



From the Pastor's Study

Dear Beloved Church Family,

After preaching our third service on Christmas Sunday, I sat down in my assigned seat right next to the open window by the piano and reached for my water glass. Before beginning my sermon, I let everyone know about our Deacons' very well-considered decision to pause in-person gatherings [such as worship] on God's Acre after Christmas Eve until the end of February. We were growing concerned about increasing infection rates during this pandemic. We didn't feel it prudent to continue to gather in person during what is expected to be a very challenging winter. I had joked to our congregation that "when I can see my breath in the sanctuary," or "when Jody can no longer feel her hands and feet, we know we have gone about as long as we can." As I reached for my glass of water during that service, I noticed that it had developed a thin layer of ice on it. At the moment, I looked out at our congregation, a sparse gathering of hat, mitten, and parka clad church members, and I felt a profound sense of gratitude. While I had initially hoped to keep meeting in person throughout the winter, I found myself both proud of our congregation's resolve and grateful to God for the ability to gather for worship on God's Acre since late May. The work of the Deacons, led by Jill Robey, and the ushers led by Todd Baker and Bentley Elliot, has been amazing figuring out how to gather each step of the way safely as our understanding of this pandemic evolved. From my seat in church last Sunday, I could also see our Youth Tent — which has played host to remarkable gatherings of young people, offering them weekly opportunities for fellowship and faith formation. I smiled as I thought about a comment our Town's Health Department Director, Jen Eielson, had made the week before, that there hasn't been a single COVID case linked to any church worship or programming from any of the churches in our town. Remarkable!



For over 280 years, we have gathered as a family of God's children in order to experience His presence, learn Christ's ways, and serve our neighbors – all to make faith a way of life.

While I really did hold out hope that we could maintain in-person worship and programming throughout the remainder of the pandemic, as I thought about all that had been accomplished, I thought of a quote from my dear friend, Jay Twombly. When I first arrived on God's Acre over five years ago, the church was trying to wrap up the Capital Campaign that funded the renovation of the church parsonage our family lives in. The Trustees had raised

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about 95% of the resources needed, and there was a question about reaching out one last time to church members to meet the goal. Mindful of the impressive generosity to date, and aware that a new season lay ahead for the church, Jay said, "why don't we just proclaim victory and move on." I love that ethic and have thought of it often in the life of our church. Sometimes, when we have given our best and most faithful efforts, it is indeed good to "proclaim victory, and move on."

Dear Church Family, we did not expect this pandemic, and the amount of effort to keep our church family connected and supported has been incredible. We are moving into a new phase of this pandemic — a challenging winter before a spring that will likely bring widespread vaccinations and a resumption of normal activities. Again, I think it is time to "proclaim victory and move on." By the grace and goodness of God and thanks to your continued generosity, our church remains vital and healthy during this pandemic. I am so grateful to all of you, and to God for all that has been possible, and I am excited for what is on the horizon for our

congregation. With all the new families moving to our area, this upcoming year promises to be extraordinary. So, even though we must endure one last season of darkness and distance, let us give thanks to God, proclaim victory for what has been accomplished, and move on and into what will prove to be a very exciting and dynamic future for us.

I give thanks to God and to all of you for the way we have managed through this pandemic together.

Yours in Christ,

Chapin

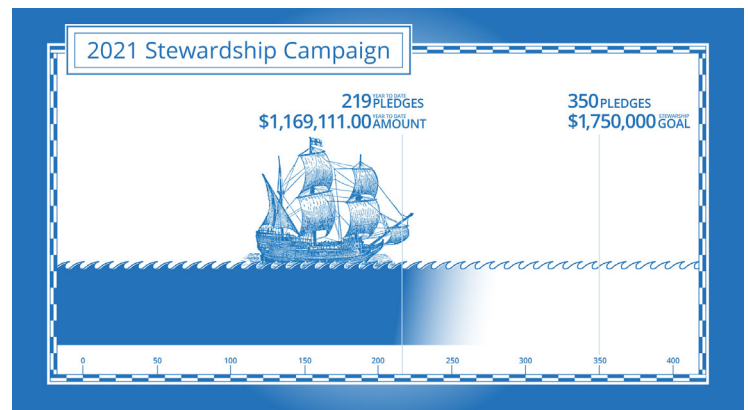
P.S. One challenge we do have that you can help with is getting in 2021 pledges to the church. People are very generous, but we find that pledges are a bit slower to come in this year than in years past. So, if you feel blessed by your church family this year, please consider expressing that appreciation by offering a pledge or gift to our church for our 2021 Stewardship Campaign, online or by mail. Our hope is to receive most of our pledges by Epiphany Sunday, January 10.

