



FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

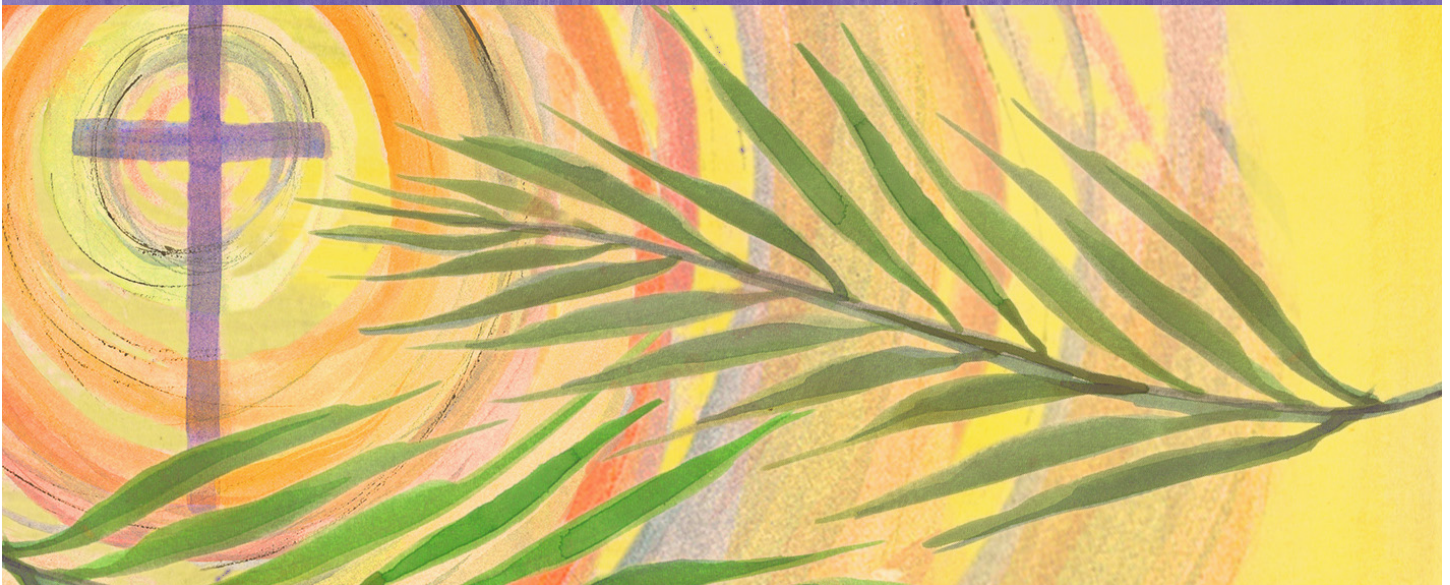
Dear Church Family,

It is February, and I have two worship opportunities to share with you. First, believe it or not, Lent is almost upon us. Lent, a 40-day season starting on Ash Wednesday and concluding on Holy Thursday, prepares us to receive anew the promises of Easter. During Lent, we are encouraged to read scripture, serve others, and practice self-control through fasting. Whether you have observed Lent previously or not, you have likely heard of the practice of “giving something up for Lent.” To intentionally abstain from something you consume — certain foods, impulsive purchasing, time spent watching television, or other forms of entertainment — are forms of fasting. Fasting during Lent deepens our communion with God, focusing on prayer, repentance, and gratitude while enhancing spiritual reliance and obedience to God. Lent can be a spiritually rich season that helps people of faith focus on what is most important in life — our relationship with the Lord — by abstaining from activities and behaviors that often distract us from that primary relationship. This year, Ash Wednesday falls on February 14, so Lent begins on Valentine’s Day! While I don’t yet know the exact message for that service, I trust that the union of Ash Wednesday and Valentine’s Day will provide the opportunity for some interesting and perhaps enlightening reflection. So, I hope you will join me for our Ash Wednesday service on February 14 at 8:00pm in the Meeting House or online as we begin our prayerful journey with Jesus that will take us to the foot of the Cross and ultimately to the entrance of the Empty Tomb.



