

AHCC Connections

Dusting Off the Pages

January - June 2026



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Turning the Final Page: Celebrating Our Program Year by Rev. Erica Thompson

As we look back on this program year, we celebrate all that we experienced together through our 2025-26 theme, "Dusting Off the Pages." Throughout the year, we embraced the invitation to rediscover the power, poetry, and presence of God in scripture – not by taking every word literally, but by taking it seriously. Together, we explored the Bible as a living conversation that calls us toward compassion, justice, curiosity, and transformation. Week after week, our worship reminded us that these ancient stories continue to speak fresh truth into our lives and our world.

The year began with Homecoming Sunday and Member Engagement Sunday, when we celebrated the many gifts, passions, and ministries that make our congregation such a vibrant community. Drew Hall buzzed with conversation as members and friends discovered new opportunities to serve, learn, advocate, and connect. It was a wonderful way to launch a year filled with meaningful ministry.

From there, the momentum continued. Choir, Bell Choir, Faith Lab, Youth Group, MaLL, Men's Fellowship, Women's Fellowship, and many other ministries flourished, creating opportunities for worship, fellowship, learning, and service across every generation. We also enjoyed a rich variety of special programming, including Adult Bible Study, Kingdom Opportunities, Bible Trivia, youth outings, the annual lock-in, and many other events that strengthened relationships and nurtured faith.

As you explore this newsletter, we hope you'll enjoy revisiting the many moments, milestones, and ministries that shaped this remarkable year. Thank you to everyone who participated, volunteered, led, supported, and shared their gifts. Together, we truly dusted off the pages of scripture and discovered anew God's presence at work among us.

I hope you enjoy reading about these programs, ministries, and events, whether you were able to attend in person or not. And I hope that you make every effort to engage with your AHCC family throughout the summer – we have a great worship series planned!

Grounded in Purpose, Steady in Faith Stewardship Campaign



In a world that often feels uncertain, we are called to be rooted in something deeper – a purpose that sustains us and a faith that steadies us. AHCC is one of the places where those roots take hold: where we gather in worship,

grow in understanding, care for one another, and are sent out to serve. That grounding does not happen by accident; it is nurtured through shared commitment, faithful presence, and the willingness of each of us to participate fully in the life of the church.

That is why, for this year's stewardship campaign, we invited you to be Grounded in Purpose and Steady in Faith – to stand firmly in what we believe and to support what God is doing through us.

Where We Stand (as of June 25, 2026)

Total Households Committed: 194
Percent Participation: 24%
Total Dollars Committed: \$586,441
Percent of Goal: 59%
Matching Gift Challenge: \$65,434

Matching Gift Challenge

A generous legacy gift has been made to support AHCC's operating budget, providing a powerful opportunity for our community to grow together. Through this extraordinary gift, every new commitment and every year-over-year increase in commitment amount will be matched dollar for dollar, up to a total match of \$100,000. So if you are a first-time pledger, or if you increase your commitment this year relative to your commitment last year, the impact of your giving to our Grounded in Purpose and Steady in Faith campaign will be doubled! This matching gift not only honors the enduring values of stewardship and generosity but also invites each of us to take part in shaping a strong and sustainable future.

There's still time to make your commitment. Contact Glenn Olson, Coordinator of Development and Accounting 860.216.9833 at golson@ahcc.org.

Making an Impact

In June, we published an Impact Report that outlined some of the ways AHCC supports Outreach. We are so blessed to be in a position where we can partner with our neighbors and other agencies to continue to bring about God's Kingdom here on earth. Below are a few highlights - the entire report can be found in printed form at the church.

AHCC offers **IN-KIND BUILDING USE** and is the home to the ConnectiKids offices, tutoring, and summer camp site. Additionally, Spectrum in Motion Dance Theater is provided space for rehearsals and summer camp, and two local choirs, Hartford Youth Choir and New England Pride 247/365, are provided rehearsal space.

GRANTS totaling \$53,117 will be made to non-profits through restricted funds held by the church: the Faith Collins Fund for "Needy Gentlewomen;" the Luna Leche Fund for direct social services; the Riege Fund for ConnectiKids; and the Buchanan Fund for international mission work.

AHCC **VOLUNTEERS** helped the staff of NINA (Northside Institutions Neighborhood Association), a community development organization in Asylum Hill, to prime and paint the interior of a home at 102 Huntington Street two days in the fall and in the winter.

PASTOR'S DISCRETIONARY FUND

At the heart of it all, we are a community that cares for our neighbors. There are often unplanned needs that come our way and your pastors use this fund to respond to crises and the needs of our church family and our neighbors. We have used this fund to help with emergency rental assistance, medical bills, getting families' utilities turned back on, and purchasing warm clothing for children in the city of Hartford.

