



COVENANT NEWS

The Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Webster Groves

FROM THE PASTOR

MARCH 2021

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March Forth!

This is the month that our God has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it!
(Psalm 118:24, paraphrased)

I am composing this note to you speedily, hopefully not hastily, after the month of March has begun. I tell you this, with some embarrassment, because I am also sharing my favorite Dad Joke from yesterday, the fourth of March – March Forth!

We have a lot planned in the month ahead of us. Consider –

- Lent continues with our series, “Webster Groves and African America,” on Wednesday evenings at 7:00pm, as we consider together the prophetic witness of our church through the years, for the sake of Civil Rights;
- Our first (and last, we hope) Virtual Benevolence Auction is underway, to benefit all the organizations we contribute to collectively, for the sake of outreach and uplift;
- “Journey through Creation” takes place on March 20, at 7:00pm on Zoom; it’s our second worshipful exploration about stewardship, for the sake of the environment;
- And then comes Holy Week! As we did last year, we will endeavor to preserve the highs and lows and sanctity of our observances from Palm Sunday through Easter.

You surely perceive by now the sincerity of my Dad Joke and this late-coming message inviting you to celebrate with me the wonders of this month: March Forth!

Peace.

PASTOR DAVE DEARON



WORSHIP NOTES FOR MARCH 2021 AND HOLY WEEK

This schedule is subject to change, as need may arise.

All Sunday worship is recorded and available from our YouTube channel (bit.ly/FCCWG-YT), starting late in the day on Saturday. The same video is played at 10:00am on Sunday as a Zoom watch party (bit.ly/FCCWG-Worship).

PLEASE NOTE: *Volunteer Readers are needed, for the pre-recorded Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday services. If you would like to be one of them, please contact the pastor at your earliest convenience, at DDenoon@FirstChurchWG.org.*

Sunday, March 7, 10:00AM – *Third Sunday in Lent; “Amistad” Sunday (UCC); United Church of Christ Women’s Week* – Mark 5:25-34. Pastoral Assistant Halley Kim enters the pulpit for the first time, to consider with us the story of the cure of the woman with a 12-year-long flow of blood whom Jesus basically credits with healing herself (“Daughter, your faith has healed you.”). ***Message of the Day: “When Women Are Heroic”***

Sunday, March 14, 10:00am – *Fourth Sunday in Lent; “One Great Hour of Sharing” Special Offering; Daylight Saving Time begins.* – John 3:14-21. This passage is, on its surface, very reassuring, but it brings the contemporary Christian in contact with a cosmology that may seem foreign. Pastor Dave Denoon offers the ***Message of the Day: “The Nature of Good and Evil”***

Saturday, March 20, 7:00pm – Our Calvin Worship Renewal Grant presentation, ***“Journey Through Creation, Part 2”*** takes place on Zoom (see formal announcement elsewhere in this newsletter).

Sunday, March 21, 10:00am – *Fifth Sunday in Lent; The Vernal Equinox.* – John 12:20-33. As a group of non-Jewish foreigners come to meet Jesus, he is caused to muse upon his coming death and the fleeting quality of life. Pastor Dave Denoon picks up this theme, encouraging us to cherish one another. ***Message of the Day: “Don’t Miss the Omen of Greek-speaking Romans”***

Sunday, March 28, 10:00am – *Palm/Passion Sunday.* – Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Mark 1:1-11 (Palms); Mark 14-15 (Passion). After our tradition of greeting “Jesus” on a donkey, shouting Hosanna! we remember the Christ’s final hours with a reading of the two penultimate chapters of the gospel according to Mark. ***WATCH FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS about a gathering for the purpose of recording on video a safe and social distanced Palm Sunday and Passion!***

Thursday, April 1, 7:00pm – *Maundy Thursday.* Our annual observance of Communion on this night will be done virtually at the beginning of a Zoom meeting that will also include a pre-recorded service of Tenebrae (Shadows).

Friday, April 2, 7:00pm – *Good Friday.* This year’s Good Friday service will be like last year’s, a virtual experience of the Stations of the Cross. It will be streaming online and offered as a “watch party” at 7:00pm.

