

THE BELFRY CHIMES



We Prepare to Bid Farewell to Pastor Jane Hawken

Rev. Jane Hawken accepted the call to become the minister of The First Congregational Church of Portland on February 1, 2006, and for the past 17 years has served this congregational with grace and compassion, and has been a witness to God's presence among us. She has helped us grow spiritually and encouraged us to be faithful followers of Jesus in our daily lives.

We have benefitted from Pastor Jane's guidance through the ebb and flow of congregational life. Her inspirational sermons have called us to be our best selves and to always keep God at the center of our lives. Her guidance has been ever present as we embraced becoming an "open and affirming" church, and as we took the lead to create the Portland Refugee Resettlement Group to welcome an Afghan refugee family to America. Her focus on helping the congregation remain relevant during the pandemic was unwavering in the face of unprecedented challenges.

We rejoice that Jane Hawken answered the call to minister among us, and we send her into retirement with our love and best wishes! Please join us on January 22, 2023, for worship and a celebration of Rev. Jane Hawken's career in pastoral ministry.

Retirement Events
To Honor
Rev. Jane Hawken

January 22, 2023

Worship Service
10:00 a.m.

Luncheon
11:45-ish

Celebratory Program
Following Luncheon

* Luncheon reservations
due by January 8

A Farewell Message from Pastor Jane Hawken

Dear Friends,

The month of January is named after Janus, the ancient Roman god of all beginnings. Janus was depicted in art as having a head with two faces looking in opposite directions. Janus had the ability to look to the past and look to the future, which is evocative of the month of the January when we look back and look ahead.

I didn't choose the month of January for retirement with Janus in mind. As I have previously shared, retiring on January 31, 2023 brings me to a full 17 years of serving as your pastor having started on February 1, 2006, and a complete 39 years in the pastoral ministry having begun on February 1, 1984.

That said, Janus does seem instructive as this is a time to look back and look ahead. I look back on 17 wonderful years of ministry at the First Congregational Church of Portland.

- ✦ We have worshipped and worked and learned together.
- ✦ We have engaged in mission projects and outreach work, acts of hospitality and expressions of kindness.
- ✦ We have enjoyed fellowship, fundraisers, concerts, programs, retreats, and classes.
- ✦ We have tended to our building and grounds, accomplished major renovations, and created the Memorial Garden.
- ✦ We have celebrated (over) 300 years of church heritage and history.
- ✦ We have strengthened various forms of communication and have launched an online worship presence.
- ✦ We have faced the challenges of the pandemic with resolve and hopefulness.
- ✦ We have participated in ecumenical and interfaith ventures and worship services.
- ✦ We have nurtured the children and youth in the congregation while also being open to the ways they have taught and inspired the adults.
- ✦ We have observed the liturgical year with its meaningful seasons, including solemn days and celebratory ones.
- ✦ We have shared the sacraments of baptism and communion, and gathered at the poignant times of weddings and funerals, Confirmation Sunday, and New Member Sunday.
- ✦ We have laughed and cried and thus lived out the Apostle Paul's exhortation to the first century congregation in Rome: "to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep."

In short, we have been a community of faith with struggles and successes, but mostly with a shared vision to "be the church" and follow Jesus who calls us to love God and others – especially the disenfranchised.

And now we look ahead. I look ahead to a new life without pastoral duties, but hopefully with a pastor's heart as I seek to grow in compassion, generosity, and faith. And you, the church's members and friends, look ahead to new leadership and new ways of working and worshipping together while retaining the core mission as stated above to "follow Jesus who calls us to love God and others – especially the disenfranchised."

As you look back on 2022 in your own life, do so with gratitude and if needed, with forgiveness. As you look ahead to 2023, do so with optimism and openness. Whether looking back or looking ahead, remember Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

God bless you in all the days ahead!

Jane

A Message from Church President Joe Aresco

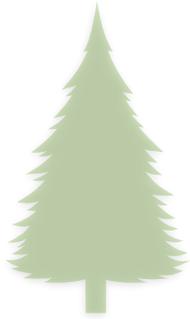
As we say goodbye to 2022 and welcome 2023, it is certainly a transitional and exciting time for our church. This month we will say goodbye to Jane and thank her for her wonderful ministry with us. We then begin our transition to a new called minister.

