



FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Dear Church Family,

After several years of referring to his disciples as students, Jesus transitioned to calling those students “friends.” It was high praise and also an indication of a deepening intimacy of the relationship between Jesus and his closest followers. As you read through the gospels, you may notice that Jesus often referred to different people as friends. In the Gospel of John, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were named friends of Jesus, and the gospel attests that Jesus loved that trio of siblings. Jesus often welcomed strangers and even some of his enemies by greeting them as a “friend.” Even when Judas approached Jesus to betray him, Jesus referred to Judas, saying: “Friend, do what you are here to do.”

Friendships and the call to friendship were very important to Jesus. Jesus was sustained by many of his friends, and he greeted even those hostile to him by holding out the possibility for a more generous and gracious form of relationship.



As I look back on my life, I realize I did not really begin to maintain friendships in a concerted way until graduate school. I am always amazed and a bit jealous of people who have been able to maintain connections with friends going back to childhood. Honestly, I don't think I developed the skill to be a truly good and enduring friend until my mid-twenties. I also think I made my way through much of my early life believing that close family was about as much connection as a person might want or be able to sustain.

That changed as I edged toward the end of my time in seminary, and I realized that to be sustained in my vocation, I would need the support, encouragement, and inspiration of friends who shared a similar call as I did. So, I actively and deliberately sought out people I wanted as friends. When I encountered a clergy person whom I found interesting and enjoyable to be with, I purposefully befriended them. Being intentional about friend-making and friend-keeping has become something of a spiritual discipline for me. And I have found, even and especially within the church, my relationships feel much more like friendships than relationships constructed and separated by the roles of pastor and people. Friendship, I have come to believe, is one of the most important expressions of true Christian experience. Friendships at their best

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and most noble are committed, loving, supportive, encouraging, and correcting relationships. The best of friends are not afraid to show affection and are willing to offer words of helpful critique. Friends have a way of keeping us accountable to our best selves and most admirable ambitions.

This April 28, we will be joined by one of my very best friends, Rev. Andrew Warner. Andrew and I became friends during our Clinical Pastoral Education at what was then New England Deaconess Hospital in Boston in 1996. We are now edging toward thirty years of friendship. I cannot imagine my ministerial journey without his wise counsel and guidance, our shared critique of our denomination, and our sense that the centrality of Jesus is essential to vital faith and vital churches. While Andrew was one of the first friendships I intentionally chose to maintain, he is the last in our "Circle of Friends" program lineup. I hope you will join me in welcoming Andrew at the end of April to hear what word he might have for us and what we can learn from his current ministry.

Jesus knew that friendships were sacred and holy relationships that offered support, encouragement, and challenge. Friendships were central to Jesus' life and ministry. May we aspire to form and maintain friendships through which we can both give and receive a similar measure of blessing.

Yours in Christ,
Chapin

Circle of Friends - Sunday, April 28

On Sunday, April 28, we will welcome our fifth Circle of Friends guest preacher, Reverend Andrew B. Warner. Andrew B. Warner, CFRE, serves as Director of Development for the Wisconsin Conference of the United Church of Christ. He leads the fundraising efforts of the conference, supports the planned giving and effective philanthropy of congregations, and works to organize a foundation based on a community foundation model for the endowments of the conference and congregations.

Before joining the conference staff in 2019, Andrew served for twenty-two years as pastor of Plymouth Church UCC of Milwaukee, a vibrant and inclusive Christian community. Through faith-based leadership and board service, Andrew developed as a leader who connects people's deepest passions with generative opportunities and initiatives.

Andrew also serves as a Generosity Outreach Officer of the national setting of the UCC. In that role, he trains, coaches, and mentors conference and congregational leaders across the country to strengthen the culture of generosity in the UCC. Working collaboratively with the staff of the national setting, conferences, and congregations, Andrew designs workshops, presentations, and resources on philanthropy and the development of best practices.

