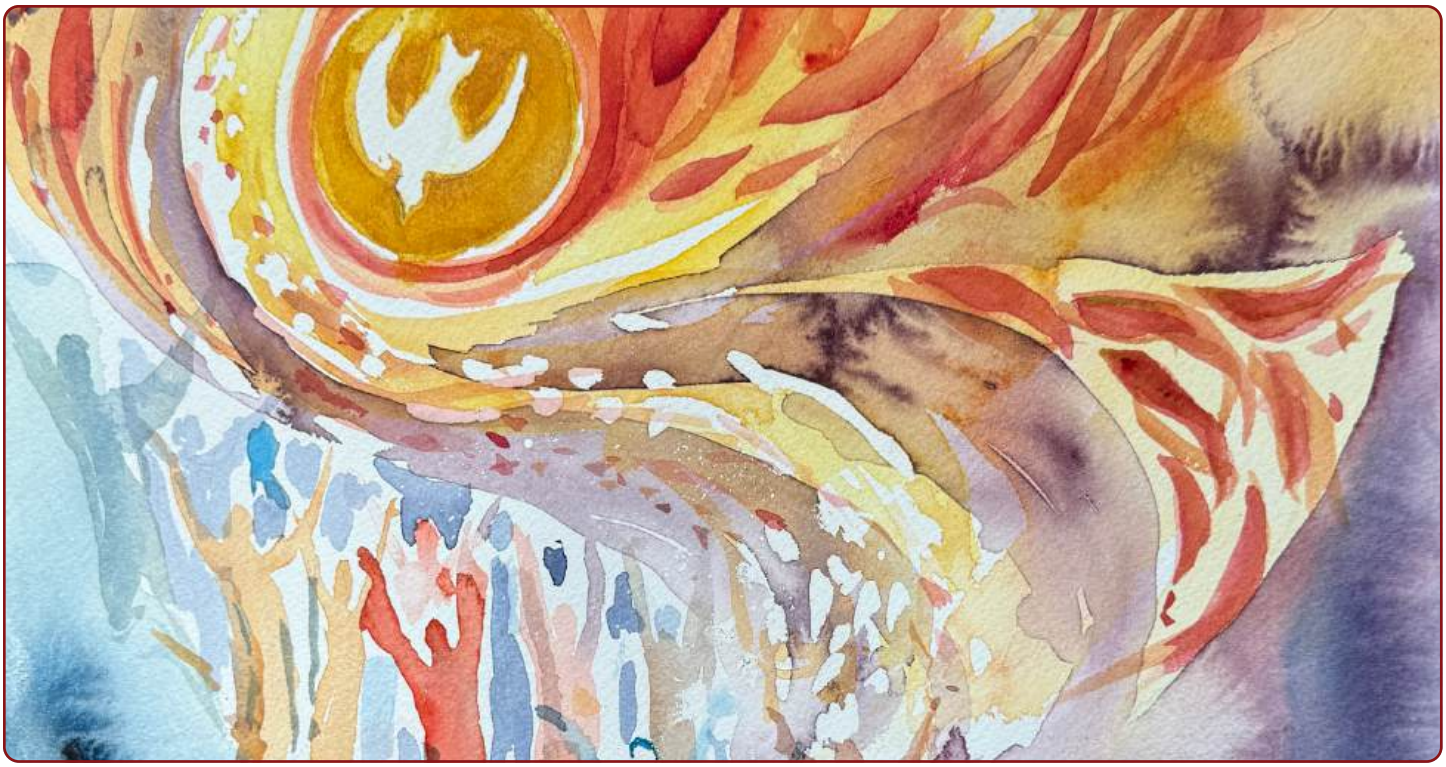
The Congregational Church of New Canaan

news@GOD'S ACRE

Summer 2026



FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Dear Church Family,

I want to take a few moments to share with you two ministry developments that I am genuinely excited about—both of which offer us meaningful opportunities to help shape the future of our church together. But before I get to those opportunities, I want to begin with a reality that is never far from my heart and mind as a pastor.

