



FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Dear Church Family,

Over the last four years, as I worked toward completing my Masters of Divinity, I would often take a week away from classes to travel with our YG Fish on the mission trip. Each time, my peers - and even my professors - would look at me with genuine curiosity when they heard about our program. "You lead over a hundred teenagers on a mission trip?" they would ask. "How does one even do that?"

Their questions always made me smile, because in many ways it had become second nature to me - the preparation, the many lists and reservations, the travel days, the joyful chaos of send-off, and the steady work of serving together. And yet, looking back, I now realize what they were really naming is: this is not the norm for most churches, certainly not for many here in New England.

What a rare and sacred gift it is to belong to a church with a thriving youth ministry. What a privilege it is to be part of it. As I prepare for what will be my twenty-first mission trip with our youth, I find myself filled again with that same honor and awe. And the answer to that lingering question - of how does one even do this is rather simple: With the help of God. Truly.

Because God never sends us alone. God sends us together, surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses - carried by the prayers, love, and faithfulness of a church that looks at our

young people and says, we believe God is doing something amazing through you.

Scripture reminds us in Hebrews 12:1: *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses... let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us."*

A mission trip is never simply ten days away from New Canaan. It is the fruit of a living spiritual inheritance from one generation of fish to the next. It is shaped by the advisors who return year after year (most alumni of the program itself), by parents who entrust their children to the care of our team, by volunteers who labor quietly behind the scenes, and by congregants who have long believed that the faith of our young people is worth nurturing.

On Commissioning Sunday, I was reminded of the cloud of witnesses in a particularly powerful way as we welcomed Jason Coker back into our midst. Jason is not only the National



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FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Continued from page one

Director of Together for Hope, our mission partner, but also a beloved friend of this congregation and a former YG advisor. Jason is someone whose own story has been intimately woven into the life of God's Acre for nearly twenty years. What a sacred reminder it was to hear Jason preach to our youth and families, and to reflect on how the Holy Spirit first led him to this church so many years ago. His life has become a testimony to what can happen when someone is formed in community, supported in faith, and then sent forth into the world. Today, Jason lives out Jesus' call to bring justice, dignity, and hope to communities too often overlooked, serving siblings in need with courage and compassion through his work with Together for Hope.

In many ways, Jason is living evidence that our mission trips are not simply about a single project completed, but rather, about disciples formed over time. The Spirit uses these experiences - these relationships forged, these moments of serving - to shape hearts and call lives forward in ways we cannot always predict. If you missed his sermon, I invite you to listen online. It is a profound witness to the work of Christ among us.

This month, 104 of our Mission Fish will take their part in being part of this cloud of witnesses by traveling to Helena-West Helena, Arkansas, to partner with Delta Circles and Together for Hope. Helena-West Helena is a community marked by deep resilience, but also by generations of economic hardship - marked as one of the poorest counties in our country - shaped by systemic poverty and racial injustice that have left many siblings in Christ, too often unseen or forgotten.

Our youth will step into this place not as saviors, but as servants and learners, seeking to meet Christ in their neighbor and to better understand the sacred call to love across difference. They will live simply, without phones, grounded instead in relationship, service, and shared life in Christ.

And so too in a few weeks' time, because of your ongoing support of our YG mission trips, many of you will receive a Mission Sponsor letter in the mail as a thank you for your contribution to our mission sponsor fundraising campaign. When it arrives, my hope and ask is not simply that you will read it, but that you might prayerfully pause and remember what is truly unfolding through this ministry.

When you read the reflections and words of our fish and hear what they share, I have one simple ask of you: please pray for them by name. Pray that their faith would continue to grow and be nourished, that they would come to know what it means to serve as Christ's follower, and that they would experience, deeply, the strength of the cloud of witnesses surrounding them - a church that loves them, supports them, and walks with them in this journey of faithful discovery.

I am profoundly grateful to the many hands that have made this annual mission possible over the years. And I trust that the same Spirit who has carried this ministry across generations will continue to lead our youth - and all of us - forward in faith.

Thanks be to God for the witnesses among us, and for the Spirit still calling the Church into the vital work of love, justice, and hope.

