“Shut the Front Door!”
by Matt Laney

That saying is all the rage now. It’s the “polite alternative” to a more crude expression, but one that evokes the crude version nonetheless. If you don’t know what I’m talking about, consider yourself blessed.

Still, it makes me wonder, is God in the business of shutting doors? We have another familiar expression about that: “When God closes a door, God opens a window.”

Say you were applying for a job and then didn’t get it, you might say that God “closed that door.” If you wanted to go to the store and then your car broke down, well, God obviously wanted you to stay home. If you got lost on the way to a meeting, God must not have wanted you to be at that meeting. All this is good, of course, because by closing a door God was guiding you to something better which will be revealed in time.

It’s a comforting perspective, one that cultivates faith and hope in the face of adversity or less than desirable circumstances. On the other hand, not everyone is comfortable with the notion that God is behind everything that happens to us. And with good reason. The sunny optimism of “When God closes a door, God opens a window,” can forestall against grumbling and complaining over the small stuff in life, but it’s less effective when our lives are devastated by a significant injustice, a sudden loss or when life deals us a raw hand.

I don’t know about you, but when I have been in the pit of despair and grief, the last thing I wanted to hear was a cheery aphorism about doors and windows.

So I tend to think God is not in the business of shutting doors. I agree with Paul that “God works all things for good,” because “God is good all the time” but I’m less inclined to see everything that happens as an act of God. I believe God is always making something new out the raw materi-

First Wednesday Dinner and Worship
Wednesday May 7, 7:00pm

You won’t want to miss the final First Wednesday dinner and worship of the program year. We will begin the evening with a Cinco de Mayo-inspired feast featuring tortilla soup, jalapeno cheddar corn muffins, “South of the Border” coleslaw, corn, black bean and mango relish and Tres Leches cake.

Following dinner, church members and musicians Jim Morgan, Scott Nierendorf, Dan Jackson, Jeff Doyle, Jim Kirchmyer and Maurice Thomas will bring their musical talents to bear for a rockin’ evening of music and word. Featuring sacred songs in classic rock, R&B, and contemporary Christian styles, this will be an upbeat and fun worship service showcasing our very own “garage band for God.” Dan Campolieta will join the band on the keys, as well as Steve Mitchell and Christen Hernandez as featured vocalists. This will be our final First Wednesday Worship of the season until the fall. See you there!

AHCC Welcomes Kim Grehn, Stewardship Coordinator

AHCC is pleased to welcome a new team member. Kim Grehn will serve as the Stewardship Coordinator on the AHCC staff. He is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee where he earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Mass Communications. He also holds certifications in Social Media for Business and Principles of Fundraising. His fundraising experience began in public radio. In fact, it was during a fund drive that he met his wife, Debra. They moved to Connecticut in 1988 when Kim took a position with Connecticut Public Broadcasting as music director. He later became station manager for WNPR.

Prior development experience includes development and Marketing Coordinator with FOCUS Center for Autism, Public Broadcasting and Stewardship Chair and Financial Secretary for South United Methodist Church. Kim is Development and Marketing Coordinator for FOCUS Center for Autism. His experience with FOCUS began as a parent. He previously served on the Board for FOCUS helping with Fund Development and Donor Relations.

Children’s Musical: Table for Five…Thousand!
Sunday, May 4, 9:00 & 10:15am worship

Be here to support AHCC’s children by coming to our children’s musical: a telling of the miracle of the loaves and fishes like you’ve never seen before! Thirty of our 3rd – 6th graders have been working hard under the direction of Christen Hernandez and Dan Campolieta to produce this show about how even the smallest among us can make a big difference. The musical will be part of both worship services and there will be a special Communion at the end where you get to be part of the miracle!
Do you know anyone who is thinking of joining AHCC?

New Member Orientation, Thursday, May 1, 5:30 - 8:00pm in the Library; dinner and childcare included

If you know someone who would like to attend, please have them RSVP to Mary Way at mway@ahcc.org. Our next class of new members will be joining the church on Sunday, May 18, with a welcome reception following the worship service. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact Rev. Erica Thompson at ethompson@ahcc.org or 860.216.9819.

Youth Director Position Available

Complete job description on the “Connections” bulletin board and our website, ahcc.org.

Contact Helena Carvalho, Director of Operations at 860.216.9824 for more information.