Saturday, April 3, Time TBA – *Holy Saturday.* The annual Easter Egg Hunt will be transformed this year into a decoration of a cross set in the Jubilee Garden. ***WATCH FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS about this wonderful gathering for all ages!***

Sunday, April 4, 10:00am – *Easter Sunday, Festival of the Resurrection, Virtual Communion (at 11:00am during Coffee Fellowship).* – Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Mark 16:1-8a. With a Paschal Fire, shouts, and cheers, we greet the Resurrection of Jesus and begin to anticipate our own restoration. Vaccines are becoming widely available, and a light may be visible at the end of our historic, pandemic tunnel! The choir (virtually) sings a joyful “Hallelujah!” as we all reflect together with the pastor upon ***“Fear and Trembling” here in the face of such good news.***

LENTEN STUDY CONTINUES: *FIRST CHURCH AND AFRICAN AMERICA*

I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while: so that you might have him back forever, ... as a ... a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Holy One. (Philemon 14-16)

The excerpt above is in the letter from Paul to Philemon, a Christian slaveholder whose bondsman Onesimus had fled to Paul for justice's sake. We cannot read it today without realizing the profound effect that America's original sin of slavery has had on justice in our country and individuals in it because white America did not choose to heed Paul's demand for justice as Philemon evidently did (Tradition remembers that a freed Onesimus would eventually become a bishop in the early Church.).

If you have not already been doing so, please, plan to join Pastor Dave Denoon and the rest of the professional staff for a series of presentations and discussions about racism in America, particularly as we have experienced it at First Church. Where have we been with this issue? Where are we now? What have we done about it, and what must we be doing, for the sake of establishing equality and equity as the basis of an open and affirming society?

*– All these meetings will be on Wednesdays in Lent at 7:00pm, at bit.ly/FCCWG-Worship –
February 24 – The Covenant Gathering, January 31, 1866*

Recording now available from SoundCloud – soundcloud.com/firstchurchwg/original-meeting-and-discussion-about-it

March 3 – First Church and Reconstruction, plus a few years: 1865-1883

Coming soon to [@FirstChurchWG](https://SoundCloud.com), and YouTube <http://bit.ly/FCCWG-YT>

March 10 – Brushes with Racism, 1939-1957

March 17 – Developing Dialogue, 1993-2017

March 24 – Recovery from Racism and Establishing Equity, Today and Onward

FROM THE MUSIC DIRECTOR

As the spring teases us with beautiful weather after a frigid blast of arctic air we begin to look forward to the still-new year. I am still searching for my vaccine dose(s) – which is a vexation for me in St. Charles County. As we begin preparations to open the church building to the public again, we also look forward to opening live, regular worship and are confronted by a surprising truth – as we anticipate things getting back to “normal,” things will never go back to the way things were. Just as 911 changed us permanently as Americans, this pandemic has changed us too.

I am sure our internet broadcast of services and occasional Zoom meetings will not go away but will probably become a permanent part of the new “normal.” Even as the Archdiocese has banned choirs for the upcoming Easter season (called the Triduum) we will have a virtual choir. Just as symphony orchestras are grappling with “reimagining” the concert “experience,” we are grappling with reimagining music presentation in church over various platforms.

We are making plans for a musically glorious Easter season and when we re-open the sanctuary to the public, I am planning to have a short series of recitals highlighting our sanctuary's resident pride, our organ and piano. Have a happy, productive, and thoughtful spring. Stay safe!

Leon Burke



MODERATOR'S CORNER MARCH 2021

Winter is still here, and we continue to cope with snow, ice and COVID. Although we aren't there yet, the prospects for the future keep looking up. The ice and snow will melt preparing the way for spring, and COVID numbers continue to improve along with the vaccination opportunities in the community (although not as quickly as we would like). The Restart Committee continues to wrestle with all the variables surrounding the risk factors of the pandemic. One of the big unknowns involves the variants of COVID-19 that are popping up around the world and start to make their way into our country. Hopefully our efforts at masking, social distancing and sanitizing, while achieving a higher percentage of people being vaccinated, will keep the mutations in check. There is much more to be learned, and we must continue to be vigilant, but as the numbers drop, we are also preparing to restart church and community activities in our facility. The Restart Committee has been busy establishing protocols, prioritizing activities and assessing risk factors for each activity. Soon you will start to see our church facility once again become a vibrant place in our community.