In Faith,
Kelly Antonson
Associate Minister for Children, Youth, & Families

YOUTH MINISTRIES



We welcomed 2026 with an abundance of joy as we continued our preparations for our YG Mission Trip. We commissioned our 104 traveling YG fish on Sunday, January 11, during our 10:00am worship service with the help of Dr. Rev. K. Jason Coker and YG alum Alex Reinman, who offered words of wisdom. We also officially kicked off our Mission Sponsor campaign, seeking donations for the work we will be doing alongside community members of Helena-West Helena, Arkansas, and Together for Hope.

**Will you be a Mission Sponsor?
Use the QR code to give today!**



www.godsacre.org/give

February with Youth Ministries

YG met in teams throughout January to continue to forge team connections and support one another as we prepare for travel. 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, further engaging participants, as each MSYG advisor will continue to lead their team in smaller activities throughout the year. Then we traveled to Camp Silver Lake on our annual Winter Weekend. We worshiped by the fire, sledded in -8 degree weather, fellowshiped with crafts and food, and had nightly vespers/bible study together. Our theme was "Unshakable Faith," where we pondered what it means to have a firm foundation in Jesus Christ through scripture and team-building activities. It was an absolute highlight of our year so far!

We had two Movies for a Mission events this January that allowed our high school fish to connect with our younger fish, offering young parents some time to themselves and simultaneously participating in our mission sponsor fundraising campaign!

We are excited to hear more about the adventures of our YG fish as they travel to Helena-West Helena, Arkansas, 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.



CHILDREN'S MUSIC & DRAMA

Children's Choirs Sing this Month

Mark your calendars! Our children's choir will join us in worship for the **10:00am service on February 8**. They will sing our prelude and anthem alongside our Chancel Choir. We would love to have you come and witness, as they have been practicing vigorously!



Ash Wednesday Communion Service

February 18, 8:00pm
Chapel

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent and serves as a call to spiritual reflection and discipline. Historically, Lent originated in the early Church as a period of penitence and fasting, leading up to the celebration of Easter. While traditionally associated with the imposition of ashes, some Protestant communities, like ours, use anointing oil instead, aligning with Jesus' teachings in Matthew 6:17-18 to anoint oneself when fasting, thus keeping the focus on personal repentance and spiritual renewal.



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 year's stewardship theme, Love-Driven Generosity, draws inspiration from Jesus' words to Peter in John 21: "Feed my lambs." We believe it is our shared responsibility to tend to the needs of our church family and the wider community we serve. Every prayer, pledge, and act of service strengthens our ability to live out the love Christ has entrusted to us.

Currently, we have 256 pledge cards (60% of our goal) totaling \$1,560,253 (62% of our goal). We hope and pray that 425 individuals and families will participate in our campaign as we strive to reach our financial goal of 2.5 million. Together, through love-driven generosity, we can continue to tend Christ's flock with care, compassion, and hope. Please return your pledge card to the church by mail or pledge online at www.godsacre.org/pledge.



The Congregational Church of New Canaan
2026 Stewardship Campaign
Love-Driven Generosity

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."
John 21: 15-19

In response to God's love and as a concrete expression of your faith and gratitude, please consider a meaningful step up from your 2025 pledge.

2025 Pledge: \$ _____

2026 Pledge: \$ _____

Church envelope requested: Yes No

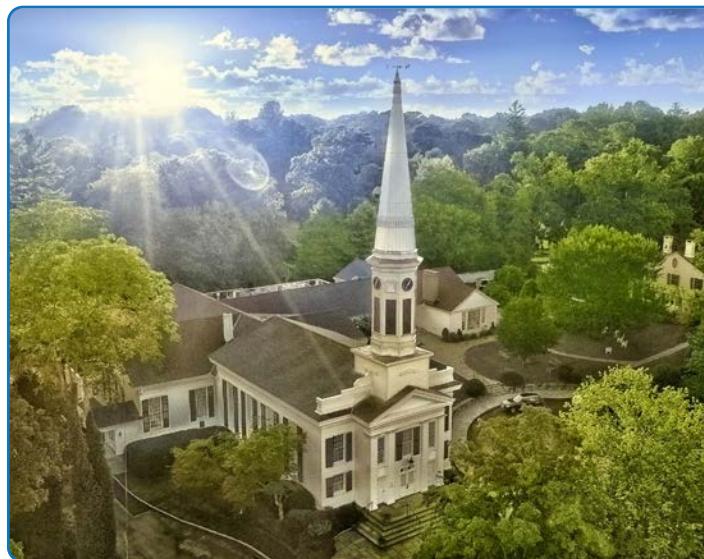
Our church database requires a pledge to be assigned to one individual in a household. Please indicate that name here. Giving statements will reflect total household contributions for the year.