A Stewardship Campaign Message

Thank you to all who have already generously pledged to the Stewardship Campaign. We have had a healthy start and are hopeful that our community will continue to come together to support our church during this unprecedented year. As we continue our Pilgrim journey through this difficult winter together, we remember and recommit to the hope, unity, sacrifice, and resolve of our faith that will allow us to move from a paralyzing pandemic into a season of unparalleled promise and possibility.

Led by Chapin and the staff, our church has responded resourcefully to the challenges of the past year, and we are thriving in many ways (within the constraints of the pandemic) — outdoor services, a spectacular Christmas celebration, booming youth programs, a large new member class, continued Christian education and ongoing care for our members. We are very grateful for the blessings of this community.

Our church's ability to thrive during this challenging time is a reflection of our community's commitment and support. If you have not yet pledged, could you please reflect on the ways in which your financial gifts to the church can be used to support God's work in the world in 2021? Please consider making a pledge to the Stewardship Campaign and, if possible, please consider increasing your commitment. Like our Pilgrim forebears, we are relying on all members of our church to help carry this extraordinary community through this challenging year into the upcoming season of promise and possibility. - John Burges and Eileen Thomas, Stewardship Campaign Chairs



We are at 219 Pledging Families and \$1,169,111 toward our goal.

Adult Formation

Before and After: The Bible, Brain Science, and Lasting Transformation

Join the Rev. Dr. Allen Hilton
Wednesdays, January 6-February 10
7:30-9:00pm on Zoom

New Years' offers clean slates and fresh starts. Nutrisystem and Peloton flood our screens with Jane and John Doe miraculous 'Before and After.' But resolutions notoriously fail, and some of us have even given up on them. Here's good news: the Bible is full of successful 'Before/After' profiles that stuck. Peter caves to a servant girl during Jesus' trial, but a couple of months later speaks courageously to the court that condemned Jesus to death. Paul's life turns on a dime on Damascus Road and stays turned. And contemporary neuroscience offers deep insights into how the 'After' can stay. Join our longtime friend Allen Hilton for six weeks letting scripture and science talk to us about transformation. Contact Marianna Kilbride, marianna@godsacre.org for a Zoom invite.



When in Rome

Monday Bible Study 7:00-8:00am, beginning 1/11.
Women's Tuesday Bible Study 9:30-10:30am, beginning 1/12.

The apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans summarizes his theological thinking and has influenced the faith formation of St. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and Karl Barth. Join us in exploring this rich letter together following the Yale Bible Study series found on our website, <https://www.godsacre.org/adult/yale-bible-study/yalestudy-romans/>. Contact Marianna Kilbride, marianna@godsacre.org for a Zoom invite. New members are always welcome, and no prior study is necessary!

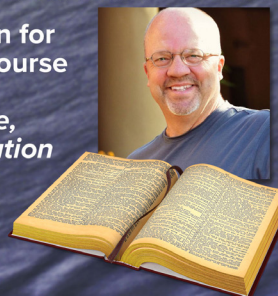
Fridays with Merton

Join our group's read of Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, as we begin our next book, *The New Seeds of Contemplation*. New members are always welcome! Meetings are via Zoom Fridays 8:00-9:00am. Contact Marianna Kilbride for an Zoom invitation.

Bible Study for the New Year!

Join Rev. Dr. Allen Hilton for a six-week discussion course
*Before and After:
The Bible, Brain Science,
and Lasting Transformation*

Wednesdays:
January 6 – February 10
7:30 – 9:00pm on Zoom



Pastoral Care

Stephen Ministry Training Beginning in 2021 Ever Thought About Becoming a Stephen Minister?

The Congregational Church of New Canaan will be

training another class of Stephen Ministers in 2021 through 50 hours of extensive training on Zoom. Stephen Ministers work alongside our pastors to care, encourage, and provide emotional and spiritual support to

people going through a difficult time, such as divorce, grief, hospitalization, unemployment, terminal illness, relocation, chronic illness, or loneliness. If you have gifts for caring, encouragement, and listening, please begin to prayerfully consider whether you might want to be part of this exciting ministry. If you think you might be interested, talk with one of our Stephen Ministry Leaders: Beth Baker, Rev. Kibbie Laird, Rev. Chapin Garner, or Marianne Perry.



