



The Congregational Church
of New Canaan

NEWS@GOD'S ACRE

OCTOBER
2026

From the Pastor's Study



Dear Church Family,

It seems that almost every day, in the news as well as in everyday conversation, concerns about artificial intelligence grow. Sometimes we hear alarming, even doomsday scenarios. More often, perhaps, there is simply a growing sense that we are creating something extraordinarily powerful without yet fully understanding where it will lead us.

A few months ago, prompted by a conversation in our men's book group, I invited one of my dear friends, Dr. Wesley Wildman of Boston University, to join us for worship and conversation. What began as an invitation to explore an interesting emerging issue now feels like an increasingly important conversation for our church and community.

Wes is unusually equipped to help us have it. He is Professor of Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics, and of Computing and Data Sciences at Boston University. Before pursuing graduate studies in religion and philosophy, he studied mathematics, physics, and computer science. Today, he teaches AI ethics and works at the intersection of technology, human life, ethics, and religion. He also co-chaired Boston University's task force examining the opportunities and challenges presented by generative AI.

In other words, Wes understands both sides of this conversation. He understands something about how these technologies actually work, but he also spends his life thinking about the larger human questions they raise: What will these technologies do to us? What possibilities might they open? What might they threaten? How do we preserve human dignity, truth, responsibility, and community in a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence? And, for us as Christians, where does faith enter into all of this?

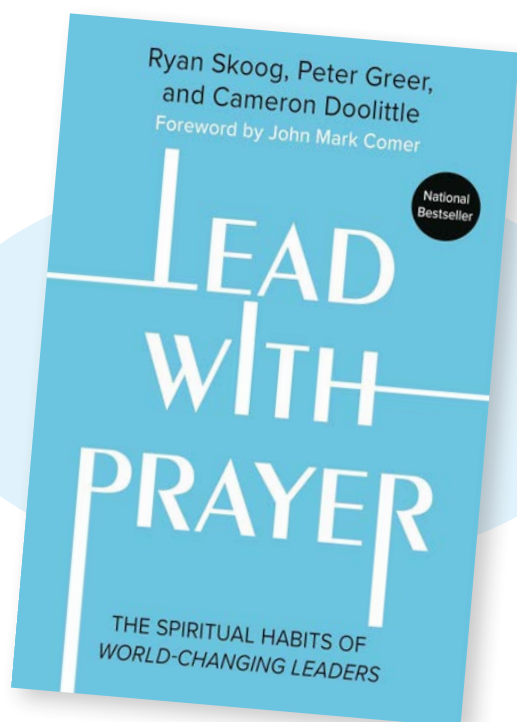
Dr. Wesley Wildman will join us on October 25 and preach at both our 8:00 and 10:00am services. Following the 10:00am service, he will lead a conversation and Q&A in the Chapel about the intersection of theology, ethics, and artificial intelligence.

When we first conceived of this opportunity, we imagined it simply as an interesting and informative conversation for our congregation about how faith and emerging technologies might intersect—for good and for ill. Increasingly, though, I believe this is a conversation worth sharing with friends, neighbors, and family members beyond our church community.

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Early Morning Men's Bible Study

This fall, the Early Morning Men's Bible Study will dive into the book *Lead with Prayer: The Spiritual Habits of World-Changing Leaders*. Our study, drawing from the Bible and the book, will help us develop practical tools and habits to become leaders who pray - in our homes, workplaces, and the community. Starting October 2, we will meet twice a month, on Fridays from 6:00-7:00am. Contact seankelley05@gmail.com to sign up or learn more.



Bible Studies

New Participants are Always Welcome!

BIBLE STUDY OPTIONS

Monday Morning Bible Study, Library

7:00-8:00am, Exodus

Monday Women's Bible Study, Parlor

9:15-10:15am, Exodus

Wednesday Morning Bible Study with Chapin, Library

9:30-11:00am, Chapin's Study

Thursday Faith & Mental Wellness, Library

8:30-9:30am, Meets Bi-Weekly

Friday Early Morning Men's Bible Study, Parlor

6:00-7:00am, Beginning October 2, Meets Twice a Month

Friday Online/Zoom Merton & Friends

8:00-9:00am, Contemplative Book Discussion

Contact Marianna Kilbride at marianna@godsacre.org for more information.



AI Ethics and Faith

On October 25 it is our great pleasure to welcome to the pulpit Dr. Wesley J. Wildman, Professor of Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics, and of Computing and Data Sciences at Boston University. After preaching, Dr. Wildman will join us at 11:15am in the Chapel for discussion. Bring your questions!

