



The Congregational Church
of New Canaan

NEWS@GOD'S ACRE

SEPTEMBER
2026

From the Pastor's Study



Dear Church Family,

I hope you all have had a wonderful summer! It has been such a delight to see so many of you make your way up God's Acre for our summer worship services in the garden.

It has also been a remarkably vibrant summer in the life of our church. Particularly meaningful to me has been our Collegiate Preachers initiative—teaching and empowering a new generation to engage in the art and craft of preaching. I have appreciated not only the sermons themselves, but also the earnestness and faithfulness with which our young preachers have approached their work. I have been equally moved by the way our congregation has embraced them and by the enthusiasm with which this new ministry has been received. What a hopeful sign for the future of the Church!

Now we turn our attention toward a new program year, with so many opportunities for worship, fellowship, service, and spiritual growth for children, youth, and adults. We will begin the year together with worship and our Kickoff Brunch on Sunday, September 13, when we will highlight many of the ministries and programs that will shape our life together in the months ahead.

This year, however, we are also entering a particularly important season in the life of our church.

As you have likely heard, we are beginning to prepare for our 300th anniversary in 2031. It is an extraordinary privilege to be stewards of a community of faith that has worshiped, prayed,

served, and proclaimed the Gospel for nearly three centuries. Very few institutions in our country have experienced such longevity, and we should receive that inheritance with both gratitude and humility.

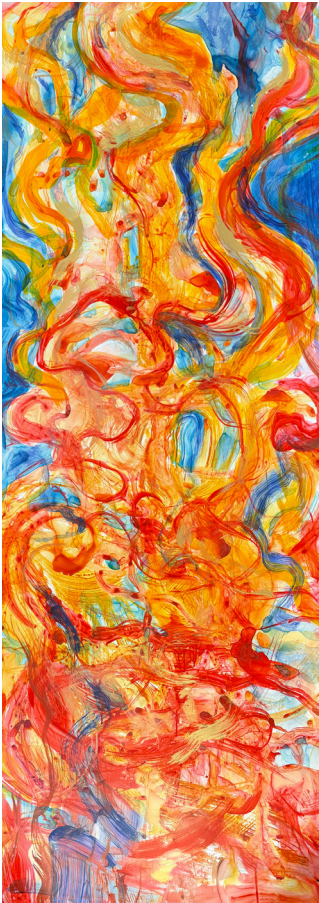
But an anniversary, properly observed, is not simply an occasion for celebration. It is also an invitation to reflection. For that reason, this coming year will be a Season of Discernment.

We will spend time remembering who we have been as a church and exploring more deeply what it means to stand within the Congregational tradition. We will ask who the Lord is calling us to be and what work Christ is calling us to undertake in this particular moment. And we will begin imagining how we might faithfully prepare and resource this church for a fourth century of ministry on God's Acre.

Importantly, we are not beginning this process because there is a problem to solve. Quite the opposite. We have been entrusted with a remarkably vital congregation, and it would be very easy simply to keep doing what we are doing. But faithfulness asks something more of us.

Our Congregational tradition teaches that when Christians gather prayerfully in the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is present among us. Our task, then, is not simply to determine what we want our church to become, but to listen together for what the Lord desires our church to become.

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Join us for Sunday Worship

8:00am
Chapel Service

10:00am
Traditional Worship Service
with Church School

Our summer worship schedule will conclude on Sunday, September 6, and we will resume our regular worship schedule the following Sunday. Worship is on Sundays at 8:00am in the Chapel, or 10:00am in the Meeting House **beginning Sunday, September 13**. Nursery care is available for both services, and Church School will be offered at 10:00am.

ADULT FORMATION

Join Us For Our Fall Bible Study

Exodus, the second book of the Bible, continues the narrative of the birth of Israel. It is the story of the Israelites' oppression and escape from Egypt, in which we see a number of narratively and theologically important events: the burning bush, the plagues, the Passover, the crossing of the sea, divine revelation at Sinai, reception of divine law, and the episode of the golden calf.

The Exodus is the central story of the entire Hebrew Bible, the foundational event for Israel's identity. But the history of these events, and the history of this text, are more complicated than popular representations would lead us to believe. This study explores this richest of biblical books, and the history that lies behind it. Several of our fall sermons will be based on Exodus texts, adding to the richness of our study.

Join us on Mondays in the library with a Zoom option available.

7:00am-8:00am **Monday Morning Bible Study**

9:15am-10:15am **Women's Bible Study**

Contact Marianna Kilbride, marianna@godsacre.org, with questions or to be added to the distribution list.