Andrew lives with his husband in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Their eldest son Tomas attends the University of St. Thomas, while their youngest studies aviation at Fox Valley Community College. Andrew loves to cook and entertain, a practice he calls his "gastro-evangelism."



STEWARDSHIP

Annual Meeting and Stewardship Update

On March 3, the church conducted our 291st Annual Meeting both in-person and via Zoom. We had high attendance and a successful meeting. The 2024 budget was passed with a forecast of approximately \$3.34 million in income and expenses for the year. The 2024 Stewardship Campaign continues to track well, as we exceeded our goal of \$2.2 million. To date, we have 368 pledges for a total of \$2,667,666. Thanks to all of you who have given so generously this year!



WELCOMING TEAM

Spring New Members

On Sunday, March 24, fifteen new members joined the church with their families. Please welcome the following new members to our church community.

- John & Anita Bausman
- Bill & Emily Candee
- Andrew & Sarah Dugal
- Jeff & Jenn Fittipaldi
- Drew & Beth Garrabrant
- Walter & Sharon Kress
- Alden Meintzer
- Andrew & Abby Stinchfield



LIFE EVENTS



Tom and Lizzie Decarlo welcomed their daughter, Eliza Bell Decarlo to the world on December 21, 2023. Eliza has been flourishing over these last three months, and Thomas (2.5 years old) is a very proud big brother. We can't wait to introduce Eliza to her church family!



Steve Monroe welcomed granddaughter, Eleanor Meredith Monroe Thorburn on March 8, 2024.



A Holy Thank You

Much gratitude is extended to our many wonderful musicians, including Cherubs, Spirit Singers, Joyful Noise, Junior Worship Team, YG Worship Team, Joyful Ringers, Chancel Choir, soloists, and cellist Claire-Hélène Ritter, who shared their talents and contributed so much beauty throughout Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. What a blessing you are to the church!

Hymn Sing on April 21 at 9:45am

Hymns hold a profound place in Christian worship. Through poetic language, they articulate Biblical truths and convey essential theological concepts. Perhaps more importantly, hymns unite the body of Christ, joining the youngest and oldest of our congregation and everyone in between as they express their faith. When words fail, hymns provide us a way to connect with God.

Join us in the Meeting House on Sunday, April 21, at 9:45am before worship to sing favorite hymns! You choose, and we all sing!

Director of Music Ministries Search Committee Update

The Search Committee recently reviewed the results of the congregation-wide music survey with the outside consultant we'd engaged to assist us, and we've now incorporated that feedback into our ongoing search process to identify our next Director of Music Ministries. We've received more than 25 applications thus far from candidates hailing from all across the country, and the Committee has recently started the process of narrowing the field and beginning conversations with our most promising applicants.



Rehearsal for *The Fruit of the Spirit!*

This month, the church children are invited to join us in rehearsal for our musical on May 19, *The Fruit of the Spirit!* The children will learn memory verses and songs to accompany each spiritual fruit. Signups are happening now! Email Greer Lyle at greer@godsacre.org for more information.

Palm Sunday Singing

Our Children's Choirs led the church children in triumphant procession for Palm Sunday, singing "Lo, He Comes!" and joyously waving their palms. The Joyful Noise choir led our Palm Sunday prayer response by singing "Guide Us, Lord," a prayer of St. Richard of Chichester, which encourages the believer "to see Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly, and follow Thee more nearly day by day."



Vacation Bible School 2024: Save the Date

We are excited to return with another fun-filled week of Vacation Bible School this summer. VBS 2024: Carrying the Torch will explore Bible stories about light and spreading God's abundant love through a summer Olympics theme. Join us for a week of faith formation, fellowship, art, games, and fun! VBS will run the week of August 19-22 from 9:00am-12:00pm. We will invite children four years old through 4th grade to participate as campers and children in 5-8th grade to participate as junior counselors. High schoolers are encouraged to reach out to us for more information about senior counselor positions. For more information, please reach out to churchschool@godsacre.org. Sign-up information will be shared in the coming weeks!