Mainline Protestant churches like ours are facing extraordinary challenges across the country. The statistics are sobering. Since the founding of the United Church of Christ in 1957, the denomination has declined from more than 8,000 congregations to fewer than 4,500. Membership has fallen from over 2 million members to under 700,000. In many places, churches are closing, clergy shortages are growing, and the pipeline of younger pastors entering ministry has become alarmingly small.

Those numbers are alarming. And yet, they also clarify something important: churches like ours cannot simply drift into the future. We must pray, discern, imagine, and actively prepare for it.

One of the things I think many people do not fully realize is that, by nearly every meaningful measure—membership, worship attendance, mission engagement, programming, generosity, and staffing—our church is an extraordinary outlier within the life of the UCC. Quite honestly, there are very few churches in our denomination with ministries as expansive and vibrant as our own. That is not something to boast about; it is something to steward faithfully and gratefully.

And that leads me to the first development I want to share.

As we move toward our 300th anniversary in 2031, we are preparing to enter a Season of Discernment together as a congregation. It is astonishing to realize that we are caretakers of a community of faith that has worshiped, served, prayed, baptized, buried, and proclaimed the Gospel for nearly three centuries. Very few institutions in this country can claim such continuity and faithfulness.

The question before us now is not simply how we celebrate our history. The deeper question is this: How do we prepare this church for a faithful and vital fourth century of ministry? That question excites me deeply.

In the Congregational tradition, we believe that the Holy Spirit speaks through the gathered community. We believe wisdom is not reserved for clergy alone, but that the Spirit of God can speak through a minority of one person. Which means this