Name: _____

Signature: _____
(required)

Date: _____

Please return your pledge and response in the enclosed envelope or make your pledge online at www.godsacre.org/pledge



Upcoming Annual Meeting

The Trustees are reviewing the financial results for 2025. Last year's results, along with the 2026 budget, will be presented at the upcoming Annual Meeting on March 1, 2026, at 11:15am. This year's meeting will be hybrid, both in-person and available via Zoom.

Stay tuned for further details to follow.

Clementine's Playdates

Sing
Socialize
Stories & Snacks



Clementine's Playdates

Clementine's Playdates Winter Spring Session begins on February 4 and runs through May 21. Classes are on Wednesdays from 9:15-10:15am. Registration is open to the community, but space is limited. Clementine's playdates are free for pledging church members. Come sing and play with us!

Email churchschool@godsacre.org to register.



FEBRUARY

Church School Calendar

Sunday, February 1

Preschool - 3rd grade Chapel Sunday. 4th grade - 7th grade remain in the Meeting House for communion.

Sunday, February 8

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

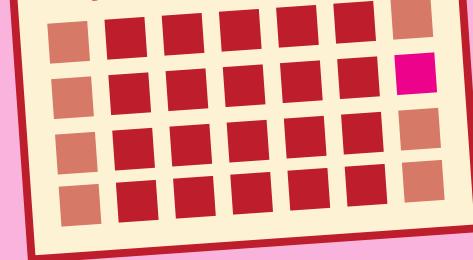
Sunday, February 15

NCPS February School Break. Combined Church School class for Preschool - 3rd Grade. Nursery care available.

Sunday, February 22

NCPS February School Break. Combined Church School class for Preschool - 3rd Grade. Nursery care available.

February 2026



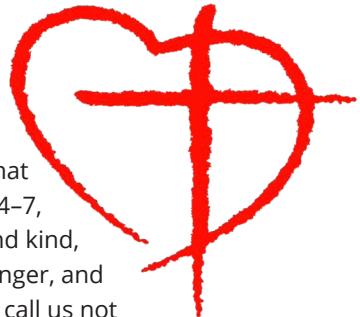
SAVE THE DATE FOR BINGO NIGHT

Children and families of all ages are encouraged to sign up and join us for a night of family fellowship and BINGO fun. On **Friday, March 6**, we will gather from 5:00-6:30pm in **Smith Hall** for some 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! Contact Sarah Haddad at churchschool@godsacre.org to learn more.



The Power of Love

As we move into February — a month often associated with love — we are reminded that Scripture offers us the deepest and most enduring picture of what love truly is. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Paul describes love as patient and kind, free of envy and pride, slow to anger, and rich in forgiveness. These words call us not only to feel love, but to live it.



Love in Motion

Love becomes real when it takes shape in our actions. It shows up in the everyday moments: a warm greeting, a thoughtful check-in, a meal delivered to someone recovering, or a quiet prayer offered on another's behalf. Our church family is blessed with countless opportunities to embody love—within our walls and far beyond them. Every gesture, no matter how small, becomes part of God's work in the world.

Creating a Community of Care

A loving church is one where people feel seen, welcomed, and valued. This means embracing our differences, extending grace, and choosing compassion even when it's difficult. When we practice this kind of love together, we reflect the generous, boundary-breaking love of Jesus. Our community becomes a place where God's presence is felt and shared.

When Love Feels Hard

There are seasons when loving others stretches us. Hurt, disappointment, or fatigue can make love feel costly. In those moments, we can lean on God's strength, trusting that the love we offer does not come from our own power alone. Through prayer and reflection, God softens our hearts and renews our capacity to love—even when it's challenging.