We are honored to do this work.

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distributed



When we reach out to our community, we are living out justice in action – sharing meals with our neighbors, meeting essential needs, and bringing joy to children and families during special seasons. Every act of service – whether mentoring a child, offering a warm meal, or praying with someone in need – becomes a real expression of mercy. And when these acts are done quietly, without a desire for recognition, they reflect a humble walk with God.

Outreach isn't just something AHCC supports – it's part of who we are. Because of your steady faithfulness, lives are being transformed, families are finding restoration, and our community is encountering God's love in meaningful ways.

Together, may we keep following the path God has set before us – living with justice, extending mercy, and walking in humility – as we step beyond our walls to serve the world around us.

The Fierce Urgency of Now: MLK Tribute Concert



AHCC's sanctuary was once again the venue where folks experienced an inspiring evening with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra as we honored the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Music and the community came together for "The Fierce Urgency of Now," the Hartford Symphony Orchestra's MLK Tribute Concert. With opening remarks by Rev. Jordan, the concert featured conductor Wayne du Maine, violinist Curtis Stewart, and the Metropolitan AME Zion Church of Hartford.

Speaking Out and Standing Up: No Kings Parade



AHCC's Justice In Action Group invited the AHCC community to come together in prayer and solidarity as we seek justice and peace in our world. The group gathered at AHCC for a time of prayer and reflection before walking together toward the Capitol, where a public demonstration was taking place.

NINA Workday

It was an intergenerational workday with folks from AHCC and NINA (Northside Institution Neighborhood Alliance) priming and painting the interior of a home on Huntington Street across the street from the church.

The event was organized by AHCC member Missy Aiello (pictured kneeling, front row, right).



Arts & Spirituality Retreat



AHCC's **Arts & Spirituality Retreat** – Journeys in Creativity is a long-running two-day event that invites attendees to connect their artistic side to their spiritual side.

Local artists and talented church members lead group activities and participants get a chance to enjoy live performances, explore visual art installations, eat, drink, paint, cut, arrange, cook, sing, pray, refresh and renew! This year's offerings included live performances, cooking, working with felt, dance/movement, and up-cycling wine bottle corks.



Mom's of Babies Group



The newly formed Mom's of Babies Group welcomes Mom's and their babies for a time of social interaction.

Young Adult Group



AHCC's Young Adult Group continues to meet at Parkville Market in West Hartford for social time and delicious food options. All young adults are welcome and encouraged to attend this gathering!

Dignity Grows Packing Party



Led by the Women's Fellowship Group and Carol Pinkston (above, left) this multi-Ministry Team endeavor engaged dozens of folks who came out for AHCC's fourth annual Packing Party for Dignity Grows, an organization that provides free hygiene products to those in need.

For each \$10 donation, Dignity Grows provides a tote bag and a full-month supply of hygiene products for volunteers to pack, and then works with social service agencies for distribution.

This year, AHCC raised over \$4100 (that's 410 filled tote bags!) some of which are distributed at our Community Meals on Sundays.

Thanks to all who participated in this event. See you next year!



Mardi Gras Worship



We kicked off an amazing Lenten Journey on February 15 with a Dixieland Jazz Mardi Gras Service! The festive worship service featured the band leading the hymns and accompanying the choir. Our gorgeous sanctuary was decorated for Mardi Gras thanks to the Music and Arts Ministry Team.

Lent: Resurrecting the Word

Many of us came into this season carrying more than we expected – worry about the world and those we love, weariness that lingers beneath the surface. We carried questions about truth – who speaks it, who pays the price for it, and how we remain faithful when hope can sound unsettling or disruptive.

This Lent, our worship made room for all of that.

Beginning on Ash Wednesday and moving toward Easter morning, we walked together through a season shaped by truth-telling, lament, and return. Through the voices of the prophets and the Gospel story, we listened for a faith that is honest enough to grieve, brave enough to tell the truth, yet tender enough to trust a love that does not give up on us.

We heard Jeremiah wrestle with the cost of speaking what must be said. We sat with Lamentations and allowed grief to be spoken without being rushed toward resolution. Hosea invited us to imagine a love that remains even when we fall short. And as we followed Jesus toward Jerusalem, we reflected on a way of living and loving that chooses compassion over control.

This was not a Lent about getting it right or having it all figured out. It was a season for telling the truth about our lives and our world, for honoring what has been lost, and for returning to the God who meets us with patience and care.



