

mid-year check-in NEWSLETTER



ASYLUM HILL
Congregational Church

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To know and be known

Happy New Year! We're about halfway through our program year and we invite you to see what we've been up to since September 2023. This "Mid-year Check-in" features highlights of some of the events, ministries, worship, and outreach experiences at AHCC.

There's more to come! As we look forward to 2024, we hope you will find many opportunities to connect.



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Name badges are one way we get to know each other better

Going "All In" On Connectivity by Rev. Erica Thompson

On Homecoming Sunday, September 17, 2023, we kicked off a new program year at AHCC inspired by the theme: To Know and Be Known. It is a theme that has resonated with so many and has been a wonderful guide for our work and ministry throughout the fall. This excerpt from my Homecoming Sunday sermon sums it up:

Connection. As human beings we are hard-wired for it. Face to face connections and being in community are fundamental parts of being human and a vital part of being a church family. Early in the pandemic, when AHCC worship services were exclusively online, we sent out a survey asking members what they were most looking forward to about returning to in person worship. Many stated that they missed live music, connecting with the preacher, and our children's programs. But the overwhelming majority of people said interaction/AHCC

friends was what they missed most. Connection.

Friends, Jesus understood our need to connect, not on a superficial level, but deeply and authentically. In fact, Jesus spent almost all his years in ministry connecting with others – many times with those society had cast aside, those considered unworthy. You see, he taught, and healed, and broke bread with women and children, with prostitutes and tax collectors, with Jews and Gentiles, with every imaginable outcast and sinner this world has to offer.

Using Christ's example, we are going all in on connectivity this year. Creating connections which will require us to be vulnerable with one another, connections that will require us to trust one another. Because being connected to others is what really, really matters!

Administration & Operations

Creating a sustainable operating structure that supports growth and expansion. Areas include Finance & Investments, Stewardship & Planned Giving, Communications, Personnel, Executive & Officers

161

Average in person attendance since Homecoming Sunday (75 online)

>5000

Number of views on AHCC's YouTube Channel since September 2023

Stewardship 2023-24

Campaign Target - \$1,250,000

Annual Commitments & Recurring Giving - \$738,239 (59%)

Participation Goal - 420

Participation Recorded - 230 (55%)

Contributions for FY 2023-24 to Date = \$536,857

Other Financial News

Christmas Offering (Pastor's Discretionary Fund) - \$4,905

Giving Tuesday Donations - \$1,154

Angel Tree 2023 - \$2,375

Community Meals 2023 - \$16,023



AHCC had billboards prominently displayed on I-84 and I-91, inviting the community to worship for Advent, Christmas, Epiphany (and beyond).

Necrology

Earl Exum - October 1, 2023 • Carol Eddy - October 4, 2023

Evelyn Olson - October 9, 2023 • Carol Terry - October 10, 2023

Early Life

Inspiring and leading children, teens, and young adults to discover their immense God-given value to live well and love others as Jesus did. Areas include Children & Families, Youth & Teens, Young Adults

Faith Lab Kids Movie Adventures!

Movie Adventure 1
B You! - **Barbie**

Movie Adventure 2
Find Your Courage -
**Indiana Jones and the Dial
of Destiny**

Movie Adventure 3
Discover Your Worth - **Elf**



21

Confirmation
Students learning
about faith, God,
prayer & the Bible



We embarked on three Adventures that explore belief, curiosity, courage, optimism, openness, kindness, empathy, community, personal value, and the love of God.



December 24 Live Nativity featured 15 elementary students reading and performing; 5 middle school students singing

Justice & Outreach

Partnering with our Asylum Hill neighbors and beyond to create a better world. Building personal relationships within our congregation and our neighbors to better understand each others' lives and how we can help each of us succeed. Areas include Community Meals, Climate Action Team, Community Grants, Justice in Action, Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA)

AHCC Recognized for Contributions to Asylum Hill Neighborhood



On October 19, AHCC was recognized by the Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association (AHNA) for its long history and continued support of that organization and our Asylum Hill neighborhood. The church has been a principal and long-time backer of AHNA, providing the organization funding, meeting space, and a mailing address for most of its 25 years.



