



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.



Dear Church Family,

This has been quite a full year for us! As I head out on sabbatical, I am heartened that so much work has been accomplished this past year, as well as advanced planning for the year that is to come. There is, however, one important issue that has yet to be resolved that will require continued conversation throughout the summer. In conjunction with our legal counsel, Trustees will continue to engage the town in deliberation over our First Selectman's assertion that the Town of New Canaan owns God's Acre. In the past few weeks, we have shared a fair amount of documentation about God's Acre history with our town officials in response to a commitment from all our Selectmen to approach the issue with open minds and genuine interest in understanding our history and the history of our ancient burial ground across the street from our Meeting House. Additionally, I recognize that many of our church members and friends may not know the original purpose, or our church's stewardship, of God's Acre that dates back to 1736. Five years after the founding of "Canaan Parish" and sixty-five years before the incorporation of the Town of New Canaan.

So, as I take leave for a little time of rest and renewal, I wanted to share a sampling of the facts about God's Acre from our church archives and the New Canaan Historical Society archives. For our history buffs, and for those who hold God's Acre dear, I hope this brief history will prove interesting and informative.

In 1965, a New Canaan Advertiser article stated, "the Historical Society believes that New Canaan's Annual Christmas Carolers at God's Acre are standing over unmarked graves." [i] In reference to the ancient burial ground there, "God's Acre" dates back nearly to the founding of Canaan Parish. As a Christian, a pastor of our church, and a proud resident of New Canaan, it is a delight to know that our town sings carols of our Christian faith over the resting place of so many of the original saints of our church every Christmas Eve.

As you have no doubt heard me reference before, the location of our church and the old burial ground referred to as "God's Acre" was selected primarily for theological reasons.

## From the Pastor's Study



*Continued on page two*

# From the Pastor's Study

*Continued from page one*

Our Congregational ancestors who founded our town chose this hill for our church and cemetery because each morning God's Acre is wonderfully illuminated by the rising sun. The sun is an important symbolic and daily reminder for our members, past and present, of the rising of God's Son, and the Easter promise of resurrection. The hill was the ideal location to inter the remains and remember the lives of the faithfully departed of our community.



God's Acre, showing Second Meeting House, the cemetery, and Academy, from Barber's Historical Collections, 1837. In front of the Church is the weeping willow beneath which was the grave of Rev. Justus Mitchell; in the right foreground, the two unmarked graves supposed to be those of Indians.

According to the New Canaan Historical Society, the earliest recorded burial on the God's Acre hill was in 1736, when Anna Beard Eells, the first pastor's wife, died.[ii] Her gravestone is said to reside in the archives of the Historical Society. In 1773, the church wanted to formally extend its burial ground to the base of the hill, and thus, it was decided that our church seek to acquire the triangle of property directly across from our Meeting House. Historical Society documents indicate that there was some confusion as to the rightful owner of the parcel at the time, due to property transfers that had already taken place since the Parish's founding in 1731.[iii] To this end, Captain Samuel Hanford, a leading member of our church, went to the Proprietors of Norwalk for approval of the purchase. There is a notation in the Proprietors Book in Norwalk in 1773 citing that Hanford was seeking "an addition to the burying-place at Canaan." The Proprietor's vote reads as follows: "Granted to the inhabitants of Canaan Parish the sum of sixty shillings, New

York money, towards an addition to their burial place." [iv] A deed was shortly drawn up on behalf of the two most likely owners of the triangular property — William Boulton and Johnathan Husted — and it was granted to the Proprietors of the Canaan Parish for the sum previously agreed upon with the Norwalk Proprietors. The cemetery was in continual use until it reached capacity with the burial of Mary Hanford in 1857.[v]

An unfortunately silent chapter of God's Acre history began when the headstones on the hill were removed, somewhere between the 1870's and 1880's. The prevailing belief is that our ancient burial ground had become overgrown, and in an effort of civic pride around our Nation's Centennial, the community cleaned up the hill and relocated the headstones to Parade Hill, and then Lakeview Cemetery, where many of the headstones reside to this day. There are no records of any human remains being relocated at that time, which, according to State Archeologist, Dr. Sarah Sportman, was not an uncommon practice in the 1800's in New England. A 1925 Connecticut Superior Court case involving the

mishandling of these stones at the Parade Hill Cemetery, states that the stones were moved from God's Acre years before without relocating the graves themselves.[vi]

In 1908, in an effort to re-mark the hill as a church cemetery, The Congregational Church of New Canaan placed a stone marker embossed with "God's Acre" near the top of the hill.[vii] "God's Acre" is a well-known 17th-century term delineating an ancient church burial ground.