TRANSITIONS

Anne Mitchell

died April 1, 2014
member since 2013

als of present circumstances, no matter how bad they may be. This year at AHCC, we have heard powerful testimonies from many of you describing how God took the difficulties and struggles in your lives and transformed them.

That is the message of the resurrection. God took the ugliness and evil of a wooden cross, an instrument of death, and transformed it into a doorway of eternal life. Maybe that’s why God chose to come as a carpenter. God is a builder of doorways.

God in Jesus Christ is actively building among us again, and not only through building and renovating homes in the Asylum Hill Neighborhood and in areas devastated by Hurricane Sandy on two recent mission trips. We also have the doorway of a newly constructed mission statement “to help people grow in faith and love as disciples of Jesus.” It’s a simple statement, but for many of us, it says it all. It means every experience we have in and through AHCC should be a threshold into growing in faith and love along the way of Jesus.

In this issue of the Hill Church News and on our newly minted website, you will see that mission statement coming alive in myriad ways. I want to thank you for all the passion and creativity you offer to the ministries of the church. What a joy it is for me to serve among you as God builds and leads and guides us forward.

Here at AHCC the front door is wide, wide open. Praise be to God!

O God, make the door of this house wide enough to receive all who need human love and fellowship; narrow enough to shut out all envy, pride, and strife.

Make its threshold smooth enough to be no stumbling-block to children, nor to straying feet, but rugged enough to turn back the tempter’s power.

God, make the door of this house the gateway to thine eternal kingdom.

(Thomas Ken 1637-1711)
Duke Ellington’s Sacred Concerts were a trio of concerts spread over the last decade in the life of this legendary composer, band leader and pianist, who died in 1974 – just 6 months after the final concert. A unique blend of gospel, classical, jazz, choral and blues filtered through the distinctive Ellington sound, and written for a band that included many of the “great Ellingtonians,” the Sacred Concerts were, for Duke, his “… most important work.”

When he was asked to present the first concert at San Francisco’s Grace Cathedral in 1965, he said, “Now I can say openly what I have been saying to myself on my knees.” In the mid 1960s, these concerts were performed in churches and cathedrals around the world. They received a lot of attention – and not all of it positive. (“Jazz in church? The devil’s music!”) Mixing musical styles, race and religion was a volatile combination. But by combining classical, choral, spirituals, gospel and blues together, Ellington wasn’t trying to be clever, he was actually introducing one world to another, and letting us get to know each other.

Come to hear selections from the concert, discuss the texts (written mostly by Ellington) and learn about what may have motivated Ellington to compose these works that touched his spirit – and our own.

**Men’s Choir**

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<td><strong>Tuesday, May 6, 6:00pm</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Rehearsal with pizza, beer</strong></td>
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<td><strong>and fellowship</strong></td>
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**Sunday, May 11, 9:00 and 10:15am in worship services**

AHCC’s Men’s Choir has become a cherished part of our celebration of Mother’s Day. This two-part experience starts with an exuberant gathering as the group learns two pieces for Mother’s Day. Steve Mitchell will mold you into an accomplished choir before the evening is through! For more information contact Steve at smitchell@ahcc.org.

**Mary the Mother of Jesus**

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<th>Event Details</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Monday, May 5, 7:00pm</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Asylum Hill Congregational Church</strong></td>
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**With Aida Mansoor (Muslim Coalition of CT), Dr. Lucinda Moser (Hartford Seminary) and Rev. Donna Manocchio**

Did you know that Mary is revered in Islam, and that Muslim women see her as a role model for their own lives? In Christian practice, Mary is also a role model and follower of Jesus. Come to discover the similarities and differences in the two religious perspectives and the unique ways that Mary’s faith shapes the lives and practices of Christian and Muslim women.

**Foodshare Walk Against Hunger**

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<td><strong>Sunday, May 4, 7:00pm</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Heartbeat Park (The Hartford)</strong></td>
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**With Aida Mansoor (Muslim Coalition of CT), Dr. Lucinda Moser (Hartford Seminary) and Rev. Donna Manocchio**

AHCC has been participating in the Walk Against Hunger for many years. In 2013, church members raised approximately $6,000. Our goal this year is to raise $7,000 and have 150 walkers. Every dollar raised helps to feed our neighbors in Greater Hartford. Please register for the AHCC walk team at foodshare.org. If you are unable to walk, you may make a contribution by check made out to Foodshare in the box in Drew Hall. For more information, contact Tony Mein, Director of Outreach Ministries at 860.216.9833.