Dr. Wildman is an expert in AI and the ethical use of it, with an emphasis on how to prepare our children for a future that includes it.

You can read his biography here Wesley J. Wildman, School of Theology: <https://www.bu.edu/sth/profile/wesley-j-wildman/> and read about his work focusing children here AI Ethics Index: <https://www.bu.edu/wheelock/research-impact/ai-ethics-index/>

To learn more contact Marianna Kilbride at marianna@godsacre.org.



Introducing the Discernment Team: Listening Together for God's Leading

Over the coming year, our church will embark on a season of prayerful discernment as we seek to listen together for where God is leading us as a congregation. While this process will be facilitated by the Discernment Team, it is important to remember that it is ultimately led by the Holy Spirit.

The role of the Discernment Team is not to make decisions or determine outcomes. Rather, the team's responsibility is to listen carefully to one another and to the congregation, gather and reflect on what is being shared, identify emerging themes and insights, and communicate those learnings back to the congregation clearly and faithfully. The Discernment Team is committed to creating opportunities for every active member of the congregation to participate.

From the very beginning, the team has committed itself to approaching this work as sacred. This is an opportunity to listen, pray, reflect, and remain open to God's guidance, trusting in God's timing and remaining attentive to the movement of the Spirit.

Our hope is to walk alongside you throughout this process, listening together, learning together, and discovering where the Holy Spirit is leading our church. We invite you to join us with open hearts, curious minds, and a spirit of prayer as we begin this journey together. You can reach out to us anytime at discernment@godsacre.org.

Discernment Team Members

Diane Bailey
Roger Bolton
Steve Case
Hoyt Davidson
Wes Fredericks
Tammie Garner
David Haddad
Sean Kelley
Marianna Kilbride
William Picard
Anna Rogers Smith
Eileen Thomas
Cooper Westendarp
Amy Werner
Allison Wolter
Daley Keogh (Youth Member)
Alexia Rees (Youth Member)
Chapin Garner (Staff Support)
Lonnie deMarco (Staff Support)



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Because the Christian response to artificial intelligence cannot simply be fear, nor, I suspect, should it be uncritical enthusiasm. Perhaps our calling is what it so often is: to seek wisdom to understand what is happening around us, to discern what is good, to recognize what threatens human flourishing, and to ask how our faith in Jesus Christ might help us navigate a world changing more quickly than most of us can comprehend.

We certainly will not settle the future of faith and artificial intelligence in a single Sunday morning! But perhaps we can begin a conversation that will help us navigate a future certain to bring remarkable challenges as well as important opportunities.

So I hope you will join us, in person or online, on October 25, and that you will consider inviting someone to join you. Once again, I believe our church has an important role to play in our community: raising consequential questions and creating a place where we can wrestle with them thoughtfully, faithfully, and together.

Yours in Christ,
Chapin

Join Our New Member Class

Interested in joining our family of faith? Sign up for our fall new member sessions to meet our leaders and learn about the traditions that have shaped life on God's Acre. Contact Anna Rogers at welcoming@godsacre.org by October 11 with questions or to sign up.

New Member Introduction Class

Sunday, October 18
11:15am-1:15pm

New Member Faith Sharing Class

Wednesday, October 21
7:00-9:00pm

New Member Sunday

Sunday, October 25
9:00-11:00am



GOD'S ACRE | FALL 2026

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REGISTER HERE

Ushers Needed!

Looking for a meaningful way to serve our church? Consider becoming an usher! Serving just once a month, ushers play a vital role in our community by offering a warm welcome to members and guests, building connections as people enter and exit, and helping ensure the safety and welfare of everyone during the service. If you are interested or would like to learn more, please speak with Hal Holappa or Teri Reed after a Sunday service, or reach out to holappahal@aol.com or treed04@gmail.com. We'd love to have you on the team!



Welcome Junior Deacons!

This fall we are welcoming six Junior Deacons - all seniors at New Canaan High School - to assist in the spiritual life of our church. All of our Junior Deacons have already been a big part of life on God's Acre and we are so blessed to have their leadership and service for this program year. They are: Eva Alexander, Tilly Doak, Hank Durfee, Caroline Haddad, Pierce Parkhill, and Alexia Rees.



November Ladies Night

Wednesday, November 4, 7:00pm

Join us for Ladies Night! 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. We hope you can join us!



