Who is My Neighbor?

Our recent presidential drama has sharpened my belief that the core work of discipleship is to learn to love (not fear, disrespect, demonize, bully, tweet-smear, assault, etc.) others. And by “others,” I mean those who do not fit, to one degree or another, the preferred and privileged profile of being a straight, white, able-bodied, American-born, educated, Christian male with disposable income.

For some, this will sound like yet another shrill attack on good-hearted, hard-working white dudes. It doesn’t have to. It could be seen as...
The Bonds and Stitches of Love
by Marcie Sener

In the late 80s, a dear friend asked if I could help with the Boar’s Head Festival by making a new “camel coat.” There is no way to describe the odor that came out of the old coat as I drove it home. When I took it into the house, the cat’s hair stood up and he ran out of the house hissing. Though I had never sewn and did not have a sewing machine, somehow the Spirit moved me and a camel coat was made.

Shortly after, my husband Bob and I joined this church. I became a member of the Boar’s Head Cast and Costume Committee. Everyone thanks me for the work I do, and it’s true that it is a lot of work. But what they do not realize is how much more this festival gives back to those who participate in it. A young girl who is shy, suddenly feels like a princess walking down the aisle in a pretty costume. Moms and Dads going through a difficult time, look up at the stage with happy tears in their eyes to see their children. Someone who is sick – fighting for her life – gives her precious time and energy to make sure that the festival is a success. These and many more moments are the rewards that warm my heart.

When we joined the church, Bob was cast in the part of the Boar’s Head Carrier and took this job very seriously. As his illness progressed, we were cast as the King and Queen. When that role was too much for him, he was cast as the Bishop, with friends standing by to assist him. During this time in our lives, the church was very important for us and continues to be for me, as it strengthens my faith through the telling of The Story, and through the bonds with my church family.

At Bob’s funeral, many people said to me: “I wished I had known Bob, he sounded like such a nice person.” I wondered, what were they doing there if they didn’t know Bob? When I shared this with our ministers, they told me that they were there to support me. I will never forget that.

I am a proud member of AHCC and grateful for the support that I have received from so many people in my church family, the ministers, staff, and especially my sharing group. AHCC is not perfect, just as we are not. However, like me, I hope that you continue to find the faith and support here that you need or will need in your life.

I also hope that we all continue to support the church in whatever form we can with our time and/or resources, so that our church may continue to be a beacon in this community and a source of strength in our lives. May God bless AHCC and all who enter here.
Asylum Hill Congregational Church  |  www.ahcc.org  |  860.525.5696

In General

“Interim” from pg. 1
multiple clergy on staff. Following interviews in October and November, the Personnel and Executive Committees affirmed his selection.

Rev. John Collins has been a pastor in the Connecticut Conference since 1980 when he came to Stratford to begin a 21 year settled ministry at Lordship Community UCC. At the end of his time in Lordship, John decided to train for and begin a new calling in transitional ministry. He served seven UCC congregations in the state as Interim Minister from 2003 to the present. John comes to us with keen interest in new ways to approach spiritual development. In his profile he says, “I am passionate about trying to speak and preach in very practical ways about supporting and developing our souls in the midst of increasingly complex lives.” John enjoys working in a team ministry environment and considers the ongoing challenges of the church to be opportunities for re-imagining ministry. He loves writing, running, cooking and playing the guitar. He and his wife Margie live in Stratford and have a grown daughter Julie.

Save these Dates

Loving God, Loving Each Other: Strengthening Connections at AHCC
Sunday, February 12 following the 10:15 service for a conversation with church leadership on strengthening connections at AHCC.

Having difficulty logging on to the AHCC Member Portal?
Curious about what you’ll find there? Stop by the Connections table in Drew Hall following either service on January 22 or 29 and talk with a fellow member who can help you with this new way of connecting to each other.

Women’s Spring Retreat
Friday, April 28 - Sunday, April 30
Location: Mercy By the Sea
167 Neck Road Madison, CT
Please stay tuned for details regarding cost and registration.

GOD’S PUBLIC SERVANT
the first eight weeks

Jesus was born, the angels sang, the wise ones brought their gifts … then what?

Great question! Join us every Sunday as Jesus inaugurates his ministry, appoints disciples and makes good on the promises of scripture … all in the first eight weeks! As he challenges the powers of this world while embracing the poor and marginalized, we encounter an altogether different type of leader and king: one who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life away for the sake of all people … including you.

Don’t miss the weekly GOOD news Sundays at 9:00 and 10:15 am.
Adult Education

SUSO co-sponsors film, “Get In The Way,” at AHCC

Sun, Jan. 15 | 6:30pm Gather | 7:00pm Film
8:00pm facilitated discussion led by Rev. Mia Douglas

In 1965, the historic Selma March known as Bloody Sunday was a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement. John Lewis – then a young student, now a U.S. Congressman – co-led hundreds of peaceful marchers seeking voting rights for African Americans in the South. When they came face to face with a wall of Alabama state troopers, Lewis took a steadfast, non-violent stand and inspired his followers to do the same. When Congressman John Lewis advocates “get in the way,” he stands behind his words, whether advancing civil rights in the 1960s or leading a 26-hour sit-in for gun control in the House this past June following the Orlando shootings. Former chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and an original Freedom Rider, Lewis has always advocated nonviolence. “Non-violence is love in action,” he declares, and he still has plenty to spread around. The civil rights icon remains a vital force in the ongoing struggle for justice.