Women's Small Groups



Small Groups within our church are essential to deepening our engagement with others and with God. Join us to explore our faith journeys together as they unfold in our daily lives. Groups will begin gathering in September and will meet monthly. Participate in person or via Zoom. Our 2026-2027 groups are now forming. To learn more, contact Marianna Kilbride at marianna@godsacre.org.

Faith & Mental Wellness: *A Spiritual Practice*

Begins September 24, 8:30am
Library and on Zoom

Join us this fall to explore the connection between faith, spiritual practice, and mental health — through scripture, prayer, meditation, and fellowship. We will look at biblical insight and practical application to support our own journeys toward wellness and inner peace.

Open to everyone exploring their mental wellness through a Christian lens. Please share this, and bring a friend.

Contact Kim Hall,
kimbhall@icloud.com or
Allison Wolter,
allisonwolter@gmail.com
with any questions.



Continued from page one

That distinction will be at the heart of our year.

Scripture gives us wonderful images for the Holy Spirit: wind that blows where it chooses, fire that descends upon the disciples at Pentecost, the dove that rests upon Jesus. In each case, the Spirit is alive, moving, surprising, and sometimes leading God's people somewhere they had never imagined going.

That is the kind of discernment I hope we can practice together.

We will create opportunities throughout the year for prayer, study, conversation, listening, and reflection—what we might think of as openings through which the Holy Spirit can offer guidance, direction, and illumination. And we will lean deeply into the Congregational conviction that the Holy Spirit may speak through a minority of one.

That means your voice matters.

We want to engage as many members of our congregation as possible because the insight we need may come through someone who has been part of this church for fifty years—or someone who arrived fifty days ago. It may come through one of our elders or one of our children. It may even come through you.

I find that possibility tremendously exciting.

We do not know where this process will lead us, and I think that is part of its beauty. If we already knew the outcome, it wouldn't really be discernment. We are simply going to try to listen faithfully, remain open to the movement of the Spirit, and have the courage to follow where the Lord leads.

So, I hope you will join me on Kickoff Sunday and throughout the year—not only participating in the life of our church but praying for it. Listen. Wonder. Ask questions. Share what you are seeing and sensing. Be attentive to where the Spirit may be moving in your own life and in our life together.

That, of course, is the calling of a Christian community in every year and every season. But it feels particularly important as we approach this extraordinary milestone.

It has been a wonderful summer on God's Acre, and I hope these months have been restorative and renewing for you. Now we have the gift of coming together again—to worship, fellowship, pray, learn, serve, and be the Church of Jesus Christ together in a world that desperately needs the hope, faith, and love we have been entrusted to share.

I cannot wait to see where the Spirit leads us.

Yours in Christ,
Chapin

SAVE THE DATE!

February 27- March 6, 2027
AMO Mission to
San Antonio, TX

Mark your calendars now for a visit with one of our favorite partners in one of our favorite places! AMO will join Blueprint Ministries to help rehab houses for a in need community. Warm workdays, evening reflections with our teams, a Mexican meal or two or three, and sharing Christ's extravagant love always make San Antonio, Texas, one not to be missed. Details to follow.

Contact Marianna Kilbride, marianna@godsacre.org.



Homefront Day

Saturday, October 3, 9:00am

Join us in repairing and rehabbing a Norwalk neighbor's home who cannot do so for health, age, or financial reasons. Homefront, a community-based, volunteer-driven home repair program, provides free repairs to qualified homeowners, enabling them to stay in their homes with improved quality of life.

No experience is necessary, and lunch is included! Ages 14 and up are welcome. Contact Marianna Kilbride at marianna@godsacre.org to sign up.



Fellowship Tailgate Social

Saturday, September 26, 6:30pm

All (adults) are invited to the Fellowship Fall Social on **Saturday, September 26**, at the Parsonage! Kick off the fall season with an evening of football, food, and fellowship. Wear your favorite team jersey and enjoy wings, BBQ, and plenty of good conversation. Reconnect with friends, meet new faces, and enjoy a relaxed evening together as we celebrate the start of a new season in the life of our church. Bring an adult beverage to share, your team spirit, and your appetite! The cost is \$30 per person. Contact Laurel Carr at laurel@godsacre.org with questions or if you need assistance with the cost. Please RSVP by 9/16.



Women's Fellowship Book Club

Wednesday, September 16

7:00pm at 161 Elm Street

New participants are welcome! Reach out to Lesley Cousley at lacousley@gmail.com or Leigh Kennedy at kennedyleigh@me.com to learn more.