Children and Family Ministries BINGO Night

Children and families of all ages are encouraged to sign up and join us for a night of family fellowship and BINGO fun. On Sunday, April 28, we will gather from 5:00-6:30pm in Smith Hall for a friendly BINGO competition. Pizza will be served, and amazing prizes will be available for all to win. This is a beloved annual church event, and we hope to have you there!



August 19-22 from 9:00am-12:00pm

April Church School Calendar

Sunday, April 7

Church School
(Chapel Service for grades 1-4, 5-7 remain in Meeting House)

Sunday, April 14

Combined Church School Class
(PreK-4th grade)

Sunday, April 21

Combined Church School Class
(PreK-4th grade)

Sunday, April 28

Church School
(PreK-7th grade)

Upcoming Trip to Mountainside

Join our Middle School Youth Group (MSYG) as we answer God's call to serve others on our mini mission trip to Mountainside Treatment Center. From June 7-9th, our MSYG fish will embark on this meaningful journey. Engage in faith exploration as we work alongside selected residents in recovery to restore and improve the Mountainside facility. Secure your child's spot on the trip by signing up before May 14. If you have any additional questions about the trip, please contact Emma at emma@godsacre.org.



MOUNTAINSIDE



MSYG
Car Wash!
\$20 per car + parking for the May Fair!



Saturday, May 11
10am-2pm

HELP US RAISE MONEY FOR OUR MISSION TRIP AND STOP BY GOD'S ACRE TO GET YOUR CAR WASHED!

MSYG Car Wash

Save the Date: Saturday, May 11

Our MSYG Car Wash runs from 10:00am-2:00pm on May 11th! Stop by God's Acre to get your car washed by our Middle School Youth Group and help them raise money for their mission trip to Mountainside this June. \$20 per car and parking for the May Fair!

AMO Mission Trip Reflections

On behalf of the church Adult Missions and Outreach (AMO) traveled to Puerto Rico in March to partner with our friends in Rio Piedras in rehabbing the house of a woman who was, until recently, homeless. Please read below some of the group's reflections upon their return.

From Marianne Toldalagi

Relax and Go With the Flow are not exactly the first words you think of when describing a group of highly energetic and motivated New Canaanites (and etc...) After all, we are the ones who are motivated by assessing a problem, figuring out the solution and then getting it done...in 4 days! Well, it seems the Holy Spirit decided we had some other lessons to learn. Suffice it to say that in the beginning, our project was a challenge for us because we didn't feel we were doing enough! We had to find the grace to communicate with our local project partners and do the essentials as they told us. And, through a few of our special angels, we were able to communicate without a word of Spanish with the frightened and lonely lady who lived in the house. We scrubbed and scraped and painted and after a few very focused trips to Walmart fixed up her room. At the end of the week she was smiling in her clean bed, listening to her new radio and particularly grateful for having a flashlight! We did manage a few major tasks...new roof, couple of new doors and fresh paint inside and out.

Along the way, our team really bonded and forged new friendships and strengthened old ones. Lots of great conversations took place and we laughed a lot. We tried very hard to create a lasting and meaningful difference for the little community in Puerto Rico, yet in many ways the Holy Spirit give us the most wonderful gift of all...friendships and sense of community that will sustain us all for a long time. So 'going with the flow' worked out pretty well for all!!



From Lesley Cousley

With encouragement from friends, my husband and Marianna, I signed up for the 2024 AMO trip with very few expectations. I had only heard what an amazing experience it was for other members of our congregation. I was 100% anxious and as one of the rookies among this seasoned group of missionaries, I wondered what kind of impact I could possibly make. I had the rewards of physical labor and task-based to-dos in my mind and while I didn't really physically build anything, I did build lasting relationships with over 25 of the most devoted, hard working and giving group of people.

