

The Congregational Church
of New Canaan

NEWS@GOD'S ACRE

NOVEMBER
2026

From the Pastor's Study



Dear Church Family,

It is hard to believe that November is upon us. As daylight continues to fade a little earlier each evening and we begin looking toward Thanksgiving and the start of Advent later this month, I have found myself thinking about the importance of remembering.

On October 25, we had the joy of welcoming 19 new members into our family of faith. Many of you may recall being invited to reflect on your own journey of faith when you joined our church. Whether that was recently or many years ago, we asked you to consider if there had been particular moments when you encountered God along the way. For some, these were occasions of immense joy and celebration. For others, they were experiences of profound sorrow or enduring losses they could never have imagined. Some were moments that may not have seemed particularly significant at the time but later revealed something about God's presence in their lives.

Having recently spent a considerable amount of time reflecting on my own faith journey while writing my ordination paper, I can attest to how meaningful this exercise can be. Taking the time to remember the people and experiences that have shaped my faith has allowed me to recognize God's presence in places I certainly did not fully appreciate while I was living through them. There were experiences I would never have chosen for myself and questions that did not come with easy answers. Yet looking back, I can see how God was ever present through the people who walked alongside me and helped shape the person and pastor I am today.

Throughout this fall, we have been journeying alongside the Israelites through the wilderness in the book of Exodus. Their story reminds us how difficult it can be to recognize God's provision while we are still in the midst of uncertainty. Again and again, the Israelites struggled to trust that God would continue to provide even after witnessing God's faithfulness in remarkable ways. I suspect there is something familiar in their experience for us all. Sometimes it is only when we look back that we begin to recognize how God was sustaining us along the way.

As we enter this season of Thanksgiving and begin our annual stewardship campaign, I wonder how often we give ourselves the opportunity to reflect on our own faith journeys. We may recognize the blessings immediately before us without considering how much of what we have today has been made possible through the care and generosity of others.

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Welcome New Members

Please join us in extending a warm welcome to our newest church members! We are delighted to have them become part of our church family and look forward to getting to know them better as we worship, grow in faith, and share in fellowship together. Be sure to introduce yourself and help them feel at home here on God's Acre!

Kevin & Cristen Cottrell
Oak Grove Place
Luke & Cate

Zachary & Kimberly Cressman
Carter Street
Hunter

Lindsay Durfee (Barry)
Silvermine Road
Will, Lincoln, Hank

William & Anneliese Essigs
Shady Knoll Lane

Will & Macy Gilbert
Seminary Street
Graham



Tighe Hoey
Vitti Street

Kristen Lee & David Monteiro
Knollwood Ln
Kolby, Kooper, Keaton Lee

Jodie Rucci
Vitti Street
Samantha, Tighe, Delaney

Mark & Molly Schimmel
Church Street
Charlie & Henry

Alex & Liz Tuff
Pepper Lane
Oliver, Adelaide, Eloise

Michael & Elizabeth Zea
Weed Street
Ella & Mason

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

FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Continued from page one

This seems particularly meaningful as we consider our own commitments to the life of our church. Stewardship offers us an opportunity to respond with gratitude for what we have received. Through the gifts we share, we can become part of how God provides for others.

So, friends, I invite you to take some time this November to remember. Remember your own journey of faith. Where have you encountered God along the way? Is there someone whose presence in your life has helped shape your faith in ways you might not have recognized at the time?

My hope is that as we take time to remember where God has been present in our lives, we might become more attentive to the ways God continues to be present among us as a family of faith. As we enter the season of Advent on Sunday, November 29, may remembering God's faithfulness along the way give us renewed hope and trust in all that is still to come.

With gratitude,
Kelly

THANKSGIVING SERVICE PROJECT
Sunday, November 22, 11:00am-12:00pm



Congregation

Join us for this beloved tradition of service and giving! Bring your family, friends, and neighbors on **November 22 at 11:00am** to share in the spirit of Thanksgiving as we pack boxes filled with care for our neighbors in need. Everyone is welcome, and every helping hand makes a difference!



