

FEBRUARY 2026

BLACK HISTORY MONTH



YOU MAY
WRITE ME DOWN
IN HISTORY WITH YOUR BITTER,
TWISTED LIES, YOU MAY TROD ME
IN THE VERY DIRT BUT STILL,
LIKE DUST, I'LL RISE. DOES MY SASSINESS
UPSET YOU? WHY ARE YOU BESET WITH GLOOM?
'CAUSE I WALK LIKE I'VE GOT OIL WELLS
PUMPING IN MY LIVING ROOM. JUST LIKE MOONS AND LIKE SUNS,
WITH THE CERTAINTY OF TIDES, JUST LIKE HOPES
SPRINGING HIGH, STILL I'LL RISE. DID YOU WANT TO SEE ME BROKEN?
BOWED HEAD AND LOWERED EYES? SHOULDERS FALLING DOWN LIKE TEARDROPS,
WEAKENED BY MY SOULFUL CRIES? DOES MY HAUGHTINESS OFFEND YOU?
DON'T YOU TAKE IT AWFUL HARD' CAUSE I LAUGH LIKE I'VE GOT GOLD MINES
DIGGIN' IN MY OWN BACKYARD. YOU MAY SHOOT ME WITH YOUR WORDS,
YOU MAY CUT ME WITH YOUR EYES, YOU MAY KILL ME WITH YOUR HATEFULNESS, BUT STILL, LIKE AIR,
I'LL RISE. DOES MY SEXINESS UPSET YOU? DOES IT COME AS A SURPRISE
THAT I DANCE LIKE I'VE GOT DIAMONDS AT THE MEETING OF MY THIGHS?
OUT OF THE HUTS OF HISTORY'S SHAME I RISE
UP FROM A PAST THAT'S ROOTED IN PAIN I RISE
I'M A BLACK OCEAN, LEAPING AND WIDE, WELLING AND
SWELLING I BEAR IN THE TIDE. LEAVING BEHIND NIGHTS
OF TERROR AND FEAR I RISE INTO A DAYBREAK
THAT'S WONDROUSLY CLEAR
I RISE BRINGING
THE GIFTS THAT
MY ANCESTORS GAVE,
I AM THE
DREAM AND
THE HOPE OF
THE SLAVE. I RISE
I RISE I RISE.



by Maya Angelou

Dear Friends,

Surely the earth can be saved by all the people who insist on love.” – Alice Walker

As I write this, we are bracing for a large winter snow storm. Weather predictions are for over a foot of snow and we're placing bets in my family as to how many inches we'll actually get. Church may be canceled on Sunday (a rare occurrence indeed!) and a snow day feels like a sure thing for Monday. The prospect of all of our tight schedules vanishing into snow piles has me somewhat giddy.

The ghastly news cycle for once is not the main topic of every conversation while we check to make sure the generator will work if we need it during the blizzard.

While weather events can be stressful for many, I must confess, I can hardly wait to see those snowflakes fly. It is good and necessary to find quiet spaces in these fraught days where we can enjoy some stillness. I'm going to do what the poet Wendell Berry suggests and watch the flakes fall out the window and hopefully, *"Come into the peace of wild things...and for a time, rest in the grace of the world."*

Connecting with one another whether by text, cell call or email, feels like the most important thing to be doing right now (along with making sure the fridge has food and the hot chocolate supply is restocked). These

(continued on page 6)

HERE'S WHAT'S HAPPENING AT FCCOL

FCCOL Choir

Thank you for all your wonderful singing in January and for getting 2026 off to such a positive start! Here is what February's rehearsal and service schedule is looking like:

Sunday, February 1: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Wednesday, February 4: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Sunday, February 8: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Wed., Feb. 11: NO REHEARSAL - date night!!

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

Wednesday, February 18: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Sunday, February 22: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am.

Wednesday, February 25: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Many thanks and best wishes to all.

Simon

Handbell Notes

The month of January has been filled with rehearsals each week. By the time you read this it is likely that the **Old Lyme Ringers** has already played in worship for the first time in the new year on February 1st. With Simon Holt at the organ and the Old Lyme Ringers at the bells "Gloria" will be played. The piece was originally thought to be composed by Mozart but recent musicological research has discovered that the relatively unknown Wenzel Müller (1767-1835) from Austria as the true composer, and Martha Lynn Thompson (b. 1940) as the arranger. The piece will be recognized by many as it was originally written for choir and orchestra. The arrangement works extremely well for bells and organ. The Old Lyme Ringers will be heard again in worship on March 1st, as they will be playing a piece appropriate for Lent.

So far in January seven children and youth have participated in the **ReBELLion** handbell choir. We are hoping that a few more young people will be joining us later into the month of February. The children have started working on two pieces that will be played in worship services perhaps in March and April. The young people come each week to

rehearsal with energy and enthusiasm, and we look forward to the time when they are prepared to ring in our worship services.

