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Sunday Worship Services at 10:00a.m.

The RHCC Church Mouse

Issue #1, 2023

March



Welcome to this edition of the Church Mouse!

We've spent the last few months exploring our options for publishing the Church Mouse. Since we now rely on the Weekly Newsletter for the most up-to-date news and recap of events, we'd like the Church Mouse to focus on more forward-thinking, in-depth content that offers previews of what's to come as well as interesting content.

The Church Mouse will now be published on a quarterly basis. Please let us know if you have something we can feature in our next issue!

office@rhccucc.org

From Where I Sit by Rev. Nada B. Sellers, M.Div.

When I began serving as Designated Term Pastor, this newsletter, *The Church Mouse*, was the central communication source for Rocky Hill Church on a monthly basis. Worship information through verbal announcements and a very large amount of information included at the back of each bulletin was being delivered, along with email information, but communication was a growing challenge.

We have come a long way! Remember *"Staying Connected"* during the shut-down months of the COVID-19 pandemic? By my count, I wrote and distributed EIGHTY-FOUR (84) editions between January 2020 and October 2021. With the growth of our use of the email platform called *"Constant Contact,"* an expanded and nimble website, a weekly "e-newsletter" curated by Laura in the office and delivered mid-week, we have been able to deliver news and information in timely and effective ways. There are many people to thank for these improvements; it has been a great team effort.

This issue of *The Mouse* – as we sometimes call it, with affection - takes another step forward in this process: moving to a quarterly issue with a more in-depth focus on topics before the church, presenting a different look through use of different software, and with a "mouse" showing up for intrigue! Your editors, myself included, believe these adjustments will further improve our ability to communicate about things that matter in church life and learning. Let's hear what you think!



Since I began serving Rocky Hill church, 40 months ago, lots and LOTS of things have changed. That was the “before times” as many of us call them, and we were quickly drawn into the necessities of gaining virtual skills and capacity, as well as staying healthy while addressing the sea change of being and doing church without physical contact. In my case, this also included few in-person relationships and within a year, a short-staffed period of almost a year, as Faith Formation sought a part-time Coordinator. Worship innovation blossomed as did our comfort levels with outside events and audio-visual media being integrated into worship settings in the Meeting Houses and Chapin Hall.

And now, in these “aftertimes,” choices are being made that lead away from the path I had hoped to travel as your continuing pastor and teacher. Due to Council’s decision at a special Council meeting, held on January 25th, I have continued my search for my next pastorate. This has led to another call to another church in Connecticut; my resignation is now official, with an announcement made during worship on Sunday the 12th of February. I am negotiating forward with Ruth, our Moderator, and Council leaders to finalize aspects of my departure. My final Sunday will be March 5th, 2023.

The questions about how to flourish as the United Church of Christ in Rocky Hill will remain before you, as they do for many of the congregations in the United Church of Christ and particularly, the southern New England region as we continue to live into a racially new Conference structure. Our time together has included lots of wonderful service in Christ’s name as well as exploration of the possibilities the Spirit is calling Rocky Hill church to. The differences in our congregation are apparent but not insurmountable with God’s help. They will require more communication and grace, and more participation, not less. I hope everyone will be willing to share in a more transparent and credible conversation, and that *The Church Mouse* can be a part of your dialogue. From Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church, I offer the following exhortation (1 Cor. 16:13-14):

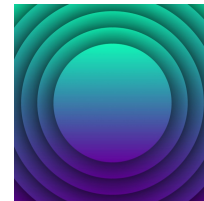
**“Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.
Let all that you do be done in love.”**

In service and with greetings to all, *PASTOR NADA*

P.S. In the “so what?” category, I invite you to check out some of the blogging done by Greg Smith at www.sowhatfaith.com where you’ll find data, reviews, reflections about more about the state of mainline denominations, especially the UCC and Presbyterian churches. For example, here are the “[Top 10 Posts of 2022](#).”

