

THE BELFRY CHIMES

February Worship Services

Sunday, 10:00 a.m.

February 5, 2023
Rev. Suzy Rivera

February 12, 2023
Rev. Kari Nicewander

February 19, 2023
Rev. Kari Nicewander

February 26, 2023
Preacher to be determined

Please join us at
Coffee Hour in
Fellowship Hall
following worship

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Matthew 18:20

Call to the Annual Program and Budget Meeting

The members of the First Congregational Church of Portland, Connecticut are hereby notified of the Annual Program and Budget Meeting to be held on Sunday, February 12th, 2023. The meeting will be held in person in the Fellowship Hall and also via Zoom Video Conference after "Coffee Hour" for the following purposes:

1. To receive and act upon the Annual Program Reports of the year 2022,
2. To act upon the 2023 Budget as presented by the Board of Finance,
3. To conduct an election of Church Officers and Board and Committee Members,
4. To approve the expenditure of up to \$35,000 for a new sanctuary roof,
5. To approve the Slate of Members for the Pastoral Search Committee,
6. To act upon any other business proper to come before said meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Joe Aresco, President
Diane Burgess, Clerk

A Message of Gratitude from Pastor Jane Hawken

Dear Friends,

Although I am a “word” person – some might rightly call me “word-y”! – who enjoys expressing myself in writing, I find it difficult to adequately convey my deep gratitude for the worship service, luncheon, and afternoon program on January 22. The thoughtfulness, time, creativity, attention to detail, generosity, and loving spirit were evident in so many ways. Along with everyone who assisted and contributed, I thank the Planning Committee members Diane Burgess, Beau Doherty, Mike Enright, Nancy Johnson, Ann Labby, and co-chairs Jeannette Hodge and George Law.

In addition to thanking people who attended worship either in-person or via YouTube, I thank the deacons, choir members, participants, and musicians. We were sorry that Kasha could not attend, but appreciated all her input and leadership. The worship bulletin was extra special and the beautiful floral arrangement on the communion table was stunning.

I also appreciate the remarkable outpouring of financial gifts for the refugee resettlement mission offering. This work makes a profound difference not only in the lives of the families who have fled their homelands in search of security and safety, but also in the lives of people who extend a helping hand and share a caring heart. This work brings volunteers together, energizes faith communities and organizations, opens our eyes to foreign countries and cultures, and provides an opportunity to participate in God’s work to “Show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels” (Hebrews 13:1-2.)

The luncheon was fantastic with delicious food, lovely flowers, beautiful table settings, (including Jane’s Retire Mints!), photographs, decorative well-wishes galore, and a photo slide show. Many thanks to the servers and dishwashers, everyone involved in set-up and clean-up, and all who planned and organized the meal.

As if the celebration could not get any more festive, the afternoon program featured one outstanding speaker after the next culminating in a rousing chorus of our Choir singing “Happy Trails” complete with creative words. The gifts, wrapped in “Jane” paper and artistically labeled and presented by the Women’s Fellowship, were overwhelming in their magnitude. The congregation’s many presents related to the National Parks will enable and accompany us on our travels. All the photos taken will be lasting reminders of a wonderful day.

Thank you for welcoming my family and friends. They extend their gratitude, too, and I heard from them that the celebration was “absolutely perfect!”

As I take my leave as your pastor, I do so with profound gratitude for the privilege of serving and leading the congregation. God bless you all!

In faith, friendship, and love,

Jane

A Message from Church President Joe Aresco

Time of Transition

What a wonderful worship service and final liturgy on January 22! I hope many of you had the chance to attend in person or via YouTube. It was a great way to honor Jane as she retires and begins the next chapter of her life. As we go through this transitional time I want to urge you all to respect the boundaries of separation between the congregation and Jane as our pastor. It is important for both parties to have a clean break and not try to reach out to each other, even in times of need. This allows Jane to move on and also for us as a congregation to begin taking steps forward toward our next called minister. I realize this will be hard for many of us to resist this urge to reach out. However I hope all of you understand this separation is important for all parties to move forward in a healthy and productive way.

Interim/ Transitional Minister

I want to update you all on the status of our search for an interim minister. I will start by saying that our profile has been on the UCC website since late October and we have had only 4 responses to date (one of which came this past week) of candidates interested in the position. In addition to the UCC website we also pursued one personal connection that did not work out.

We know that many other churches are in the same position either looking for an interim, a part time minister, or a called minister. It may just be that there is a lack of people in the ministry at this time to fill all these positions. We have interviewed candidates and recently completed or are in the process of completing more. We are hopeful that an interim pastor will be in place by late February or early March.

We have also been searching for a shorter-term bridge minister or pulpit supply for Sunday services, reaching out to numerous candidates and have secured pulpit supply for February 5, 12 and 19. We look forward to welcome these ministers and thank them for helping us during this transitional time. The pastoral relations committee and the deacons will continue to work to find clergy coverage until an interim minister is in place. We appreciate your understanding during this time of transition.