Church member Candace Low received an award from the CT Muslim Coalition for her advocacy work.



Farminary Visit



■ On Saturday, October 21 members and friends of AHCC went on an all-day excursion to the Farminary in Princeton, NJ - a place where theological education is integrated with small-scale regenerative agriculture to train faith leaders in the areas of ecology, sustainability, and food justice.



In December 2023, the Hill Quilters presented 13 twin bed quilts to Interval House – an organization founded by AHCC members Alice Kugelman, Mariana Wagoner, Grace Einsel and others – that provides life-saving and life-changing services to victims of domestic violence. Mary Jane Foster, president and CEO of Interval House, gratefully accepted the donations.

>2000

Meals served at
Community Meals
since September

We welcomed these outside organizations:



Hartford Symphony Orchestra Board of Directors

Pride 247/365 Choir

Connecticut Guitar Society

Garden Club of Hartford

Spectrum In Motion

ConnectiKids

Mid & Later Life

Offering intellectual and spiritual resources to help us grow closer to God and to one another by offering stimulating programs that are rooted in faith, and relevant to what it means to be a Christian. Areas include Adult Christian Education, Women's Spirituality & Fellowship, Men's Fellowship, Prayer Groups

Book Talk & Signing



■ On October 13, we had the honor of hosting Rev. Amy Butler, one of America's most prominent ministers/preachers. She talked about her inspiring and provocative new book, *Beautiful and Terrible Things*, a reflection on the necessity of community, the inevitability of conflict, and the transformative power of radical love. Amy read from her book and engaged in a dynamic and "real" conversation with Rev. Erica.



Women's Spirituality & Fellowship



■ On October 15, Women's Spirituality & Fellowship sponsored a Family Walk at the West Hartford Reservoir. The event was open to all ages, genders, and levels of mobility. The event was blessed with a beautiful New England fall afternoon and the group enjoyed the opportunity for exercise and great conversation.

■ Advent Retreat (December 2): Fifteen people attended this afternoon event which focused on our annual theme "To Know and Be Known." The Retreat offered table discussions on personal Advent preparations. In addition, participants discussed self-care practices with activities that included prayer-writing and the creation of personalized star ornaments.

A Different Dashboard



On October 22, AHCC friend and author Dr. Allen Hilton invited us to pause for perspective. Through his "House United" work, Dr. Hilton studies the trends and habits of the wider Christian church in the U.S., and this broad view of things helped him to facilitate a conversation in which we were able to begin to consider what sort of "dashboard" would most help us live into God's future at AHCC.



Women's Prayer Groups & Men's Fellowship

Thursday Evening Prayer Group

On the first Thursday of each month, between 6 and 10 women gathered in person at Rev. Erica's home (or via Zoom). The meetings enabled women to share "joys" of the previous month, discuss the scripture for the next sermon and concluded by offering a prayer for family, friends, community, and the world at large.

Tuesday Morning Prayer Group

One of the longest running programs at AHCC, this prayer group welcomed between eight and eighteen women each week gathered both in person and via Zoom on the first Tuesday of the month (Zoom only the other Tuesdays). The group discussed a topic/poem/hobby, and occasionally concluded with lunch together after the meeting.



Men's Fellowship Between six and twelve men gathered on the first Saturday of the month at Savvi's Restaurant to share stories, laughs, eat a good meal, and discuss the Bible passage that will be the basis of the sermon of the next day's service. The group also sponsored special events and seminars of particular interest to men.

Music & Arts

Sharing our God-given artistic talents through inspiring music, visual art, drama presentations, and more. Areas include Choirs, Concert & Events (Music 4 Humanity), Boar's Head & Yule Log Festival, Visual Arts, Arts & Spirituality Retreat, A/V Team



Boar's Head Festival Celebrates 57 years!