Widening our Circle

There is so much going on in our church family. We have many active and exciting ministries underway; you only need to read this Church Mouse or any weekly email to see the many ways in which we are a church on the move. And, at the same time, there is always room for us to learn and grow and to be even more impactful in our lives, our community, and the world.



As we head deeper into 2023, we will be exploring more about the “pillars” of our vision. These pillars are the key things we want to focus on in the next few years, to help us increase our effectiveness in doing the work we are called to do. Part of this is being willing to be open to making some changes so that we can continue to be a thriving, active church community well into the future. We are very clear in our vision that we want (and need!!) to be a church of the future, in addition to being a church with a long past.

The first pillar of our vision is to “widen the circle”—to build relationships both within and outside our congregation to further our many ministries. We have the power to widen our circle in so many different ways to create an even richer community and help our church continue to change lives. The graphic below shows just a few of these ways to widen our circle.

Every single one of us can contribute to widening our circle. As 2023 evolves, we will share more ideas with each other about how to become that wider circle.

Ruth Fitzgerald, Moderator For the [Council](#)

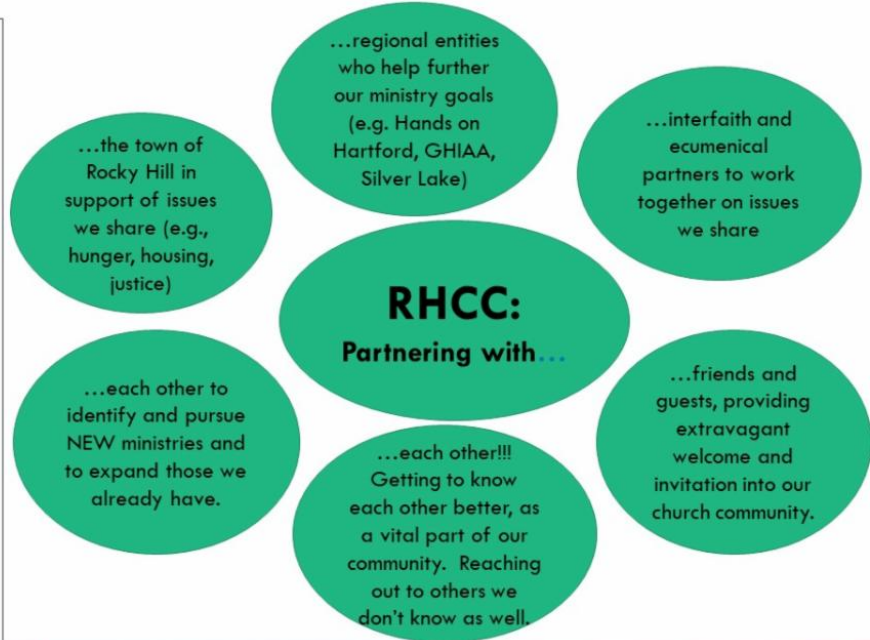
Widening the Circle

What does it mean?

- It's about partnership with others to increase our **effectiveness** in doing the things we are called to do as a church and changing lives for the better.

How do we go about it?

- By expanding and enriching our relationships with others, both within and outside our church community
- By finding common ground
- By shining our light from the hilltop!! Engaging in better communications so that all both **within and beyond** our doors know what we stand for.



VISIONFUND Update

The Council voted in October to recommend to the congregation that we retain the United Church of Christ Capital Campaign Services to assist us in undertaking a capital, (and more), campaign to help underwrite some major facilities improvements as well as some program areas we may want to pursue. This is what they do for churches, and we have been very impressed in our many conversations with them. We are calling this campaign our VISIONFUND campaign, associated with our VISION300 initiative (celebrating our 300th birthday in 2027).



Please stay tuned for more information soon, but here's what you need to know now:

- * This campaign will require a congregational vote, so we hope that you will all try to attend some information sessions to learn more.
- * Two dates are very important:
- * **Sunday, March 26 at our Budget and Elections Meeting**, after worship, we will talk more about WHAT, WHY, WHEN, and HOW. *Zoomers Welcome!*
- * **Wednesday, March 29** Jill White of the UCC Capital Campaign Services will give a more detailed presentation of the campaign and how it will be carried out. *This will be on Zoom, and we can watch either in the sanctuary or at home.*

Please mark your calendars and plan to attend **BOTH** of these very important meetings.