All were invited to write a prayer on the “palms” that were strewn in the center aisle for Palm Sunday worship

Maundy Thursday

Remembering Jesus' final meal with his disciples and his new commandment: "You shall love one another as I have loved you," we began with a light dinner and ended with a contemplative walk through the labyrinth.



Good Friday

The AHCC Sanctuary Choir presented the Herbert Howells Requiem, and Rev. Erica Thompson brought a spoken meditation.



Easter Sunday

AHCC once again led the Easter Sunrise service at Elizabeth Park Overlook, celebrating the resurrection of Christ. Worshippers gathered to watch the sun rise over the horizon and proclaim the Good News that indeed, He Lives!

Easter Worship in the AHCC sanctuary was a joyous occasion of celebratory worship where the symbols of death were cast aside and the light of the resurrection shone forth in hymns of praise, words of hope, and festive music.



More photos from Easter Sunday ...



Children & Youth



Children's Musical

On Sunday, March 22 AHCC's children presented "Don't Give Up!" a musical that features a strong biblical message emphasizing perseverance and standing strong against challenges, overcoming obstacles, anti-bullying, and maintaining faith in the face of adversity.

Faith Lab Kids

Special thanks to Climate Action Team members Laura Baird and Kathye Cipes for sharing their passion and knowledge about pollinators and composting with the Faith Lab Kids.

Stay tuned for fun family activities this summer, including movies at the church, a concert in Elizabeth Park, a Yard Goats game, and more.

For our last Sunday of Faith Lab Kids for the 2025-2026 school year, church member Steve Casillas captivated and inspired with his extensive knowledge of the life cycle of Monarch butterflies.

Confirmation Sunday

In Confirmation Class students are invited to develop friendships within the church and explore their faith more deeply. By participating in some amazing experiences, Confirmands begin making their own conscious choice to "confirm" that they want to continue growing as members of AHCC. The class is interactive, allowing students to ask questions, think through their own lives, and experience the practices of faith, service, and community at their level of understanding. On Sunday, April 26 we welcomed our Confirmands into the full membership of AHCC. Congratulations to them and their families!



Women's Spring Retreat: Women's Day of Rest, Renewal, and Discovery

The Women's Spring Retreat invited AHCC women and their friends to step away from the busyness of everyday life and enjoy a special day created just for them. Participants experienced meaningful fellowship, uplifting conversation, delicious food, and plenty of laughter in a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere.

The retreat was a day of rest and discovery as participants explored simple, practical techniques to calm the body and mind, including meridian tapping and guided meditation. Connections with other women were strengthened with opportunities to build community together, share stories, and encourage one another.



MaLL Happy Hour

A great time was had at the second annual Mid and Later Life (MaLL) spring gathering with over 50 in attendance! The room was full of laughter and fun from start to finish.



Pentecost & Memorial Day Cookout

Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit (symbolized by a dove) upon the apostles and the birth of the Christian Church. The liturgical color for Pentecost is red, symbolizing the fire of the Holy Spirit. Faith Lab Kids painted rocks symbolizing the bedrock of our faith and the sanctuary was alive with color thanks to the creativity of our Music & Arts Ministry Team. Following worship, we opened our doors (literally, since it was pouring outside!) and celebrated the day with our neighbors and a cookout.



Member Milestones



We said goodbye to long-time member, and avid Wolf Pack fan, Larry Little, who moved to be closer to family.



We took time out from Bible Study to celebrate Bernie's 87th birthday!



And the Hill Quilters' end of year gathering included a birthday cake for Rev. Lara.

Pride Month

AHCC was bursting with Pride as we presented a series of special events and services throughout the month of June. The outside of the church and the sanctuary were decorated all month long and events included: Each weekend, in partnership with The Bushnell, we hosted "Immersed in Pride" - a free, immersive arts experience with music and dance and a light show; on June 17 folks were invited to come hear Rev. Brandon Robertson, author, activist, and public theologian known for his inclusive spiritual content on social media; on June 22 we had a screening of the documentary "1946: The Mistranslation That Shifted Culture" that follows the story of tireless researchers who trace the origins of the anti-gay movement among Christians to a grave mistranslation of the Bible in 1946; on June 26 we closed out the month with a one man show, "Communion" by Matthew LaBanca based on his real life story about being a gay Catholic music teacher who marries the man he loves, and is fired by the church - upending his faith and unsettling his entire community; and finally, Sunday June 28 was Pride Sunday with music provided by New England Pride 365, a performance collective of LGBTQ+ members and allies, comprised of singers, dancers, actors, musicians, poets, and writers.