Women's Fellowship

November Service Event

We look forward to partnering again with Inspirica in the month of November to support their **Harvest for Hope** Thanksgiving Food Drive.

Date and time coming soon!

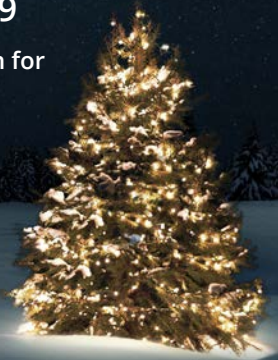


~SAVE THE DATE~

Men's Christmas Dinner

Wednesday, December 9

Gather with the men of the church 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!



~SAVE THE DATE~

Women's 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.



Clementine's Playdates Begins October 7

We are delighted to kick off another season of Clementine's Playdates: A Parent/Caregiver and Child Social Class for children ages 0-3. Join us for play, songs, snacks, stories—all the while building a strong faith foundation! This year, we are offering this program on Wednesdays from 9:15 -10:15am in the Parlor. The Fall/Winter session begins on October 7.



A New Year at The Preschool on God's Acre!

A new school year at The Preschool on God's Acre is in full swing! We're proud to offer a dynamic play-based curriculum that goes beyond the basics, weaving in the core values of Kindness, Unity, Courage, and Respect every single day. Guided by emergent curriculum, we adhere to the Connecticut Early Learning Standards in creating and implementing curriculum and assessments. Our vibrant classroom environment is designed to nurture young minds and inspire a love of learning through play-based activities.



We are now accepting applications! Completed applications can be emailed to directors@psganc.org, mailed to our address, or dropped off in the mailbox on the PSGA entrance door. Once we receive your completed application and application fee, we will call you to schedule a tour. Any questions, please call (203) 594-1265. We look forward to meeting you!

Sneaker Wrapping Service Project for 4th -7th Graders!

On Sunday, October 11, the 4th-7th graders will meet during Church School to wrap the sneakers that have been collected for our Inspirica sneaker drive. This is a fun tradition that the students enjoy and promises to bring joy to the recipients at Inspirica. This is a Sunday your child won't want to miss.



First Communion for 4th grade

Every year, fourth graders celebrate the important spiritual milestone of participating in their First Communion. The United Church of Christ recognizes two sacraments, and communion is one of them. Fourth Graders participated in a communion workshop in September and are invited to partake in their First Communion on Sunday, October 4 at 10:00am. Congratulations to our fourth graders!



Kicking off a Joyful Year of Youth Ministry!

We are so excited to be off to a wonderful start to the 2026–2027 Youth Group year! It has been great to welcome everyone back, reconnect with familiar faces, and begin a new season of faith, fellowship, fun, and service together. We look forward to all that is ahead this fall and are grateful for the energy and enthusiasm our youth have already brought to their groups.

Our first few gatherings have reminded us how meaningful it is for our youth to have a place to build friendships, ask questions, grow in their faith, and simply have fun together. Whether your child is joining Minnows, Guppies, JYG, MSYG, YG, Quest, or one of our music programs, we are thrilled to have them involved and hope they will invite friends to join them throughout the year!

Highlights so far include our Kickoff events for both MSYG and YG, as well as scavenger hunts where teams get to learn more about one another and the church. Our youngest members loved the rain gutter ice cream social and water-balloon fights! If you have any questions about upcoming offerings, please reach out to youthgroup@godsacre.org.

October is packed with programs, special events, and new traditions. The mandatory YG Parent Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, October 18, from 7:00–8:30pm. Any youth—fish or otherwise—interested in our February Mission Trip must have a parent or guardian attend this meeting. This meeting will take place simultaneously with the YG event, during which each fish will fill out a team-preference card to help determine their team for the year.

Notable changes and special events for our younger ministries in October include:

Friday, October 2

JYG Late Night, 6:00–10:00pm

Monday, October 12

MSYG and YG will meet on Monday, same time, because of Columbus Day.

Friday, October 16

Our first Tapestry Worship of the year for Minnows through MSYG. This is an opportunity to weave youth-led worship into our time together as we follow this year's scripture.

Thursday, October 22

Quest will meet from 7:00–8:30pm for its second gathering of the year.

Sunday, October 25

YG Trunk or Treat will take place immediately following the 10:00am worship service.



MUSIC MINISTRIES

Come Sing with Us!

Love to sing? We'd love to have you join us, whether for a season or the full year. Newcomers are welcome at any time! For more information, contact Nerva Altino at nerva@godsacre.org or (203) 966-2651 x104.