Ruth Fitzgerald, for the [Council](#)

Racial Justice Steering Committee 2022 GHIAA Summit:

On December 7, 2022, a small but mighty group from RHCC, attended our first [GHIAA](#) (Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance) Summit at Weaver High School in Hartford.

This event was a culmination of work that began in the Summer of 2022 by the members of over 30 UCC churches, Christian churches, Synagogues, Mosques, and Universalist Churches in the Hartford area, that are seeking justice for the people of Connecticut.



From the Treasurer: Shifting Perspectives

About three months ago, I contemplated drafting an article about what was shaping up to be a very stressful year for us financially. Faith giving, (ongoing sustaining support), seemed to be heading downward when compared to the same period last year, and our Memorial Fund was substantially reduced due to market influences, which many of us can relate to from our personal investments.

However, I never got around to writing that article. And, lo and

Members of these congregations held honest and meaningful conversations with their peers, lay leaders, and pastoral leadership to identify issues that “kept them up at night.” The problems that had been identified over those months were presented during the Summit to the member congregations and political leadership from the Hartford region, with the hopes of obtaining a promise of collaboration to help find solutions and resolve injustices experienced by marginalized people in our state.

It was a deeply spiritual and powerful moment for me to stand in front of over 700 people and share that Rocky Hill Congregational Church was now a GHIAA member and that our church would work with the other congregations of GHIAA to fight for justice in Connecticut. Our Racial Justice Committee and Core Team have spent countless hours deepening our understanding of racism and how we can work as allies to address racist systems that impair the ability of our BIPOC and marginalized siblings to live in freedom.

The areas identified were:

Mental Health:

GHIAA will partner with [HUSKY 4 Immigrants](#) to expand health care coverage for adolescents regardless of immigration status.

GHIAA will join forces with [NAMI-CT](#) and [CT Keep the Promise Coalition](#) to call for peer-run respite and community-based support for those experiencing a mental health crisis.

GHIAA will engage congregations to build infrastructure for supporting mental health at the community and congregational levels.

Environmental Racism:

GHIAA will fight for the remaining MIRA funds to be allocated towards proper remediation of the trash-to-energy plant in the South End of Hartford.

Educational Equity:

In a state where 50% of K-12 students are individuals of color, Connecticut spends \$720 million more to educate school districts that are 75% white students than they do on school districts that are at least 25% students of color. GHIAA will demand funding equity for Connecticut in partnership with [Faith Acts for Education](#) and [CONNECT](#).

Housing and Homelessness:

GHIAA will join with [Open Communities Alliance](#) to fight for zoning reform for affordable housing.

Fight for a rent cap to curb predatory rent hikes that increase housing insecurity across the state.

Call on area towns to increase funding and support for homelessness, which now falls mainly on Hartford.

Gun Violence:

GHIAA will fight for increased resources for organizations working directly toward gun violence prevention in urban areas.

We will have the opportunity to participate in these legislative actions in the coming months. Please watch for updates via weekly newsletter, bulletins, emails, and the Church Mouse.

As we continue on our journey to becoming an anti-racist church and freeing ourselves from the burden of racism that impacts all of us, I ask that you pray for the Racial Justice Committee and those involved in the GHIAA Core Team. When I looked out on the crowd of

behold, the picture today is improving! Our sustaining giving is actually up about 5% over the same 8 month period, (May 1 – Dec 31), in the prior fiscal year, and the financial markets seem to be consolidating with a better outlook.

Even so, as the trends may be turning, the glass is still only half-full. We continue to have longer term worries about the amount of our Memorial Fund that we are spending annually, because of our budget shortfalls. Moreover, inflationary pressures are impacting just about all of our costs. We need to expand our revenues just to maintain the status quo.

