

Wilmot's First Congregational Designated a Racial Justice Church

Kimberly Swick Slover
FCCW UCC

Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God. – Micah 6:8

Parishioner Doug MacDonald arrived early on a Sunday morning in July 2018 to unlock the doors of First Congregational Church of Wilmot (FCCW) United Church of Christ (UCC). As he ascended the stairs, he found anti-Semitic symbols and language scrawled across the white front doors. MacDonald scrambled to cover the graffiti before the congregation arrived,

but the act of vandalism would unsettle this close-knit church community and alter the trajectory of their future.

The congregation came together to discuss how best to respond and decided to hold a gathering of solidarity to convey the triumph of love over hate. Their leader, the Reverend Sara Marean, invited faith leaders from surrounding communities to speak and hundreds of people of all faiths joined the FCCW UCC congregation to hear speeches, sing songs, and join in prayers for hope and healing.

Since joining the FCCW UCC in 2014, Reverend Marean shared her passion for racial justice and equality with her Wilmot congregation.

“It’s important for people to understand the deep and ongoing history of racism in our country and that entrenched, systematic inequality is not just a thing of the past,” she said. “That history continues to affect how people live today.”

As the incidence of Black men killed



FCCW UCC Racial Justice Steering Committee members are: Reverend Sara Marean, Bonita Better-Reed, Paul Currier, Donna Reade. Missing: Nancy Allenby.

Photo: Christine Jensen

by police escalated across the United States, the topic became a frequent theme in Reverend Marean’s conversations and church sermons. Following the horrific televised murder of George Floyd in May 2020, she and her congregation agreed it was time to act.

“After George Floyd’s murder, it became important for us, as people of faith and citizens of our nation, to do a deeper dive,” Reverend Marean said. “We would continue the trajectory we had been on but take it to a different level and investigate what it might mean to focus our collective energy on becoming a racial justice church.”

As the Black Lives Matter protests against police violence and racial injustice continued across the country, the FCCW UCC formally began its journey in spring 2020 toward creating a Racial Justice Covenant and becoming a Racial Justice Church. The church formed an ad hoc Racial Justice Steering Commit-

tee (RJSC), and Reverend Marean invited church member Dr. Bonita (Bonnie) Better-Reed, Professor Emerita from Simmons University, and a diversity educator with 40 years of expertise, to chair the Steering Committee. Better-Reed would work creatively and collaboratively to design and lead the committee, which included fellow parishioners Paul Currier, Donna Reade, and Nancy Allenby, the church’s director of Christian Education.

In subsequent months, amid a global pandemic, the RJSC led the congregation in a mostly remote yet intensive journey of education and enlightenment. Following The Process of Becoming a Racial Justice Church provided by the New Hampshire Conference UCC (NH-CUCC) Mission Group, the congregation collectively read books, watched videos, and listened to speakers from across the country and participated in interactive workshops over a period of 18 months.

This robust and intergenerational series of programs focused on three themes recommended by the NHCUCC:

1. Learners in a community of mutual accountability studying the historic and continuing impact of white privilege and slavery on racism.

2. Interrupters of the continued cycle of racism with a focus on current events.

3. Becoming allies" with People of Color in challenging race-based injustice in the areas of criminal justice, environmental degradation, economic deprivation, and exclusion from full participation.

The new church covenant reads as follows:

"All humankind is created in God’s image, and each of us is a beloved child of God. The presence of inequality and racism embedded in our systems harms God’s creation. As

followers of Jesus, we are called to confront and heal the racial injustices that separate humanity from God’s will and See Justice on page 23



Nancy Allenby is the Director of Christian Education at FCCW UCC and a member of the Racial Justice Steering Committee. Photo: Bonita Better-Reed

South Danbury Church News September 2022

Blazing Star Grange Fair, Saturday, September 10

Linda Wilson, South Danbury Church

Danbury’s Blazing Star Grange Fair is Saturday, September 10. Come spend the day (and evening) enjoying festivities, food, games, prizes, raffles, auction, music by Lindsey Schust and the Ragged Mountain Band, and by Cardigan Mountain Tradition – and watch for our float in the parade at 11 AM.

Looking ahead, the church’s annual Homemade Pie Sale will be on Friday, October 7, from 3 to 5 PM. Come promptly to be sure of finding your favorites!

Thank you to everyone for your support and participation in South Danbury Church events and activities! We are especially grateful for your donations to the South Danbury Church Essential Home Goods Shelf at the Danbury Community Center. The non-food home goods collection began this year with a suggestion from Reverend Gail Kinney and, thanks to Kendra, the DCC is hosting it. Personal care items are especially helpful. Contributions are always welcome, and can be brought to the DCC or to church services and events.

For church news, programs, events, and announcements of worship services, follow us at Friends of the South Danbury Christian Church on Facebook; call or text 603 491-3196; or email SouthDanburyChurch@gmail.com.

If you would like to be on our mail-



The South Danbury Church's float for the 2019 Danbury Grange Fair featured the theme "Danbury's Got Talent." Artelia Lyn Ellis represented the many talented bakers and cooks at the South Danbury Church.

Caption and photo: Linda Wilson.

ing list, send us an email. Please contact us if you need a ride to attend worship or events. We’ll be happy to help.

The South Danbury Church, located at 1411 US Route 4 in South Danbury, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. We are an Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ, UCC.



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