Fellowship Kickoff Brunch

Sunday, September 13
following the 10:00am Worship Service

There will be plenty of food and fellowship in Smith Hall for all to enjoy! Check your email for ways to contribute or contact Laurel Carr at laurel@godsacre.org.



Vacation Bible School: God Squad Adventures in Faith

We had a wonderful week with your children at our Super-hero Training Academy, earning badges for: Bravery, Trust, Kindness, Perseverance, and Courage. Campers explored these themes through Bible stories, games, and crafts. We extend our special thanks to our amazing junior and senior counselors, who helped make the camp such a special and enriching experience.



Church School Registration and Kickoff Sunday!

Church school registration is now open! Please be sure to enroll your child for the 2026-27 Church School year (in conjunction with any of our Youth programming and Children's Music offerings!) using the email link and form sent to you. Classroom options for infants through 7th grade will be waiting to welcome all children on Sunday, September 13. Come reconnect with old friends and teachers and meet new ones!

Be sure to visit the
Sneaker Tree
following the service for
an opportunity to
purchase a pair of new
kicks for a kid in need!

This is a wonderful
family-friendly
outreach opportunity!



**We can't wait to see you and kick off
another church year.**

Children and Families Fall Events

- September 13, 10:00am** Kickoff Sunday
First day of Church School and
Welcome Back Celebration
- September 20, 10:00am** Church School Communion
Workshop for 4th graders
- October 4, 10:00am** Fourth Grade First Communion
- October 7, 9:15am** Clementine's Playdates begins



Clementines Playdates For Fall/Winter

Registration is open for Clementines Playdates Fall/Winter session. Join us on Wednesday mornings beginning on October 7 from 9:15-10:15am in the Parlor. Children aged 3 and under are invited to join us with a caregiver for faith-based play, fun, songs, stories, and games. Please contact Sarah at churchschool@godsacre.org for registration information.

Inspirica Sneaker Tree

Back to school means pencils, pens, and new school sneakers! New sneakers in the right size, such a given for most of us, are an incredible gift for a homeless child. Take a sneaker from the tree on Kickoff Sunday to sign up and buy for your chosen child. Sneakers may be returned to the box in Smith Hall or mailed directly to Tracy Goldman at the church. For questions or to get a link to the sign-up sheet, contact Tracy Goldman at office@godsacre.org.

Our Plate Offering for September

Our plate offering during September goes to Inspirica, our Stamford partner striving to end homelessness and housing insecurity, largely in Fairfield County. Inspirica helps individuals and families achieve independence through support services and affordable housing.

Inspirica Inc. is one of the largest providers of emergency housing and support services in Connecticut, and the largest in Fairfield County. Located in Stamford, they house over 500 people daily across 12 facilities and provide critical services, including vocational training, childcare, and housing assistance, to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. By focusing on those most in need—including families, seniors,



and those impacted by mental illness and HIV/AIDS—Inspirica helps permanently break the cycle of housing insecurity.

Their mission is to end homelessness through an end-to-end platform that supports long-term independence, measuring success by how those they serve achieve and maintain permanent housing and stability.





Youth & Choir Program Times

The schedule for our youth offerings, which includes Youth Groups and Children's Choir, is below. Youth Groups and Children's Choirs are separated by grades into different groups.

Minnows and Cherubs include children in kindergarten and first grade and are offered on a rotating schedule every other week from 4:00-5:00pm. Guppies and Spirit Singers include children in second and third grade, with Guppies scheduled on Tuesday from 4:00-5:00pm and Spirit Singers is held

Tuesday from 5:00-6:00pm. JYG and Joyful Noise include children in fourth and fifth grade, with JYG scheduled on Thursdays from 4:00- 5:00pm and Joyful Noise from 5:00-6:00pm. MSYG includes children from sixth to eighth grade and is offered on Sunday from 4:00-5:30pm, and YG includes all high school youth and meets on Sunday from 7:00-8:30pm.

For any questions regarding our youth offerings, please do not hesitate to reach out to Kimmie Dyrvik at kimmie@godsacre.org.

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	 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
	ROTATING EVERY OTHER WEEK		 Quest (grades 9–12) 7:00 – 8:30pm 3rd Thursday of the Month

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

YG Senior Retreat!