The worship service is currently being pre-recorded and then uploaded to YouTube on a weekly basis. This has required a herculean effort from our clergy and volunteers to put each production together. We are truly grateful for their efforts. It has become apparent that even after we resume holding worship services in the sanctuary, it will be necessary that we retain an on-line presence. Our pandemic experience has taught us that we can reach out to our congregation and to the community more effectively by using the technology of the internet. The Communications Committee and Parish Life have been looking at the best way to do this and the resources we will need to make it work properly.

Progress is also being made by the Strategic Planning subcommittee working to increase the income flow for the operational budget and as a way to rebuild the endowment. A variety of possibilities have been examined that serve both our fiscal well-being and our church's mission in the community. The three areas showing the most promise are: 1) using the Gore Avenue lot to develop condo housing; 2) a collaborative effort to develop a community art center; and 3) building a senior citizen living facility. Action steps are being taken in each of these areas with some exciting possibilities emerging. It is also possible that our course of action will involve a mix of opportunities. Of course, no decisions will be made until there is something specific to present to the church membership, but progress is being made.

A great piece of news comes from our Treasurer, Jenny Jones, who submitted another loan application from the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) under the Cares Act. Her efforts on our behalf in 2020 resulted in the granting of a loan of \$62,300 to help meet our payroll expenses and was ultimately forgiven. She submitted an application for another loan this past month and has been notified that we have been approved for a new PPP loan of \$62,300 with the potential of having it forgiven! Our thanks go out to Jenny for looking out for our interests.

Thus, as we cope with the pandemic and its consequences, we move forward while creating exciting opportunities for our church. We have learned that change can result from both need and desire. We are looking to capitalize on this opportunity to make a stronger, healthier and more vibrant church community. Stay tuned, stay in touch and stay healthy.

In Christ,
Mark Edwards, Moderator

TREASURER'S REPORT

Below are the church operating results for the month ending January 31:

Statement of Financial Activities

	2021	2020	Budget	Change to Prior Year	Change to Budget
Income				Higher/(Lower) Income	
Pledges and Gifts	\$ 45,910	\$ 72,205	\$ 26,250	\$ (26,295)	\$ 19,660
Transfer from Endowment	10,000	10,000	21,583	-	(11,583)
Benevolence	-	1,250	1,250	(1,250)	(1,250)
Use of Space and Miscellaneous	1,370	3,577	3,926	(2,207)	(2,556)
Interest Income	56	158	967	(102)	(911)
Total Revenue	57,337	87,190	53,976	(29,854)	3,360
Expenses				(Higher)/Lower Expense	
Human Resources Expense	\$ 27,263	\$ 38,933	\$ 35,861	11,671	8,599
Facilities and Finance Expense	\$ 9,627	\$ 10,929	\$ 13,515	1,303	3,888
Benevolence Expense	\$ 1,250	\$ 1,250	\$ 2,667	-	1,417
Christian Education Ministry Expense	\$ -	\$ 306	\$ 342	306	342
Parish Life Ministry Expense	\$ 124	\$ 305	\$ 933	181	810
Executive Ministry Expense	\$ 112	\$ -	\$ 600	(112)	488
Total Expenses	38,375	51,723	53,917	13,348	15,542
Net Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets	\$ 18,962	\$ 35,467	\$ 59	\$ (16,505)	\$ 18,903

Statement of Financial Position

	2021	2020	Variance
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 230,520	\$ 180,268	\$ 50,252
Prepaid expenses	9,700	-	9,700
Pledges receivable	280,558	254,649	25,909
Property and equipment	29,861	31,319	(1,457)
Minister housing long term receivable	60,000	60,000	-
Total Assets	\$ 610,639	\$ 526,235	\$ 84,404
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 55,535	\$ (1,551)	\$ 57,086
Unrestricted Designated Funds	37,836	22,209	15,626
Restricted funds for:			
Per the Endowment Trust	45,815	39,419	6,396
Churchyard	34,007	34,340	(333)
Kishlar/Dickens Room Maintenance	58,096	58,096	-
Temporarily restricted funds for pledges	280,558	254,649	25,909
Memorial Funds	77,144	79,532	(2,388)
Long term liabilities	60,000	60,000	-
Unrestricted Net Assets	(38,352)	(20,459)	(17,893)
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 610,639	\$ 526,235	\$ 84,404