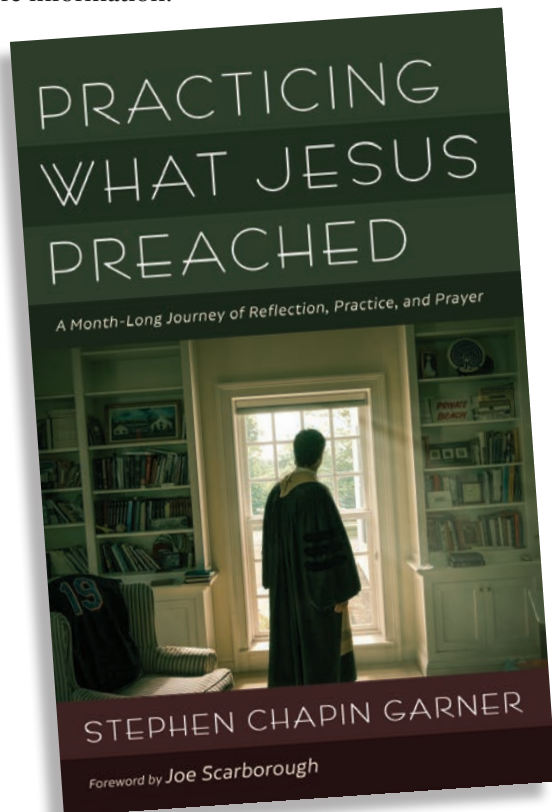
The other worship opportunity I invite you into is our Sunday Evening Worship services, which will be offered in the Chapel on the first Sunday of the month from February through June. Over the years, I have had church members approach me and ask if it might be possible to have a worship service at a time other than Sunday morning. Honestly, I have resisted this suggestion for a couple of reasons; first, we worship on Sunday morning because of Jesus’ resurrection on Easter Sunday, and no matter how many or how few people show up, we gather on Sunday morning to proclaim to the world that on a Sunday morning many years ago, death was defeated and the promise of eternal life was extended to us all. My other reservation about an alternative service time is my skepticism that people who struggle to find time on Sunday morning for worship will be able to make time during the evening.

Continued on page three



Practicing What Jesus Preached

Please join us in a Lenten journey of reflection, practice, and prayer. Chapin's latest book leads us devotionally through the Sermon on the Mount, the most famous teachings of Jesus. Reading Monday through Friday during Lent, the 31 days of the book take us from Ash Wednesday up to Maundy Thursday when our special services begin. Chapin's book, *Practicing What Jesus Preached*, is available at the church, Elm Street Books, Wipf & Stock Publishers www.wipfandstock.com, and other online vendors. Contact Marianna Kilbride at marianna@godsacre.org for more information.



SUBSCRIBE FOR LENT

New Podcast:

Practicing What Jesus Preached for Lent

Each weekday beginning Ash Wednesday through Holy Week, Chapin will offer a podcast with reflections, questions, practices, and prayers, on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Take time to journey with Jesus this Lenten season, by striving to put what Jesus preached into practice.

The podcast will be available on all major podcast platforms beginning February 14.



WORSHIP

Ash Wednesday - February 14

Join us at 8:00pm on Wednesday, February 14, for our Ash Wednesday worship service in the Meeting House. We will mark the beginning of Lent, a season of preparation for Easter, with this traditional service that offers time for reflection, Communion, prayer, and penance. We emphasize the anointing with oil over the traditional imposition of ashes as a way of honoring Jesus' encouragement in Matthew 6:16-18, "so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." We invite everyone to begin their Lenten journey with us for this service of worship, whether in person or via livestream.



FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Continued from page one

I have also had a growing number of people request the opportunity to have a service that allows church members to sing more contemporary Christian music.