In 1923, the Town of New Canaan's War Memorial Committee approached the church and requested that the Town's War Memorial, the Wayside Cross, be allowed to be placed at the base of the ancient burial ground. After thoughtful discussion, our church Trustees voted to support the effort, and the decision was announced to our church members the very next Sunday by The Rev. Dr. James Howard Hoyt. [viii]

Since that time, the church and the town have collaborated on the care and maintenance of the ancient burial ground. It has a rich and complicated history, perhaps best summed up by beloved town historian Mary Louise King in the New Canaan Historical Society's 1973 publication *The Making of Main Street*. King captured the complex history of God's Acre, stating: "it is still classified as a cemetery, owned by the Congregational Church, protected by state law, cared for by the town." [ix]

In my tenure as your pastor, I have so loved witnessing and participating in the numerous church and civic events that take place on our sacred hill. Caroling on God's Acre, Memorial and Veterans Day services of remembrance, the lighting of the Menorah for Hanukkah, and the placing of the Cross during Lent through Eastertide are all beloved traditions in our town and church community. I am confident that our church's many pastors and parishioners buried on that hill would take great joy in the central and very special place God's Acre has in our town and in our hearts. And, with every new sunrise, we are reminded of their lives, their memory, and the Easter promise of resurrection we all hold dear!

Yours in Christ,  
Chapin

- [i] *New Canaan Advertiser*, February, 1965.
- [ii] *New Canaan Advertiser*, February, 1965.
- [iii] The New Canaan Historical Society ANNUAL January 1965, Volume V, Number 5, p. 20.
- [iv] The New Canaan Historical Society ANNUAL January 1965, Volume V Number 5, p. 20;  
*The Making of Main Street*, by Mary Louise King, The New Canaan Historical Society, 1971, p. 7.
- [v] *The Making of Main Street*, by Mary Louise King, The New Canaan Historical Society, 1971, p. 9.
- [vi] The New Canaan Historical Society ANNUAL January 1965, Volume V, Number 5, p. 37.
- [vii] Trustee Minutes for The Congregational Church of New Canaan, July 1, 1908.
- [viii] Trustee Minutes for The Congregational Church of New Canaan, March 1923.
- [ix] *The Making of Main Street*, by Mary Louise King, The New Canaan Historical Society, 1971, pp. 6-7.

## Spring Worship on God's Acre - No RSVP Required!

Join us for In-Person Worship in the Meeting House this Spring!

Sundays 8:00am & 10:00am



Come as you are and worship with us this spring. We hope you will join us if you are comfortable. Capacity limits are still reduced, overflow will be in Smith Hall once we reach 150 in the sanctuary.





# Mission and Outreach

## mayim chaim (flowing water)

Maasai Sunday - May 9, 2021

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God...*

Revelation 22:1

In this pandemic year, we've learned not to take for granted many of the simple things in life. Family. Health. A good meal. One thing we probably do take for granted, though, is that when we turn on the tap, water comes out.

Our Maasai friends in Kenya do not take water for granted. It is life-giving. It is precious. And it is, in many cases, miles away from the village. Over the years, we have funded several water projects in the Ngong Hills, including last year's pipeline to the village of Embarbal Osidan.

There is more need. And so, this year, encouraged by MSA, we are proposing to take on two projects.

The first is an upgrade to the borehole, or well, that serves the area. For years, water has been brought to the surface by a pump powered by a diesel generator. That pump and the generator are past their design lives and require increasingly expensive maintenance. When they fail, there is no water. Our partners would like to replace them with a solar power array and a new submersible pump – a green, lower maintenance, and more reliable solution. The cost of this project is \$18,600.

The second project would take advantage of the more reliable source of water. It would fund a 3½ mile pipeline to the Ole Sokorte village, which currently has no clean, freshwater source. The cost of this project is \$7,000.