Many give generously. During the first two years of the pandemic, while many other churches were reducing staff and other expenses, we were able to carry on, due to your level of giving. And our ministries have been growing!

As we continue to give generously to our MAG (Monthly Abundance Gift) recipients, our ongoing sustaining support could use a bit of an inflationary boost. After all, this basic giving provides the foundation for all that we do as a church.

We will soon need to develop a budget for the upcoming fiscal year. It will be a challenge! While we have started down some paths toward expanding our revenues in non-traditional ways, (e.g., through grants, rental income, etc.), those efforts will take time to bear fruit.

So when you consider how much you can provide in support of RHCC’s ministries in the next year, know that all gifts continue to be vital as we endeavor to become the church that we aspire to be...and that we are called to be.
Dave Hall, Treasurer



CPR Certification Course

We will be hosting a CPR Heartsaver Certification course on June 10th at 10:00 am. in Chapin Hall.

This course will be taught by Connecticut-based, veteran-

congregations, (some who had half of their membership present), standing for Justice on that December night, it was plain to see that this is the work God calls us to do, the work that will unite us in love. Valerie Triblets, [Racial Justice Steering Committee](#)



Office Notes:

This year, we will be publishing much-needed updates to the Member Directory, email distribution lists, Breeze Church Management, and Constant Contact databases.

We are asking for **everyone's participation** so we can have accurate and the most up-to-date information available to us to reach you with important information. If you haven't already, please respond to office@rhccucc.org with the following information:

Name: First, Last, (Nickname, if applicable)

Partner, Spouse, Children's Names: First, Last

Address: Number, Street, Town/City, State, Zip code

Email address: example:

name@serviceprovider.com/net/org

Telephone: Cell, Home

Please share your pictures! We'd love to have access to the wonderful photographs you take! You can email photos with descriptions and names of folks in the photos to: office@rhccucc.org

NOTE: Please contact the office for a *Minor Photo Release* form giving RHCC consent to use photos containing your children's image or likeness for publication in the Weekly newsletter or the Church Mouse! office@rhccucc.org

Light The Tower: If you would like to remember or honor your loved one by Lighting the Tower in the weekly newsletter, please let Laura know at: office@rhccucc.org

Office hours are as follows:

Monday 10:00 am-12:00 pm (virtually)

Tuesday 10:00 am-1:00 pm

Wednesday 9:00 am-3:00 pm (virtually)

Thursday 9:00 am-3:00 pm (virtually)

Friday 10:00 am-1:00 pm (by appointment)



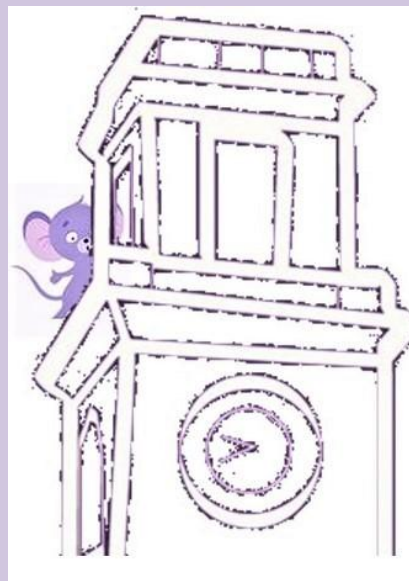
Notes from Facilities

Facilities has had a busy winter so far. To date:

*We've been working with a commercial Realtor to rent a section of the 2nd floor. We have a signed agreement to rent two "suites" on the second (top) floor of the building. To date, only a couple of entities

owned, **CPR Training Professionals** and will cover adult, child, and infant CPR training, AED usage, and choking remediation.

The cost of the course for RHCC members and friends is only \$37.50! There is limited enrollment space, so please contact the office at office@rhccucc.org with your interest soon!



Name the Mouse!

Do you know the Church Mouse's name?

The Church Mouse likes to pop up in unexpected places in our quarterly publication, and we sure would like to make it feel welcome by giving it a name!