While I am not entirely sure what the need or demand is or will be for a Sunday evening contemporary worship service, I am glad to experiment to see where the Holy Spirit might lead us in this endeavor. The service will be a communion service held between our youth programs from 6:00-7:00. I am looking forward to offering a message at this service, and I am grateful to have Greer Lyle and Nick Dupey leading us in song. So, if you have been looking for, or hoping for, a more contemporary service on a Sunday evening, I hope you will be able to join us this February 4 at 6:00 in our Chapel!

Here are your special worship invitations for the month: Ash Wednesday service at 8:00pm on the 14th and our first Sunday Evening Worship service at 6:00pm on the 4th!

Yours in Christ,
Chapin

STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship Update

Our 2024 Stewardship Campaign is making positive strides toward our goal, though we still have a ways to go. This year, we have aspired to reach 425 financial pledges. Beyond financial pledges, we invite you to envision what "greater works than these" the Holy Spirit is calling us to in the years ahead. Currently, we have 270 pledge cards (64% of goal) totaling

\$1,341,256 (61% of our goal). We are very grateful for the blessings of this community. If you have not yet pledged, please consider making a pledge to the Stewardship Campaign, and if possible, please consider increasing your commitment. Beyond pledging, we hope that you will also encourage others to participate in this year's campaign.



Upcoming Annual Meeting

The Trustees are reviewing the financial results for 2023. Last year's results along with the budget for 2024, will be presented at the upcoming Annual Meeting on March 3, 2024 at 11:15am. This year's meeting will be hybrid, both in-person and available via zoom. Stay tuned for further details to follow.

Currently, we have 270 pledge cards (64% of goal) totaling \$1,341,256 (61% of our goal).

All-Church Souper Bowl Sunday Sunday, February 11

Midwinter is a time of increased need at homeless shelters. Join us for a special Souper Bowl Sunday on February 11 for a fun-filled morning of faith-based competition, fellowship, and service in honor of Superbowl Sunday. Children are encouraged to wear jerseys of their favorite teams, bring a canned soup donation for our Open Doors Food Drive, and participate in some friendly church-school trivia during the worship service.

This is a Sunday you won't want to miss! Adults bring your items too. Cars will be parked in the front circle with trunks open between 9:45am-12:00pm. Contact Tracy Goldman at office@godsacre.org with questions.



- Needed items for Open Doors include:**
- Soup (preferably chicken noodle)
 - Rice (preferably 2lb bags)
 - Dried Beans (red or black)
 - Canned Tuna
 - Spaghetti Sauce
 - Peanut Butter
 - Jelly (grape or strawberry)
 - Breakfast Cereal
 - Spices
 - Coffee
 - Can Openers (regular old manual kind)
 - Reusable Grocery Bags

February Church School Schedule

Sunday, February 4
Pre-K-4th grade Chapel Sunday, Storytelling with Mrs. Grogan

Sunday, February 11
Souper Bowl Open Door Food Drive and Trivia Sunday for Pre-K-7th grade

Sunday, February 18
No Church School, activity bags available in worship

Sunday, February 25
Combined Church School class for Pre-K-4th grade



Pivot House Men's Chorus

On Sunday, February 4, the men of Pivot Ministries will join us in the Meeting House at 10:00am to sing and lead worship. Over three decades of partnership with the Congregational Church of New Canaan make for warm and happy visits. If you have not experienced Pivot, you are in for a treat. Pivot Ministries, founded in 1970, is a residential recovery program located in Bridgeport. Pivot's mission is to treat drug and alcohol addiction as a spiritual challenge and return the men to their families whole. All will be blessed by their spirit and stories. Plan to stay after the service to greet the men during fellowship time in Smith Hall.



Hymn Sing in February

Every month, on the third Sunday, we gather in the Meeting House at 9:45am to sing our favorite hymns. You get to choose, and the choir leads us as we prepare for worship. The next Hymn Sing will be on February 18, the First Sunday in Lent, so no "Alleluias"!