The Maasai Ministry Team has been overwhelmed by your generosity in the past; you have changed lives. We ask for your consideration of these two important projects in support of our sisters and brothers in Kenya.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

The Maasai Ministry Team; Diana Beecher, Lyn Bond, Laurel Carr, BJ Flagg, Maria Hemmings, Marianna Kilbride, Caroline Leather, Connie McManus, Carolyn Mulry, Beth Picard, Tom Robey, and Debbie Shew

To participate please contact Marianna Kilbride, [marianna@godsacre.org](mailto:marianna@godsacre.org).

**mayim chaim (flowing water)**

\$0 \$5,000 \$10,000 \$15,000 \$20,000 \$25,000

**MAASAI SOLAR PUMP & PIPELINE PROJECT**

**\$25,600 GOAL**

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God... Revelation 22:1*

# Children & Youth Ministries

## Celebration Week!

What a year it has been! Each week our FISH filled the youth tent with joy, laughter, and great enthusiasm, and we could not be more proud of them and their resiliency! As the program year comes to an end, we look forward to celebrating our amazing youth the week - Tuesday, May 25, 4:00pm-5:30pm K-4th Grade, Wednesday, May 26, 4:00pm-6:00pm 5th- 8th Grade. See you there for fun games, activities, and sweet treats!



## Youth Ministries in May

As we roll into May, we are further reminded of the joy and hope that spring brings. This year May will be our final full month of K-8th programming, but there are some amazing events we have to look forward to. On May 21 JYG and MSYG will unite for a Middle School Late Night. The evening will include pizza, capture the flag, relay races, vespers, and laser tag. Middle schoolers will meet at the church at 6:00pm for the start of the evening. The following week will be our celebration week for all youth groups. We will provide more information surrounding activities as we get closer to the week. Another date to keep in mind is the Beacon of Light Dinner on June 3. Please join us for an evening of celebration as we move further into a post-pandemic world.



## Save the Date: Vacation Bible School!

Get your calendars out and save the date for a fun-filled experience with the return of Vacation Bible School! Beginning on 8/25 and concluding on 8/27 from 9:00am-11:30am we welcome children 1st Grade – 5th Grader to join us in-person at the church for an experience filled with fellowship, faith development, and excitement all around! Rising 6th graders and older are invited to participate as counselors and assist in making this the best last week of summer ever! Registration and further details to come in June- stay tuned!

## Support Our Service!

Will you be a Mission Sponsor? This year, 43 of our YG fish will embark on a truly life-changing pilgrimage to Wakefield, Massachusetts, to work for the second time with, Next Step Ministries to serve our brothers and sisters in need. Our Mission Fish will continue sharing Christ's love through renovating the Boys and Girls Club's youth center, dedicated teen space, and updating their outdated playground.

Youth will be working to repair the community centers for the Boys and Girls Club of Wakefield and Stoneham. The children who will benefit from our service have perhaps experienced greater hardships during the pandemic than we could imagine. The Boys and Girls Club has been a safe haven for children to play, complete homework, and thrive. Our fish will work on outfitting and updating their centers to serve the current needs of their children better. The Boys and Girls Club's mission is to enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens. Of the 300 students who utilize the clubs daily, 31% are being raised by others than their biological parents, often by grandparents or other relatives. The difference between the Boys and Girls Club and other youth centers and activities such as YMCAS and recreation departments is that children don't pay high fees to participate; all youth are welcome!

Their mission can only be accomplished with the help of volunteer groups like YG. And we can't do it without sponsors like you!

The work that we will do together will be life-changing for the children and for our YG Mission Fish, and we invite you join in this effort by making a Mission Sponsor contribution. Please prayerfully consider making donating to support the outreach efforts of our youth. Mission Sponsors receive handwritten letters sent from the mission fish on-site, describing their day-to-day experiences. If you would like to become a Mission Sponsor [click this link to go to the Give button](#) on our website.