Ladies Who Stitch (LWS)

Please save your holiday cards for us! We use the front of cards, that have no writing on the back, to make sets of gift tags. These can given to one of us, or be left **behind our curtain, on the counter at the back of the Sheffield.**



In January, we pulled a collection of things from our inventory for the **Tree of Life** (<https://tolef.org/>) travelers to use as gifts during their trip to Palestine. Included were potholders, Simple Bags, crocheted dish cloths, ornaments, and lavender and balsam sachets. We were happy to donate these and sent them with our warmest wishes for a safe and reassuring trip.

IRIS (Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services

<https://irisct.org/>) is now also

helping the homeless, and is especially in need of warm adult clothing and twin-sized bedding.

Twice a month, a FCCOL volunteer travels to New Haven to deliver collected items. LWS will help by accepting new and gently-used donations for IRIS

and for the New London Homeless Hospitality Center. Please leave donations on the Sheffield Stage clearly marked - "LWS."

We have stored our remaining Christmas creations to make room in the Partnership Store to better display our cold weather and regular things, as well as a few special items for Valentines and Easter. Some of our newer creations include soft glasses cases, gift bottle bags, small zippered pouches, pillow covers, and elasticized bookmarks with pockets for pens, reading glasses and cell phones.

Ladies Who Stitch meet regularly on Mondays from 10:00 a.m. to



2:00 p.m. in the Sheffield Auditorium. Visitors, and shoppers are always welcome.

The Partnership Store is open while we work, on Sundays following the service, and during most special FCCOL events. We offering guilt-free shopping for goods from Haiti, Palestine, Tribal Crafts and LWS.

If you have questions, or you wish to receive the weekly LWS email updates, notify the church office, or contact Eunice via email - eunicetaylor@me.com.

God's Neighborhood

Sunday, Feb 1: We will introduce Black History month by finishing the stained glass Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. art project we have been working on as a class and hanging it in the hallway for all to see. We will also continue to hear our very talented students that sign up to play their instruments in the big room downstairs when we all meet. And hear a poem called *Dreams by Langston Hughes*. "Let justice roll down like an everlasting stream" (Amos 5:24) was a prophetic refrain Dr. King preached on often as a theme for seeking justice for all people.

Our high school and middle school students will be cooking chili and cornbread during Sunday School. So that we can participate in an act of service that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. emphasized is the most important thing that we can do. Serve others. We are serving at the outdoor service called Chapel on the Green in New Haven. The plan is to attend a short outdoor service on the New Haven Green at 2PM and then serve guests on the New Haven Green (food for 100) at 2:30PM. We'll carpool from FCCOL at 12:45 pm. Or drive down and meet there: 230 Temple St, New Haven, CT 06510. **Meet us on the Green at 1:45.**

Saturday, February 7th: The Old Lyme Cub Scout Pack will be helping to serve coffee and donuts at the Cup-of-Joe Café right outside of the Shoreline Soup Kitchen and Pantries inside the church library from 8:30-10:30am. The Scouts are working to achieve their Citizenship badge for Arrow of Light and have offered to help the Youth Group! If you are interested in helping serve with our Youth group in the future, or if you have a group that you know would delight in serving, reach out to Laura and let her know!! Cup of Joe's Café is set up on the first Saturday of every month. Our next date to serve is March 7th from 8:30AM-10:30AM. Also, if you are in need, the SSKP's mission is to share food and fellowship with neighbors, feeding the hungry on the shoreline.

Sunday, Feb 8: Our students will make Valentines cards for homebound members of our church and make cookies and decorate them for fellowship hour with hearts and give out cookies to folks at Fellowship Hour immediately after our service. In the big room downstairs in our Sunday School we will continue with the theme of Black History Month, listening to music by our students and reading a poem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing by James Weldon Johnson* which became the *Black National anthem*. In class students will hear again Jesus words, "I call you friends" from the gospel of John (v. 15:15) and will color posters of Black innovators that have helped make change within our country to hang in their class.



Sunday, Feb 15: Our Old Lyme students have school vacation this week! During Sunday School, we will be hosting a pajama day and drinking hot cocoa and eating popcorn in the big room while watching a short movie, *Your Legacy | Animated Short Film | African American History on YouTube*. This film is an empowering introduction to African American history, celebrates and honors enslaved ancestors, and acknowledges their resiliency, accomplishments and sacrifices. Have a great week off from school!

Sunday, Feb 22: At 10:00 am, In the big room we will welcome another piece to be played by our student artists!! And we will read our last poem for our theme of **Black History Month, Still I Rise, by Maya Angelou**. Additionally, on this day in our classes, we will wrap up everything we have been working on all month. The stained glass artwork of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other important African American heroes should be up and hanging in the hallway! Come down and check them out!

Sunday, Feb 22: Confirmation class begins at 4:00 to 5:30 in the Library. Tacos will be served!

Memorials

Wendy Knight
Austin Wood
Joshua Fergelewski
Nancy Strohla

Grief and Loss Group

This monthly support group is for those who have lost a loved one and those struggling with other losses. Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday, February 4th** from 5:00-6:00 pm in Hoag Parlor.

ARC Blood Drive

American Red Cross Blood Drive in February at The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme will be on



Thursday, February 12th from 1:00 pm -6:00 pm. in the Fellowship Hall.

