



FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Dear Church Family,

After a particularly enriching and demanding fall and early winter season in the life of the church, I am preparing to take some time away for rest and renewal.

I want to begin by reflecting on how remarkable this season has been. We started our program year by addressing profound tragedies in our town, playing a central role in providing resources and care for our community. Throughout the fall, we experienced increased engagement in many of our programs and ministries, including a wonderful uptick in attendance at our Sunday evening worship services.

Having Nerva Altino join our music program has been an extraordinary gift. His presence has brought the desired variety to our musical offerings and has dynamically connected our children's, youth, and adult music programs to one another. In addition, we launched two search committees, began work on a new preschool program, and hosted Christmas on God's Acre, playing host to our entire town as is our custom on Christmas Eve.

Even during what is often our "winter lull," we've seen sustained engagement and attendance. This was especially evident on Youth Commissioning Sunday, where we covenanted

with 105 youths for their mission trip in a "standing room only" Meeting House.

Time and again this season—through joyful moments and challenging ones—I've found myself thanking and praising God for the great gift and extraordinary honor of being part of what the Holy Spirit is doing in our community.

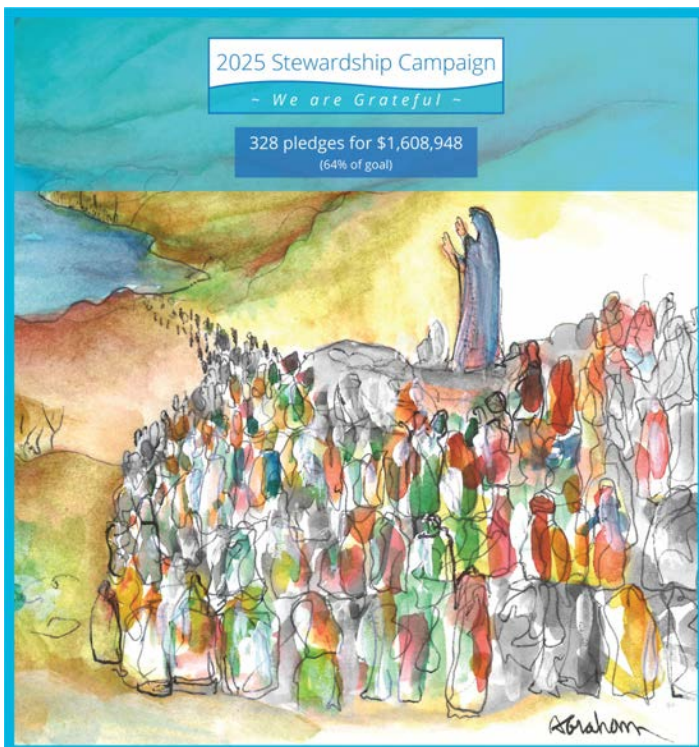


Now, I am ready for a bit of a rest. In February, I will travel to meet our friends and mission partners in Israel. While we canceled our group trip due to the war and the closure of many sites, I kept my February ticket with the hope of a safe opportunity for rest and spiritual renewal. Conditions remain tense, but the ceasefire, recent geopolitical developments in neighboring countries, and Israel's efforts to stabilize the region have alleviated direct threats within Israel itself. My friends anticipate that pilgrimages will resume by summer,

Continued on page two

Stewardship Update

Thank you to all who have already generously pledged to the Stewardship Campaign. We have had a healthy start and hope that our community will continue to come together to support our church. This stewardship season, we are reminded of the blessings we've shared as a church community and the importance of gratitude in inspiring our generosity. Our church has a proud tradition of uniting to support our mission, making a significant difference in the lives of so many. This collective commitment makes a profound impact, enabling us to be a beacon of faith and service in our community. Currently, we have 328 pledge cards (82% of our goal) totaling \$1,608,948 (64% of our goal). We hope and pray that 400 individuals and families will participate in our campaign as we strive to reach our financial goal of 2.5 million. With hearts united in gratitude, we look forward to what we can achieve together on God's Acre. Please return your pledge card to the church by mail or pledge online at www.godsacre.org/pledge.