Our amazing senior leaders traveled this past August to Charlemont, Massachusetts for a weekend full of rafting, camping, and worshipping together. This was an unforgettable weekend and one that set the tone for their senior year to come! We are so excited to watch this class lead YG with grace, and we are so grateful for the time we had in nature together.



REGISTER NOW FOR YOUTH PROGRAMMING

Please take a moment to scan the QR code and register your fish(es) for the upcoming programming year. We ask that all fish be registered before our first week of programming, starting September 13. Thank you!

TIME TO SIGN UP!

**Welcome Back Week:
September 13–18**



REGISTER NOW



Sing with Us – Chancel Choir Welcomes You!

Do you love to sing or have always wanted to give it a try?

The Chancel Choir is open to all adults who want to lift their voices in worship and fellowship. No prior music training is needed—just a willing heart and a desire to make a joyful noise! You'll be seated with helpful section leaders to rehearse music that will be sung in the upcoming weeks, making it easy to learn and feel supported.

Come be part of something meaningful and musical!
For more information, contact Nerva at nerva@godsacre.org
or (203) 966-2651 x104.

Chancel Choir Rehearsals Resume September 10

We're excited to welcome back all members of the Adult Choir! Rehearsals will resume on Thursday, September 10 at 7:30pm. Whether you're a returning singer or interested in joining, we'd love to see you there as we begin a new season of music and fellowship.

Kickoff Sunday

Special Music at the 10:00am Service

Come kick off the new program year with us at the 10:00am service, featuring festive music to mark the occasion! Timpani, trumpets, and the Chancel Choir will add a joyful and celebratory tone as we gather in worship and community.

It's a wonderful way to begin the program year together.



Join Our Pastoral Care Community!

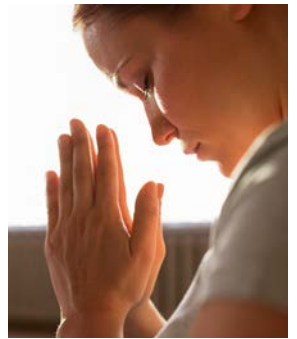
At our Church, **Pastoral Care** thrives on the principles of connection, love, and compassion. Our ministry teams are flourishing, each contributing uniquely to our collective mission to love one another.

Our **Helping Hands Ministry Team**

provides care and support to those who need some temporary help. Whether it is someone who needs help after a hospitalization or calling upon a church member who might be experiencing a life transition, our team of "helping hands" is there to offer a bit of cheer, a listening ear, or a quick local errand. Contact **Sharon MacLachlan** at sharontinayvette@icloud.com for ways to get involved.



Our **Prayer Ministry** helps ensure that the comfort and strength of prayer are available to everyone in our community. We are blessed to walk together as a family of faith, supporting one another and living out God's call to love as He loves us. These prayers are offered each week as Prayers of the People during our Sunday Worship service and again each Wednesday during Quiet Chapel prayers. Whether in person or in your own space, we invite you to join us in lifting up our community in prayer. To join this meaningful ministry, contact **Barb Clayton** at barb@godsacre.org.



The **Flower Team Ministry** is coordinated by Juliet Howe, who helps select the flowers and provides the training for our team of flower arrangers. These team members lovingly create our beautiful altar flowers for each Sunday service and many other occasions at the church.

The team member in charge of the weekly arrangement chooses the flowers from a floral wholesaler for the larger arrangement and then helps to create smaller arrangements to be delivered to church members after the service. Contact **Juliet Howe** at juliet@eehowe.com to join.



Are you interested in helping to bring a smile to fellow church members? Please consider joining the **Card Writing Ministry Team**. This ministry shares care and kindness by sending hand-written notes of sympathy, encouragement, and celebration to mark meaningful moments in the lives of our church community. Please join us and write cards that make a difference in someone's life. We supply you with beautiful church note cards, the recipient's name, address, and reason for the card. Please contact **Stephanie Radman** at stephanieradman@gmail.com if you would like to join this ministry team.



The **Prayer Shawl Ministry Team**

meets on the second and fourth Mondays of each month, 10:30am - 12:00pm, in our Church Parlor to sit, knit, and share fellowship with one another. Each prayer shawl is lovingly created and then blessed by the knitters and the congregation to wrap each recipient in God's love. No experience is needed; we will provide you with the yarn and teach you how to knit. Please contact **Twee Haffner** at tweehaffner@gmail.com to join this ministry team.



If you would like to get involved or like prayers offered as part of our Sunday Worship service, please email **Kelly Antonson** at kelly@godsacre.org or **Barb Clayton** at barb@godsacre.org.