Bible Study

The Book of Exodus: Please join us as we continue to discuss The Book of Exodus: Stories of Exile and the Search for Freedom. We meet every Thursday from 11:00 -12:00 pm in the Library. Call or email the church for the Zoom link.

TransParent Group Meeting

Meets monthly on the 3rd Wednesday of every month 5:30-6:30. Next meeting is on **February 25th**. For Parents, Caregivers and Family Members of Trans Youth/Young Adults: Our group provides conversation, support community and education for parents and caregivers around the issues of transgender, nonbinary, and gender-diversity. For more information email us at: fccol@fccol.org.

Ash Wednesday Service

Wednesday, February 18th at 6:30 pm. This year we will be reading parts 3 and 4 of T.S. *Eliot's Four Quartets*, followed by the distribution of ashes.

Writing at the Well

Join us on **Friday, February 27th** at 10:00 am in the Hoag Parlor as we meet 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.

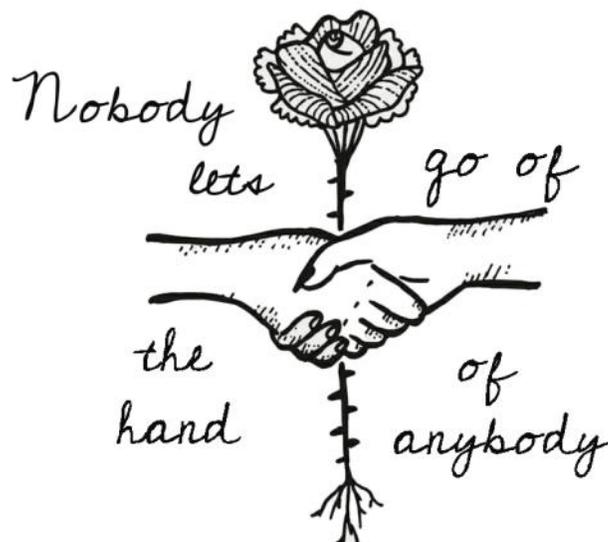
FCCOL Science Discussion Forum: UFOs... Are We Alone in the Universe?

Come join us on **February 27th** at 6:00 in the Fellowship Hall for a potluck supper and interesting discussion on the UFO controversy. We will listen to



people's personal experiences, review video clips, and discuss recent congressional hearings that have explored the UFO phenomenon. Please bring a dish to share if you are able and join us for a fun-filled evening of

exploration into the unknown! Questions? Contact Tom Sherer (tesjr299@outlook.com).



Rescheduled FCCOL's Annual Meeting

Sunday, February 8th, 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 purpose of the annual meeting is to: receive the reports of the ministers, boards and committees, and church officers for the year 2025; 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 2026; and conduct such other old or new business as shall properly come before the meeting.

Adult Forum Sunday, February 1st with Gregg Carlson from Convergence Consulting

Gregg Carlson from Convergence Consulting will again be with us over the weekend of February 1st. At the Adult Forum on that Sunday Gregg will make a presentation on the work we have done together over the past year. That session will provide an opportunity for us to make comments and ask questions. Also, during his visit Gregg will be visiting with a number of our congregation members and staff to begin to assess the longer-term staffing needs of the church as we pursue the initiatives that resulted from our work over the last year.

Southeastern Connecticut (SECT) Interfaith Community Organizing Project Invite

Communities of faith are building an interfaith power base for systemic justice change in Southeastern CT. On Wednesday, February 4th from 6 to 8 p.m. there will be a Delegate Meeting at ALL Souls New London, 9 Jay Street, New London, CT. (Core Team members from All Congregations). People interested to learn more about this project please contact Susan Switzer at sswitzer790@gmail.com. More information and training to come. All are welcome!



FCCOL travelers and friends in Palestine

"reach outs" are sacred conversations; a lifeline in a stormy season.

I remember how we initiated an old fashioned phone chain during COVID. This feels like a similar season of need. Whether because of a blizzard, a pandemic or because the news is just too much to take, reminding one another of our simple presence, kinship and belonging can be an unexpected, nourishing gift.

Maybe by the time you are reading this newsletter, the groundhog will NOT have seen his shadow on Feb 2nd and spring won't be so far away. In the meantime, we have a number of events and services on the calendar to look forward to and we hope you'll be joining us here and there!

On February 1st, we're delighted to welcome back Rev. Gregg Carlson from Convergence for a final weekend of meetings and an Adult Forum. There's much to celebrate together as we envision the future of FCCOL and the shared ministries that animate our life of faith together. On February 8th, we'll gather for a postponed Annual Meeting. Later this month, we're hosting an Adult forum with a speaker panel of families and allies of loved ones who are members of the trans and nonbinary community. Two college students will also share their personal journeys as trans people. These stories are especially crucial to share given the attempt by leaders in our country to erase the rights and human dignity of our trans neighbors and friends. In the face of such cruelties, here at FCCOL our church can be a much needed safe harbor for trans youth, adults and their families.