Continued from page one

meaning this moment offers a unique chance to experience beloved holy sites without the usual crowds. I am also energized by the excitement our mission partners and friends have shared about my visit and the opportunity to deepen those relationships as one of the first to return—a connection that may benefit future group trips from our church.

Looking further ahead, I have also been sustained by the knowledge that 2025 is my sabbatical year. It is astounding to me—in the best possible way—that we have already shared a decade of ministry together. If you look at the plaque on the back wall of our Meeting House, you'll notice that our tenure now exceeds that of nine of the previous eighteen Senior Ministers. Together, we've journeyed through a richly blessed decade, including the challenge and opportunity of navigating a global pandemic.

During my sabbatical, I plan to take July and August away. My plans include extended time at Canandaigua Lake and Cuttyhunk Island, attending the UCC General Synod in Kansas City, and hiking portions of the Camino trail in Spain with Tammie. I'll share more detailed plans as the time for my departure approaches.

I truly cherish the feeling that all my time and abilities are fully utilized in ministry with you. I feel so blessed to witness the remarkable work the Spirit of God is leading us into together.

While I look forward to this season of rest and renewal, I am equally excited about the future work this sabbath and sabbatical time will prepare us for in the years ahead.

Yours in Christ,
Chapin



Annual Meeting: March 2

The Trustees are reviewing the financial results for 2024. Last year's results, along with the budget for 2025, will be presented at the upcoming Annual Meeting on March 2, 2025, at 11:15am. This year's meeting will be hybrid, both in-person and available via Zoom.

Stay tuned for further details to follow.

Faith@Work Foundations: Discovering Your Gifts & Talents

Dates: March 12 - April 16

Wednesdays, 7:00-8:15pm

Join us for a transformative 6-week journey this Lent led by Tammie Garner. We will explore your unique gifts and talents and discover where God may desire you to invest them in the world so that you can begin to live out your God-given purpose in life and find greater meaning in the work that God is calling us to do as people of faith.



This class is open to all those who are interested in deepening their understanding of their God-given gifts and seeking guidance on how to use them in meaningful ways. Whether you're new to this journey or looking to build on previous experiences, this course will lay a strong foundation for future classes focusing on faith at work, educational and career transitions, and seeing your whole life as ministry.

Sign Up Today

Don't miss this opportunity to embark on a path of self-discovery and spiritual growth. Sign up today and take the first step towards uncovering the purpose and potential God has placed within you. To sign up, contact Tracy Goldman at office@godsacre.org. For more info or questions, contact Tammie Garner at tcgarner1010@msn.com.



Wintergreen

The cold winter months are surprisingly abundant here on God's Acre. The Flower Ministry has grown to a spectacular 24 members, all supporting each other, our services, and our community with flowers. This happens through gathering together in fellowship, teaching newer members to arrange, adding calm and beauty to our worship services, and providing flowers for the deacons to deliver to our greater community. This bounty of community and generosity warms even the coldest winter day!



All Church Souper Bowl Sunday Sunday, February 9

Midwinter is a time of increased need at homeless shelters. Join us for a special Souper Bowl Sunday **on February 9** for a fun-filled morning of faith-based competition, fellowship, and service in honor of Super Bowl 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
- Rice
- Dried Beans
- Canned Tuna
- Spaghetti Sauce
- Peanut Butter
- Jelly
- Breakfast Cereal
- Spices
- Coffee
- Reusable Grocery Bags
- Can Openers (regular old manual kind)



FEBRUARY

Church School Calendar

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 2

Preschool-3rd grade Chapel Sunday.
Grades 4th-7th remain in worship.

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 9

Souper Bowl Sunday. Bible Trivia for
Preschool-7th grade. Children are invited
to wear a sports jersey and bring a donation
for Open Doors Shelter.

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 16

Combined church school class for
Preschool-3rd Grade.

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 23

Combined church school class for
Preschool-3rd Grade.