“Get in the Way” is a riveting portrayal of John Lewis’ personal journey of courage, searing disappointments and hard-won triumphs, as over the decades he inspires others to stand up and Get in the Way. The film is not rated. All are welcome.

Get Connected at West Middle School

Do you enjoy working with children? Do you want to give back to your community? If so, the perfect opportunity is waiting for you at the West Middle School Volunteer Resource Center. Discipleship opportunities include classroom support, student activities, clerical assistance, afterschool programs, mentoring, social media, and marketing. The Resource Center is also looking for persons to serve on their Hospitality Team, organizing the West Middle Library. Daytime and afterschool hours are available. If interested in learning more, please contact Director of Discipleship Rev. Mia Douglas at mdouglas@ahcc.org or 860.216.9834.

Hands On Hartford Receives Donation

Thank you to all who so generously contributed to Hands on Hartford in honor of Rev. Donna Manocchio’s ministry at AHCC. A donation has been made to Hands on Hartford in the amount of $2,104. Hands on Hartford, a social service non-profit organization that serves the neediest residents with adequate food and housing, has a special place in Donna’s heart. Thank you for your loving support of Donna’s ministry through your cards, letters and donations. This contribution to Hands On Hartford in her honor has touched her heart.

Men’s Ministry

Breakfast meeting
Sat, Jan. 7, 8:00am
Ristorante Piatti, 1001 Hebron Avenue, Glastonbury

All men of the church are welcome. Bring a Bible, $10-15 for breakfast, an open mind and heart (not biblical expertise) are the only requirements.
Your Generosity Continues to Make a Difference

On Sunday, December 11, Drew Hall echoed with sounds of laughter and Advent Joy as members of AHCC’s Outreach Faith in Action Team processed returned Angel Tree gifts. Also that day, the donations to the Hartford No Freeze Project toiletry collection bore witness to our congregation’s generosity and the dedication and organizing expertise of our church’s Faith in Action Team. The spirit of Christmas, love and care were palpably present in Drew Hall. For this and for you, we give God thanks!

Happy New Year & Epiphany!

Dear AHCC Families,

I would like to thank our Spirit Hill Music teachers, Kate Swanson, Schauntice Marshall-Shepard, Susan Carroll and Jack Pott for working with the children of Spirit Hill to put on such a spirit-filled Christmas Pageant. And a very special thank you to Kyle Cannon whose behind-the-scenes work makes everything look like it just falls into place. The children of our congregation are very lucky to have so many caring and dedicated volunteers in their church life.

Spirit Hill lessons for preschool – grade 5 start on Sunday, January 15. Our first unit will look at Jesus’ beginning ministry and his selection of the disciples. Looking toward February and March, lessons include The Good Samaritan and The Lost Coin & the Lost Sheep. I am also working with members of SUSO to present a special lesson created by the Sandy Hook Foundation for grades 2 – 5. Mark your calendars for our next CFMC Movie Night on March 10 and the annual Children’s Musical on March 19.

I leave you with a prayer you can read with your family to celebrate Epiphany and the arrival of the Magi at the manger where Jesus lay.

Epiphany

Star in the sky,
We follow.
Stable in the distance,
We travel on in anticipation.
Animals surround and shepherds bow down.
Mother beams and angels herald.
Babe in the manger.
We follow with love and the glory of God in our hearts.
Alleluia! Amen.
- M. Jackson

Blessings,
Marcie Jackson, Director of Children & Family Ministries

Children & Family Ministries Important Dates

January 1 New Year’s Day Worship (10:15am)
No Spirit Hill lessons or childcare for infant - preschool.

January 8 No Spirit Hill lessons (Childcare available 10:15am only)

January 15 Spirit Hill Lessons: The Disciples (10:15am)
Childcare available (9:00 & 10:15am)

January 22 Spirit Hill Lessons: The Disciples (10:15am)
Childcare available (9:00 & 10:15am)

January 29 Spirit Hill Lessons: The Disciples (10:15am)
Childcare available (9:00 & 10:15am)
an invitation to practice the gospel, an opportunity to listen and love and help heal the world. Yes, white guys can be “othered” as well, but rarely and minimally, by comparison. Learning from and including those who have been historically marginalized by our society is sacred work, gospel work.

Jesus called it “loving your neighbor,” and it was the heart of his ministry. When a privileged, well-off, well-educated man asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered with the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In the parable, the esteemed neighbor was not the person next door with similar life-experience, but a despised “other,” a Samaritan.