Stepping Into a Year Shaped by Love

As 2026 unfolds, may we commit ourselves once again to being people of love. Let us look for opportunities to encourage, to forgive, to listen, and to lift one another up. Small acts of love ripple outward in ways we may never fully see, yet they transform lives.

May love be the lens through which we see one another and the path we choose to walk each day — remembering always the call Jesus gives us: to love one another as He loves us.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Births



Barb and Jim Clayton welcomed granddaughter
Kit Marie Clayton
 daughter of Henry and Claire Clayton
 on December 15, 2025.



Caroline and Will Smittle welcomed daughter
Ellie Mae Smittle
 on December 27, 2025.

In Loving Memory



Charles (Charlie) Oscar Rose Jr.
 August 7, 1952 - November 29, 2025

The Flower Ministry

As we enter February, we are grateful for our Flower Ministry and the engaged, fun-loving group of arrangers who bring beauty and joy to our worship services. Their creativity and teamwork enhance our sanctuary and reflect the care and connection within our church community.

New arrangers are always welcome, whether you are experienced or simply curious to learn. Working alongside supportive teammates, the Flower Ministry offers a meaningful and enjoyable way to serve. If you are interested in joining the team, please reach out to Juliet Howe at juliet@eehowe.com.

The Flower Ministry also offers the opportunity to dedicate arrangements in honor or memory of loved ones or to celebrate special occasions. If you would like to make a dedication, please contact Tracy in the church office at office@godsacre.org.



Join Our Prayer Shawl Circle - New Knitters Are Warmly Welcomed & Needed!

Join the Prayer Shawl Ministry on the second and fourth Monday of each month from 10:30am-12:00pm in the Parlor. We gather to knit, enjoy fellowship, and create prayer shawls that are later blessed and shared with those in need of comfort and God's love.

No knitting experience? No problem! We'll provide yarn and happily teach you the basics.

If you'd like to be part of this meaningful ministry, please contact Twee Haffner at tweehaffner@gmail.com or Tracy Goldman at office@godsacre.org.



Mission Partner Spotlight & February Plate Offering Recipient Open Doors

Open Doors strives to make a direct impact in the Greater Norwalk area by guiding every person in the cycle of homelessness toward housing stability. Their circle of support addresses both immediate and long-term needs by providing access to meals, groceries, and clothing to ease daily hardships; offering educational opportunities such as literacy courses to expand skills; and economic programs designed to increase financial stability.



In 2025, Open Doors assisted 3,129 individuals and served over 105,000 meals—nearly double what they served five years ago. Thanks to the generosity of our church members, in 2025 MSA was able to provide financial assistance to support Open Doors' operating expenses, the lunch program and emergency food needs, as well as fund the construction of a new fence separating the Shelter's children's outdoor play area from the parking lot.

Beyond financial contributions, our church community actively supports Open Doors by holding two to three food drives a year to help stock their Food Pantry. In addition, members from our Ministry Team volunteer in the Open Doors kitchen on the fourth Thursday of each month to help prepare a meal and serve it to nearly 200 hungry people.

Our February Plate Offerings will go to Open Doors. They are grateful for your donations! For more information on Open Doors, or if you are interested in joining the Open Doors Ministry Team, please contact Susie Swindell at susieswindell66@gmail.com.



All Church Souper Bowl Sunday Sunday, February 8



Midwinter is a time of increased need at homeless shelters. Join us for a special Souper Bowl Sunday on **February 8** 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 Susie Swindell at susies1@optonline.net with questions.

Regular sizes are better than family or economy size products. Many homes have limited storage, and it's also easier to carry for people who are walking or taking public transit.

Needed items for Open Doors include:

- Rice (2 lb bags)
- Dried beans (red or black)
- Canned soup, especially filling soups like beef stew, minestrone, etc*
- Canned vegetables*
- Fruit cups or canned fruit*
- Cooking oil like olive oil, vegetable oil, etc
- Sugar (2lb or 4lb bags)
- All-purpose flour (2lb or 5lb bags)
- Cereal*
- Pancake mix & syrup
- Cream of wheat
- Coffee
- Tea
- Spices

* Low sodium and sugar free items are appreciated!