February Youth Ministries

We welcomed in 2025 with an abundance of joy as Kelly returned, and we began our preparations for our YG Mission Trip. We commissioned our 105 traveling YG fish on Sunday, January 12, during our 10:00 am worship service, and we keep them in our hearts and prayers as we look forward to our future travels together. We also officially kicked off our Mission Sponsor campaign, seeking donations for our tiny home construction project alongside our partner, Mission Waco. YG met in teams throughout January to cook meals for Inspirica women's shelter, building community through service and fun.

Our younger fish continued to meet as we discussed many of Jesus' miracle stories and how he came to be baptized. We made crafts like baptism bracelets, marshmallow towers, and dreamcatchers, and we are excited to work together to build snack bags for our traveling YG fish. It is always a joy to come together during the week, and we look forward to all our spring programming post mission trip!

MSYG teams were revealed at the beginning of January, which provided even further engagement as each MSYG advisor will continue to lead their teams in smaller activities throughout the year. We traveled to Camp Silver Lake on our annual Winter Weekend, where we made s'mores, completed a ropes course, and painted together. It was a weekend full of worship and community, and we always come back with full hearts and new friends!

We are excited to hear more about the adventures of our YG fish as they travel to Waco, Texas, and we keep them in our thoughts and hearts. May the Holy Spirit guide them, challenge them, and remind them of His unwavering strength as they serve those who may need it most.

YG



Important Events:

1. **Rachels Challenge** on Sunday, February 2 from 6:00-8:30pm. This will be a mental health-forward event that will help to frame the mission of our trip in a few short weeks!
2. Monday, February 10th from 7:00-8:30pm is pilgrimage prep, which is **covenant** for all traveling fish.
3. We will be heading to Waco, Texas from *Thursday, February 13th to Saturday, February 22nd*. Look out for all our updates on @yg_ig and keep our group in your prayers as we help to build up the community of Waco!

MSYG



Important Events:

- Sunday, February 2nd from 4:00-5:30pm is our Inspirica Service Project
- Sunday, February 9th from 4:00-5:30pm is Tape-A-Thon
- Sunday, March 2nd from 4:00-5:30pm is MSYG-eopardy!

Quest



Important Events:

- Contemporary worship on February 2 from 6:00-7:00pm.
- Dinner and Discussion on Thursday, February 6th from 6:30-8:00pm.

Minnows



- Monday, February 10th and Monday, February 24th from 3:30-4:30pm

Guppies & JYG

Important Events:

- Guppies on Tuesday February 4th and Tuesday February 25th from 4:30-5:30pm
- JYG on Thursday February 6th and Thursday February 27th from 5:00-6:00pm.
- We will be 'feeding 100' and helping to serve our YG fish!

Will you be a Mission Sponsor?

Scan the QR Code or go to godsacre.org/give to donate to our 2025 YG Mission Trip!



Will You Be a Mission Sponsor? About Our Mission To Waco

We have \$100,000 to raise for our mission!

For over three decades, The Congregational Church of New Canaan has been committed to creating a community where youth can experience and share the love of God. Together, we walk with Christ all year to nurture a youth ministry marked by love, covenant, and active participation.

This February, 105 of our YG Fish will embark on a mission pilgrimage to Waco, Texas, to partner with Mission Waco and Grassroots in serving those in need. This year, our work will focus on building tiny homes for the unhoused population of Waco and supporting critical home repair projects for community members facing poverty. Each afternoon, our youth will also lead Bible camps for local children, fostering connection, faith, and hope across generations. Mission Waco has been a beacon of transformation for the Waco community, creating sustainable solutions for housing, education, and community empowerment. We are eager to support their work!

YG provides a space for the Spirit to move, offering our youth the chance to deepen their relationship with God and one

another. Today, we humbly ask you to join us to walk with us as a mission sponsor, offering your prayers and resources to support this initiative. Our goal is to raise \$100,000, which will ensure that every mission fish can participate, regardless of financial circumstances, while also covering housing, food, and materials for the projects – which includes the sponsoring of three tiny homes. Your support as a Mission Sponsor will directly contribute to this effort, making it possible for our youth to live into their calling as agents of change.