Church School

The children of our church will be big contributors to our annual Thanksgiving Service project. All children will receive a "Turkey Bank" in the beginning of November and are encouraged to raise money through both acts of service and fundraising through family and friends. The money raised through Church School will contribute directly to the stipend provided to our Thanksgiving dinner recipients to purchase turkeys. Children will bring their Turkey Banks back to church on **Sunday, November 22.** That day all church school classes will participate in the Thanksgiving Service Project both during church school and following the service with their families.



Missions and Outreach

Our November plate offering goes towards the 2026 Thanksgiving Service Project benefiting the following local agencies:

Grace Baptist Church in Norwalk
Food is delivered to local families in need

Macedonia Church in Norwalk
Food is delivered to families in need

Carver Foundation of Norwalk
After-school program for children in need

Person to Person in Darien
Provides food, clothing, and other programming predominantly to the working poor

Mid-Fairfield AIDS Project in Norwalk
Provides social services to people living with HIV and AIDS

Open Doors in Norwalk
Serves the unhoused with a food pantry, shelter, and three meals daily

Pacific House in Stamford
A shelter and kitchen serving homeless men in our area

Pivot Ministries in Bridgeport
A rehabilitation program for men addicted to drugs and alcohol

Liberation House/Liberation Programs in Stamford
A rehabilitation program for men addicted to drugs and alcohol

Inspirica in Stamford
Strives to end homelessness and housing insecurity

Future 5 in Stamford
Helps students achieve their academic, career, and life goals

During the month of November, we partner with these agencies to feed a full Thanksgiving meal to over 1000 individuals. We will gather at the church the Sunday before Thanksgiving, November 22, to pack, stack, decorate, and deliver boxes of food to our neighbors in need. Congregants wishing to support this beloved church tradition may make a monetary donation to this project by visiting our website, using the GIVE button, and designating the gift to the "Thanksgiving Project." You can also donate cash or check in the Sunday plate or stop by the church office. Contact Marianna Kilbride at marianna@godsacre.org to learn more.

Welcome Junior Deacons!

We are so excited to welcome this year's Junior Deacons: Eva Alexander, Tilly Doak, Hank Durfee, Caroline Haddad, Pierce Parkhill, and Alexia Rees. They are all seniors at New Canaan High School and have been involved in the life of our church since they were young! We look forward to having them serve and discern along with our Board of Deacons.



What Being a Deacon Means to Me

Serving the congregation as a Deacon is gratifying beyond measure. The liturgical responsibilities help deepen faith and broaden the aperture on how our congregation improves our community, both inside and outside of the worship service.
– Alex Reinman



Discernment Team

Preparing for a Season of Congregational Discernment

Over the past several months, the Discernment Team has been prayerfully gathering, learning, listening, and preparing for an important season in the life of our church. Together, we have been seeking to open our hearts and minds to God's leading as we prepare to engage the entire congregation in a process of communal discernment.

As we engage in this season of discernment, we are seeking to:

- Remember who we have been as a church and deepen our understanding of what it means to stand within the Congregational tradition.
- Prayerfully ask who God is calling us to be and what work Christ is calling us to undertake in this particular moment.
- Imagine how we might faithfully prepare and resource this church for a fourth century of ministry on God's Acre.

As part of our preparation, we have had the privilege of learning from gifted leaders and teachers. Rev. Kent Siladi, former UCC Conference Minister and former Pastor-in-Residence at our church, helped us explore the nature of discernment itself, what it is, what it is not, and how faithful communities listen together for God's voice.

We have also spent time with Rev. Dr. Sarah Drummond, Founding Dean of Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School, who has been helping us better understand the rich history of Congregationalism and the enduring wisdom of the Congregational Way. In addition, we have been reflecting on our own church's history and previous discernment efforts, seeking to learn from those who have faithfully stewarded this congregation through earlier seasons of change and opportunity.

Now it is time to begin sharing some of this foundational grounding with the wider congregation.

We are delighted to welcome Dr. Drummond to God's Acre on Sunday, November 15. She will preach during our morning worship services and then remain with us at 11:15am for a conversation on the Congregational Way, offering insights into the history, values, and practices that have shaped our tradition and helping to ground us for the discernment work ahead.