Search Committee

We have put together a great group of members to be on the search committee to go through the process of finding our next called Pastor. These members will be officially voted in at our annual meeting on February 12. It is a great mixture of young and seasoned members, men and women, as well as newer and long time members. I want to personally thank each of them for agreeing to take on this very important work. The prospective members are as follows: Gail Bergan, Mary Clark, Beau Doherty, Jeff Fraulino, Beth Gould-Ruitto, Mike Klick, Elaine Law, Rob Lentz, Kristin Medvecky, Karen Rettich, Judy Thompson, and Louise Wright.

In closing I want to thank the pastoral relations committee for all the hard work they have been putting in to try to find an interim minister, talk to potential members of the search committee, locate pulpit supply, and many other tasks needed to help during this time. Please understand it will not be the same without Jane as our leader, but change is okay. Change means new ways of doing things. Change can be scary at times. Change is also exciting. While we go through this period from one minister until we can call a new settled pastor, please embrace this time and ask yourself what you can do to help and get involved to make this time productive and positive. As always let us continue to be the loving and compassionate congregation that we have been for so long and will continue to be moving forward.

Pastoral Care

In the event you or a member of your family is in need of pastoral care during this time of transition, please call the Church Office. The phone messages will be checked daily.

Joe

Celebrating Chocolate for the last time!



25th Annual Mid-Winter Chocolate Fest

February 4, 2023

1:00 - 4:30 p.m.

By Nancy Johnson

Our final Chocolate Fest is almost here and we thank you in advance for whatever help you can provide. Here are some of those ways:

- ♥ **Contribute to our Baked Sale Booth:** Chocolate, non-chocolate and gluten free items of any kind would be great.
- ♥ **Best Sellers:** Cookies, Pies, Breads If you need valentine bags to package your items, please speak to Nancy as we have a supply we should use up.
- ♥ **Candy donations** of fudge, brittle, toffee or other creations are welcomed.
- ♥ **Come and shop** and as always monetary donations are always accepted and appreciated. Checks would be made out to the Women's Fellowship.
- ♥ **Help clean up!** This will happen at 4:30 p.m. so stop by and give us a hand.

CHOCOLATE FEST BAKERS TAKE NOTE

Baked goods items can be brought to the church on Friday, February 3 from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. or Saturday morning between 9:30 and 11:30 a.m. **IMPORTANT-** Please label your donations with name of item and if it contains nuts, the kind of nut you used!! Also, feel free to be creative in your packaging.

CHOCOLATE FEST WORKERS TAKE NOTE

1. Wear festive Valentine colors (red, pink, white) or hearts of any kind. Be sure to look for your name tag when you arrive.
2. All workers are asked to not park at church as we need to allow ample parking for our customers. Carpool, get dropped off, or park at Gildersleeve School or the professional building.
3. All workers should arrive by 12:15 p.m. unless otherwise instructed and please note that the fellowship hall door will be locked at 12:45 p.m. due to the fact that customers in the past have been arriving early. We will all gather in the fellowship hall at 12:50 p.m. for a moment of prayer before the Fest begins.
4. Workers are asked to help pick up their area as the day progresses to make cleanup go faster at the end.



Women's Fellowship Meeting

Sunday, February 26, 2023

Following Worship

All women are invited to the first meeting of the new year to be held in the meeting room across from the church office following the worship service and after you enjoy a brief time at coffee hour. This meeting will be spent evaluating the last Mid-Winter Chocolate Fest and discussing what new fundraiser might take its place. We will also spend time talking about what the future of Women's Fellowship will look like. Your thoughts and suggestions are always needed and appreciated. We hope to see many of you there!



SPECIAL PARKING REQUEST TO WORSHIP ATTENDEES

As you enter the driveway leading to the church parking lot, there are several parking spaces on the left side of the driveway. If you are able bodied, please do not park in these spaces on Sunday mornings, leaving them open for worshippers who need closer parking due to health or mobility issues.

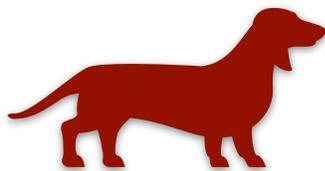
Thank you for your assistance in making worship attendance possible for all!

News for Children and Youth

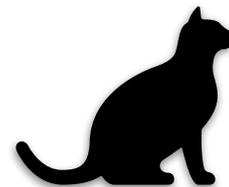
The Church School and Infant/Toddler Care Schedule is as follows. Please note that dates are subject to change, and each month's schedule will appear in the monthly *Belfry Chimes* issues.

February 5 and 19

March 5, 19, April 2, 9, 23, May 7, 21, June 4, 11



Church School Mission Project "Penny Challenge"



The Penny Challenge is a fun way to collect funds for a mission project which will be decided upon by the Church School children. **Throughout the month of February**, two containers will be located in Fellowship Hall. One will be labeled **DOGS** and one will be labeled **CATS**.

Bring your spare change with you when you come to the church,
and drop some money in the container of your choice.
Even though it is called "Penny" Challenge, donations of nickels, dimes,
quarters, and even dollar bills are welcome!
The winner will be announced in March.