This trip provided so many meaningful opportunities to witness God's work. As "type A" task-oriented individuals, we learned the lesson of emptying ourselves to receive the blessings of the week. We witnessed the grace and compassion displayed by Jini Martens as she sat with and comforted Trinidad (the homeowner) while we scraped, cleaned and repainted her room. We witnessed the outpouring of support from the community in caring for Trinidad but also opening their home and kitchen to nourish us. We witnessed the magical gift of a group of people coming together as one, to work toward one goal and we witnessed the humility of each member of our group selflessly serving and filling each other's cups.

When I look back through the vast collection of photos from our trip (which I've done almost every day since returning), I see a common thread in most of the photos - A LOT of radiant smiles. I can't help but think that these smiles are the result of giving and serving together to the point that our cups are overflowing. I also believe that smiles are universal and contagious and by serving this community in Puerto Rico and improving Trinidad's life just a little bit, we created a feeling of hope and support for those that needed it most.

The first few days of the mission trip brought mixed emotions for me.

What did I sign up for?

How can we possibly get this work done?

Will it really make a difference?

How will my family get by without me?

I'm not sure I can do this again.

But by the end of the week and upon my return home, I find myself asking...what's next?

Who can we serve next?



Jesus Moments - From Stephanie Douglas-Parkin

Our homeowner's name was Trinidad, which in Spanish means the Trinity, the union of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There were twenty-three Mission Fish. While most were the usual participants, we were blessed by the addition of 5 women, younger by a generation, who brought new energy and enthusiasm to the group.

This was my seventh trip, and from experience had tempered expectations. There would be idle moments, where either limited tools, space, projects or skill sets didn't align. Sometimes homeowners don't interact, being unsure of who or what to expect, or how to engage.

Still, with our newer mission fish, I was hopeful that they would have a memorable, faith filled experience.

Things did not start out exactly that way.

We had work to do, although the work scope was not well defined, nor did it necessarily utilize our resources fully.

And Trinidad seemed inaccessible, due to language differences and her condition. She was in her 70's and had been a drug addict and homeless, until a relative left her a shabby house a few years ago. The house had three rooms, two upstairs. But we soon discovered that Trinidad was immobile. She lived only in the small room downstairs, lying on a bed, with a basket of meager food and drink items at her feet. She could

not climb to the upper level, or down the six stairs to the yard outside. Trinidad lived her life, as one of our group said, in her own 5 x 8 foot cell.

While we could tidy the outside and repair other spaces, we were unsure of how we could fix that tiny space Trinidad occupied, or even how to reach her.

Nightly Vespers centered on "emptying" ourselves of our routine preoccupations to focus on the mission. But what we really needed to do was empty ourselves of expectations. If we couldn't do much for Trinidad, we would do what we could, working together as disciples, with the loving support of Zulma and the Iglesia Bautista de Rio Piedras and the neighbors on Trinidad's street, who fed our entire team daily.

Then the Jesus moments started to occur.

Our mission fish Susan found she could speak to Trinidad in her limited Spanish, and discovered she hadn't eaten. From then on, Susan brought Trinidad food. "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink", as Jesus said in Mark 25:35.

When we needed to move Trinidad from her room, several of the mission fish gently lifted her into a chair, and carried her up and down the steep steps; this brought to mind the story in Mark, of the four friends who carried and then lowered the paralyzed man through a roof so Jesus could heal him.

As home repairs were happening, mission fish Jini sat with Trinidad, silently, comforting her through the confusion. In an ultimate Jesus moment, I watched Jini tenderly wash Trinidad's arms, as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, saying "I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15).

In the end, our expectations for a memorable, faith filled experience were exceeded. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit were surely among us that week — enabled through a tiny woman named Trinidad.



April Plate Collection – Pacific House

The April plate offering will go towards Pacific House. The mission at Pacific House is to prevent and end homelessness. The agency provides fundamental needs of food and shelter while offering short-term, solution-focused case management services (free to clients), which help them access community resources to secure stable housing quickly. While Pacific House is focused on housing the homeless in Fairfield County, the agency also helps individuals get back to school or find employment to help them ultimately afford housing and help reduce the homeless population in Connecticut.