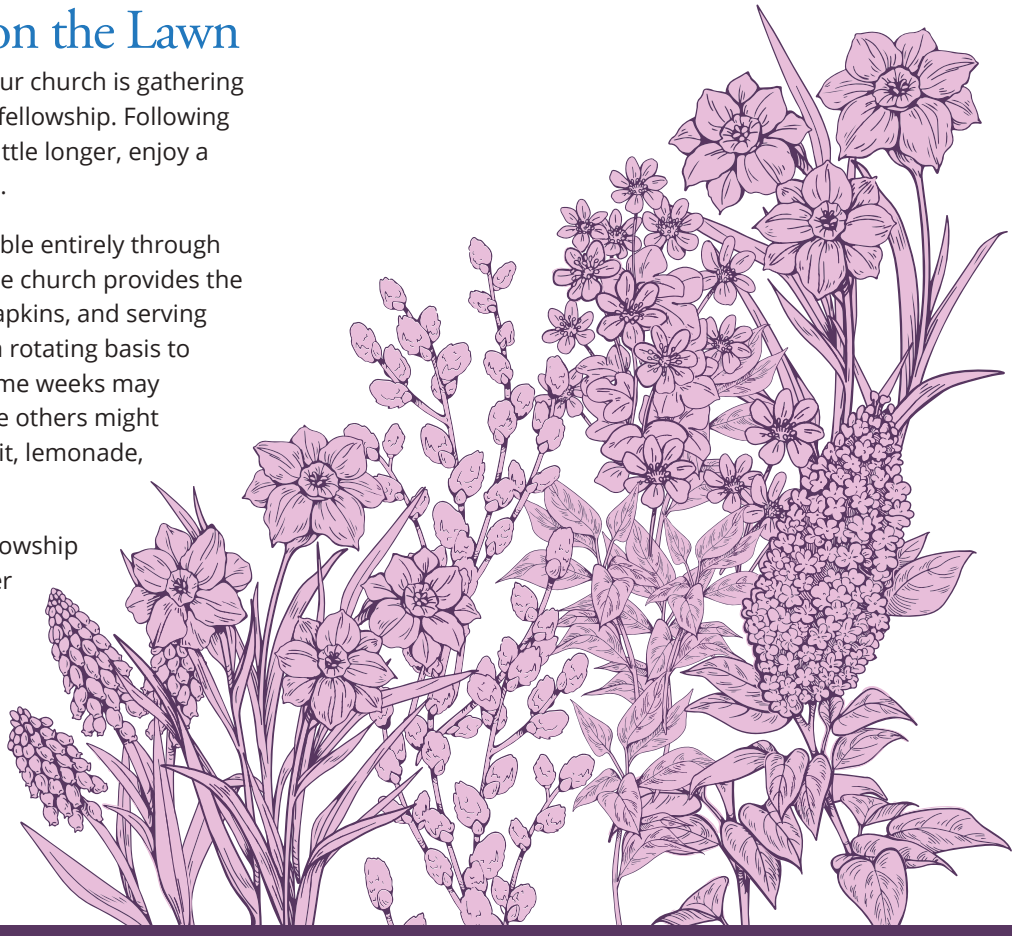
Continued on page three

Summer Fellowship on the Lawn

One of the simple joys of summer at our church is gathering on the lawn after Garden Worship for fellowship. Following worship, we invite everyone to stay a little longer, enjoy a refreshment, and connect with friends.

Our Summer Fellowship is made possible entirely through the generosity of our congregation. The church provides the fellowship table, paper goods, cups, napkins, and serving supplies, while volunteers sign up on a rotating basis to bring refreshments of their choice. Some weeks may feature homemade baked goods, while others might include store-bought donuts, fresh fruit, lemonade, iced tea, or other seasonal treats.

If you would like to host a summer fellowship time, you can sign up in the Parlor after worship or contact Laurel Carr at **laurel@godsacre.org.** Hosting is easy, flexible, and a wonderful way to contribute to the life of our congregation. We are grateful to all who share their gift of hospitality with us!



FINANCE

Important Update Regarding Your Digital Giving

The church has recently upgraded our giving tools through our existing partner, Pushpay. This change is designed to make your giving experience much more intuitive, secure, and flexible. Here are a few details that might be helpful as you navigate the new system.

There are three simple ways you can use Pushpay moving forward.

- First, you can give online by visiting our church website and clicking on the GIVE button.
- Second, you can text to give by sending the word GIVE to (833) 474-7983 to receive a direct link.
- Third, you can use the QR code by simply scanning it wherever you see it displayed.

Once you are on the new page, you can easily set your gift amount, choose your giving frequency, and select the specific fund you would like to support.

For our recurring givers, if you already have a recurring donation set up, there is absolutely nothing you need to do. Your gifts have automatically transferred into our new system.

If you have any questions or need a hand getting set up, please feel free to reach out to Maria Stadnik at **finance@godsacre.org**. Thank you so much for your continued generosity, faithfulness, and support of our community.

Requesting Discernment Team Nominations

As we begin planning a Season of Discernment to prayerfully prepare our church for future generations, we invite the congregation to recommend thoughtful, reflective, and spiritually attentive individuals who can listen for the Holy Spirit's leading. If you have specific recommendations for the Discernment Team, please email **discernment@godsacre.org** with a letter describing how the person embodies the characteristics listed.

FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Continued from page one

process will only be as rich and faithful as the willingness of the congregation to participate in it. And I truly believe there is reason for hope.

One of the great temptations in difficult times is to become defensive, nostalgic, or fearful. But the Holy Spirit is rarely interested in preserving comfort. The Spirit moves. The Spirit surprises. The Spirit leads communities into places they never imagined they could go.

My hope is that this season of discernment will not merely help us preserve a church but help us discover what kind of church God is calling us to become for the generations that follow us.

The second development I want to share is one of the most hopeful signs I have seen in years.

This summer, we are launching our first cohort of collegiate preachers' young adults from our church community who feel drawn to learning the craft and calling of preaching. In a moment when fewer and fewer young people are exploring ministry, I cannot tell you how encouraging it is to have young adults eager to study Scripture, wrestle with theology, and proclaim the Word of God.

I will be working closely with this group over the summer, helping them develop sermons and explore the art and discipline of preaching. And toward the end of the summer, our young preachers will likely offer messages in worship.

Now, I know many of us become accustomed to worship feeling a certain way and to hearing familiar voices from the pulpit. I understand that impulse completely. But I want to encourage all of us to see these moments not as interruptions to worship, but as investments in the future of the Church.

If we truly desire a future filled with thoughtful, faithful, courageous pastoral leadership, then we must create space for young people to discover and exercise those gifts. Encouraging young preachers is not separate from the mission of the church—it is essential to it.