Update from Music Minister Search Committee

Thank you to all who took the time to complete the music survey. We received over 150 responses! The search committee will be analyzing the results to help guide our process of identifying our next Director of Music Ministries. We will be kicking off our search this month, so stay tuned for updates. In the meantime, if you are aware of any candidates whom you think the committee should consider, please contact David Haddad at davidmhaddad3@gmail.com.



Wanted: Handbell Ringers

The Joyful Ringers are looking for new members. No experience is necessary; however, it is helpful if you read music. Ringing handbells is fun, challenging, and a great way to give back to your church. High schoolers and adults are welcome! Want to give it a try? Contact Michael Burnette, Interim Director of Music Ministries, at michael@godsacre.org or (203) 966-2651 x104.



Children's Music is Thriving on God's Acre!

After a wonderful fall season and packed Nativity Pageant, the Children's Choirs are excited to spread God's light this spring. This month, Spirit Singers and Joyful Noise will join in worship on Sunday, February 11, with upbeat tunes about what it means to "be a light" - a fitting way to ring out the last Sunday of Epiphany! Be sure to mark your calendars, as this one is not to be missed! The Children's Musical will be announced later this month and sign-ups will open on February 18. Please email Greer Lyle, our Children's Music Director, with any questions at greer@godsacre.org.



Will you be a Mission Sponsor?



For over three decades, The Congregational Church of New Canaan has had a mission to create a community in which youth can experience and share the love of God. All year, we have continued to walk with Christ to create a community for our youth marked by love, covenant, and participation.

This February, 108 of our YG fish will embark on a truly life changing pilgrimage to San Juan, Puerto Rico to work with our partner, *First Baptist Church of Río Piedras* to serve those brothers and sisters in need. In 2017, the Caribbean Island of Puerto Rico was devastated by Hurricane Maria. Over 40,000 families lost their roofs, their feeling of safety, their investment and security, and their homes. Estimates vary, but there are still more than 25,000 families that need help to rebuild and go on with their lives. For the past few years, our partners, *First Baptist Church of Río Piedras*, have hosted teams that have completed over 354 roofs and 8 houses. In addition to past and current hurricane damage, there are elderly poor in the area who need help with home repairs. Our trip this year will continue the work our adults began last year with

these wonderful partners as they work their way through the storm damage and poverty in Puerto Rico.

Their vital work and mission can only be accomplished with the help of volunteer groups like YG. YG provides a space for the spirit to move and allows our youth the opportunity to foster a greater relationship with God and one another. Today I ask you to join us as a mission sponsor. Our YG families pay a fee to participate, but that fee covers only about half the actual cost of this trip. Your donation will not only help provide housing, food, and other needs but, more importantly, make this trip possible for our Mission Fish in need of scholarships.

God's work can only be accomplished with the help of volunteer groups like YG. And we can't do it without sponsors like you! Will you be a Mission Sponsor?

Donate today at www.godsacre.org/give and choose Mission Sponsor as your designation.



Filling in the Blanks Packing Event - A Great Success!

Back in early January, Women's Fellowship and Missions and Outreach combined forces and packed over 600 bags of food for children in need of weekend meals. Thanks to all who participated in this meaningful event.



February Plate Collection - Open Doors

Every night in Connecticut, there are over 3,000 people without a home; almost 800 of those are in Fairfield County. Homelessness has many causes. In Fairfield County, the lack of affordable housing drives many individuals and families into homelessness. Our longtime partner, Open Doors has a mission to make a direct impact in the greater Norwalk area by guiding every person in the cycle of homelessness toward housing stability. Their vision is to engage every person at risk of and experiencing homelessness with a holistic set of tools and resources that can be tailored to their individual needs. Our plate offering for February is designated to this compassionate cause. Please join us in supporting Open Doors.