We're Virtual January & February

We have a lot planned for the New Year on the Virtual God's Acre. Join us for worship, Bible studies, small groups and so much for the children and youth groups! Follow along on the website for details!
www.godsacre.org

Children & Youth Ministries



A December to Remember

This December, all of our youth (K-12th) participated in ringing bells for the Salvation Army. This year opportunities for service have been greatly limited, so coming together to aid members of our community was truly a blessing. All of the money raised has gone to help defray heating costs for our neighbors this winter. We were particularly proud of our 5th and 6th graders who stood outside and rang their bells in the bitter cold before the big December snowstorm!

All About Advent!

The spirit of Christmas radiated through Children & Youth Ministries this Advent season! Wreaths, ribbons, trees, and sparkles transformed the tent into a Christmas wonderland for all of the Advent activities. MSYG & YG began the month building gingerbread houses centered around a conversation on homelessness while K-4th built Advent wreaths learning each candle's meaning. Ten families participated in our worship services, sharing prayers for each new week of the Advent season! The cold did not keep our FISH friends away as each week, kids arrived more bundled and excited for another week of faith and fellowship! We look forward to continuing the fun in 2021!



Team Tree Decorating!

Each YG team spent time decorating their own Christmas tree this year that would uniquely represent their team name! It gave us an opportunity to gather for fellowship and festivities when we couldn't carry on our traditional progressive supper dinner. Take a look at the photos of the happy teams!





We're Virtual January & February

Youth Ministries will move to a virtual offering for January and February with plans to return to our tent in March! We look forward to seeing our FISH friends via zoom for fun-filled virtual activities!



Thank you for your generosity!

A heartfelt thanks to all the congregation who made Christmas for others a special time in so many ways. Thanks to you, homeless children had toys, more the double the families we normally have supported had a special meal on Christmas day, and our Salvation Bell Ringing efforts brought in more funding for our local community than ever before. Pivot Ministry was fed and loved, and our neighbors will be warm this winter. Truly the Lord has been glorified by your kindness, thank you!



The Dunlap Crew!



The Flynn's!

Children's Music Ministry

Children's Music on God's Acre 2021

Thank you to all those who made music under the Youth Tents so special last year. In this new year, we hold on to the memories we had together and look forward to ways we can continue praising God's name through music virtually. Drum circles, rhythmic games, and sharing of talent every week is something I know will continue to bless our lives.



Head Angel –
Amelia Emson



Prophet Isaiah –
Merritt Sheffield



Luke –
Jameson Flynn

Virtual Nativity Pageant 2020

Thank you to all the children who prepared roles and solos, bringing the Christmas story to life for the Virtual Nativity Pageant. Your commitment to your parts was inspiring, and I am so proud of all of you. To our volunteers, Carolyn Dean, Diana Sweitzer, Genevieve Lehman, and Olivia Bognon, thank you for your commitment to making this such a positive experience that will now be with us forever!



Music Ministries

Joyful Ringers

A new musical ensemble began in September. Joyful Ringers bell choir met Thursday evenings and has played in church each month. Years ago, the church purchased four octaves of White Chapel bells from England. With repertoire requests for additional bells, the church purchased a fifth octave from the Schulmerich Bell Company. December 10 was the second time to showcase these bells. They are the low bass notes and much heavier than the upper octaves. This octave completes the full sound of bell music. Because of COVID precautions, Joyful Ringers is on "pause" for a few weeks. Please let us know if you are interested in playing. Joyful Ringers include James Doak, Robin Foley, Thomas Lezon, Tereza Nemassanyi, Carol Bayne, Rachel Rodgers, Sarah Owen, Laurie Owen, Tammie Garner, Debbie Chapman, Linda Avgerinos, and Nancy Upton.



THANK YOU!

The Advent and Christmas seasons were especially beautiful because of the music. Thank you to all the singers who sang the Wednesday worship services, virtual services, Sunday morning services, and Christmas Eve services. They are Anush Avetisyan, Jenny D'Alba, Anne Maguire, Antonio Abate, Aram Tchobanian, Dimitrie Lazich, and Matthew Cossack.