Frankly, one of the clearest signs of spiritual vitality in any congregation is whether younger generations can imagine themselves serving there and leading there. And thanks be to God, that is happening here.

So, I really am asking all of us to lean into this next season together—a season that includes real challenges but also remarkable opportunities for imagination, adventure, growth, and renewal.

Participate in the discernment process. Bring your wisdom, your questions, your prayers, and your hopes. And if we happen to have some young preachers standing in our pulpit this summer, come ready not merely to evaluate them, but to encourage them, pray for them, and celebrate the possibility that God may be raising up a new generation of leaders right here on God's Acre.

That, to me, feels like hope.

Yours in Christ,
Chapin

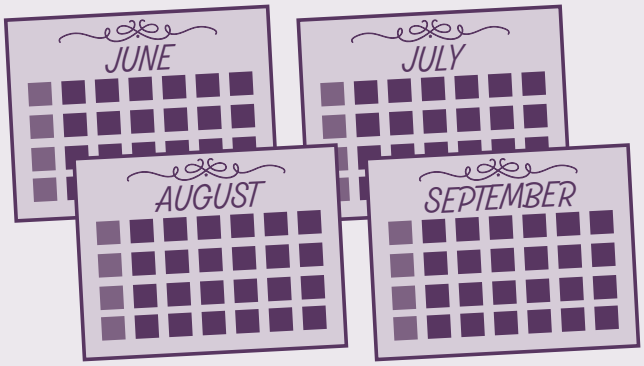
Summer
Church School Calendar

June 21 – September 6
Summer Church School Combined Class

July 5, August 2, August 9
No Church School. Children remain in the service. Nursery care provided.

August 17-20
Vacation Bible School 9:00am-12:00pm

September 13
Kickoff Sunday



Vacation Bible School 2026

August 17 – 20 9:30AM -12:00PM

We are excited to return to our original VBS timing this year. VBS "God Squad: Adventures in Faith" will be held on August 17-20 (Monday through Thursday from 9:00am-12:00pm). We will have an action-packed week exploring Bible Superhero stories through games, activities, songs, crafts, and more. We are looking forward to learning and playing with your children at the end of the summer!

Summer Church School

Nursery care will be available for children ages three and under throughout the summer. For nine weeks this summer (June 21 - September 6, no class 7/5, 8/2, 8/9), we will also be offering summer children's programming in a combined class for children ages four through fourth grade. While our shorter 45-minute Garden service is an excellent opportunity for children of all ages to learn more about worship with their families, we want to provide a space for fun, fellowship, and kid-friendly activities during the summer months. We encourage you to make a plan that works best for your family and your individual children, knowing that, in the end, we are glad to have you join in any way you can.

Children's Ministries Fall Preview!

We wish you a restorative and joyful summer and are already excited to welcome you back in the fall. Save the date for some fun children and family fellowship opportunities coming your way when we return!

September 13
Kickoff Sunday: First day of Church School and Welcome Back Celebration

October 7
Clementine's Playdates begins Wednesdays at 9:15am

October 25
Children's Halloween Event

November 8
Family Harvest Dinner

November 22
Thanksgiving Service Project

Summer with Youth Minstries!

We will have a variety of fun summer offerings at God's Acre for all youth ages K - 8! Please scan the QR code to register for these fun summer events.

Summer On GOD'S ACRE!

YOUTH EVENT SCHEDULE

SIGN UP

JUNE 28

TACOS & MOVIE NIGHT

Build-your-own tacos and come watch a fun movie!

5:00-7:00PM
Smith Hall

JULY 14, 15, 16

BIBLE BUILDERS

Come for a 3-day faith retreat after day camps to learn more about Bible stories while completing crazy building challenges!

4:00-6:00PM
Smith Hall

JULY 19

SUMMER WATER FUN

Join us for an after church splash bash with water slides, water baloons, games, and ice cream!

10:00AM-1:00PM
Church Grounds

JULY 20,21,22

FISHING FOR FAITH

Learn about fishing in the Bible like the Fishers of Men while casting lines with Tighe in this 3-day story series!