Winter Gardens

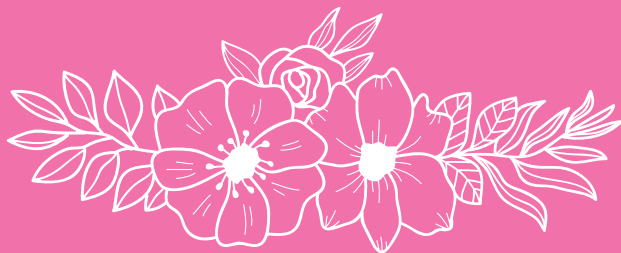
The very first time I visited the New York Botanical Gardens was a frozen, February day. In my early twenties and newly in love with gardening, this winter visit seemed like a good idea at the time. The cold, however, was overwhelming, so not long after arriving, I wished to be just about anywhere else. That's when I stepped inside the conservatory. Suddenly, there was nowhere else I'd have rather been. It was so warm and full of oxygen. Everything was a beautiful, calm green.

Years later, it's frozen February again. Luckily, on Sunday morning, no matter what's going on outside, inside on God's Acre, it's always warm. As far as the green part, the flower ministry has you covered. Blooms arranged by our team will be in the Narthex, Chapel, and Meeting House. After the service, we keep the warmth going by breaking down the altar flowers so the deacons can deliver bits of sunshine to members of our community.

Thursday, February 8, at 9:30am, the Women's Fellowship is offering a flower arranging class. If you love flowers or have always wanted to learn to arrange, please join us. Perhaps you will have so much fun, you will even join the Flower Ministry Team.

As always, contact Tracy Goldman at office@godsacre.org to schedule a flower dedication.

So glad to be together, no matter the season.
Warmly, Juliet Howe.

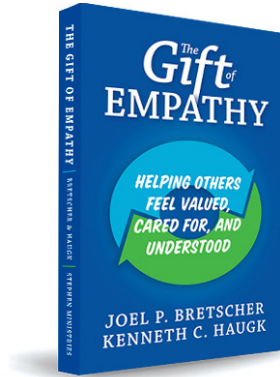


Dedicate Flowers for Sunday Worship

Dedicate a floral arrangement to remember someone special who has passed away or who is celebrating a special birthday, anniversary, or graduation. Please contact Tracy Goldman at office@godsacre.org to choose a date and discuss color preference. A suggested donation of \$100 is greatly appreciated.

Give the Gift of Empathy

This past November, our Stephen Ministers gathered to talk about empathy. The discussion was guided by the book *The Gift of Empathy* by Joel Bretscher and Kenneth Haugk. Empathy is at the core of Pastoral Care and it is what our ministry teams strive to offer to our church family. In fact, in many ways, giving the gift of empathy is the best way for all of us to love our neighbors as God loves us.



Here are a few takeaways from the book.

- Empathy is not something you have; it is something you give.
- Empathy is looking at a situation from someone else's perspective to experience how they are feeling and to affirm them.
- A simple, empathetic response is usually the most effective way to comfort someone who is suffering.
 - “I’m so sorry;”
 - “That must have been awful;”
 - “My heart goes out to you;”
 - “I’m feeling your pain.”
- Empathy is understanding what another person is experiencing while staying in control of your own emotions. Being stable allows you to be helpful and to compassionately let someone know that they are not alone. By encouraging them to share their feelings, you give them the opportunity to release them. Empathy is about active listening, not about advising or trying to fix a situation.
- The person receiving empathy feels understood, valued, accepted, encouraged, and cared for.
- The person giving empathy builds stronger and more meaningful relationships with family, friends, and coworkers; empathy helps us expand our own perspectives, grow personally, and feel less pressure to “fix” things. Empathy enriches others’ lives as well as our own.

The book offers many good tips to help us act more empathetically. It can be purchased on the Stephen Ministries website: <https://www.stephenministries.org/default.cfm> or you could borrow a copy from the Pastoral Care office by contacting Beth Baker beth@godsacre.org or Barb Clayton barb@godsacre.org.