Continued

Since our use of space income continues to be low due to the pandemic, the church has applied for a second loan provided by the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) of the CARES Act. The PPP loan was created so that organizations can keep their workforce employed during the pandemic. The CARES Act allows forgiveness of some loans and our first loan was forgiven in December 2020. We are again working with Enterprise Bank to facilitate the loan between the Small Business Administration and the church and will apply for forgiveness of this second loan also.

If you have any other questions or want further detail, please let me know.

Thanks

Jennifer Jones, Treasurer

BENEVOLENCE - GIVING TOGETHER

THE GIVING STORE



Hello all. It is time...our Benevolence Giving officially began on March 7 and will run through March 20. As you know, the Benevolence Auction Committee is conducting a giving campaign this year called "Giving Together." Our giving helps to support agencies from Gateway 180 to Webster-Rock Hill Ministries. Using the funds generated by our annual giving we help provide counseling, build houses, assist children and support the Minister's Discretionary Fund, used by our pastor to help individuals in need.

Our goal this year is to raise \$23,000. We are asking you to open your heart and your pocketbook to GIVE. Give as much as you can. You might consider the amount that you spent at last year's auction or the time you invested in last year's auction as a guide. For your information, the Independent Sector gathers data and conducts research on volunteerism in the nonprofit sector. The results of that research provide nonprofits a way to calculate the value of volunteer time. As of July 2020, their estimated national value of each volunteer hour is \$27.20. Wow, who knew all that work that we put into the auction has a value. So, as we are unable to hold the auction this year, we can still do our part to support Benevolence Giving.

For some fun and to receive something in return we have a "**Giving Store.**" The money collected from the Giving Store will go to support the Minister's Discretionary Fund. **The Giving Store** is on the website and you can begin making your selections now through March 20 (when the store will close at noon). If you are unable to use a computer, please call Debbie at church. She will help you. We encourage all of you to participate. This list is posted on our website. It is simple, go to:

<https://firstchurchwg.org/benevolence-giving-together/the-giving-store>.

All you have to do is select the item(s) you want and select payment. (Once the item has been purchased, it will be unavailable for additional purchases.)

OUR CHURCH DURING CHALLENGING TIMES THE GREAT DEPRESSION YEARS

In some aspects the Great Depression years looked a lot like the Covid 19 period. There was large-scale unemployment, 25% of the workforce was jobless. Consumer spending and investment dropped causing a steep decline in industrial output and there were failing companies, and a large increase in mortgage foreclosures. Folks cut corners in preparing food – lots of diced potatoes with hot dogs, creamed chip beef over toast, bologna casseroles, and prune pudding. The alternative for many was the breadline/soup kitchen.



Our minister then, Rev. George Gibson said, “In Depression times we have the opportunity to enrich home life and revive certain family values that had been lost sight of in prosperity. The Depression will have been a dead loss if it fails to teach us the economic rightness of justice and of love. Dooms day is forever around the corner so long as prosperity is insanely distributed.” Does this sound like it might have been spoken in current times?

Rev. Gibson wrote, “The Depression so keenly felt in all phases of our life has been regarded incidental in the life of the church. The people as a whole are to be commended for their hopefulness in personal problems and in the problems of the church.” The Sunday school building was finished in 1929, the year of the economic crash. Loans needed to be renegotiated. The Church budget needed to be cut. Church services were discontinued during most summers, though Sunday school happened some summers. At one point the Trustees were authorized to list our corner lot for sale. It was listed for \$30,000. An offer of \$19,000 was made and the site was to be used for a filling station. This offer was not accepted.