4:00-6:00PM
Mill Pond

JULY 26

CALF PASTURE BEACH & MINI GOLF

Join us for an after church outing to Calf Pasture beach, lunch provided!

10:00AM-2:00PM
Day Trip

AUGUST 23

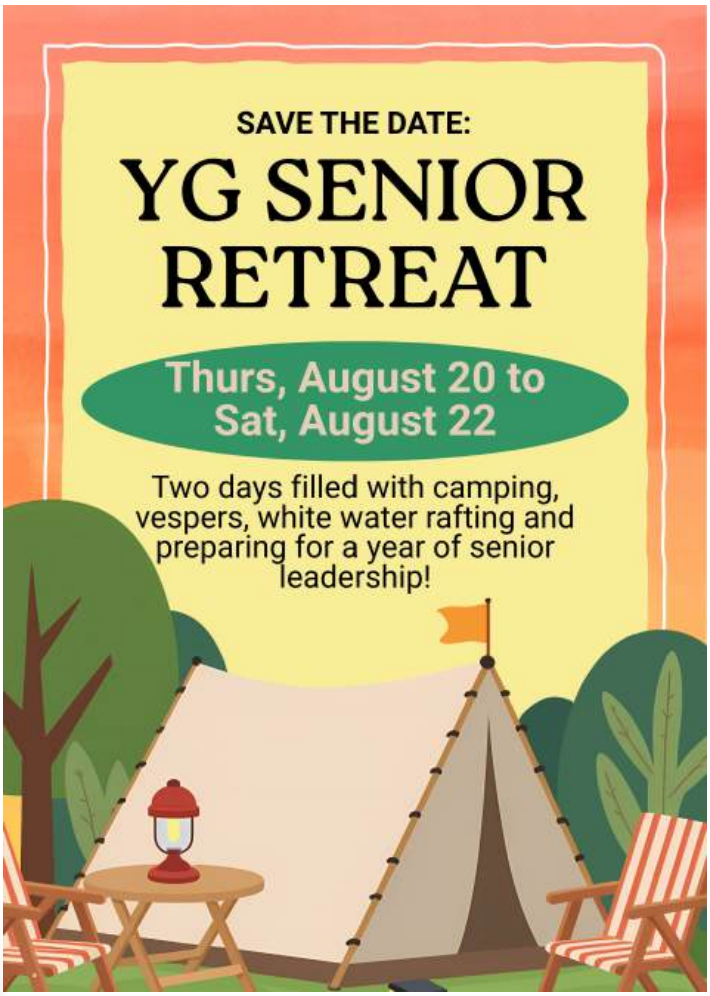
MYSTIC DAY TRIP

Come for an all day outing after church to the Mystic Aquarium, Seaport, and Pizza! Lunch and dinner provided. $50 suggested contribution

10:00AM-8:00PM
Day Trip

Updates from YG Mission Trip 2025

We have some very exciting updates from our partners at Mission Waco! In 2025, YG traveled to Waco, Texas, to serve alongside Mission Waco as they began the process of building Creekside Community Village. YG, along with the immeasurable help from our mission sponsors, was able to build three of the first community homes in the village. We received an update from our partners at Mission Waco that they have begun moving neighbors into the homes and will very soon have all our 35 homes filled! At full capacity, they hope to provide homes for over 300 formerly homeless individuals and will provide wrap-around services with existing Mission Waco programs and partners to keep them off the streets and in the community. We wanted to share this incredible news with the community to showcase the hard work of our YG fish and to honor the way the spirit has continued to move in this amazing community. Two of our three houses have tenants, who we hope to visit in the coming months. Please enjoy some photos of these amazing homes!



YOUTH MINISTRIES

SAVE THE DATE

Youth & Choir Program Times 2026-2027

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	THURSDAY
MSYG (grades 6, 7, 8) **4:00 – 5:30pm**	Minnows (grades K–1) **4:00 – 5:00pm**	Guppies (grades 2 & 3) **4:00 – 5:00pm**	JYG (grades 4 & 5) **4:00 – 5:00pm**
YG (grades 9-12) **7:00 – 8:30pm**	ROTATING EVERY OTHER WEEK Cherubs (ages 4–grade 1) **4:00 – 5:00pm**	Spirit Singers (grades 2 & 3) **5:00 – 6:00pm**	Joyful Noise (grades 4 & 5) **5:00 – 6:00pm**
			Quest (grades 9–12) **7:00 - 8:30pm** **3rd Thursday of the Month**

ADULT FORMATION

We Talked, New Canaan!