While our search for an interim (transitional) minister continues, we also plan to form the search committee to begin the process of calling a settled minister. The plan is to put forth and approve the members of a search committee at our annual meeting in February so they may begin their work this spring. While no dates are certain and this process must be thorough, the best estimate of a time frame for a new called minister would be roughly 12-18 months.

As we enter this year with perhaps some apprehension and uncertainty, I also feel it is a time of excitement. Although change isn't always easy, it does offer a time to look at who we are as a church family, how we do things, and where we want to go as we move forward. Certainly the church of today is different from the church of 25 or 50 years ago. It is this challenge we face and with the help of the wonderful members of our church congregation we will navigate our way forward with excitement, enthusiasm and love.

I wish you all a Happy New Year.

Joe



THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY

On Christmas Eve, the offering from both services totaled \$1,625.
The Jumbo Christmas Card donations totaled \$140.

**THESE OFFERINGS TOTALING \$1,765 HAVE BEEN DONATED
TO THE PORTLAND FUEL BANK!**

The Giving Tree adorned our sanctuary this December with festive lights and gift tags as we continued our tradition of helping Ruth Maio and her staff at the Portland Senior Center bring Christmas cheer and joy to many families.

This tradition continues because of your time, heartfelt kindness, and the thought of a child opening a gift on Christmas morning and imagining the excitement, laughter, joy and “magic” of Christmas ~ all that a child should receive on this special day.

“Thank you” for joining our mission of making someone’s Christmas a little more special, and “thank you” for your generosity to help others experience the magic of Christmas.

The tree looked beautiful with handmade ornaments from the First Church Nursery School children, and thank you to Amy Jahnke and Laura Winakor for helping us keep the tree adorned.

Christmas Sweets & Treats Holiday Sale Was A SWEET SUCCESS

Thank you to everyone who helped make the Church Annual Cookie Sale a sweet success!

Your cookies and Christmas related donations were very much appreciated.

Special thanks to Robin Richardson and Nancy Johnson, who took donations of “items no longer needed” by church members and created treasures for sale!

Including the sales on the day of the event and the following two Sundays, the total amount raised was **\$1,456.25**, exceeding the amounts raised in past years.

Celebrating Chocolate for the last time!



25th Annual Mid-Winter Chocolate Fest February 4, 2023, 1:00 - 4:30 p.m.

By Nancy Johnson

The world of Chocolate is once again happening in our church, but for the LAST TIME! Twenty-five years has been a good run, but it is now time to say good-bye to chocolate and maybe hello to a new fundraiser for the Women's Fellowship. Thank you in advance for whatever help you might be able to provide to make this last one a sweet success.

This is what we need now:

Gifts that keep on giving! The Women's Fellowship would love to recycle your unwanted Christmas presents and new or hardly ever used gift items especially Valentine related ones. Look for the decorated box in the fellowship hall for your contributions. These will be used to help create baskets. And yes, we will take that box of Chocolates off your hands. Deadline for these items will be Wednesday, January 11.

Basket Donations! Now is the time to start thinking about what type of basket you will contribute to our 25th annual festival. Please let Nancy Johnson know as soon as possible what your pleasure is. She can be reached at 860 342-4098 or email her at nlj1952@comcast.net. So far, we have the following:

"BEE" MY VALENTINE – Faith Fraulino
A STEW LEONARDS SURPRISE – Melissa Vibberts
SOME "BUGGY" LOVES YOU – Nancy Johnson
SUPER BOWL BASKET – Margaret Stewart
MADE IN CONNECTICUT – Beth Gould-Ruitto & Becca Hall

Anyone up to doing a Chocolate Lovers Basket? Other ideas include: Tea, Coffee, Children's Activity, Bird Lovers, Kitchen Comfort, Picnic, Breakfast, the possibilities are endless!