Members of the Discernment Team will also be present to answer questions, hear your reflections, and help foster the thoughtful conversation and shared learning that will guide us as we listen together for God's leading in the months to come.

As we embark on this journey together, we invite you to join us with open hearts, curious minds, and a spirit of prayer. We believe God is continuing to write the story of this congregation, and we look forward to discovering together where Christ is calling us next.

Questions and thoughts are always welcome and may be directed to **discernment@godsacre.org**.

Family Harvest Dinner

Children and Family Ministries invites you to a family Harvest Meal on Sunday, November 8 from 4:30-6:00pm. We will share an Italian meal together and participate in fall-themed activities, crafts, and games for children and their families. Join us for fellowship, food, and fun as we usher in the season of gratitude together.

Deadline to register has been extended to November 4th. Contact Sarah Haddad at churchschool@godsacre.org to RSVP.



Upcoming Church School Schedule November

November 1

Children's Chapel, Kickoff for Turkey Banks, No Church School 4-7th grade

November 8

Regular Church School, Family Harvest Dinner fellowship event from 4:30-6:00pm

November 15

Regular Church School

November 22

Return Turkey Banks, Church School Thanksgiving Service Project during Church School and Fellowship Hour

November 29

Combined Church School Class for Pre K-3rd grade, first Sunday of Advent



Advent Wreath Lighting

During the season of Advent, we invite church families to participate in our worship service by lighting our Advent Wreath each week at the 10:00am service. Should your family be interested in participating in this holiday tradition, please reach out to lindsey@godsacre.org by November 15.



Calling All Singers!

If you'd like to join the Chancel choir for the Christmas Concert, on **December 13**, please contact our Director of Music Ministries, Nerva Altino, at nerva@godsacre.org. Rehearsals are held every Thursday, from 7:30 - 8:15pm.

Welcoming Singers for Christmas Concert



November Youth Ministries Happenings

November invites us into a season of gratitude, giving, and joyful fellowship! We are thankful for the energy, kindness, and enthusiasm our youth bring to our church community, and we look forward to another month of growing in faith, deepening friendships, and serving our neighbors together.

October gave us so much to celebrate! From our first K–8 Tapestry event to JYG Late Night and an Agape Dinner with YG, our youth enjoyed meaningful opportunities to worship, connect, and have fun. Our October 25 Trunk-or-Treat brought our church family together for a festive time of creativity and fellowship. Thank you to everyone who decorated a trunk, joined the fun, and helped make the day special! These shared experiences strengthen the bonds within our Fish community and help us carry that spirit of love and belonging into our service to others.

We will kick off November with our MSYG Lock-in on Monday night, November 2! Our middle school Fish will spend the night at church, enjoying time together and making memories with friends. Be sure to mark your calendars and scan the QR code to register!

Later in the month, Youth Ministries will take part in our annual Thanksgiving service project the week of November 16-22. Together, we will help assemble Thanksgiving boxes for our neighbors in need; a meaningful opportunity to put our faith into action and share God's love during this season of giving. We look forward to sharing this special week of fellowship and service!

Thank you for being part of our Youth Ministries family and for helping our young people grow in faith, friendship, and generosity. We are grateful for all the ways our youth and families bring God's love to life in our community!

If you have any questions about upcoming offerings, please reach out to **youthgroup@godsacre.org**.









Notable changes and special events for our youth ministries in November include:

Monday, November 2
MSYG Lock-in
Scan the QR code to register!