These were challenging times. The Women’s Association assumed the duty of helping pay the S.S. debt and the manse loan. Each year they were able to raise the \$1,000 they pledged to pay off the debts by having bazaars, card parties, bake sales, lunches and dinners – what women do best! Bulletins on many Sundays noted in lieu of flowers in the chancel that donations were made to help pay the debts. At one point operating funds were cut 40%. The minister’s salary was cut 10% and they had to borrow from the Deacon’s fund \$16.52 to pay November 1936 bills. At year end there was only \$54.59 in the church bank account.

In the later 30s Rev. Gibson resigned to answer a call to Hyde Park in Chicago. He had led our church through the Depression, raised awareness about social and inter-racial issues, as well as, anti war issues. Church membership was beginning to increase and the Inglis years were ahead of us.

Kay Roush,
Historian



Journey through Creation

Earth, Art, and Faith... Alive!

The Ministry of Imagination, Creativity and the Arts (MICA)

Co-Creating with the Creator

Airing on Saturday, March 20, 7:00 PM CDT

Celebrating the Vernal Equinox

Please use the link below to register for the webinar:

<https://tinyurl.com/jtc-registration>



Rev. Cliff Aerie,
Director of MICA
(Ministry of Imagination,
Creativity and the Arts)

Our first webinar and worship services have been a resounding success. We move now from exploring earth's story as our story to discovering the ways in which we can live as co-creators with our Creator God, to restore ecological health to our planet. We originally planned this webinar for the winter solstice, but with the increasing scope of the pandemic

we have moved our schedule back a few months. Artist Tia Richardson and environmentalist Dr. Mick Smyer will join our host, Rev. Jan Barnes in a creative environment to inform and inspire.

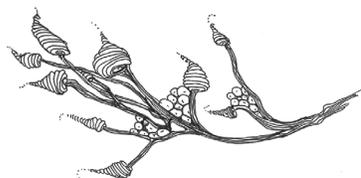
Journey Thru Creation Program...

Our four-phase program emphasizes the following themes:

- Exploring the blessings and wonder of God's Creation.
- Discovering our role as co-creators with the Creator.
- Pursuing ecological justice for the earth and its inhabitants.
- Celebrating our Journey Together as God's Children.



Rev. Jan Barnes



Tia Richardson is a full-time community mural artist based in her hometown of Milwaukee, WI. She graduated with an associate degree in Graphic Design from Milwaukee Area Technical College. Her work has evolved into mural projects that offer community members from all walks the chance to freely express



their diverse feelings and perspectives. Documentation of her focus on trying to create a sense of unity through art shows evidence how, despite our differences, we can work together for the common good. Tia has completed over 50 murals in partnership with non-profits, K-12 and post-secondary schools, businesses and local government. She was recognized as Artist of the Year by the Milwaukee Arts Board in 2018, and in 2020 produced a short film about one of her projects called 'Rockford Taking Flight'. Visit www.cosmic-butterfly.com to learn more about Tia and her community art practice.



Dr. Michael "Mick" Smyer is the founder and CEO of *Growing Greener: Climate Action for a Aging World*. Mick taps expertise in gerontology, communication strategies, and human-centered design to move people from anxiety to action to habit on climate change. He uses psychology

and behavioral economics to help participants replace their habit of climate avoidance with a specific action, their next step on their own climate journey. Mick is the former Provost and an Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Bucknell University. A national expert, Smyer has written and lectured extensively on aging. Dr. Smyer holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Yale University and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Duke University.

This program is made possible through a Vital Worship Grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Grand Rapids, Michigan, with funds provided by Lilly Endowment Inc.

25 YEARS BUILDING HOMES WITH HABITAT FOR HUMANITY



For 35 years and more than 400 homes later, Habitat for Humanity has been at work here in St. Louis. But did you know that volunteers from our UCC churches in the St. Louis Association were instrumental in bringing Habitat to St. Louis at the very beginning? UCC volunteers have been at work in those homes in so many ways and with so many memories. From fund raising, to wielding a hammer, we have worked together.