**Women’s Prayer Group**

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<td><strong>Tuesdays, 10:00am</strong></td>
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There is no need to register to be part of this wonderful group as it is a casual gathering of women (come as you are, and as you are able). We open with the sharing of joys, continue with thoughtful and spirit-filled conversation, and end in prayer and meditation.

If you would like more information or would like prayers lifted, please contact Erica Thompson at ethompson@ahcc.org or (860)216-9823.
CARING MINISTRIES

 Prayer Shawl Ministry
 Do you know someone who might benefit from the warmth and love of a prayer shawl? If so, we invite you to look for just the right one. We also invite any knitters or crocheters of any experience level to become part of our passionate and enthusiastic group. We offer free lessons to those needing them. We meet once a month to bless the newly made shawls and of course, to engage in fellowship. It’s very gratifying to know that ordinary hands can bring extraordinary peace and spiritual comfort.

 The Prayer Shawl Ministry will have shawls on display in Drew Hall beginning May 18. For more information, visit shawlministry.com or contact Donna Morrison at donnabmorrison@yahoo.com or 860.490.5778.

 Caring for Parents/Elders
 Meeting following 10:15am worship, May 18

 Many of us find ourselves in the stage of life where we need and want to help our parents through their old age, whether our parents are experiencing physical problems or cognitive issues. If being with others for comfort, commiseration, prayer and support sounds like something you would like to explore, please join us for our next small group meeting. Spouses or significant others are welcome. If you are unable to attend, but would like to join the group, please sign up at the Caring Ministries bulletin board or contact Katie Nixon at kt_151@yahoo.com or 860.690.0291, or Rev. Donna Manocchio at dmanocchio@ahcc.org.

 A Tapestry of Love
 An evening of conversation and reflection to remember and celebrate our mothers and fathers who have died. Rev. Donna K. Manocchio, facilitator
 Thursday, May 29, 6:30pm

 Parents are an essential part of the fabric of our lives, and their deaths can leave a space in our hearts and spirits. This season of Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, especially if it is the first holiday without your parent, can be filled with many emotions – sadness, grief, gratitude or longing. It is also an opportunity to remember and celebrate what they meant to us and the lessons they left to us. All are welcome for a time of reflection and stories, hopes and prayers, laughter and maybe even a few tears. Please bring a photo of your parent(s) and a description or story to share.

 CHILDREN AND FAMILY MINISTRIES

 Rock Cats Baseball
 Saturday, June 1, 1:35pm

 Come support the New Britain Rock Cats as they take on the Binghamton Mets. All are welcome! Tickets are $7.00/person. Children 4 and under are free if sitting on a parent’s lap during the game. Sign-up forms and payment information can be found at the Spirit Hill table in Drew Hall. Last day to sign-up is May 18 and payment must be received to guarantee a seat.

 Shepherds and Teachers Needed
 We are looking for youth and adults to work with our Spirit Hill children in grades K-6 in the upcoming school year. No teaching experience is required, just a joy of working with children and a love of sharing the Word of God. If you are interested in teaching or shepherding, please contact Kyle Cannon at kcannon@ahcc.org.

 Upcoming Important Dates

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| May 4 | Children’s Musical: “Table for Five ... Thousand!”  
No Spirit Hill Classes |
| May 11 | Mother’s Day  
Daycare for Infant–PK available on lower level |
| May 18 | New SH Unit starts – “Paul: Who Can be a Christian?”  
Registration forms and payment due for Rock Cats game |
| June 1 | AHCC travels to the New Britain Rock Cats |
| June 8 | Last Day of Spirit Hill Program Year |
| June 15 | Father’s Day  
Children in grades K–5 attend worship  
Daycare for Infant – PK available on lower level |
| June 22 | Spirit Hill Summer Program starts at 9:30am service |

What’s Happening in Spirit Hill?
Curriculum Highlight – Paul: Who Can be a Christian?
For in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. - 1 Corinthians 12:13

This unit explores the life and preaching of Paul, a devout Jew, who embraced the teachings of Jesus after encountering the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Paul would go on to travel extensively spreading the Word of God using symbols and stories that helped those who came to hear him preach come to a deeper and fuller understanding of the Gospel message. Spirit Hill students in grades 1–5 will learn about Paul and his teachings through drama, art, and a study of the earliest worship services. Look for more information on this new unit in the weekly Spirit Hill email update. If you do not receive this weekly update, please contact Kyle Cannon at kcannon@ahcc.org to be added to the distribution list.