Will you help us name the Church Mouse? **Suggestions from children are especially welcome!**

Please email your suggestions to: office@rhccucc.org



Congregational Care

As was proposed by several members, recent Sunday bulletins have revived the printing of Joys and Concerns from the previous Sunday. The thought is to have each request appear for just one week unless it is an ongoing condition or has significant

updates. interest in the space. We have also contacted a couple of contractors about the cost of room modifications, which may be required.

* We have standardized our rental agreements to ensure consistency with folks who use our building. Thank you to Laura in the office to putting this together for us, and for monitoring our agreements.

* Our Digital Ministry Team has been working to improve our audio visual capability for the Sanctuary and Chapin Hall. This includes ongoing tweaks to our current system, as well as looking to additional improvements. Recently, we've had to replace our failing Sanctuary TV. Fortunately, it was still under warranty. We engaged with the conference's "Digital Ministry" to review our setup for Zoom interactive services. The Digital Minister visited our facility and reviewed our interactive worship equipment and process, and was impressed with our progress. He made suggestions on additions we might make for the Sanctuary, and new equipment in Chapin Hall for summer worship.

* Just like our members are facing at home, we are facing significantly higher heating and electric bills this year. We are working with our vendors to save costs. On the heating side, we are working with the contractor who licenses our heating management program to ensure that we are optimizing our scheduling of heat. We are also working with the contractor that installed our boilers on maintenance to ensure that they are operating at top efficiency and last as long as possible before needing replacement. On the electrical side, we are making efficiency improvements, replacing incandescent light bulbs with LED bulbs, and recently we replaced light switches in the bathrooms with motion sensing switches. Because of Eversource's recent announcement of higher rates, we are investigating alternate electric suppliers for the short term and solar power for the long term.

* We have started a conversation with our architect on putting our Steeple restoration project out for bid. The State Historic Office approved our application for 50% reimbursement for renovating and repairing our Steeple. Estimated cost for the project is \$130,000. The terms of the grant require us to pay all costs up front with reimbursement from the State to us on project completion. We need to sign a contract with the architect to prepare bid documents, and to bid the project. Once bids are in, we will need to have a Congregational vote to fund the project. It is hoped work would start in the spring or early summer.

* We have begun replacing security cameras as they have entered the end of life support by the vendor. We received a notice from the vendor, (Arlo), that they will no longer support the cameras after April of this year. We will be in the process of slowly replacing cameras over the next few months.

* As with the security cameras, changes in technology have forced us to update the cellular dialer for our fire alarm system. The old dialer was no longer supported as 3G cellular frequency has been dropped nationwide.

For any questions or suggestions, please contact [Dave Sageman](#) or 860-985-5988.

updates.

On a quarterly basis, we will acknowledge our Zoomers and mention the members who are unable to be in worship with us for a variety of reasons. Feedback about these changes is most welcome.

In the months ahead, Congregational Care will be honoring Great Grandparents and bringing an Easter message and/or gift to those unable to Zoom or worship with us.

Our Prayer Shawls are well stocked so please keep it in mind when someone you know is going through a difficult time. Recently, with the help of Human Services, prayer shawls were offered to the residents of the apartment complex that suffered a severe fire on Glastonbury Ave. It may be a friend or neighbor not affiliated with our church community, that is experiencing some difficulties, everyone can use the physical, comforting gift of prayer.

We'd like to THANK the members of Inreach/Coffee Hour - Ruth, Sue, Jean, and Nancy who have served more years than they may care to remember!

Due to upcoming medical challenges, they have reduced their services to just the first Sunday of each month.

We are hoping that several teams of two or more will consider hosting coffee hour for the rest of the month. The fellowship is certainly enjoyed by all. Please contact [Steph Heneghan](#) with your interest.



A Word from the Generosity Team

As we start to prepare for our spring campaign, we want to say again how grateful we are for all of the Time Talent and Treasure that our congregation invests in making our church a more effective instrument of God's love in the world.