Christmas Concert

Join us on **Sunday, December 13** at 5:00pm for a joyful Christmas Concert presented by Music Ministries. Featuring choirs, soloists, and instrumentalists, this special celebration is free and open to the public. A festive reception will follow in Smith Hall. For more information, please contact Nerva Altino at nerva@godsacre.org.



Advent Musical Moments

Also, you don't want to miss our Advent Musical Moments on Wednesdays, December 16 and 23, which will feature Greer Lyle and Hans Tashjian, both of whom will be presenting meditative musical renditions during the Lenten Season.

FLORAL MINISTRY

The Joy of an Autumn Garden

The summer's Garden services, celebrating with the beauty of the outdoors, are some of everyone's favorites. As we move back inside to the sanctuary, we're looking forward to creating that same feeling of beauty and abundance through our weekly fall flower arrangements. Each season brings its own special palette and inspiration, and autumn is always spectacular.

As we begin a new season, we also welcome new members to the Flower Ministry. No experience necessary; teaching this craft is part of our ministry. Whether you are an experienced flower designer or simply love working with flowers, we would be delighted to have you join us.



**The Pivot Ministries Men's Choir
will join us for worship on
Sunday, October 11 at
the 10:00am service.**

Celebrating New Beginnings

"Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

Isaiah 43:18-19a

As we enter a season that often brings fresh starts, we offer our heartfelt gratitude to **Beth Baker** for her many years of faithful service as our Stephen Minister Leader. Through her compassion, wisdom, and dedication, Beth has helped nurture a caring ministry that has touched countless lives within our church family.



While Beth will be stepping away from her leadership role, we are delighted that she will continue serving as a Stephen Minister. As she spends more time in two of her favorite "happy places," Florida and Cape Cod, we wish her every blessing in this new chapter. We give thanks for her faithful friendship, caring presence, and ministry among us, and we celebrate this new beginning with her.

At the same time, we lift up all those in our congregation who are embracing new beginnings this season, whether through retirement, a new school year, a new job, a move, a new ministry, or another life transition. May each new path be filled with God's guidance, grace, and joy.

As Beth begins this new chapter, Ann Whittaker and Kim Hall will be joined by Barb Clayton, our Pastoral Care Minister, in leading this faith-filled ministry and carrying forward its tradition of Christ-centered care and support.



Please contact Ann at ahwhittaker@yahoo.com, Kim at kimbhall@icloud.com, or Barb at barb@godsacre.com if you know of anyone who might enjoy a Stephen Minister relationship.

Prayer for New Beginnings

Gracious God, bless all who are beginning a new chapter in their lives. Grant them courage for the journey, joy in new opportunities, and peace in times of uncertainty. Strengthen the bonds of friendship that sustain us and help us remain faithful companions to one another wherever life's path may lead. Through every ending and every beginning, remind us that your love goes before us and remains with us always. Amen.

Remembrance Sunday is on November 1

As we prepare for our service, we invite you to share the name of a loved one who has died since our service last November. Names received by Tuesday, October 27, will be included in the bulletin as we remember and honor those we have lost.

If you have any questions or have a name to share, please contact Tracy Goldman at office@godsacre.org.



Backpack Collection Exceeds Expectations

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our congregation, this year's backpack collection for Filling in the Blanks was a tremendous success. Together, we donated **187 brand-new backpacks** more than double the number collected last year!

Filling in the Blanks combats childhood food insecurity by ensuring children in need have access to nutritious food on weekends. The backpacks we collected will now be filled with special holiday items and distributed to children participating in the program.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed. Your generosity will help bring joy, comfort, and support to children and families throughout the holiday season.



AMO Mission Trip Sign-ups Start October 11

Join us February 27-March 6, 2027, to partner with 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 information, contact Marianna Kilbride at marianna@godsacre.org.



MSA Spotlight: Pivot Ministries

Empowering Men to Live Lives Filled with Hope

Pivot is a faith-based, low or no cost, structured and active addiction recovery program that fosters spiritual growth, personal discipline, life skills, and vocational discernment, enabling men to return to their communities sober, employed, and motivated to serve.

It sits on a 5-building campus on Bridgeport's East side and offers a full 9-month residential program at no cost, as well as ongoing support programs. It is supported entirely through private donations, churches, foundations, and community



partners. Pivot is an active partner with The Congregational Church of New Canaan, regularly attending Men's group functions, joyously performing at our services, and hosting our youth for an overnight mission trip.

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, helping them stay in their homes with an 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.



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 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