As you know, February is Black History Month, and the classes in God's Neighborhood will deepen their learning of prophetic figures who stand out in our history and contemporary world. Our plans for the April Civil Rights Youth Trip to Koinonia Farm in Georgia (April 11th-16) is underway and there are still a few spots available! The start of Confirmation Class has been rescheduled for Sunday, February 22nd from 4:00-5:30 pm. We're grateful to Dr. Kevin Booker for co-leading some of our youth programming this term.

In addition, Steve has our congregation *Reading the Bible In One Year* on speed dial (I'm falling behind, anyone else?) as well with discussion groups beginning each month.

In these pages you'll also find a reflection by Rev. Susan Switzer who just returned from Minneapolis having joined the national call to stand up for justice there. We also have an article from a parent struggling to raise her children in these heartbreaking times.

Given that it's the season for Valentine's and healthy hearts, this wisdom from James Baldwin calls to mind the work and joy of love here at FCCOL: *"Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word "love" here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace - not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth."*

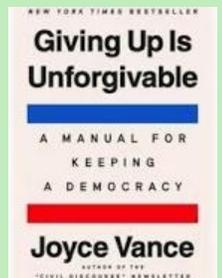
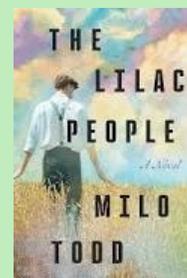
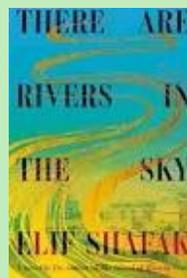
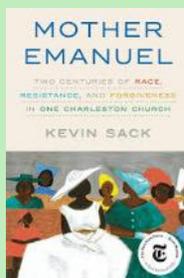
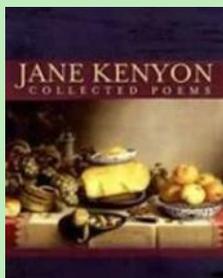
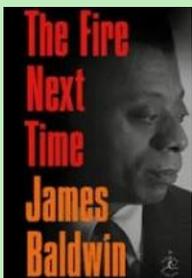
Hope to see you in between the snow piles. Keep warm. Keep connected and keep the love going...

Gratefully,



Reading:

The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin (rereading this month!) *Jane Kenyon: Collected Poems* *Mother Emanuel: Two Centuries of Race, Resistance, and Forgiveness in One Charleston Church* By Kevin Sack, *There Are Rivers in the Sky* by Elif Shafak *The Lilac People* by Milo Todd, *Giving Up Is Unforgivable* by Joyce Vance



Minnesota is Showing Us the Way - Love Our Neighbor & Take Action Now!

Friends,

Last Thursday, January 22nd, 650 clergy from across the US responded to a call from MARCH (Multi-faith, Anti-racism, Change and Healing) to meet in Minneapolis to witness and resist ICE's Operation Metro Surge.

The call was grounded in the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when on March 8, 1965 he summoned *clergy of all faith traditions to join with him for a ministers' march from Selma to Montgomery*. Dr. King said, *that in this way, America will testify to the fact that the struggle in Selma is for the survival of democracy everywhere in our land*.

This is our Selma moment, so as a daughter of Minnesota, I had to go. What I experienced from our MARCH hosts and Westminster Presbyterian Church was **extravagant welcome**. There was oodles of food and coffee, tables overflowing with warm jackets, hats, mittens and boots, and a palpable spirit of joy.

I experienced **deep truth telling** from Minneapolis poet laureate Junauda Petrus and Jim Bear Jacobs, Dakota Elder who reminded us that what we're experiencing today is not new in the history of America. The horrors being inflicted on Black and Brown bodies today, goes back hundreds of years to the slave patrols.

I witnessed **unfathomable commitment** seeing dozens of businesses with signs on their doors saying, "Closed Today in Support of ICE Out of MN" to hearing and feeling the voices of 50,000 people chanting in the streets in subzero temperatures.

And I experienced **expansive gratitude** from Minnesotans thanking us for showing up. They feel less isolated. One person said that the protective shield they had put around their hearts had softened a bit with our presence. And some folks who couldn't walk, thanked us too. One Somali and one Ethiopian Uber driver told me my ride was free because of having shown up and for giving voice to them when they could not.

Yes, there was palpable anxiety and fear present, but **hope** continually broke through. For me, the brightest beacon of light in the dark were the young MARCH activists. They were clear. Yes, the US government is using the play book of authoritarian regimes, but they are following the social science of countries that have upended authoritarian rule. And these activists — many across faith traditions. — are courageous and determined. (Read *Why Civil Resistance Works* by Erica Chenoweth & Maria J. Stephan).

Yes, I believe that I am, we are, being called to stand up and speak out. And that might look different for each of us. Below **see two simple things you can do** to take action. In the meantime, I am lifted up by the words spoken at a vigil on the night of Alex Pretti's death at Unity Church Unitarian in St. Paul Minnesota, by Rev. Shay McKay.

Make of us mountains

Make of us multitudes

Make of us disciples, not of men, or money, power or complacency

But disciples of truth, of peace and of justice

May we be now again and always, attuned to the web of which we are all a part

May we be now again and always be attuned, to where that web is broken and strained and hurting

And may we be now, again and always,

Willing to be the hands and hearts to repair, to support, and to love. May it be so!