**STEPHEN
MINISTRY**

Love Thy Neighbor

*Stephen
Ministry*

*Card Writing
Ministry*

*Prayer Chain
Ministry*

*Flower
Ministry*

*Prayer Shawl
Ministry*



Contact Beth Baker at beth@godsacre.org
or Barb Clayton at barb@godsacre.org
to get involved.

We are a warm and
welcoming family of faith,
bound together in
compassion and love.

Fellowship Supper Club

Save the Date: Saturday, March 23

We are a large and active church, and one of the joys and challenges of being in a large church is that there is always someone new to meet! Our Supper Club can foster opportunities to make friends with other wonderful people outside our usual social circles.

What is Supper Club? Supper Club is a guided potluck dinner at a host's home, where a group of people meets in an informal and relaxed setting. It's great for newcomers and long-timers.

Who can participate? All adults who attend our church (members and visitors) are invited to participate!

How does it work? Save the date! We will gather on Saturday, March 23. Everyone who signs up for a dinner will be grouped with 6 to 8 other people. Each person or couple will be assigned a dish or a role that will contribute to a complete dinner (host, appetizer, main course, dessert, etc.). On the day of the dinner, you prepare your dish, grab an adult beverage to share (if desired), and head to your host's home to enjoy an evening of food and fellowship!

Who figures out when and where our supper club will gather? Multiple small dinners will occur on March 23. When you sign up, the club's coordinator, Dawn Doak, will reach out with your assignment the week of the dinner. If you



are willing to host the dinner in your home, you can indicate that on the sign-up form (hosts don't need to cook! They are just responsible for setting the table and serving non-alcoholic beverages).

What if I can't cook? You don't need to be a gourmet cook! The recipes are designed to be easy and great for groups.

What if I'm a vegetarian, lactose/gluten intolerant, or allergic to garbanzo beans? There is a place to list all your dietary restrictions on the online form. The coordinator and hosts will be informed of your needs and will work with the group to make sure there are options for you.

Stayed tuned for the invite coming to your inbox in late February! Contact Dawn Doak at dawn.norris@gmail.com if you would like to host.

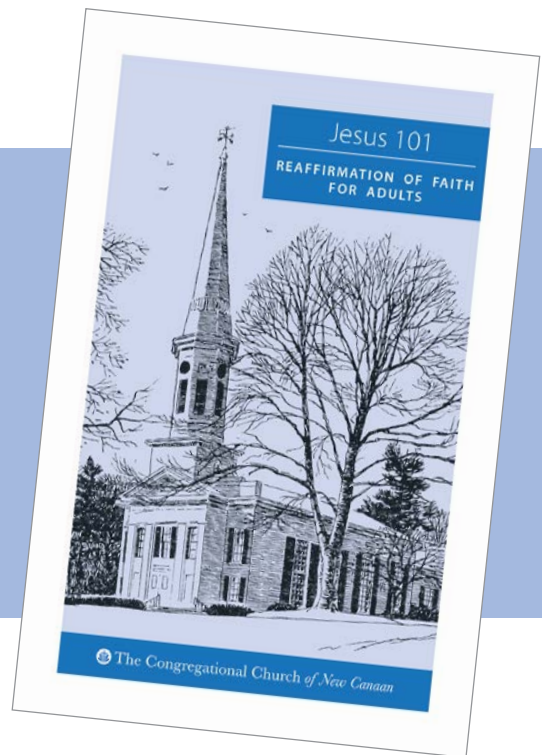


Adult Confirmation

Begins February 4, 8:45-9:45am

Adults are invited to spend twelve Sundays this winter and spring reading and discussing scripture, faith themes, and faith questions with church friends, just like our confirmands. Confirmand parents or soon-to-be confirmand parents may particularly find this class useful. Prayer, resurrection, worship, and sacraments are explored before writing your own statement of faith. Whether brand new to faith or reaffirming a long-held one, join Chapin and Marianna to engage in your faith with your church family.