Also, gratitude to Thomas Lezon, trumpeter, who played December 20 services. Your talents, time, and devotion to the church are so admired, and we are grateful. You inspire us when you lead in worship. Thank you for your gift of sacred music.



Questions about Quest

What is Quest?

What if instead of just being lectured about God, you could experience God yourself? What if, instead of just reading about what Jesus said to others 2,000 years ago, you could hear what Jesus has to say to you today? What if, instead of just listening to speeches about peace and love, there was a peaceful weekly refuge where you could live out the vision with your fellow Fish?

Now, that would be a Quest worth taking. In 2021 come and start this years' Quest, searching after your understanding of Christian truth and peace.

Quest is a program that serves the dual purpose of enriching both our spiritual and intellectual lives. Quest is open to any and all high school students who seek a peaceful space in their week and a deeper understanding of scripture. Quest is a chance to experience the church's ancient traditions and is open to all those who wish to live out the vision of a small group community. We will be meeting via zoom on Tuesday nights in early 2021.

What do you do at Quest?

Quest tends to our spiritual growth in many ways. We focus on the ancient spiritual traditions of the church. These traditions include meditation forms drawn from ancient monastic traditions (e.g. Benedictine meditations, lectio divina, and Gregorian chant); guided meditations developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola; Quaker "centering down;" Protestant "centering prayer;" Buddhist breathing and walking meditations; and Eastern Orthodox gazing exercises with icons. After a brief introduction, we experience each meditation together and reflect on our shared experience. After reflecting on our experience, we close with prayer.



Quest also challenges us to expand our thinking and develop our own religious and philosophical beliefs while learning from the insights of others. It is a communal discussion of theology, ethics, and our own personal stories and questions of faith. Based on the knowledge of God as revealed to us through scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, Quest offers an opportunity to gather with other high schoolers and put away questions for tests and exams in favor of asking life's biggest questions, including our own purpose and God's plan for us.

The goal of Quest is not just to be able to repeat the words of ministers and theologians but to find our own answers in scripture, prayer, and meditation. We seek to form new questions in the light of our mature reason and discover new relationships with God through time spent with one another.

How do I have my child join Quest?

It's simple - reach out to Kelly Antonson at leather@godsacre.org and let her know your high schooler would like to join. She'll connect them to the group, and their quest will begin!

Fellowship



Thank You! Women's Fellowship & Junior Deacons

An amazing group of women and junior deacons came out to deck the tents for Christmas Eve! On a rain date for our rain date just two days before Christmas Eve nonetheless. We are so thankful for these terrific and talented decorators. Their efforts made what could have been a gloomy Christmas Eve a night of light and splendor!

Our Church Community

Ministers

The Rev. Dr. Stephen Chapin Garner, x1
Senior Minister

The Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird, x831
Associate Minister of Children, Youth,
and Families

Staff

Kelly Leather Antonson, x824
Senior Youth Director

Anush Avetisyan, x821
Director of Children's Music & Drama/
Video Production Technician

Erik Burns, x834
Youth Director

Laurel Carr, x833
Program Manager

Dr. Jo Deen Blaine Davis, x827
Director of Music Ministries

Anthony Jones
Sexton

Marianna Kilbride, x832
Director of Missions and Outreach

Caroline Leather, x835
Director of Children's Formation

Marie-Ange Masters, x823
Director of Accounting

Marianne Perry, x822
Director of Operations

Church Lay Leadership

David Carlson
Chair, Board of Trustees

Jill Robey
Chair, Board of Deacons

Janis Hennessy
Chair, Nominating and Governance

Jeff Altman
Chair, Personnel



The Congregational Church
of New Canaan

23 Park Street
New Canaan, CT 06840
(203) 966-2651
www.godsacre.org

We are a Stephen Minister Church

Newsletter Submissions

If you are planning on contributing to the February newsletter, please submit by January 18.
Email submissions to: laurel@godsacre.org.

myConnect Corner

Become part of myConnect, our online church community!

Within myConnect you can:

- view an online directory
- interact with groups
- set up and manage your online giving
- view giving statements
- register for events
- find ways to volunteer

Two ways to login:

1. Visit www.godsacre.org/myconnect
2. Go to www.godsacre.org and click "myConnect@God's Acre" in the upper left corner.

Need an Account?

Click "Sign Up Here" on the login page, enter your info, and look for our email to get started.

Questions?

Contact marie-ange@godsacre.org