Sixty New Canaanites gathered on Saturday, May 16, at the Lapham Center from different sides of the political aisle and told each other their stories. It looked like this and sounded beautiful!

LET'S TALK NEW CANAAN

A Community Conversation Across Political Differences

Women's Fellowship Spring Luncheon

On May 1, the Women's Fellowship Ministry and the Pastoral Care Team partnered to host our annual Women of Wisdom Spring Luncheon. Women of all ages gathered for fellowship and to celebrate and honor women ages 80 and older in our congregation. When asked where in nature they feel most connected to God, their answers reminded us that faith grows in quiet moments – on the shore, in gardens, beneath trees, or simply in stillness. It was a special day, and we left feeling grateful for the incredible women of our congregation.

A woman who walks with God will always reach her destination.
– Unknown

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Summer Open Play Mahjong

Join us for a relaxed morning of Mahjong on Wednesday, June 24, from 10:00am–12:00pm in the Parlor. Whether you're a seasoned player or relatively new to the game, all are welcome to join us for open play and fellowship.

Please note that this is not an instructional session, so participants should have a basic familiarity with Mahjong. If you own a Mahjong set, we encourage you to bring it along.

Ally Dunlap and Anne Gunter will help organize and set up our first gathering. During the session, they will also share information and gauge interest in continuing open play Mahjong gatherings throughout the summer.

Come enjoy some friendly competition, conversation, and connection. No RSVP required.

FLOWER MINISTRY

Come Grow with Us: The Flower Ministry Team

The Flower Ministry team recently gathered at the Parsonage to celebrate the beauty of spring and the faithful work of this special group. Each Sunday, their artistry helps create a sacred and welcoming space, and throughout the year, their arrangements are shared with members of our church family as reminders of God's love and the community that surrounds them. As spring reminds us of renewal and new life, we give thanks for the creativity, generosity, and spirit of this wonderful team—and we warmly invite others to join in this meaningful ministry. Contact Juliet Howe at **juliet@eehowe.com** to get involved.

MISSIONS & OUTREACH

Pacific House Homeless Shelter - Volunteers and Food Donations Needed!

While many of us are traveling this summer, the 60 men at the Pacific House Homeless Shelter are still in need! Once a month (every third Thursday), our church provides and serves dinner at the shelter in Stamford. Volunteers are needed to both provide food items (especially a baked Ziti!) and serve a hot meal to the men residing there. Contact Andy Parkin at **andyparkin7@gmail.com** for details on how to help.

July MSA Spotlight - PEHT

The Partnership to End Human Trafficking (PEHT) is a nonprofit organization that began in 2016 due to a need that arose in our community. Our location along the I-95 corridor and the proximity to New York and Massachusetts make it a regular location for human trafficking activity. PEHT provides survivors of trafficking with a pathway toward healing and independence through community outreach, residential recovery, and economic empowerment. Their program is divided into three categories. They embrace survivors with a trauma-informed residential program as well as community-based services for those who can't be housed. PEHT offers food, medical, and mental health services, education, legal assistance, and transportation assistance. They educate the local community and service providers on trafficking, including how to identify, prevent, and avoid it. They empower survivors by offering employment. PEHT has a shop in Fairfield where survivors manufacture and distribute products. Survivors receive job training and financial literacy training. PEHT serves Fairfield County and the greater Hartford area, and it is the only provider of its kind in Connecticut. They are one of the newer partners to our church community, but a very worthwhile one. For more information and volunteer opportunities, contact Beth Picard at **bpicard44@gmail.com**.

August MSA Spotlight - Filling In The Blanks

Join Filling in the Blanks' efforts this **August** by bringing a **new full-size backpack** to church or drop one (or three or five!) off in Smith Hall anytime in August. Contact Marianna Kilbride at **marianna@godsacre.org** to learn more.