This is what we will need closer to the event:

- ♥ Workers for the event! We will need people to work at the booths, car parkers and greeters. There is a sign-up sheet in the fellowship hall or contact Nancy and she will add your name.
- ♥ People to help set-up following worship on January 29.
- ♥ Candy donations like fudge and other new creations would add so much to this booth.
- ♥ Baked goods of all kinds, chocolate and/or non-chocolate. **Best sellers:** Cookies, Pies, and Breads, but items of all kinds will be very much appreciated. Feel free to be creative with packaging.

Please note that baked goods and candy can be brought to the church on Friday, February 3 from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. or Saturday morning between 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.

In advance, I would like to thank everyone for the many ways you will be helping to make this final festival a celebratory and memorable one.

 Nancy



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.** It has come to our attention that some members who have difficulty walking the distance from the back parking lot to the front entrance have been unable to attend worship services due to the lack of parking near the entrance.

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

YOUR CHURCH NEEDS YOU !!

If you receive a call from the Nominating Committee asking you to serve on a board or committee for 2023, please prayerfully consider the request and say yes if at all possible.

If you haven't yet turned in your pledge card for 2023, please prayerfully consider your response and return the card as soon as possible. Just as you need to know your income to plan your home budget, the church needs to estimate income in order to plan the budget for the coming year.

If you are able, please come to the Chocolate Fest Workshop on January 11 at 6:30 p.m. There is something for everyone to do at the workshop; you need only to be "willing" and being "crafty" is not necessary!

COME ONE, COME ALL ... TO THE CHOCOLATE FEST WORKSOP!

DATE: Wednesday, January 11, 2023

TIME: 6:30 p.m.

TYPE: Chocolate Fest Workshop



Why is Chocolate a blessing?

- 1) The cacao tree that gives us chocolate only bears fruit within a narrow band of approximately 10 degrees of the equator.
- 2) It takes 400 cacao beans just to make one pound of chocolate.
- 3) Each year, the cacao tree produces roughly 6,000 blossoms. Only about 30 will eventually bear fruit.

With statistics like these, you can see why many consider chocolate a blessing indeed!

Chocolate has blessed our life here at church for the last 25 years and hopefully it will continue to do so at this last one. However, it will only be a blessing with your help. Please join us for this annual workshop as we prepare for our annual festival. You will be able to choose how you would like to contribute from a variety of simple tasks. There is always something simple to do, so don't stay away because you are not a "crafter." Hope to see you there!

News for Children and Youth

The Board of Christian Education is looking forward to offering our church school students an exciting year of programs and activities in 2023! 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.

January 1, 15, 22, 29. January 22 program will be held in the upstairs classroom.

February 5 and 19

March 5 and 19

April 2, 9 (Easter activities), and 23

May 7, 21

June 4, 11 (Celebration Sunday)

Christmas Pageant

What a wonderful gift we received with the beautiful Christmas Pageant! It was filmed live outside and shown during worship on December 18, and is available on the church's YouTube channel. Thank you to all the participants.

The Church School Children are learning the lessons of generosity!

The donations of books, games and activities collected by the children for the Connecticut Children's Medical Center will help hospitalized children pass the time. Thank you to Monique France for delivering these gifts.

The UNICEF collection boxes enabled our church to donate \$154.90 to UNICEF! Great Job!!!

In 2022 the children raised money from weekly collections and fundraisers. They voted to donate the money to the families of the fallen Bristol Police officers, Connecticut Humane Society and the Portland Fuel Bank.

January Collection for Portland Food Bank: During the month of January, the church school children are collecting new socks, new or slightly used hats, mittens, and gloves for children and adults to be given to the Portland Food Bank for distribution to families in Portland. The donation box is in Fellowship Hall.

JUMBO PRETZEL SALE: JANUARY 29, 2023

Please support the Jumbo Pretzel Sale, with proceeds being donated to a charity of the children's choice. Plain, salt or cinnamon pretzels will be available during coffee hour for the bargain price of \$3.00.

The First Congregational Church of Portland, CT

United Church of Christ

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The Reverend Jane Hawken, pastor