Here are three things we can do right now:

1. Make Calls to Our CT Senators

(Chris Murphy and Richard Blumenthal) Dial 202-224-3121 (follow the prompts) For NO FUNDING FOR ICE or call their offices directly at: Chris Murphy 202 240-4041 DC, Blumenthal 202 224-2823, DC.

2. TAKE AN ICE OUT OBSERVER/NON VIOLENT TRAINING and sign up for upcoming dates at: act.womensmarch.com

3. Follow this link for more information: <https://www.standwithminnesota.com/>

Mission Outreach at The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme in 2025

The Christmas Eve offering is dedicated every year to the Ministers' Discretionary Fund of the First Congregational Church. Over the course of the past year this fund has dispersed a little over \$40,000 to local families in need. It is supported by this church's annual budget, by occasional special donations in memory of a loved one, and, **most importantly**, by the annual Christmas Eve collection.

The essential core of Jesus' ministry is his commandment to care for the most vulnerable around us. Currently we are seeing the erosion of all manner of support for the vulnerable. Food insecurity is on the rise and secure housing is unattainable for many. Health care is costly beyond reach for many. Families are struggling to provide not only basic necessities for their loved ones, but to manage the stress of so much uncertainty. The draconian measures now taken in immigration enforcement have caused unprecedented pain for many families who work in and among us all.

The Ministers' Discretionary Fund is a critical tool in the ministry and outreach of our church. It enables the ministers to respond quickly and with respect for confidentiality. In crisis situations this kind of help is truly critical. Your generosity this evening helps enormously.

Mission outreach at FCCOL includes not only the Discretionary Fund, but donations to, and partnerships with, a great many organizations who do courageous work with the vulnerable in our area and beyond.

This past year \$70,000 was dispersed by our Board of Missions; over \$50,000 of that amount was given to social services in New London County alone.

Additionally, the Benevolent Society donated \$35,000 to agencies in this region. This money was raised mainly through their annual White Elephant Sale; a courageous undertaking that gathers in many volunteers (as well as donors) throughout our region.

In this past year special gifts totaling more than \$57,000 were made by our members and friends to our refugee resettlement work, our Saturday morning food pantry and its monthly diaper initiative, the One Great Hour of Sharing work of the United Church of Christ, the Witness Stones Project of Old Lyme, the Immigration Assistance Fund, The David Good Memorial Fund (designated to assist in our partnership work), maintenance of our Refugee House in Old Lyme, and more.

Beyond all that is listed above, anonymous gifts of over \$50,000 have enabled us to fund the rebuilding of the church's "parsonage barn" which is critical to our White Elephant Sale projects, and over \$35,000 was donated to make our mission and partnership trips possible.

Thus, in total for the year 2025, over \$290,000 in critical support was made possible through the generosity and dedication of the people of this church.

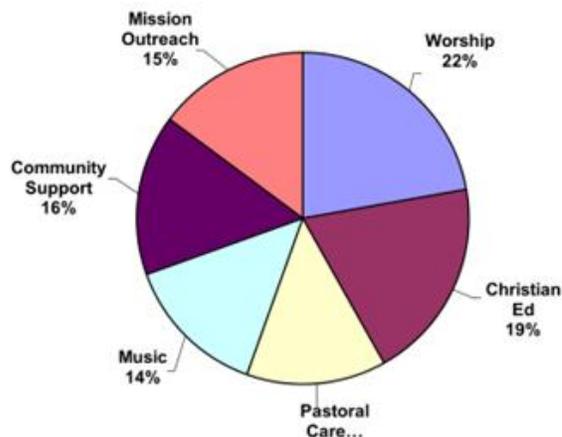
The 2025 Annual Reports are printed and available in the office if you would like to pick up a copy.

Board of Mission Benevolences 2025

The United Church of Christ, One Great Hour of Sharing (UCC) Homeless Hospitality Center of New London The Hospital Chaplaincy Programs of L&M and Middlesex Hospitals Habitat for Humanity of SECT Bethlehem University in Palestine Safe Futures of New London (formerly the Women's Center of New London)	Tree of Life Educational Fund Inc. Humanitarian Outreach on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in South Dakota Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services, Inc. of New Haven (IRIS) Doctors Without Borders International Rescue Committee The Refugee Resettlement House of FCCOL Hospice and Palliative Care of Middletown, NLHHC Veterans' Housing Project (The Major Edward Good House), Cactus Jack Foundation Charley's Closet of Guilford Literacy Volunteers of Valley Shore The Ct Hospice Estuary Council of Seniors A Sacred Place of the York Prison (the Barbara Fund)
The New London Soup Kitchen on Montauk Avenue (now called DINE) Shoreline Soup Kitchens and Food Pantries The Diaper Bank Project of FCCOL The Crosby Fund for Haitian Education Martin House Alliance for Living of SECT Covenant Shelter of New London The Shepherd's Field School of Beit Sahour, in Palestine Lymewood Senior Housing Lymes' Senior Center Lyme-Old Lyme Food Share Garden Church World Service UNRWA (Middle East crisis support) The Ministers' Discretionary Fund of FCCOL FRESH New London	World Central Kitchen United Palestinian Appeal The Blue Door (medical equipment to borrow) ANERA (for aid to Gaza) The AMOS project connecting faith communities in New London County Care and Share (food and more in East Lyme) Christ the King Pastor's Fund The Justice Dance Project (of York Prison)