Sign up for all events at the Opportunity Table unless otherwise specified.
Duke Ellington ... in the church ... with a Jazz Band!

Sunday, May 18, 4:00pm | Tickets ($25) available by calling the Concert Line at 860.278.0785 or online at ahcc.org

Best of the Sacred Concerts to include four Hartford Church Choirs
A John & Edie Murphy Music for Humanity Concert

Just want to “CLUE” you in on this special and powerful musical collaboration: the Music Ministry of AHCC is proud to partner with three sister churches in Hartford’s North End as we recreate music from Duke Ellington’s Sacred Concerts. The choirs of AHCC, Faith Congregational Church, Union Baptist and Metropolitan AME Zion join in this musical journey through the faith and spirituality of one of America’s greatest jazz composers and performers.

The concert features a 15-piece band made up of some of Hartford’s finest jazz players, amazing tap dancer Corey Hutchins, inspiring soloists from across the region, and a choir of more than 100 voices! For the past few months, choirs from the four churches have been practicing on their own, as well as gathering at different houses of worship to meet, share and sing together – building community as we build this concert event. Drawn heavily from the Black experience in America of the 1960s, this unique blend of gospel, classical, jazz, choral and blues styles manifests a spiritual message and deep theology we all share. AHCC soloists Jolie Rocke Brown, Sarah Armstrong, Schauntice Marshall-Shepard and Traci Christiansen Keen will be joined by Marques Ruff who is stepping out of his current tour with Chanticleer to sing with us. As you can imagine, they sound amazing!

This concert is presented as a John and Edie Murphy Music for Humanity Concert, an outreach program of Asylum Hill Congregational Church. The full value of your ticket to the Duke Ellington Sacred Concert will support the YMCA Teen Incentive Program (Y-TIP), which is offered through the Wilson-Gray YMCA Youth and Family Center on Albany Avenue, Hartford. Y-TIP engages youth in a variety of academic enrichment and career exploration activities with a goal of improving the academic success of low-income, minority children that frequent the Wilson-Gray YMCA, by helping them develop the skills needed to make positive choices for themselves and their families.

We Need Your TRASH!

Summer Parade Project heads to “The Jungle” this August; Donations can be left on stage in Drew Hall

AHCC’s annual Community Art Project & Parade is getting its act together! But we need supplies and decorative items from YOU. As you continue your spring cleaning, keep us in mind and bring usable items to church. We will reuse and recycle them into works of “moving art” and costumes for the neighborhood parade on August 23. This year’s theme is In the Jungle, so we expect to see lots of plants, animals and insects in the parade line up.

What can you offer to the collection? We are looking for the following items (and more if you think of it):

- **Fabrics**: bed sheets, large pieces of colored fabric (1 yd. or more), animal prints, smocks and rags, T-shirts, pantyhose, tights or stockings
- **Cardboard**: large pieces – single ply (furniture/fridge boxes), toilet paper and paper towel rolls
- **Decorative items**: Colored paper, feathers, pipe cleaners, shiny and colorful things, yarn, bottle caps, egg cartons (paper or Styrofoam)
- **Paint Supplies**: brushes, rollers, drop cloths (no paint, please)
- **Structural**: egg crate foam (like a bed roll), water bottles: any size – with caps, aluminum cans, wire hangers, umbrellas, bicycle inner tubes, PVC pipe, wood poles, dowels, mop/broom handles
- **Tools**: pliers, hammers, wrenches, wire cutters, screw drivers, utility knives
- **Rolling stuff**: strollers, wheel chairs and wagons

Start collecting now and bring it in as you get it together. Thanks for your “trash” and support!

The Summer Community Art Project is presented by the Worship & Arts Committee and funded by the AHCC Thrift Shop and the Greater Hartford Arts Council. For more information on this community art project, contact Steve Mitchell at smitchell@ahcc.org or 860.216.9831.

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YOUTH AND TEENS

**Junior High**

- May 4: Leading. Leadership can be hard – sometimes it’s just easier to follow the crowd. Join us in a conversation about all the ways you can STEP UP and be leaders!
- May 11: No YG – Celebrate the women in your life today.

**Senior High**

- May 4: Dessert Parties (5:00 – 6:30pm), Colin and Grant Bannister welcome youth from West Hartford, and Haley McLaughlin will host youth from Glastonbury and surrounding towns.
- May 11: No YG – Celebrate the women in your life today.