibid. pp. 24 – 25.

Homeless Hospitality Donations

We are grateful to everyone who helped with the donations of socks and coffee for the Homeless Hospitality Center of New London. Their request for canes (used canes are just fine!) and ground coffee and socks will continue. Please bring them to church and leave them with the deacons at the front door if you have one to donate; or bring it to the church office during the week. Many thanks.

Sunday Flowers

We're scheduling members and friends who would like to provide pulpit flowers for Sundays. To sign up, call Jill Harned, 603-398-9004. Thank you!

Housing Wanted

We regularly hear from folks who are in need of an affordable rental. If you have any information that could be helpful, please let Anne in the office know. Even a room to rent for a period of time would be greatly appreciated.

Caretaker Position Available

Aldrean (Al) Chuma is a professional caregiver and available to offer any assistance you may need with your loved one at home. Part-time and full-time hours. References available at: #917-957-3963.

Vehicle Wanted

Our caretaker, Bill Slivinski, is in need of a car. Please let us know if you can help. Call 860-434-8686. Thank you.

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. Rebecca T. Crosby, Minister for Haitian Outreach

Rebecca A. Francisco serves as minister to the South Lyme Union Chapel

Jolene Brant, Director of Youth Education/Junior & Senior Pilgrim Fellowship Leader

Rachael Jungkeit, Director of Children's Music

Robert McCracken, Church Administrator

Anne Koczka, 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.

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The submission deadline for the April Newsletter is Friday, March 19th.

Please e-mail the church office at fccol@fccol.org if you want to be added to or removed from the newsletter mailing list, or receive your copy digitally!
Thanks for your help!



The reproduction of our Meetinghouse is from a sketch by William Steeves.