



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **THE WITNESS STONES PROJECT COMES TO WILTON, CT**

*Sponsored by an Ecumenical Collaboration Across Three Towns*

[Wilton, CT: February 7, 2023] Four area faith communities (St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Wilton; The Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Westport; Wilton Presbyterian Church; and St. Paul's on the Green, Norwalk) are collaborating to sponsor a series of workshops presented by The Witness Stones Project, Inc. for area youth to discover and chronicle the local history of slavery through art, story, music, video, or poetry. The Witness Stones Project™ is an educational initiative whose mission is to restore the history and honor the humanity of the enslaved individuals who helped build our communities.

The project provides local archival research, professional leader development, a classroom curriculum, and workshops to help students discover and chronicle the local history of slavery. Dr. Julie Hughes, archivist and historian associated with the Wilton Public Library, recently spoke at a forum at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Wilton in which she shared "slavery was of deep significance in our area" as she told numerous stories of individuals who are known to have worked, lived, and worshipped in Wilton, Norwalk, Redding, New Canaan, and beyond. Nathan Pawelek, who oversees children and youth faith formation at UU Westport says, "It's hard to imagine our quaint little towns having a past with enslaved people, working and living here. I try to imagine what life was like for these individuals."

Beginning on Wednesday, March 1 from 6:00-8:00pm and continuing for two more sessions on March 8 and 15, youth will have the opportunity to be led by the Witness Stones staff in learning the history of slavery locally and regionally while exploring five themes that were instrumental in establishing slavery in Connecticut. Using primary documents from Julie Hughes' research, students will create stories to honor the enslaved. The program will culminate with the placement of a "witness stone" at a public community ceremony in the late Spring 2023 in which youth will share their creative expressions to honor the enslaved of our communities.

Funding is provided by the sponsoring faith communities as part of acknowledging their complicity in issues of injustice towards those who were enslaved, many of whom had an integral part in the building of churches at the behest of their early founders. There is no cost for youth to participate; young people in grades 6 – 9 are particularly invited to attend no matter their faith or tradition, but all youth are welcome. This is not a religious program; it is a secular history curriculum that has been used in public and private schools across Connecticut and beyond.

The first session (March 1) is open to the public, including parents and any other adult who is interested in learning about the mission of The Witness Stones Project, Inc. at no cost. Pre-registration is required for both youth and adults. All sessions will be held at the WEPCO complex located at 48 New Canaan Road in Wilton. Learn more and register at <https://www.witnessstoneswilton.com> or contact Sharon Ely Pearson [sharonepearson@gmail.com](mailto:sharonepearson@gmail.com), project coordinator and member of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church.

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