The 57th Annual Boar's Head & Yule Log Festival brought a sense of excitement and energy throughout the building. Despite some winter weather, we had a very enthusiastic audience for all four performances. AHCC's Sanctuary Choir was enthusiastically present as well for all four performances.

Voices of Concinnity Candlelight Concert



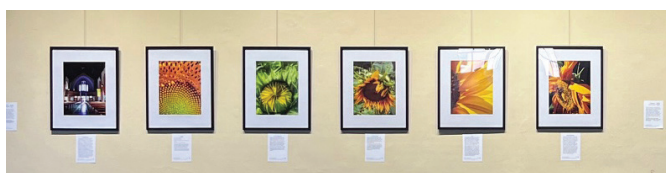
On December 9, Voices of Concinnity, a 12-voice professional vocal ensemble of dedicated, seasoned choral artists from diverse backgrounds performed "Candlelight: A Choral Tapestry to Illuminate the Season." The concert was presented as part of AHCC's Music for Humanity Concert Series and raised over \$1000 for Hands on Hartford.

Thanksgiving Altar



The Music & Arts Committee once again produced a beautiful altar display for Thanksgiving Sunday, consisting largely of fresh produce. All of this food was then bagged and handed out at the Community Meal that day.

Drew Hall Art Wall Features Photography of Candace Low



Church member, Candace Low, took up mobile photography early in the pandemic. These photos, all taken with her cell phone, are meant to take a closer look at the beauty all around us.

AHCC Choir Invited to Sing with Hartford Chorale



December 20 Cathedral of Saint Joseph. The invitation came because our very own Jack Pott is the director of both groups! The free concert featured music by Bach and Handel accompanied by a full orchestra, and was attended by almost 1500 people.



AHCC was contacted by the Wadsworth Atheneum early in the fall as they had just acquired a porcelain tureen in the shape of a boar's head. Being familiar with AHCC's festival, the museum staff wondered if our choir would perform a few pieces as part of their Festival of Trees and Traditions. We gladly said yes, and even brought along a few cast members in costume, along with our actual Boar's Head!

Nurture & Engage

Creating a thriving membership – not just increased membership numbers – but focused on how we care for one another, invite others into fellowship and connection opportunities, and empower each other to create spaces to grow together. Areas include Membership & Growth, Member Engagement, Congregational Care, Welcome Team

Congregational Care Team

This group met once a month for prayer, fellowship, and to discuss the needs of those in our community. Each person in the group made visits and calls or wrote notes to folks needing care.

Missy Aiello • Carol Barry • Marjorie Berger • Leisa Cleveland • Nancy Comeau • Jim Cox-Chapman • Susan Dworman • Kathleen Graham • Betty Hammaker • Susan Hight • Rosemarie Robinson • Chris Sesta • Linda Smith • Martha Simpson • Jan Tracy • Nancy Whitehead • Sandy Wood Forand

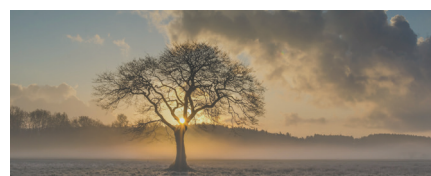


■ Mother and daughter, Shannon and Catherine Pankratz, created quilts for clergy members to distribute to those who might need to be reminded with a warm "hug" that they are loved and cared for.

Quilts



Longest Night Service



■ December 19. Members and friends gathered for a time of remembrance, release, and rest and to find solace from the many burdens we carry such as grief, loss, loneliness, doubt, fatigue, illness, apathy, economic distress, emotional, physical and mental pain, our own and others, to name a few. This annual service offers respite during a season when the focus on cheerful gatherings and celebrations, and being "merry and bright" can become heavy burdens in our own personal dark places.

■ Twenty eight individuals/households purchased 54 poinsettias in honor or in memory of loved ones. Clergy and volunteers made 44 individual deliveries literally all over the state of Connecticut and into Massachusetts.

Poinsettias



Welcome New Members

Michael Bugyi • Susan Dworman
Denise Blackburn • Sonya Green

Worship

All of our worship experiences are created with the knowledge that each one gathered brings their whole selves to that moment. We believe God meets us wherever and however we are.