Giving Matters

When we – usually the Treasurer or Board of Stewardship – present financial results or budgets to the congregation we normally frame these reports as numbers in accounting categories. Categories such as



salaries, benefits, property, utilities or insurance. While these reports are factually correct, they don't properly convey what the congregation's contributions are actually invested in. What we do as a church is much better expressed as six fundamental ministries – Worship, Christian Education, Pastoral Care, Music, Community Support and Mission Outreach. Looking at our financial resources in this way, shown on the accompanying chart, tells a much different story.

Fully 31% of our annual budget (over \$962,475 in 2026) is devoted to Community Support and Mission Outreach, serving people in need outside of our church. This consists of the direct

disbursements of the Board of Missions, as well as our facility that hosts organizations such as the Red Cross Blood Drives, AA and Immigration Assistance.

These investments reflect our church's commitment to the New Testament's charge to help others less fortunate than ourselves. Therefore, every additional dollar that is contributed above and beyond our fixed costs can help these outward-looking ministries. Giving **DOES** matter!

Diaper Bank Saturday

A Big Shout Out of thanks from our guests who received diapers, wipes, and baby food throughout 2025. What our guests cannot say in words, is often expressed on their faces with smiles, and sometimes, relief. During the last quarter of this year, increasing numbers of our aging guests have inquired about adult diapers.

Babies have always been and continue to be our focus; yet surprisingly, unsolicited donations of adult diapers started arriving. This past month, a trunk load of adult wear was donated. God does always provide.

In 2025, pantry guests from New London (outside the SSKP service area) are now getting their diapers from service organizations within New London.

In 2025, the Diaper Bank:

- Supplied diapers to 282 babies!
- Spent a little over \$4000 for the purchase of diapers and wipes.
- Received monetary donations from members and friends in the amount of \$1120.
- Received individual diaper donations totaling approximately 48 cases worth \$1440.
- Received approximately 48 cases of baby food and 72 containers of baby cereal totaling? PRICELESS!
- Was generously supported by the Board of Missions and The Benevolent Society.

A special thanks to the volunteers who, every month, welcome guests and distribute diapers.

Families Corner

With increasing regularity lately, I find myself thinking “what will I tell my children one day about what it was like to parent, even exist, in the times we currently find ourselves in?” I know I haven’t lost my sense of optimism entirely as I picture these discussions happening in response to them learning about “primary sources” in their middle and high school years, and not in an ‘encampment for the woke’ somewhere after the fall of the republic. In my own formative years, I was obsessed with asking my Dad about the 1960s. He was a campaign volunteer for Bobby Kennedy in 1968 when he was assassinated, and it seemed unreal that someone in my direct family was so close to what I read about in textbooks. The Kennedy optimism was a staple of my childhood. We were always asking not what our country could do for us, but what we could do for our country, and trying new things not because they were easy, but because they were hard. My childhood was in the age of “you can be anything and everything you want to be.” though admittedly, with two professional educators as parents, there was a “but you will go to college” caveat that came along with that. For me, there was a definitive end to childhood when I moved to New York City for college, and my second day of classes was September 11th 2001. My first few days living on my own was now under quarantine. A version of New York City I wouldn’t see again until the quiet streets of the Covid Pandemic decades later. But in that fear of September 2001, there was a cultural solidarity. A sense that we were proud of what America stood for, and that no one could take that away from us; that the American Experiment, this pursuit of a more perfect union, was so special, so singular, that the only way to try and take it from us was to rip it out of our hands. It was the wake up call that would shake us all from our partisanship of the early aughts, and remind us how lucky we are to be Americans. I thought that 9/11 would be what my children asked about one day. And now, that time seems like the easy one to talk about.

On the car ride to the No Kings protest this fall, my four year old twins were talking about where we were going, and why. I told them, we are very fortunate to live in a country where we choose the people who are in charge of the rules. And when they do things we don’t agree with, it’s then our job to let them know. Sometimes we call them, and sometimes we gather in a public place with signs and say hi to our neighbors, sing songs, and make sure people know they’re not alone. Needless to say there were quite a few follow up questions, most importantly, “would there be snacks?” I have leaned into “joy as resistance” in the last year(s), though I have to say, it is not without a great deal of guilt. I read and see stories every day of other mothers who do not have that luxury, and it is increasingly stunning, the juxtaposition of reality and the magicmaking I do for my preschoolers. My daughter came home the other day with a note that Grandma had thankfully transcribed that she wanted to “send to the fairies.” That night, I watched footage of an American citizen being killed by her own government. My son made a New Years Resolution at school to “eat more ice cream.” We invaded another country to take their oil. This to me, is what it’s like to parent right now. When children are too young to understand cruelty, because it’s not in them, the herculean effort of every day is to protect their magic. I find much of my inspiration through music, and one of my favorite Oscar Hammerstein lyrics is “you’ve got to be taught to hate and fear, you’ve got to be taught from year to year, it’s got to be drummed in your dear little ear, you’ve got to be carefully taught.” And if you’ve spent any time with really young children, you’ll know that until they’re taught to hate, it’s not in their lexicon. It’s the heartbreaking beauty of childhood, that we all start eternally open and hopeful, kind and optimistic. Learning to share, and understanding fundamentally right and wrong. Then one day, we start to call that naive. And it is. But it’s also perfect. It is the “more perfect” version of the union that we’re in search of. As we neared Downtown New Haven, the last of our protest playlist songs came on. Another from the great world of American Musical Theatre, we listened to this as we parked:

“Keep Marching”

written by Shaina Taub for the Broadway Musical “The Suffs.”

“The path will be twisted, and risky, and slow

But keep marching, keep marching

Will you fail or prevail?

Well, you may never know

But keep marching, keep marching

‘Cause your ancestors are all the proof you need That progress is possible, not guaranteed

It will only be made if we keep marching, keep marching on...”

And at the end of the day, having my children believe all that wisdom, that’s what I care about.

Until that pesky arc of the moral universe starts bending a little more towards justice, and even after, we figure out a way to mail “the fairies” their note, and we make sure that 2026 has a lot of ice cream, and a lot of dental hygiene. And we. keep. marching.

by Caitlin Doonan

Here is the link to the song “Keep Marching” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWhAuyAiohc>

All This Sainted Difference: A Spiritual Pilgrimage to Brazil

August 10-20, 2026

In her poetry collection *The Cachoeira Tales*, Marilyn Nelson writes of a contemporary group of pilgrims, each with a story to tell, traveling together not to Canterbury, but to Cachoeira, Brazil. There, the pilgrims encounter the Sisters of Our Lady of the Good Death, who blend African, Indigenous, and Catholic ritual elements. Founded by those who had been enslaved during the 19th century, the sisterhood was established to serve the poor, while keeping alive the sacred traditions of Africa, handed down as a precious inheritance



from one generation to the next. Every year in Cachoeira, the Sisters offer a three-day celebration of music and of dance, where the Orixas (African divinities who bear a striking resemblance to Christian saints) come in order to bless, heal, chasten, and encourage contemporary people. It is in Cachoeira that the pilgrims in Marilyn's poems converge. And it is in Cachoeira that pilgrims from FCCOL shall converge this coming August.

This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to explore the African ritual traditions of Brazil. Visiting not only Cachoeira, but locating ourselves in and around the city of Salvador, we'll encounter the rituals, music, dance, foodways, and visual art that have sheltered and protected human lives through generations of hardship. We'll visit *terreiros* (house temples) around the city and throughout the surrounding countryside. And we'll discover how these dynamic and aesthetically charged spiritual systems (Candomblé and Umbanda) have evolved across time. The centerpiece of our journey will be the Feast of Our Lady of the Good Death, where we shall witness how the Sisters become a living bridge between this world and the other.

Designed to resonate and to link with our travels to Haiti, Cuba, New Orleans, and West Africa, our pilgrimage to Cachoeira and Salvador will be organized with the help of our friend Ned Sublette, and his vast network of contacts in Brazil. It is a fabulous opportunity to explore a beautiful part of Latin America (it will be winter in Salvador, meaning we can expect temperatures in the 70's and 80's), together with the history and spirituality of the African descended peoples of Bahia.

Contact Steve Jungkeit for more information, at steven@jungkeit.net.

A Moment to Celebrate, Reflect and Inspire from the Board of Missions

There were many guest speakers at the SE Connecticut Habitat for Humanity's celebration, but there was noticeably one who stepped up to the podium, brimming with joy as she described her story. Acknowledging she knew nothing about construction, as a volunteer she learned how to use a hammer, measure, paint, cut wood and developed her skills. She embraced Habitat's mission and community built around the organization.

Years later she qualified as a recipient of a home for her family. Surprisingly, she acquired the house she helped to build. Humbly, she described the impact of having a place called home, and for the first time in many years experiencing stability. She was proud, as a single parent of young children, to provide a safe warm environment.

Habitat for Humanity has helped many people nationwide like this young woman and her family. It's mission is to provide affordable housing to families in need by building, rehabbing, and acquisition of mortgages. The program is also committed to teaching and educating families in a wide range of skills pertinent to home ownership.

Finding available housing is extremely difficult. Connecticut has only 7% housing vacancy, which is considered the most constrained housing market in the country. Contrast this with the percentage of income- constrained households. More than 53% of Connecticut renters and 27% of Connecticut homeowners spend more than 50% of their income on housing.

Who qualifies? "Habitat welcomes households making between 40%-80% of the area median income who meet three criteria: desire to be a first time homebuyer, ability to pay, and willingness to complete the program.

Habitat guarantees housing expenses (taxes, insurance, mortgage) do not exceed 30% of a household's gross monthly income."