Truly, because of you, our church changes lives! We hope to show you many examples of this as the

Rocky Hill Congregational Church



Established in 1797, Rocky Hill Congregational is the oldest church in town, dating back to the Colonial Era, when Rocky Hill was part of Wethersfield's Second Parish. Congregationalism was the official religion of the Connecticut Colony until the separation of church and state in 1818. The current meeting house, shown here in 1999, was built in 1868 on land purchased from the Robbins family, replacing an earlier meeting house in the vicinity of the current police station.

The church bell, installed in 1816, was an important element of village life and still tolls from the church tower today. It tolled every day at noon and 9 p.m. and was also used to announce fires and deaths. For some years, it signaled the start of 4th of July celebrations. But several times it occasionally enjoyed breaking into the church and ringing the bell in the middle of the night, so this practice was ended in 1896.

The meeting house is a prototypical 19th century New England Congregational style church. The quality of exterior detail, with its Palladian windows, fluted columns, dentil moldings, and classical balustrades under foundation, was an important determinant in its placement on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. The three-story tower once had a spire with a large gilded ball. But that spire was taken down after it was damaged by wind and was replaced in 1843 with this clock tower.



Built between 1848 and 1852, a parish house expansion added classrooms, meeting rooms, offices, a parlor, and a small chapel. It also provided space to become a parsonage, which was originally Rocky Hill's first kindergarten and has served an important need to this day. This photo shows just the first floor of that addition completed. A later 1993 expansion added several new classrooms and an elevator, making the building more accessible.



One of the church's most renowned pastors was Calvin Chapin, who served for 63 years until his death in 1922. His was prominent in forming the Connecticut Bible Society in 1816 and the American Board of Foreign Missions.



In 1922, a serious fire in a stove behind the meeting house damaged the back of the church and destroyed several other buildings. Local men formed a bucket brigade until fire departments could arrive. These buildings were never repaired, leaving open land for later church expansion.



A Church for the Future - While proud to be the town's oldest church, Rocky Hill Congregational seeks to be a church of the present and future, striving to meet changing times. The church welcomes all who seek justice, kindness, and love for all people and for creation. No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

year unfolds.
The Generosity Team: Jarod Taylor, Liz Reed-Swale, Doretta Andonucci, Ruth Fitzgerald



An Update about Church Signs

Have you seen the lovely historic signs popping up all over town? Well, here's ours! This is just a photo representation, but the real thing will be mounted soon. The Rocky Hill Historic Society (RHHS) received a grant from the Moser Foundation to prepare some historic signs for the town. Some of these signs are already in place around the center of Rocky Hill. RHCC was one of several groups invited to add a sign that will be paid for by the RHHS grant. As the oldest church in town, we were delighted to be asked, and jumped at the chance! In fact, adding a historic interpretive sign has been something we had hoped to do for our birthday year in 2027.

Our Signage and Wayfinding Team is currently working with Facilities on some alternatives for updating our other signs and ensuring that our signage and our landscaping is part of a coordinated plan.

Save the date!
The Green Team Presents:
The Green Expo
Saturday, June 3, 2023
10 AM-1 PM

The Rocky Hill Congregational Church will hold its 3rd annual Green Expo on **Saturday, June 3, 2023**, on the church grounds or inside if it rains. We will have exhibits focusing on protecting and preserving the environment and plenty of entertainment! Bring the family! More details to follow.

The Green Team is also working to encourage the church and the church community to become:

ZERO WASTE:

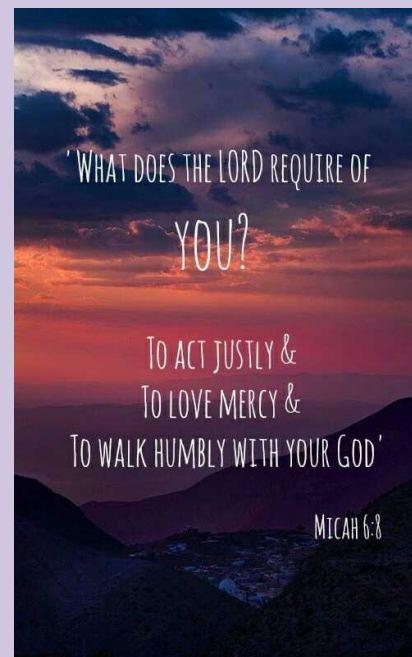
- * Refuse what you don't need. This prevents unwanted items from coming into your home and applies to all those promotional items you're offered, along with things like junk mail and plastic straws.
- * Reduce what you do use. This equals less waste overall.
- * Reuse whatever you can. Can you extend the lifespan of something by mending, handing it down, or repairing it? Can you buy or sell second-hand? Reusing also means swapping disposable products for reusable ones that can easily be cleaned instead of thrown away.
- * Recycle what you can't refuse or reduce. Saving resources from the waste stream by recycling is one option, but keep in mind that some items will not recycle indefinitely and will end up in a landfill at the

What Happened to the Nominating Committee?

As reflected in the recent changes to our church constitution, the Nominating Committee is now the **Talent Team**. It has been renamed to reflect our wider mission: to get to know the interests and passions of our congregation so that we all can participate in various aspects of our ministries.

While the Talent Team is still responsible for recommending people for elected positions, its role is so much more. We seek to match the talents and passions within our church family with the many ways that those talents can be offered.

We are all called to serve using our gifts and talents. Are you looking for your calling? Visit with the Talent Team at our Talent Fair on **Sunday, March 5th**, after worship in Chapin Hall. Learn about the many opportunities available to use your gifts in support of our Church's mission.



end of their lifespan. These are the items that 'zero wasters' try to avoid.

* Compost what's left over. Composting food scraps, paper pieces, and wood or bamboo products returns nutrients and fiber back to the earth.

Thanks, *The Green Team*

Faith Formation News

Happy Spring 2023! We are excited to share news of what we have been up to and what we have planned for the new year.

On January 9th we had the great joy of watching a fabulous Epiphany pageant with actors from ages 6 to 60(+). It was a truly wonderful event enjoyed by all, complete with angels, shepherds and wise people. Following Advent, the theme of the SPARK program has been "Holy Troublemakers and Unconventional Saints". The youth of the church have left worship weekly to attend the SPARK fun and learning time.



Please mark your calendars and plan to attend our next upcoming event:

* We will be holding a kickoff/orientation on Friday evening, March 3rd, for parents and youth interested in getting more information about the upcoming confirmation program and the introduction of a new youth group program.

Please watch the weekly e-news for more details about these events. Feel free to contact our Faith Formation Coordinator, [Elisha Brady](#), or your [Faith Formation Ministry Team](#), Candy Smith, Liz Pulling and Nancy Rolfe, with any questions or suggestions for our Faith Formation program.



WHAT'S GOING ON?

- Feb. 26: Racial Justice documentary: *Reclaiming History: Our Native Daughters* with pizza lunch
- March 3: Confirmation kick-off/orientation meeting-Chapin Hall
- March 5: Time, Talent & Treasure Team Fair
- March 26: Budget and Elections Meeting (including presentation to Congregation on VISIONFUND)
- March 29: Presentation by Jill White of UCC on our VISIONFUND
- April 2: Palm Sunday
- April 6: Maundy Thursday
- April 7: Good Friday
- April 9: Easter Sunday
- June 3: Green Expo 2023
- June 10: CPR training-Chapin Hall

All are Welcome at Council Meetings

Unless we go into Executive Session to discuss salaries or other private information, we always welcome attendance and input. Our meetings are sometimes in person and sometimes by Zoom and typically begin at 7 pm. Contact the church office to find out the meeting venue if you plan to attend. Dates will be posted on the church calendar which is on our website: <https://www.rockyhillucc.org/calendar>

For more information on RHCC worship, activism, and happenings, visit:

OUR WEBSITE: [RockyHillucc.org](https://www.rockyhillucc.org)

OUR FACEBOOK PAGE: [Facebook.com/rhccucc](https://www.facebook.com/rhccucc)

OUR INSTAGRAM PAGE:

www.instagram.com/rockyhillucc

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