Saturday, November 14
YG Senior / Freshman Retreat

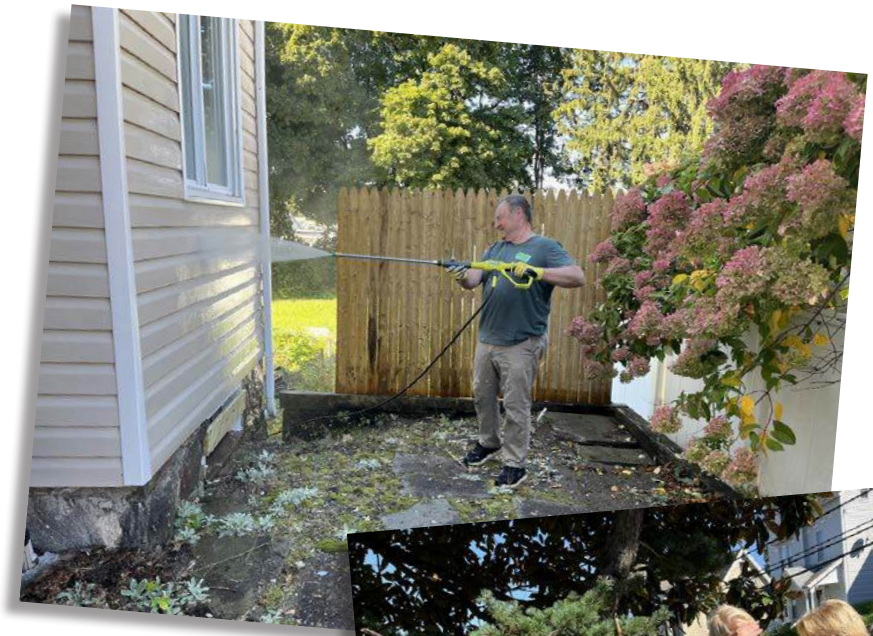
Sunday, November 22
MSYG Crashes Church School, 9:30–11:00am

Sunday, November 16-22
Annual Thanksgiving service project

HomeFront Day!

Thank you to our wonderful HomeFront Day crew! Under beautiful skies we prayed, ate, power washed, scraped, painted, replaced fencing and light fixtures!

The homeowners were very, very pleased.











Advent Project Kickoff

Families in need have hard choices at Christmas.

Paying for food and winter utilities often leaves no room in the budget for gifts. In working with local partners, our three annual Christmas projects target that issue.



Be a Bell Ringer!

Each year, we ring the Salvation Army Bells at Walter Stewart's Market to raise funds for our local neighbors in need. Bell ringing is an excellent service opportunity for all. To sign up, contact Beth Picard at **bpicard44@gmail.com** and she will send you a link for the available time slots.





The Angels

These gifts we buy are for children in the homeless or working poor communities. You can either buy a gift online and have it shipped directly to Inspirica or shop in-store and return your gift to Smith Hall. Signups begin November 15 during fellowship time.

Contact Beth Picard at **bpicard44@gmail.com** with any questions.



The Doves

Similar to our Angel gifts, every year we partner with Person-to-Person on their Dove program. Food insecurity has increased substantially for local families, and the Dove dollars we donate is a true blessing.

Our Dove donations provide food for an entire day for a family or individual in need. Signups begin November 15 during fellowship time.

Contact Debbie Simpson at **debcsimpson24@gmail.com** with any questions.

Intentional Gratitude Practices

November naturally turns our hearts toward gratitude. As we gather with family and friends around Thanksgiving tables, we are reminded of God's abundant blessings. Yet gratitude is more than a feeling we experience during a particular season. It is a spiritual practice that can draw us closer to God and deepen our sense of joy throughout the year.

The Apostle Paul encourages us to *"give thanks in all circumstances"* (1Thessalonians 5:18). While life is not always easy, cultivating gratitude helps us recognize God's presence and faithfulness even during challenging times.

Gratitude shifts our focus from what is lacking to the many gifts that surround us each day.



> *"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever."*
> — Psalm 107:1

One simple practice is **gratitude journaling.** At the end of each day, write down three things for which you are thankful. They do not need to be extraordinary. A phone call from a friend, a beautiful sunrise, a prayer answered, or a moment of peace can all become reminders of God's goodness.

Another meaningful practice is to begin each morning with a **brief prayer of thanksgiving** before the day's worries take hold. Consider thanking God for a new day, for loved ones, and for opportunities to serve others.

You might also practice **expressing gratitude directly.** Write a note, send a text, make a phone call, or tell someone in person how much they mean to you. Acts of appreciation strengthen relationships and often bless both the giver and the receiver.