To contribute, you can mail a check to the church or donate online at www.godsacre.org/give. Please designate your gift as “YG Mission Sponsors.” Every gift, no matter the size, brings us closer to our goal and helps transform lives—both in Waco and within our youth group.

God’s work can only be accomplished with the help of volunteer groups like YG—and we cannot do it without sponsors like you!



Youth Sing This Month

On **February 9**, at the 10:00am service, be sure to come early to hear our children's choirs and youth music groups unite to sing the prelude! Donning their favorite jerseys for the Super Bowl, they will serenade us about "More Love" just in time for Valentine's Day later that week. We invite the congregation to join us by wearing your favorite jerseys and bringing your soup donations on Super Bowl Sunday!



Spring New Member Class

Are you or someone you know interested in joining our family of faith? Please plan to attend our new member sessions this spring. These sessions provide an opportunity to meet our leaders and to learn about the religious beliefs and traditions that have been the hallmarks of our congregational life on God's Acre since 1733.

Dates for the Spring 2025 New Members classes:

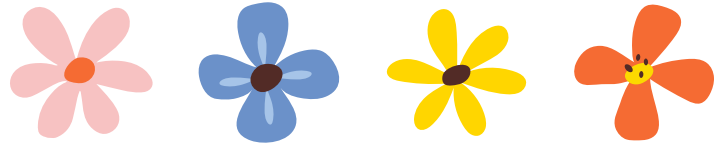
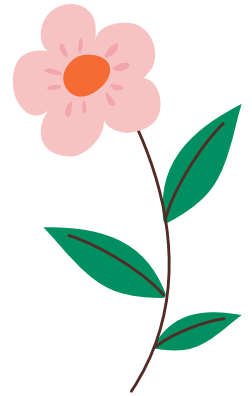
New Member Orientation Class
Sunday, March 23, 11:15am-1:15pm

New Member Faith Sharing Class
Wednesday, March 26, 7:00-9:00pm

New Member Social
Saturday, March 29, 4:00-6:00pm

New Member Sunday
Sunday, March 30, 9:00-11:00am

If you are interested in joining our church please contact Anna Rogers at welcoming@godsacre.org.



Associate Minister Search Team Update

The Associate Minister search team will host sessions for church members interested in discussing the Associate Minister role. You are invited to attend one of the following:

- **Sunday, February 2 at 9:00am in the Parlor**
- **Sunday, February 9 at 9:00am in the Parlor**
- **Monday, February 10 at 7:30pm via Zoom** (*link below*)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84480219728?pwd=kEd8zqKaz-vRQtzOEGul8V7IK5HeKNv.1>

Meeting ID: 844 8021 9728

Passcode: 000257

Your input in this important process is valuable and much appreciated.



The Power of LOVE

In the Bible, we find the essence of love beautifully captured in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.”* These verses illustrate the core attributes of love that we, as Christians, are called to embody in our daily lives.

As we step into a new year, we are reminded of one of the most powerful forces in our lives: Love. Love is not just an emotion; it is a commitment and a calling that shapes our relationships, our community, and our faith.

Love as an Action

Love is best expressed through action. It’s in the small gestures—a smile to a stranger, a helping hand to someone in need, or a word of encouragement. In our church community, we are given numerous opportunities to show love. Whether it’s volunteering here at church or for a local charity, visiting a member who is unwell, or simply reaching out to someone who may be feeling isolated, each act of love makes a difference.

Building a Loving Community

As a church, we strive to create an environment where love thrives. This means embracing one another’s differences, practicing forgiveness, and fostering an atmosphere of acceptance. When we come together in love, we mirror the inclusive love that Jesus showed us, drawing others to our community and offering a glimpse of God’s kingdom here on earth.

Love’s Challenges

While love is powerful, it can also be challenging. We may find ourselves struggling to love those who hurt us, or we may feel inadequate in expressing love to those around us. In these moments, we can look to God for guidance and strength. Through prayer and reflection, we can cultivate a heart that is open to love, recognizing that it is God’s love that empowers us to love others.

