

Art & Spirit at AHCC

Anyone whose been to Asylum Hill Congregational Church, no matter where in the building they go, can see evidence of their support for the arts, both material and performance. They have a long history of commissioning and displaying material art as well as performances, often created by Asylum Hill and Hartford residents that have been featured in the *News & Views*.

What may not be so well known though is their annual Arts & Spirituality Retreat, this year titled “Freeing the Artist Within” A maximum of 50 individual sign up for the weekend to explore a wide variety of artistic expression, all intended to “awaken the creative Spirit”

It began Friday evening with a musical performance by Kate



Callahan and Friends featuring Cynthia Wolcott and Michelle Begley. Kate is a well-known local singer/songwriter and guitarist recently appointed Connecticut State Troubadour. It was a fitting beginning to a weekend focused on art that feeds the soul.

This was followed by a dinner catered by *Linda Wayman Cooks!*, the *Arts & Spirituality Retreat Kitchen Team*, and *Hands on Hartford Caterers Who Care*. It was a delicious example of Culinary art well practiced.

From there, the participants began the creative process with an hour of making masks with cardboard, scissors and pastels.

Saturday morning began with coffee, as it should, before moving into Gentle Chair Yoga that was led by Cynthia Wolcott. It was exactly as the name suggests as it was gentle, true yoga, while seated in chairs.

From there the Art Experiences began. Everyone selected their first and second choices for three of the ten available opportunities. Anywhere from three to five opportunities were available at each of three sessions, and a balanced group was assigned to each. They ran the gamut from food that included making apple pie jam or classic marinara, lemon garlic and caper sauces as well as a creamy cheese sauce to a poetry class. While one group was learning about the pipe organ – including a video of it’s history, a small wooden model that they collectively assembled and a trip into the choir loft to get up close to the church’s Aeolian-Skinner organ, another was making small objects from different materials. Either layers of paper, cut into shapes and mounted in small boxes creating s sort of 3-D scene or pieces of quilting cloth cut into shapes and glued on a background creating colorful framed art.

Hexagon shaped pieces of multicolored paper were also arranged and glued to card stock to make a variety of display pieces.

Other opportunities included exploring dyeing techniques using natural sources like tree bark and nut husks, purple cabbage or onionskins. The pallet of colors, either singly or combined were amazing. There was even an exploration of Verdi's Rigoletto that included viewing select scenes from a DVD that featured Luciano Pavarotti.

The afternoon ended with everyone sitting in a circle, several sharing thoughts and impressions of the group experience, many there for the first time. A final group exercise and a prayer of thanksgiving concluded the 12th annual Arts & Spirituality Retreat.

For more photos, go to <https://photos.app.goo.gl/6NZvp9oGhCEgWviF8>