25 years ago, we were invited by the Rev. Duane Meier and the Rev. Doug Anders to raise funds together and find the volunteers to build a home. Since that time our giving has totaled more than \$800,000. Unfortunately, because of Covid 19, volunteer opportunities are not available at the moment, but the need for affordable housing continues. Habitat is hoping that volunteers might begin working later this year. [To read the full report, click here](#)

EASTER FLOWER SPONSORSHIPS



Normally, during Easter we enjoy having our sanctuary beautifully decorated with a variety of beautiful spring flowers. As we will only be here in spirit this Easter, we have drastically reduced our order to save money. We will be getting about 10 Easter Lilies, 4 blue flowering hydrangeas, 4 pink flowering azaleas and 4 orange rieger begonias. We are hoping to bring some cheer to those of us who are stuck inside.

You are invited to make a contribution to defray this expense. A donation of \$20.00 is suggested.

You may also like to designate your contribution in celebration, honor or memory. We hold many in our hearts especially during the Easter season as we celebrate the hope and joy of the season. This is a lovely way to show those feelings. [Click here to order a flower.](#) If you would like to order a flower and do not have internet access, call Debbie at the church at 314-962-0475.

The flowers will be available for pickup on Monday, after Easter Sunday. Come early for flower selection! Weather permitting, the flowers will be in the Jubilee Garden.

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

“Water is life. Water is love. Let love flow.”

(special offering collected, March 14 & March 21)



Access to clean fresh water is vital for all of humanity, but for women in particular, water access means the difference between life and death for them and their families. The United Nations International Observance of the World Water Day (March 22) reflects on the importance of water in our daily lives and remembers those who lack access to adequate drinking water supplies.

For women and girls around the world, it can be a 12 hour walk to the nearest water source to collect water to maintain basic needs and crucial hygiene practices during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With your support, 100 families will benefit from the Water Well project, sponsored by the United Church of Christ in Mozambique (UCCM). When you give to One Great Hour of Sharing, you invest in the hopeful future of women and girls around the world and serve as co-workers with God to build a just world for all.



March

BIRTHDAYS

Joshua Shannon 3/7
 Kathleen Ferrell 3/9
 Brody Zink 3/13
 Kristen Rinne 3/14
 Kitty Pearl 3/18
 Lauren Gomez 3/20

James Harris 3/21
 Casen Hood 3/21
 Matthew Borutta 3/24
 Amy Byrne 3/26
 Joshua Walker 3/28

SPRING BRINGS HOPE AS WE APPROACH ANOTHER TRIP AROUND THE SUN



March 8, 2020, was the last Sunday the church had in-person worship. What a long and crazy year it's been – the pandemic... the economy... politics... yikes!

The year has been tolerable. I, like many others, missed what we considered normal social activities. Running into friends as the grocery store became the new norm for socializing.

Working from home was even pretty tolerable. The office switched our QuickBooks from the desktop version to the online version, and that turned out to be a good move. And then there's Zoom. It does make meetings easy and convenient, and I know it will be around for a while. But if you all are like me, the less I sit in front of a screen to have meetings, the better!

One of the best things that happened last year was the Christmas Tree Trimming party in the Jubilee Garden. As long as we were maintaining safe distances and wearing masks, we were told, we could safely gather outside in small groups. We got to enjoy the beautiful space together, and safely. As time moves forward, I hope that we will continue to be creative and discover new ways to get together and take advantage of the Garden.

I knew, going into Spring of 2020, I could handle the isolation as long as I had a garden to work in. The above left photo was taken on February 18th and the above right on the 24th. What a difference a week makes. Seeing the hellebores (Lenten Rose) and other spring flowers beginning to bloom, feels promising.

Everyday, more and more people are getting their Covid-19 vaccinations. That gives me hope that soon we can begin to gather again, whether it's in our church, at our homes, or even at a restaurant. I do have hope that this will be a better and brighter year.

Debbie Tolstoi



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Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

Missing Someone?

Have you been missing someone for a while from worship and other church events? Please, let Pastor Dave Denoon or Joan Musbach, Parish Life Chair, know. Either will be happy to follow up for you.

Follow us on

Facebook

www.facebook.com/FirstChurchWG/

SoundCloud

www.soundcloud.com/firstchurchwg

YouTube

<http://bit.ly/FCCWG-YT>