I’ve often wondered how this parable would play out according to the prejudices of our time. Maybe something like this …

The Parable of the Good American
An investment banker from Manhattan visited Newark where he was robbed, beaten severely and left in the gutter, half dead. A renowned preacher happened down the same road but, when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. Later, an elected public servant passed by and ignored him as well. But a tattooed young man in a hoodie, whom some would call a thug, saw the man and took pity on him. He called an ambulance and followed him to the hospital. He took out a wad of cash and told the hospital staff, “Take good care of him and I’ll pay for any extra charges when I come back.”

Or how about this?

The Parable of the Good Palestinian
An Israeli woman was going from Jerusalem to the Gaza Strip when she got jumped. They beat her, mistreated her and left her for dead. A rabbi came that way, but when he saw the woman, he crossed to the other side of the street. Then a priest came by and saw her and also ignored the woman. But a Palestinian Muslim walked by and when he saw the woman he took pity on her. He administered first aid to stop the bleeding, took her to a nearby hospital. “Look after her,” he told, “and when I return I will pay her bill.”

Or maybe this?

The Parable of the Good Thug
An investment banker from Manhattan to Jerusalem to the Gaza Strip when she got jumped. They beat her, mistreated her and left her for dead. A rabbi came that way, but when he saw the woman, he crossed to the other side of the street. Then a priest came by and saw her and also ignored the woman. But a Palestinian Muslim walked by and when he saw the woman he took pity on her. He administered first aid to stop the bleeding, took her to a nearby hospital. “Look after her,” he told, “and when I return I will pay her bill.”

The election has left many of us feeling beat up and short of breath. If not, it’s hard to disagree that our country needs healing. In a recent conversation about all the disturbing dynamics of the election year, particularly the ways in which the ugliest elements of our country have been emboldened and energized, Director of Discipleship Rev. Mia Douglas said, “What if we believed the church is the answer? Of course it is the answer, but what if we actually believed that?”

Those were prophetic words for me. It’s tempting to view the church as a place designed solely for spiritual comfort, care and fellowship. But we are also called to join God’s mission to transform and redeem the world and all creation. We are called to be the hospital and rehab center for what ails us.

So this year, and perhaps for years to come, I’d like us to believe and act as if the church is the answer to what ails us, particularly in response to racism, sexism and xenophobia. I want us to explore, in as many ways as possible, this sacred and fundamental question, “Who is my neighbor?” This is gospel work. It will be uncomfortable and deeply rewarding.

In many ways we are already doing it. We are open and affirming, we have a growing focus on the reality of racism in our culture, we are active in refugee resettlement, we are involved in interfaith dialogue, we are in relationship with our actual neighbors through West Middle School and ConnectiKids, we have an emerging emphasis on those who live with mental illness, just to name a few things.

What does the future hold? I’m not sure. I only know that I, the staff and the deacons, will need a lot of help figuring it out. If you are interested in exploring how we might lean more deeply into this question, “Who is my neighbor?” I’d like to hear from you and invite you to help us along the way. Together, we can be the answer.

With you on the journey,
Matt
Arts & Spirituality Retreat
Fri, Feb. 10 & Sat, Feb. 11
Dan Hansen
dhansen1@comcast.net

Join local artists and talented church members as they lead large and small group activities designed to help you explore your artistic side as it relates to your spiritual journey. This year’s retreat will begin on Friday evening with a sumptuous dinner and live entertainment. Participants will disconnect from their “normal routines” and enjoy live performances of music and dance; explore visual art installations; paint, cut, arrange, cook, sing, dance and pray. You can tailor your experience through your selected special interest sessions, which offer more intimate interaction with artists, teachers, speakers and performers. The cost of the retreat is $60 and includes workshops, performances, fun, as well as dinner on Friday and lunch on Saturday! Look for registration brochures in Drew Hall in mid-January.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Start Your Ovens!

With a reputation for serving delicious goodies, AHCC needs your homemade cookies, brownies and bars (regular and gluten free) for the approximately 4000 people who will attend the Boar’s Head Festival performances! Whether you make a few extra dozen when you’re baking Christmas cookies and drop them off for the AHCC freezer, or bring them in freshly baked the week of the Festival, we’re delighted to feature them at the receptions! Drop off the cookies in the AHCC kitchen anytime through January 8.

Music & Arts

This year, Grades 3-5 will be exploring the "Lost Parables" of Jesus in Spirit Hill AND the musical. Beginning January 15, songs from the musical will be introduced during regular Spirit Hill Music rehearsal time. Cast members with speaking roles or solos will stay for extended rehearsals starting in February. Contact Susan Carroll for more info: scarroll@ahcc.org

THE STORYTELLIN' MAN

MARCH 19, 2017
AHCC CHILDREN’S MUSICAL

This year, Grades 3-5 will be exploring the "Lost Parables" of Jesus in Spirit Hill AND the musical. Beginning January 15, songs from the musical will be introduced during regular Spirit Hill Music rehearsal time. Cast members with speaking roles or solos will stay for extended rehearsals starting in February. Contact Susan Carroll for more info: scarroll@ahcc.org
Highlights: Children’s Christmas Pageant