For questions or to sign up, contact Chapin Garner at pastor@godsacre.org.

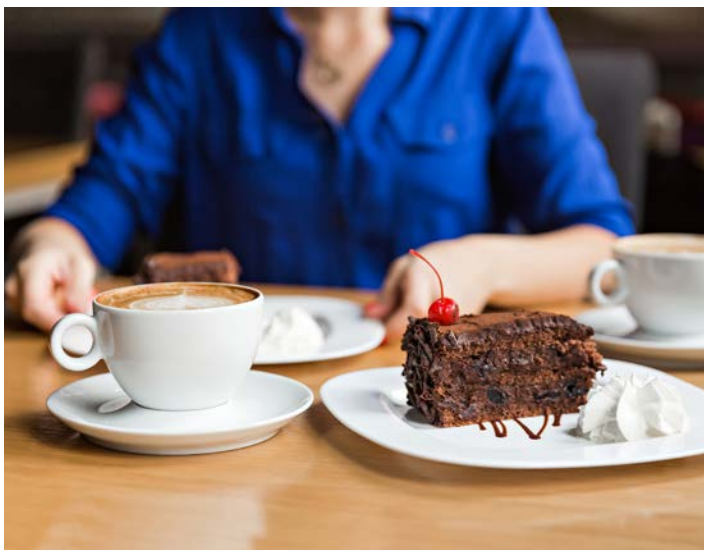


WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Cake and Coffee is back on March 7!

Please join us for cake, coffee, and camaraderie at the beautiful home of church member Malia Frame on Thursday, March 7 at 9:30am. We will serve coffee and light refreshments. Let us enjoy some fellowship time together. Invites will be in your inbox soon. Contact Lesley Cousley at lacousley@gmail.com to RSVP or if you would like to bake.

Rides are available. Please contact Tracy Goldman at office@godsacre.org for help in obtaining a ride.



Women's Fellowship Flower Workshop

Thursday, February 8 - 9:30-11:00am

Ladies, join us in Smith Hall for a flower-arranging workshop. Juliet Howe, head of the Flower Ministry Team, will guide us in creating a beautiful arrangement. Our morning will be filled with flowers, fellowship, and fun. The cost is \$45. Please contact Laurel Carr at laurel@godsacre.org if you need financial assistance.

Sign up and leave with your own floral creation.

Register by February 4 at:

godsacre.ccbchurch.com/goto/forms/158/responses/new



OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

Ministers

The Rev. Dr. Stephen Chapin Garner, **x101**
Senior Minister

Pastoral Care Emergency, **x103**

Staff

Kelly Leather-Antonson, **x110**
Senior Youth Director

Beth Baker, **x102**
Interim Minister of Pastoral Care

Dr. Michael Burnette, **x104**
Interim Director of Music Ministries

Laurel Carr, **x107**
Director of Communications

Barb Clayton, **x102**
Interim Minister of Pastoral Care

Lindsey Daly, **x112**
Director of Children's Ministries

Emma Garner, **x111**
Youth Director

Tracy Goldman, **x109**
Community Life Coordinator

Sarah Haddad, **x113**
Church School Coordinator

Anthony Jones, **x116**
Sexton

Marianna Kilbride, **x105**
Director of Spiritual Formation

Caroline Leather-Smith, **x106**
Director of Operations

Greer Lyle, **x115**
Director of Children's Music and Drama

Maria Stadnik, **x108**
Director of Finance

Allison Wolter, **x114**
Youth Ministries Administrative Assistant

Church Lay Leadership

Diane Bailey
Chair, Personnel

Chris Baker
Chair, Board of Trustees

Barbara Clayton
Chair, Nominating and Governance

Dionna Carlson
Chair, Board of Deacons



The Congregational Church
of New Canaan

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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 March newsletter, please submit by February 19. 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 laurel@godsacre.org