Lenten Workshop: Join Us on a Journey of Connection and Purpose

All are invited to join a Lenten book group centered around Jennifer Wallace's new book, *Mattering in the Modern World: The Secret to Unlocking Deeper Connection and Purpose*, due out on January 27. Led by the Mental Health Ministry Team, we will be exploring the book through a faith lens. Dates are February 25, March 3, 11, and a shared meal on March 25. Meetings will be offered in person with a virtual option. To sign up or if you have any questions, please contact Martha Palmer at marthapalmer76@yahoo.com.



"A road map for living a happy and fulfilled life.
Mattering should be required reading for everyone!"
—INA GARTEN, New York Times bestselling author

MATTERING



THE SECRET TO A LIFE OF
DEEP CONNECTION *and* PURPOSE

JENNIFER BREHENY WALLACE

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF NEVER ENOUGH

DEACONS / USHERS

Emergency Response Training

On January 11, Ushers and members of Senior Leadership participated in emergency response training in the Parlor. New Canaan EMS hosted Hands-Only CPR and Stop the Bleed training, providing practical, life-saving skills for responding to medical emergencies. Twenty members of our church family participated, learning how to recognize cardiac arrest, perform effective chest compressions, and control severe bleeding using direct pressure and tourniquets. Our Senior Deacon, retired FBI Agent Dawn Norris Doak, then led us in a thoughtful discussion on emergency preparedness during Sunday services. This training strengthened our readiness to care for one another and our community, reinforcing our commitment to being loving, calm, and capable helpers in moments of crisis.

If you are interested in joining our usher team or participating in a future emergency response class contact Lonnie de Marco at lonnie@godsacre.org.



FELLOWSHIP

MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

An Active February

Our Men's Fellowship group offers a number of ways to connect this February.

On January 31 at 8:00am in Smith Hall, the Men's Fellowship is hosting a breakfast and fellowship for the men of Pivot House. The cost of the breakfast is \$10, and for an additional \$10, you can sponsor a Pivot guest. Contact Don Moyle at donmoyle@gmail.com or Steve Antonson at antonson.steven@gmail.com to volunteer to set up, cook, and clean up, or with questions. Please register to attend by clicking the link below:
[https://godsacre.ccbchurch.com/goto/forms/301/responses/new.](https://godsacre.ccbchurch.com/goto/forms/301/responses/new)

The M4 Small Group breakfast is scheduled for Friday, February 13 at 7:30am. A wider Men's Small Group meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 23, at 7:30pm in the Chapel. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend any or all. If you have questions or want to get involved contact Steve Case at scase135@outlook.com.



Women's Fellowship Cake and Coffee

Please join us for a delightful morning of cake, coffee, and camaraderie on Wednesday, March 4, at 9:30am. Enjoy freshly brewed coffee, light refreshments, and unhurried time for fellowship and connection.

Invitations will arrive in your inbox soon. To RSVP or lend your baking talents, please contact Lesley Cousley at lcousley@gmail.com. We look forward to sharing this sweet time together!



SAVE THE DATE!

Fellowship Dinner Parties

You are invited to join us for a shared celebration of faith and fellowship at our dinner parties on **Saturday, March 28, at 6:00pm**. These small gatherings will take place in homes across town, connected by the joy of coming together on a single evening.

Each dinner party will include 8-10 guests. Participants will be asked to prepare one simple dish and bring a beverage to share. No culinary expertise required. The recipes will be easy, and store-bought options are always welcome. More details and sign-up information coming soon!

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



SPRING 2026

New Member Class

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 learn about the religious beliefs and traditions that have been hallmarks of our congregational life on God's Acre since 1733.

New Member Orientation Class

Sunday, March 22
11:15am-1:15pm

New Member Faith Sharing Class

Wednesday, March 25
7:00-9:00pm

New Member Sunday

Sunday, March 29
9:00-11:00am

**REGISTER
HERE**



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

OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

Ministers

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

Kelly Antonson, **x110**
Associate Minister for Children, Youth,
and Families

Pastoral Care Emergency, **x103**

Staff

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

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**
Youth Director, Co-Lead

Tracy Goldman, **x109**
Community Life Coordinator

Sarah Haddad, **x113**
Church School Coordinator

Anthony Jones
Sexton

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

Khanisha Denise Moore, **x111**
Youth Director, Co-Lead

Caroline Smittle, **x106**
Director of Operations

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

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

Dawn Doak
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