# Music Ministries

## Sunday soloists for May

- May 3** - Hans Tashjian, bass  
**May 9** - Aram Tchobanian, tenor  
**May 16** - Anne Maguire, mezzo soprano  
with Virginia Leeman at the organ  
**May 23** - Anush Avetisyan, Anne Maguire,  
Antonio Abate, Dimitrie Lazich  
**May 30** - Anush Avetisyan, soprano  
and Matthew Cossack, baritone

## Pentecost Sunday, May 23

8:00am and 10:00am services

To celebrate Pentecost Sunday, come hear Anush Avetisyan, Anne Maguire, Antonio Abate, and Dimitrie Lazich sing festive music.



# Children's Music Ministry

## Rejoice! Children's Choirs Return

Save the dates for Children's Choirs to begin the week of September 12!

We will meet in a Smith Hall to praise God through music this fall. Our social activities, voices, and community will continue to grow and we look forward to seeing you there!

If you would like to participate please reach out to Director of Children's Music and Drama, Anush Avetisyan, [anush@godsacre.org](mailto:anush@godsacre.org).

## Plan Ahead for Fall 2021

Please mark your calendars:

### Mondays:

Grace Notes: Ages 2 – 4 with a parent/guardian  
4:00pm – 4:30pm

Cherubs: Ages 4 – Kindergarten  
4:30pm – 5:00pm

### Wednesdays:

Spirit Singers: Ages 6-10 – Grades 1-4  
4:00pm – 5:00pm

Joyful Noise: Ages 11 and up – Grades 5-8  
5:00pm – 6:00pm

# Floral Ministry

## Under The Tent

It was a true blessing to gather together again with our church community on Easter Day on God's Acre. The floral ministry enjoyed both decorating the tent and each other's company. After the services, the congregation was invited to take a spring plant to welcome new neighbors to New Canaan, and every plant quickly found a new home.



# Fellowship

## MG is back!

Did you hear? Men's Fellowship Group, aka MG, is going strong this year. We are currently planning for some in-person outdoor activities this spring, including:



### Saturday, May 8: Family Hike at the Leon Levy Preserve in South Salem

Located just 15 minutes north on Route 123 in South Salem, the Leon Levy Preserve has a fun hiking loop that winds through hardwood forests, a ravine with 25-foot cliffs, views west toward the Hudson, and passes the ruins of a 32 room stone mansion. We will hike the 2.5-mile loop trail, which is easy but with moderate elevation, and end with some outdoor, socially distanced refreshments after the hike. Bring the entire family this MG event! Dogs (on leashes) are welcome, too.

### The Annual MG BBQ at Waveny!

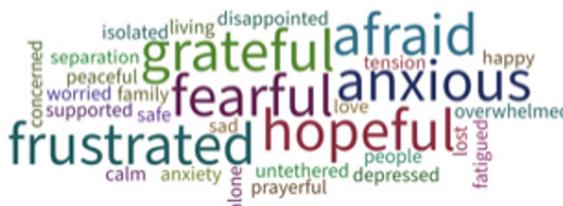
Last year, we missed it, but plan to forge ahead with great MG fellowship combined with a great BBQ at Waveny again this year. The exact date in mid-June is yet to be determined, but we are looking to book a Thursday evening – stay tuned for more information on this fan-favorite MG event! More details on both of these events will be forthcoming. In the meantime, please feel free to contact Don Moyle with any questions at [donmoyle@gmail.com](mailto:donmoyle@gmail.com).

## Need someone to talk to?

Our congregation has been blessed by Stephen Ministry since 2006. Why? We believe you don't have to go through stressful times alone.



During Covid I have felt....



# Our Church Community

## Ministers

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

The Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird, x2  
Acting 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  
Director of Communications

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

Hoyt Davidson  
Chair, Board of Deacons

Barbara Clayton  
Chair, Nominating and Governance

Lonnie deMarco  
Chair, Personnel



The Congregational Church  
of New Canaan

23 Park Street  
New Canaan, CT 06840  
(203) 966-2651  
[www.godsacre.org](http://www.godsacre.org)

*We are a Stephen Minister Church*

## Newsletter Submissions

If you are planning on contributing to the June newsletter, please submit by May 18.  
Email submissions to: [laurel@godsacre.org](mailto: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](http://www.godsacre.org/myconnect)
2. Go to [www.godsacre.org](http://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](mailto:marie-ange@godsacre.org)