The Parables - Greatest Hits

The parables are Jesus' most often used teaching tool, simple but clever and powerful stories to illustrate a greater truth or spiritual and moral lesson. Join us for this greatest parable hits series beginning April 15. Mondays in the Library, 7:00-8:00am, or Tuesdays (Women's) in the Parlor, 9:30-10:30am. A Zoom link for either group is available. Contact Marianna Kilbride at marianna@godsacre.org.



Meals On Wheels – Volunteer Drivers Needed



Our long-standing partner, Meals on Wheels, is looking for drivers to deliver meals to New Canaan residents who are unable to provide a meal for themselves. Meals are picked up at Waveny Care Center at 10:30am, and delivery usually takes about an hour and a half. Feel free to bring a friend or your kids along while serving your community.

Sign up today one of the following ways:

Sign-Up Genius

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c054fa5a72ba2f94-january#>

Contact Marianna Kilbride at marianna@godsacre.org

Connect with Meals on Wheels directly by contacting Jen Van de Graaf at jenvdg@gmail.com or Shona Goldenberg at lolarosebea@gmail.com



Gratitude: More than just “Thank You”

O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.
 – Psalm 107:1

As we express gratitude, we delve into a profound aspect of our human experience. Gratitude transcends mere thanks; it is deeply woven into our being. When we acknowledge the blessings in our lives, whether from the Divine or from the kindness of others, we unlock a cascade of benefits that touch every aspect of our existence.

Scientifically, gratitude is akin to a miracle worker for our well-being. It activates our brain’s reward circuitry, fostering patience, humility, empathy, and tranquility. It’s as though gratitude rewires our very essence towards contentment, inviting harmony into our lives.

Furthermore, gratitude enriches our relationships. It deepens connections with friends, family, and colleagues, nurturing bonds that withstand the tests of time. It’s akin to a sixth sense, heightening our awareness of the beauty around us. When we train ourselves to notice and appreciate the seemingly insignificant moments, they blossom into profound sources of joy and fulfillment.

So, how can we cultivate gratitude in our daily lives?

- First, notice. Pay attention to the people and moments that evoke gratitude within you. Whether it’s a simple act of kindness or a profound gesture, take notice.
- Second, think. Reflect on why these individuals or experiences are meaningful to you. Consider the impact they’ve had on your life and the blessings they bring.
- Third, feel. Allow yourself to immerse in the emotions that arise when you think of these blessings. Whether it’s warmth, joy, or peace, let these feelings wash over you.
- Finally, do. Take action to express your gratitude. Whether through words, deeds, or simply a heartfelt smile, find ways to show appreciation for the goodness in your life.

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.

In embracing gratitude as more than just words but as a way of life, we open ourselves to a world of abundance and blessings beyond measure. Let us journey together in gratitude, enriching our lives and the lives of those enriching our lives and the lives of those around us.

Contact Barb Clayton at barb@godsacre.org or Beth Baker at beth@godsacre.org to learn more.