Finally, take time to notice God's gifts in the ordinary moments of life. A walk through autumn leaves, laughter shared with family, worship with your church community, or a quiet moment of prayer can all become opportunities for thanksgiving.

As we enter this season of gratitude, may we be intentional about recognizing God's blessings and sharing that spirit of thankfulness with others. A grateful heart not only honors God but also helps us see the world through the lens of His love and grace.

In Loving Memory



Marcia Blaikie Blod
January 6, 1945 - September 24, 2026



Kevin Scott Smith
September 24, 1968 - October 5, 2026

PASTORAL CARE

Celebrating 20 Years of Stephen Ministry at our Church!

Christ Caring for People through People.



Photo taken at our October Stephen Ministry Meeting - *From left to right*

Back Row: Wes Fredericks, Chris Bach, Mike Rodgers, Tom Robey

Middle Row: Beth Simon, Barb Clayton, Lyn Chivvis, Hope Hetherington, Jeanne Fredericks, Pamela Crum, Martha Palmer, Twee Haffner, Kim Hall, Ann Whittaker, Gail Banigan, Beth Baker, Tracy Goldman

Front Row: Hermine Davis, Sharon MacLachlan, Parry Grogan, Lindsay Tucker, Penny Mardoian, Kathy Johnston, Katrina Hering

Stephen Ministers Not Pictured: Diane Bailey, Courtney Flynn, Shawn Gardner, Susan Garofoli, Ryan Lindner, Joan Lister, Don Moyle, Fatou Niang

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

STEPHEN MINISTRY

MISSIONS AND OUTREACH

AMO Mission Trip

Signup Through November 5

Join us **February 27–March 6** to partner will our great pals at Blueprint Ministries in San Antonio, Texas. Fellowship with friends old and new, Tex-Mex, hard work, reflection - it's all in the transformational mix. Dust off your boots, work and cowboy, and pack a light bag for some warm weather when we'll need it and some missional time because we always need it. For more info contact Marianna Kilbride at marianna@godsacre.org.



ADULT FORMATION

The Christmas Stories in Poetry and Prose

Through the poetry of Luke and John's tellings of the birth of Jesus and the prose of Matthew's, we get a complex and intimate view of the beginning of the life on earth of Jesus. Join us Mondays in the library, 7:00-8:00am and 9:15-10:15am (Women's) to revisit and celebrate the Advent season. For more information or to be added to the distribution list, please contact Marianna Kilbride at marianna@godsacre.org.

November Ladies Night

Join us for Ladies Night on **Wednesday, November 4 at 7:00pm!** Enjoy an evening of wine, cheese, and good conversation before the busy holiday season begins. We'll gather at Linda Twombly's home for a fun evening of wine, food, and time together. Justin from Craftbottlz will guide us through a selection of wines, and there will be plenty of time to catch up with old friends and meet new ones. The cost for the evening is $25. Contact Liz McClave at lizmcclave@yahoo.com with questions.



Women's Fellowship Inspirica Thanksgiving Service

Our church women are invited to serve at Inspirica on **Tuesday, November 10, from 9:30–11:30am.** As part of our beloved Thanksgiving Service tradition, we'll sort and box food for Harvest for Hope. Please check your email to RSVP. Contact Marianna Kilbride at marianna@godsacre.org with any questions.



~SAVE THE DATE~

Men's Christmas Dinner

Gather with the men of the church on **Wednesday, December 9**, for a night of holiday cheer. We'll kick things off with time to catch up and connect, share a festive meal together, and then spread some holiday cheer by caroling with our friends from Pivot Ministries.



Come for the fellowship, stay for the caroling, and leave with a little extra Christmas spirit! Invitations will be in your inbox this week, please RSVP promptly. Contact Steve Case at scase135@outlook.com with questions.

~SAVE THE DATE~

Women's Fellowship Christmas Open House



Save the date for our Annual Christmas Open House! On **Thursday, December 10,** the women of the church are invited to gather at the home of Eileen Thomas for an evening of holiday fellowship. Enjoy festive hors d'oeuvres, laughter, and friendship as we celebrate the joy of the season together. Invitations will be in your inbox soon!