Love Thy Neighbor

We are grateful for those who participate in the many Pastoral Care Ministry Teams. We engage and connect with one another by providing words of love and encouragement through a thoughtful prayer, a special visit, a shared cup of coffee or a walk, a beautiful prayer shawl to cover one with comfort and love, a handwritten note with carefully chosen words, a lovely bouquet of flowers delivered at just the right moment, or a long term, deep and caring relationship provided by our Stephen Ministers.

Stephen Ministry

Stephen Ministry is a one-to-one, confidential caregiving ministry in which trained lay members provide emotional and spiritual support to people experiencing life's challenges. Stephen Ministers walk alongside individuals during difficult seasons - offering presence, prayer, and compassionate listening.

If you or someone you know could use support, please reach out. Ann, Kim or Barb would love to talk with you:

- Ann Whittaker, ahwhittaker@yahoo.com
- Kim Hall, kimbhall@icloud.com
- Barb Clayton, barb@godsacre.org



Love Thy Neighbor

Stephen Ministry
Card Writing Ministry
Prayer Ministry
Flower Ministry
Helping Hands Ministry
Prayer Shawl Ministry



Men's Ministries 2026-2027

MG Events



Men's Fellowship encourages the men of the church to get to know, support, learn from, and help one another. Contact Steve Case at scase135@outlook.com.

December 9
Men's Christmas Dinner

January 30
Pivot House Breakfast

June 14
Men's Group BBQ

Men's M4 Breakfast Gatherings



Discussions of Work and Faith
Meets monthly from 7:30-8:30am
at 31 Grove Street, New Canaan.
Contact Dirk Dunlap at dirkdunlap@hotmail.com.

September 18
October 9
November 13
December 11
January 8
February 12
March 12
April 9
May 14

Men's Small Groups



Small Groups within our church are essential to deepening our engagement with others and with God. Join us to explore our faith journeys together as they unfold in our daily lives. Mondays, at 7:30pm. Contact Chapin Garner at chapin@godsacre.org.

September 28
October 26
November 30
January 25
February 22
March 29
April 26
May 24



Men's Book Club



Meets bimonthly at 7:00pm
at 339 Oenoke Ridge, New Canaan.
Contact Jim Clayton at jcnc339@gmail.com.

September 13
November 15
January 17
March 14
May 16

Early Morning Men's Bible Study

Meets on the first and third Fridays each month beginning October 2 in the Parlor from 6:00-7:00am. Contact Sean Kelley at seankelley05@gmail.com.

Building & Grounds: Summer Updates

It was a busy summer for Building & Grounds as we completed several important projects across our church property. Among the highlights were the replacement of the roof, the installation of a new security system, the completion of repairs following last winter's ice-dam damage, and a campus-wide signage project. These improvements reflect our ongoing commitment to maintaining our building and creating both a safe and welcoming environment for all on God's Acre.

The updated security system is an especially exciting improvement, allowing us to safely keep the church doors open to visitors during regular business hours while also providing enhanced security and access control for The Preschool on God's Acre. You will also notice new signs throughout the building, designed to make the church easier to navigate and provide a more welcoming experience for visitors.

As we begin a new program year, we look forward to seeing our building filled with activity. We hope you enjoy these updates and all that has been accomplished throughout our campus this summer.



Church Family Gathering in Maine

Church friends enjoying fellowship and fun together during a gathering in Maine this summer.

From left to right:

Josie Davies, Michel Cornier, Gail Banigan, Ralph Davies, Penny Mardoian, Kathy Johnston, and Judy Hyde.



Births



Alexandra Lewis welcomed son
Alistair Fitzhugh Lewis
on June 14, 2026. Congratulations!



Cheikh and Khanisha Moore are delighted
to announce the birth of
Che' Tidian Gueye
born on May 20, 2026. Congratulations!

Weddings



Edward Erik Burns Jr., son of Ned and
Jen Burns, **married Madeline Gray
Mazoue** on July 25, 2026. Wishing you both
a lifetime of happiness!



Olivia Linnartz, daughter of John and
Vicki Linnartz, **married Sean McCafferty**
on June 28, 2026. Congratulations to
the happy couple!

Birthday



Levora D'Acosta
turned 97 on Saturday, August 22, 2026.
Happy Birthday Levora!

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**
Senior YG Director

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, **x114**
Director of Youth Ministries
and Children's Music

Maria Stadnik, **x108**
Director of Finance

Allison Wolter
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

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 October newsletter, please submit by September 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