FLORAL MINISTRY

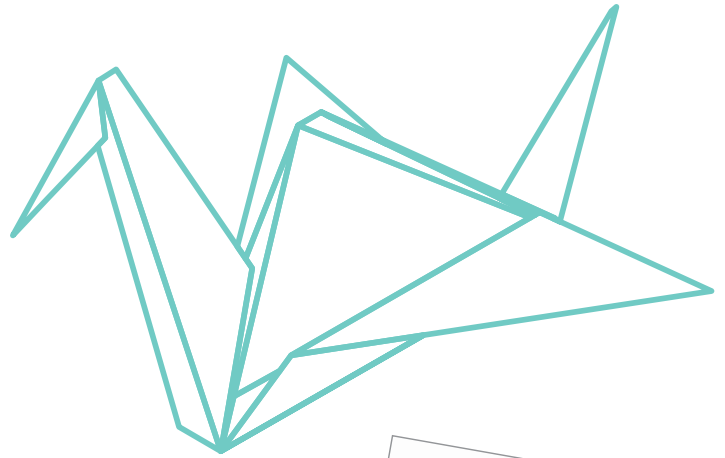
Easter Gratitude

The generosity of our church community is present in so many ways, from mission trips to volunteers in the choir and Sunday school. The beauty of this was once again represented by all the donations for the flower display, all those who delivered them after the service, and all those who kindly took the time to write the accompanying notes. As lovely as the flowers are the true beauty is the community they represent. A heartfelt thanks to all of you.



Get Involved with the New Mental Health Ministry Team

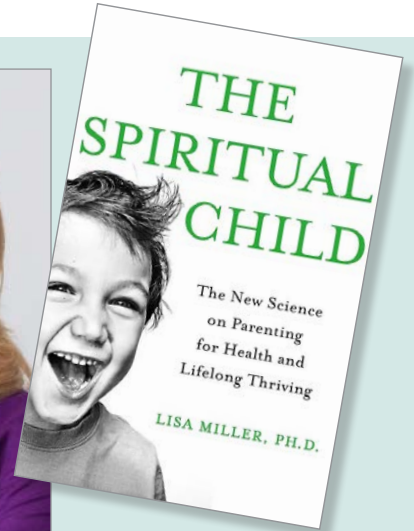
Through the lens of a foundation of faith, spirituality, and hope, a new ministry team at our church has formed to raise awareness around how these important pillars can positively impact our mental health and that of our loved ones. Our goal is to support each other and bring resources to our community. We seek members who feel called to help build a new ministry involving book groups, workshops, teen-focused programs, and more. Contact Kim Hall (917)690-3700 or Martha Palmer (919)593-6173 to learn more.



The Spiritual Child: Upcoming event with Lisa Miller

Lisa Miller is returning - Mark your calendars for May 21 and May 28!

On May 21, from 7:00-8:00pm, we are delighted to welcome back Lisa Miller, PhD., to discuss her bestselling book, *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Learning*. Dr. Miller is a professor of Psychology and Education at Teachers' College, Columbia University, and Founder of the Spirituality, Mind, and Body Institute. Many of you will remember her visit last fall when she presented new ideas in psychology and parenting from her book *The Awakened Brain* which provided data connecting science and the power of spirituality. Not to be missed!



Book Discussion Group

In addition, Lesley Cousley and Martha Palmer are leading a book group discussion on Tuesday, May 28 from 6:30-7:30pm to talk about *The Spiritual Child* and reflect on what we learned from the evening with Dr. Miller. The discussion will be in person in the Parlor.

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Women's Fellowship Spring Luncheon

Save the Date: Friday, May 3 at 11:30am

Join us for our Annual Women of Wisdom (WOW) Luncheon honoring all the women of our congregation who are 80 or older. Enjoy a special afternoon of fellowship and words of wisdom from this fantastic group of ladies. The luncheon will be held at The Country Club of New Canaan from 11:30am-1:00pm on Friday, May 3. The cost of the lunch is \$45. If you are interested in sponsoring one of our honorees, you can do so when you register. Invitation coming soon! Contact Lesley Cousley at lcousley@gmail.com with questions or to RSVP.



OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

Ministers

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

Pastoral Care Emergency, **x103**

Staff

Kelly Leather-Antonsen, **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-Smittle, **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

Lonnie deMarco
Chair, Personnel

Amy Werner
Chair, Board of Trustees

Peter Wilson
Chair, Nominating and Governance

Dionna Carlson
Chair, Board of Deacons



The Congregational Church
of New Canaan

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www.godsacre.org

We are a Stephen Minister Church

Newsletter Submissions

If you are planning on contributing to the May newsletter, please submit by April 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