In 2026, Filling in the Blanks (FITB) continues its mission to fight childhood food insecurity by providing children in need with reliable access to nutritious food on the weekends. What began as a small organization feeding 50 children in one school has grown into a robust program serving over 10,000 children across 203 sites throughout Fairfield, Putnam, and Westchester Counties every weekend.

Through our signature Weekend Meal Bag Program, FITB distributes bags filled with healthy, easy-to-prepare food to children who may otherwise go without meals when school is not in session. In addition, our Fresh Food on the Move mobile pantry delivers fresh produce, dairy, proteins, and pantry staples directly into underserved communities in Norwalk, Stamford, Bridgeport, and now Danbury. The mobile pantry also partners with local organizations to provide wraparound services, including healthcare resources, and financial literacy information, family support, and more.

In 2026, FITB expects to deliver over 1.3 million meals to children and distribute over 1 million pounds of fresh food to families experiencing food insecurity. This work is made possible through the generosity of community partners, volunteers, corporate supporters, schools, and faith-based organizations like The Congregational Church of New Canaan, which dedicates their time and resources to help neighbors in need.

FITB is committed to creating meaningful opportunities for community engagement. Volunteers 14 years or older can participate in packing events at the warehouse, 16 or older at our mobile pantry, and people of all ages can host a snack bag event. We also have two key events approaching: our family-friendly Unite to Fight 5K on August 23 in Stamford and Plates with Purpose Gala on October 16 at the Italian Center in Stamford. For more information, please contact Jennifer Moran at **jmoran@fillingintheblanks.org**.

Filling in the Blanks is deeply grateful for the continued support of the Missions and Social Action Committee and its members, which directly supports our mission to end childhood hunger and whose generosity helps ensure that children have access to the nourishment they need to learn, grow, and thrive. Together, we are creating healthier communities and brighter futures for children and families facing food insecurity.

Births

Roger Bolton welcomed grandson **Percival "Percy" Lowell Hall**, son of Taylor Bolton and Wesley Hall, on May 16, 2026. The entire family is beaming with pride!

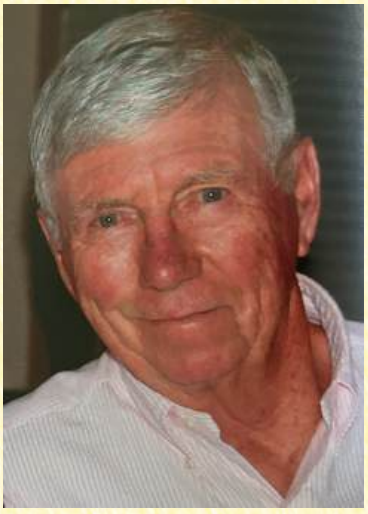
La and Taylor Holden happily announce the arrival of their newest family member, **Jones Killian Holden** born on May 5, 2026. His proud siblings, Kirk and Smith, are so excited to be big brothers!

Jackie and Brendan McEwan welcomed daughter **Ava Lila McEwan** on May 2, 2026. Her proud older siblings, Chloe and Liam McEwan, are thrilled to embrace their roles as big sister and brother.

Congregants on the Go

Penny Mardoian and **Judy Hyde** reconnecting in Maine.

In Loving Memory



William G. Stoops
January 12, 1934 - May 17, 2026

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**
Director of Special Projects

Kimmie Dyrvik, **x111**
Youth Director, YG Lead

Tracy Goldman, **x109**
Community Life Coordinator

Sarah Haddad, **x113**
Church School Coordinator

Tighe Hoey, **x111**
Director of Youth Ministries

Anthony Jones
Sexton

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

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

Diane Bailey
Chair, Personnel

Derrek Metz
Chair, Board of Trustees

Lesley Cousley
Chair, Nominating and Governance

Dawn Doak
Chair, Board of Deacons

The Congregational Church of New Canaan

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We are a Stephen Minister Church

Newsletter Submissions

If you are planning on contributing to the September newsletter, please submit by August19.
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**