Habitat for Humanity of eastern Connecticut has built 112 homes, renovated and sold affordably since 1987. Currently, there are 55 homes in Queue/4 under construction. The towns and number of housing projects underway were identified as follows:

Ledyard (38), North Stonington (6), Norwich (3), Old Lyme (2), New London (6), and 26 acres in Mansfield.

The staff of 20 rely heavily on volunteers. There were 622 volunteers last year who participated as follows:

Construction or planning - 325 volunteers who gave 3,839 hours.

ReStore - 273 volunteers who donated 6,189 hours.

Board and committee members - 46 volunteers who gifted 447 hours.

Speeches, data showcasing needs, accomplishments, and inspiration to continue the work brought the evening banquet to an end with enthusiasm for the future.

Submitted by Constance Johannessen, member of the Board of Missions

FEBRUARY 2026 CALENDAR

- Communion Sunday Service** *Sunday, February 1st at 10:00 am* in the Meetinghouse.
- Adult Forum with Gregg Carlson** *Sunday February 1st after the 10:00 am service* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Youth Group serving at New Haven Green** *Sunday, February 1st the carpool departs FCCOL at 1:00pm.*
- Ladies Who Stitch** *Monday, February 2nd at 10:00 am* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- ReBillion Rehearsal** *Wednesday, February 4th at 4:00 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Grief Group** *Wednesday, February 4th at 5:00 pm* in the Hoag Parlor.
- Handbell Ringers Rehearsal** *Wednesday, February 4th at 6:30 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Choir Rehearsal** *Wednesday, February 4th at 7:30 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Bible Study** *Thursday, February 5th at 11:00 am* in the Library.
- The Shoreline Food Pantry & Diaper Bank** *Sat, February 7th at 8:30 am* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Cup-A-Joe Café Youth Group** *Saturday, February 7th at 8:00 am* in the Library.
- Musical Masterworks** *Sat, Feb. 7th at 5:00 pm and Sunday Feb. 8th at 3:00 pm* in the Meetinghouse.
- Ladies Who Stitch** *Monday, February 9th at 10:00 am* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Board of Trustees Meeting** *Tuesday, February 10th. at 7:00 pm* in the Library.
- Board of Missions Meeting** *Wednesday, February 11th at 4:00 pm* in the Library.
- ReBillion Rehearsal** *Wednesday, February 11th at 4:00 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Handbell Ringers Rehearsal** *Wednesday, February 11th at 6:30 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Choir Rehearsal** *Wednesday, February 11th at 7:30 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Bible Study** *Thursday, February 12th at 11:00 am* in the Library.
- Blood Drive** *Thursday, February 12th starting at 1:00 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- The Shoreline Food Pantry** *Saturday, February 14th at 8:30 am* in Fellowship Hall.
- Ladies Who Stitch** *Monday, February 16th at 10:00 am* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Board of Music and Arts Meeting** *Monday, February 16th at 10:00 am* in the Library.
- ReBillion Rehearsal** *Wednesday, February 18th at 4:00 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Handbell Ringers Rehearsal** *Wednesday, February 18th at 5:30 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Ash Wednesday Service** *February 18th at 6:30 pm* in the Meetinghouse.
- Choir Rehearsal** *Wednesday, February 18th at 7:30 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- January Newsletter Deadline** *Thursday, February 19th.*
- Bible Study** *Thursday, February 19th at 11:00 am* in the Library.
- Board of Stewardship Meeting** *Thursday, February 19th at 4:00 pm* in the Library.
- The Shoreline Food Pantry** *Saturday, February 21st at 8:30 am* in Fellowship Hall.
- DINE New London** *Sunday, February 22nd departing FCCOL at 3:30 pm.*
- First Confirmation Class** *Sunday, February 22nd at 4:00 pm* in the Library.
- TransParent Adult Forum** *Sunday, February 22nd at 11:30 am* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Board of Deacons Meeting** *Tuesday, February 24th at 7:00 pm* in the Library.
- ReBillion Rehearsal** *Wednesday, February 25th at 4:00 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- TransParent Meeting** *Wednesday, February 25th at 4:00 pm* in the Hoag Parlor.
- Handbell Ringers Rehearsal** *Wednesday, February 25th at 6:30 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- Choir Rehearsal** *Wednesday, February 25th at 7:30 pm* in the Sheffield Auditorium.
- Bible Study** *Thursday, February 26th at 11:00 am* in the Library.
- Writing at the Well** *Friday, February 27th at 10:00 am* in the Hoag Parlor.
- Science Discussion and Potluck Dinner** *Friday, February 27th at 6:00 pm* in the Fellowship Hall.
- The Shoreline Food Pantry** *Saturday, February 28th at 8:30 am* in Fellowship Hall.
- Wendy Knight Memorial** *Saturday, February 28th at 1:00 pm* in the Meetinghouse.
- Nancy Strohla Memorial** *Saturday, February 28th at 3:30 pm* in the Meetinghouse.

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF OLD LYME

Staff

The Rev. Dr. Steven R. Jungkeit, Senior Minister (203-430-3208)

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

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 - 10:00 a.m.

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

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The submission deadline for the March Newsletter will be Thursday, February 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 painting by Guy Carleton Wiggins.