A New Year of Love

As we embark on this new year, let us commit to being ambassadors of love. Each of us can take intentional steps to reflect love in our words and actions. Challenge yourself to reach out to someone different from you, to forgive someone who has wronged you, or to simply express your appreciation to those around you. Together, as a loving community, we can make a lasting impact on the lives of those we encounter. Let love be our guiding principle, reminding us that in all we do, we are called to love one another as Jesus loves us.



Love Thy Neighbor

*Stephen
Ministry*

*Card Writing
Ministry*

*Prayer Chain
Ministry*

*Flower
Ministry*

*Helping Hands
Ministry*

*Prayer Shawl
Ministry*



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

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Sole Safari Sneaker Drive

Runs February 1-28

Preparations are underway for the AMO team to head to Kenya in late March. Our Maasai brothers and sisters have requested sneakers for the over 100 girls living in The Beloved Daughters of the Maasai Rescue Center. The girls range in age from 11 to 14 and are in need of new sneakers (Women's sizes 5-9). There will be a collection box in Smith Hall. To receive a signup link or with questions, please contact Lindsay Tucker at lindsaytucker08@gmail.com.

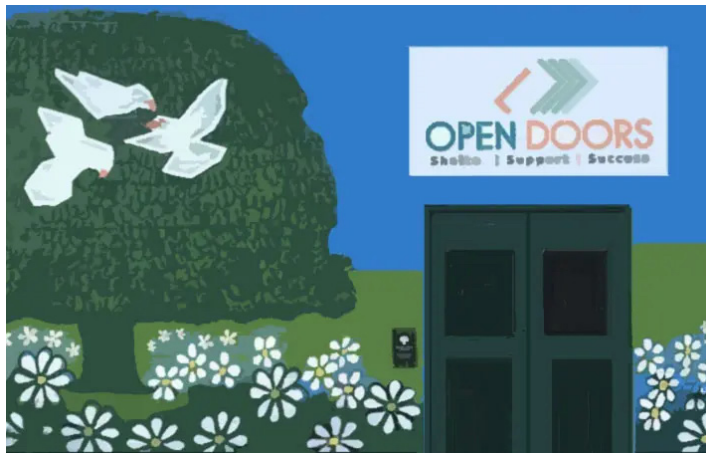


Sole Safari
FEBRUARY SNEAKER DRIVE

February 1-28

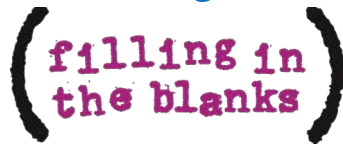
February Plate Collection - Open Doors

Every night in Connecticut, there are over 3,000 people without a home, and almost 800 of them live 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' mission is to make a direct impact in the greater Norwalk area by guiding every person in the cycle of homelessness towards 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.



Filling in the Blanks Packing Event Loads of Fun!

On January 21, Women's Fellowship and Missions & Outreach joined together to pack over 723 bags of food for children needing weekend meals. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who took part in this impactful event!



Births



Martha and Dave Burnham welcomed daughter **Katherine Sherts Burnham "Kate"** on January 9, 2025

In Loving Memory



Paul Howes
February 18, 1932 - November 22, 2024



OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

Minister

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

Pastoral Care Emergency, **x103**

Staff

Nerva Altino, **x104**
Director of Music Ministries

Kelly Antonson, **x110**
Senior Youth Director

Beth Baker, **x102**
Pastoral Care Minister

Laurel Carr, **x107**
Director of Communications

Barb Clayton, **x102**
Pastoral Care Minister

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

Lonnie deMarco, **x116**
Interim Operations and Finance Resource

Kimmie Dyrvik, **x111**
Interim Senior Youth Director

Tracy Goldman, **x109**
Community Life Coordinator

Sarah Haddad, **x113**
Church School Coordinator

Anthony Jones
Sexton

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

Caroline 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

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 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