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, **x115**
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
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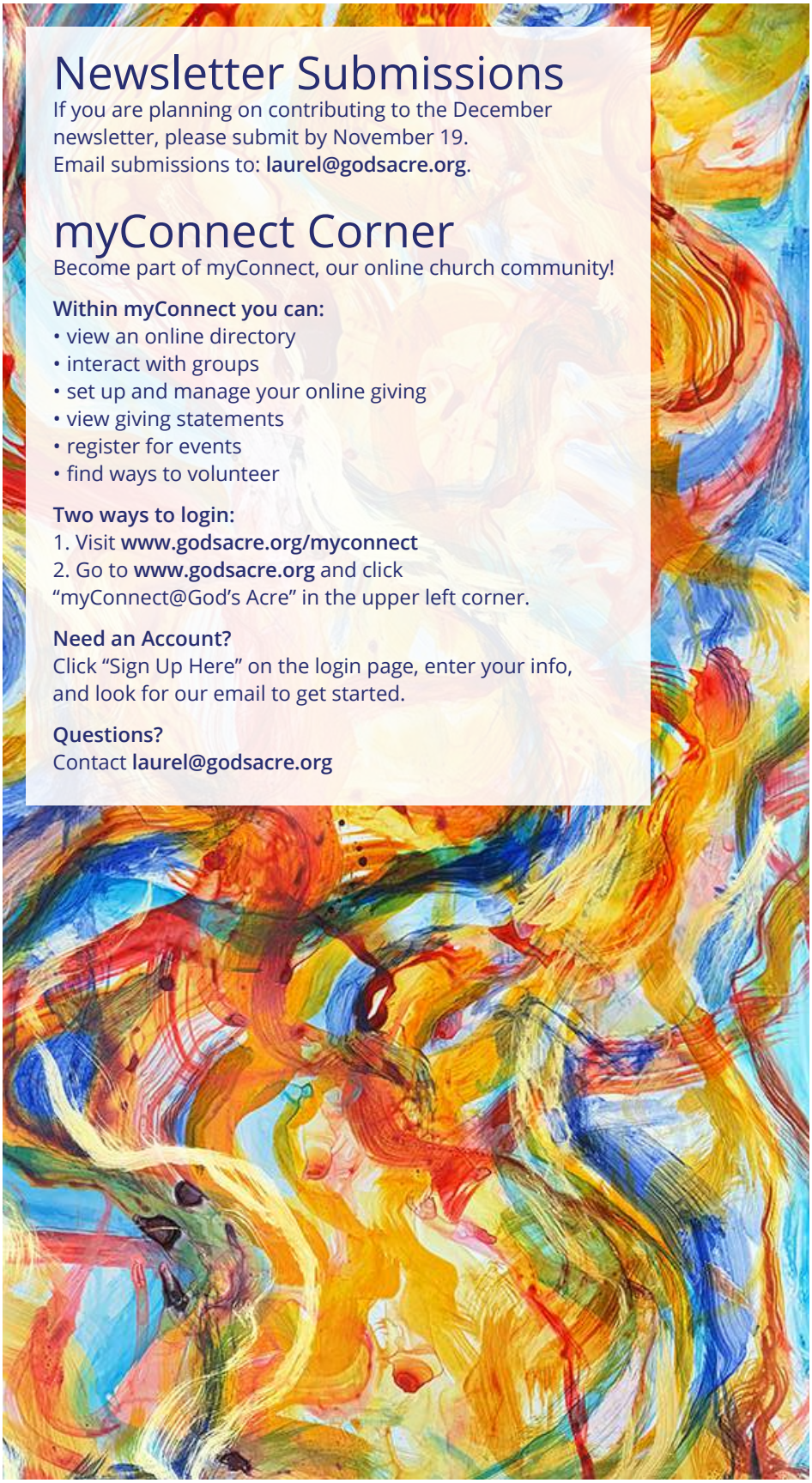
www.godsacre.org
We are a Stephen Minister Church



Newsletter Submissions

If you are planning on contributing to the December newsletter, please submit by November 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**