To Know and Be Known

Each September during **Homecoming** worship, AHCC clergy reveal the theme they have carefully and prayerfully discerned will guide worship, programs and events for the program year (September – June). As a first step on our journey, we invited folks to wear name badges on Sundays. Why? Because if you want to see someone's eyes light up, call them by their name – especially when they don't expect it.



It's not easy when the fourth Sunday of Advent falls on Christmas Eve! But AHCC's clergy and staff led three beautiful services - focusing on Advent Love and a live Nativity at 10am, and the always beautiful and inspiring Candlelight services at 8 & 11pm. It was a day of welcoming the "newborn King," and God was evident as the entire was day filled with love, light, and delight.

Other Worship Services of Note:

- Cornerstone Sunday, October 22
- New Member & Thanksgiving Sunday, November 19
- Transgender Service of Remembrance, November 20
- Christmas Sunday, December 18

Transitions

Bridge Ministers

In early December, we welcomed two part-time bridge ministers to the staff at AHCC: Rev. Sonya Green and Rev. Nina Schmid.

Sonya and Nina work alongside Revs Erica and Jordan while the Search Committee continues their faithful task of finding our next settled Minister of Mid to Later Life.

Rev. Sonya Green is working with our Adult Faith Formation and Justice and Outreach Ministry Teams.

Rev. Nina Schmid is working with our Nurture and Engage Ministry Team, focusing on congregational care and visitation.

We are thrilled to welcome both pastors!



REV. SONYA GREEN



REV. NINA SCHMID



Evan, Earl, Tammy, and Jonathan Exum. (Kyle not pictured)



Moderator Earl Exum

On October 1, our church community suffered an unthinkable, immeasurable loss with the unexpected passing of our moderator, Earl Exum. An exemplary servant-leader, Earl was a giant among men, and there are no words to adequately describe the immense impact he had on countless people and organizations, or the enormous hole his passing created in the lives and communities touched by his myriad gifts and tremendous grace.

Of course, no lives were more affected than those of the family he loved so much — his wife, Tammy and their three sons, Evan, Kyle, and Jonathan.

The AHCC community came together in ways previously unseen to celebrate Earl's life on Saturday, October 7 as we praised God together for the gift he was to us all.

Additionally, on Thursday, December 14 many of AHCC's deacons and staff attended a special event at the New England Air Museum for the Memorial Unveiling Ceremony honoring the life and legacy of Earl.

As we move forward we will continue to discern appropriate ways to honor Earl's leadership here at the church he believed in and loved so dearly.



At the October 12, 2023 Diaconate meeting, the deacons unanimously voted to appoint Vice Moderator Africka Hinds to the position of moderator serving out the current term, ending June 2024. At the Annual Meeting on June 2, 2024, Africka will stand for election to her own two-year term as moderator.



At the November 9, 2023 Diaconate meeting, the deacons unanimously voted to appoint Frank Virnelli, currently deacon-at-large, to serve out the current vice moderator term, which ends June 2024. At that time, a vice moderator will be nominated and elected to serve their own two-year term.

Thank you, Africka and Frank, for stepping up and into leadership roles and shepherding us forward with wisdom and compassion.

A Message From The Associate Minister Search Committee

The Search Committee convened on a regular basis, gathering with our SNECUCC contacts, discussing the church profile, and assigning various roles and duties to each member. We have provided both email and in-person updates during the Sunday service. Each committee member brings passion and insight to all conversations, working to be in sync with the annual theme, To Know and Be Known, the mission of AHCC, and supporting our ministers.

As always, we welcome thoughtful input from the congregation, as well as prayers and patience as we seek AHCC's next Minister of Mid to Later Life.

Committee members: Lenell Kittlitz (Chair), Tory Chavey, Anderson Curtis, Connor Gallegos, Kathleen Graham, Hannah Frenette Granfield-Horton, Africka Hinds, Wanda Williams-McCormack, and Frank Virnelli