A Week At Silver Lake Is A Great Way to Make Summer Memories

Silver Lake is the Connecticut camp that is operated by the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, and is located in beautiful Sharon, Connecticut. One-week camp sessions are available for students entering 4th grade in September through High School. Applications are now available and registration may be completed online at www.silverlakect.org. Financial aid is available.

For more information, visit the Silver Lake website or contact Ann Labby.

“God’s Work ~ Our Hands” Returns on April 30

“God’s Work ~ Our Hands” is coming back!!!! Remember that striking “sea of blue” in Fellowship Hall when 80 volunteers of all ages showed their enthusiasm, kindness and compassion to support those who needed a helping hand? **The Missions Board** is back again to sponsor this project on Sunday, April 30, 2023.

Let’s see and feel the blue “electric” spark that permeated our church that day! It was a powerful, energizing day when everyone shared their gifts and talents by reaching out to the community and genuinely “made a difference” to so many people!

If you know of someone in need of yardwork or simple carpentry tasks, please contact Karen Faass. (faass@comcast.net) More information will follow as we move toward the date of April 30.

Mark your calendar now for April 30! Thank you!

Personal Hygiene Items Being Collected for the Portland Senior Center

The Missions Board continues to collect sanitary and hygiene items for the Portland Senior Center. Please consider donating feminine hygiene products, adult diapers, deodorant, toothpaste and toothbrushes. There is a collections box located in Fellowship Hall for this ongoing “mission”. Thank You!

A Note of Thanks From the Jahnke Family

We have been overwhelmed by the kindness of our family, friends, church family, preschool families, and the greater community during the past month. Our son, Aiden, was suddenly diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia in early January and was hospitalized at CCMC. People have been so generous with calls, texts, meals, gift cards, care packages and prayers. The love and support we received is truly appreciated more than you will ever know. This is a scary time and being surrounded by the people we love has made this difficult news more bearable. We have a long road ahead of us as treatment will last at least two years, but we are ready for the uphill climb thanks to the wonderful people in our life. Aiden is currently receiving outpatient treatments under the amazing care of the staff at CCMC. We ask for prayers of healing and strength as we begin this journey.

In gratitude,
The Jahnke Family

Editor’s note: Aiden joined the church with the Confirmation Class of 2022.



Thank you to all who responded with a pledge during our annual Stewardship campaign. As of January 15, we have received nearly \$175,000 in pledges. Your generosity is greatly appreciated!

For anyone that has not yet pledged, we are still prayerfully receiving pledges into February.

A note from Nancy Johnson:

In the January 20 issue of the Rivereast, Editor Mike Thompson included news of our last Chocolate Fest in his weekly column. In case you missed it, here is what he said.

“Now this is sad. After 25 years, the annual Mid-Winter Chocolate Fest hosted by the Women’s Fellowship of the First Congregational Church in Portland, is coming to a close. I’ve never been to the festival, but I’ve often thought about it. Every year, it sounds like such a delight – and this year seems like no exception.

The festival will be held Saturday, Feb. 4, from 1-4:30 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall of the church, which is located at 554 Main St. in Portland. And if you come, you better come hungry (and maybe don’t tell your dentist.)

The event will feature a Chocolate Mousse Café, a takeout-only booth where one can purchase a variety of delectable desserts including the wonderful-sounding Double Truffle “Black Beast,” a Lemon Truffle Pie and Turtle Cheesecake.

There will also be a Baked Goods Booth, offering a variety of breads including cardamom, muffins, bars, cookies, and pies in both chocolate and non-chocolate flavors. Also, the Candy Booth will have an assortment of items including English toffee, candy coated pretzels, chocolate covered cherries, candy rose bouquets, and lollipops in all shapes and sizes.

And there’s more than just food on the menu. With Feb. 14 just around the corner, there will be a Valentine’s Craft Booth, featuring gift mugs, small gift baskets for all ages, jewelry and unique greeting cards. The children’s area will include gift items and a combination craft/grab bag. New this year will be a sale room where one will find a variety of items including vintage treasures.

Why is this delicious, and fun, festival ending after this year? Simply put, “many of the women are aging, as am I,” said Nancy Johnson, who’s the chairperson on the fest.

While the festival is always a February event – just in time for Valentine’s Day – preparation for it of course begins well ahead of time. Johnson said she makes most of the candy and all of the lollipops, and begins doing so in December. “I would like to finally have a holiday season when I don’t have to think about February.” She quipped.

Plus, she added, “I am the kind of person who likes variety in my life. Therefore, before I get too old, I would love to try something new and use my creative gifts in other ways.”

I certainly can’t blame her for any of that, though I am sad to see the event go. And it sounds like she is too. “I would love to have someone step forward to take it over, but that doesn’t seem to be in the cards,” she told me.

Johnson said she’s hopeful Women’s Fellowship will have something new in the future – but in the meantime, she’ll have years of memories to look back on. “It sincerely has been a blessing to offer an event that brings so much joy into people’s lives,” Johnson said.

So, if you have a sweet tooth itching to be indulged – or even if you just want a fun afternoon out – head on over to First Congregational Church Feb 4. Like I said, it sounds like a delight.”

The First Congregational Church of Portland, CT

United Church of Christ

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Our congregation is open and affirming.

No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.