

The Belfry Chimes

May 2023 Dates to Remember

Worship Services, 10:00 a.m.

May 7, Communion Worship Service

May 14, Mother's Day Service

**May 21, Worship Service followed
by Second Hour Renewal Gathering**

May 28, Memorial Day Service

**Tuesday, May 2, 6:30 p.m.
Church Council Meeting**

**Saturday, May 6, 9:00 a.m.
Spring Clean Up Day**

**Wednesday, May 10, 6:00 p.m.
Board of Deacons Meeting**

**Tuesday, May 16, 7:00 p.m., Zoom
Membership Committee Meeting**

**Monday, May 22, 6:00 p.m.
Women's Fellowship
Pot Luck Dinner and Meeting**

**"May flowers are opening
And leaves unfolding free;
There are bees in every blossom
And birds on every tree."**

by Emily Brontë

From the Desk of Church President Joe Aresco

As the weather continues to warm, I wanted to highlight some Church activities. Let me begin with the wonderful Lenten Series led by Reverend Julie; she certainly jumped right in with both feet and we thank her for the terrific 3-part Lenten series that she led. I also wanted to just say how wonderful it was to see the Church filled for Easter Sunday. We had some new faces and some new activities including the beautiful flower cross wreath.

As we continue our transition time period you may have already or will be noticing some other changes. This may be to the worship service or other church activities. All of this is part of the interim period. Please understand that many people will have different opinions regarding these changes. Some of these may be wonderful and may become part of our congregational life moving forward and some may not be so well received and will fall off. But it is important to embrace the idea of change and new ideas.

Another very important part of the transition process will take place through a series of "Renewal Gatherings." Please refer to the letter from Reverend Julie regarding the topics and sequence of these meetings. I encourage all of you to attend in person or via zoom. They will be held in May and June and then again in the fall. These discussions will be important to the entire congregation, especially to the new Search Committee as they will use the information from these meetings to help complete the church profile in our search for a new settled pastor. So the more input, different thoughts and ideas, and varying discussions we can have on all these topics will help us define who we are and where we want to be moving forward as a Congregation.

On a final note, the formal search committee has met and will be meeting again soon to continue their work toward creating a church profile and eventually recommend to the congregation a new settled pastor. There is no set time frame for this process and in general they are doing some background work now and also will be using information gathered during the renewal meetings and other ways to create the profile. We will keep everyone updated on the progress as their work continues. In general, we would think the profile will be completed in early 2024 and then a search for potential candidates will occur, culminating in a recommendation from the committee to council and then finally a Church vote to approve the calling of a new pastor. More details on that process will come forward as we get closer to that time.

In closing I wish you all a wonderful spring season and hope to see you all soon.

Joe Aresco

A Message from Pastor Julie Olmsted

Dear Friends,

In May we will begin our Interim work together. This is a process undertaken by the church body, leadership and interim pastor. It is different for each congregation because each congregation is different. You are basically a healthy church, with minimum conflict. You are not divided. You work together well. AND, this is a time for renewal and recharging, becoming flexible and ready for a new chapter of growth, creating and sustaining a new future. That means, this interim process could be a lot of fun and produce a lot of good fruit!

We will be calling the times we meet together “renewal gatherings,” because that’s the intention of our work together. Think of it as updating, a little remodeling, and making ready for something wonderful. We will be serious and light-hearted, truthful and kind, sober and supportive. Everyone is invited and encouraged to attend all gatherings that they can. We will take on one topic at a time, with a summary of each previous gathering and a make-up session to wrap it all up at the end. Below are the topics we will be looking deeply at for the first two, discovering what it is the Spirit might reveal.

**Gathering #1: Sunday, May 21, “Second Hour” 11:15 a.m.
“Celebrating the Past/Appreciative Inquiry”**

All the wonderful things about church in general and this church in particular that you love and wish to especially hold on to.

**Gathering #2: Tuesday evening, June 13, “Pie Gathering” 7:00 p.m.
“The Character of Your Church”**

Who is this church, really? Besides being friendly (which every church claims), what are some things that are special markers for this particular Body of Christ? How might the church stretch and grow and in what areas? What promises could you make?

We will pick up again in September, with an emphasis on vision, mission and commitment. We want to answer generally the following: *Who are we? Who is our neighbor? What is God calling us to be and do?*

There will be a review of everything at the conclusion of our gatherings, probably four or five. We will have different times to accommodate different schedules. If you have something you would like to say, ask, or explore, please email me. Your participation is important and requested.

With love and respect,

Pastor Julie

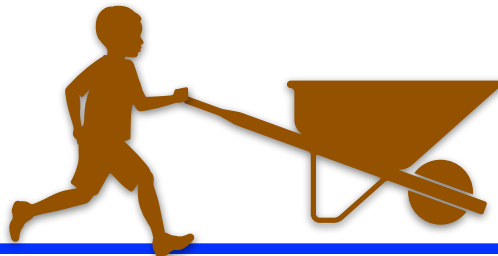
Outdoor Clean-Up Day: Saturday, May 6

LET'S TRY AGAIN ON MAY 6!

The Board of Facilities Management has set a date of Saturday, May 6, to once again, try to clean up the church yard. We were rained out in April. Two of the Board members are not available on May 6, so help by others would be greatly appreciated.

We start at 9:00 a.m. and work until the jobs are completed. Linda provides coffee and homemade snacks. There will be raking and pruning to be done, possibly some bush trimming and daffodil removal, and mulch to be spread.

Bring yard tools such as rakes, blowers, pruners and tarps. There are only a few tools at the church. **Please join us if you have an hour or two to share on May 6.**



Roof Replacement Update

From Linda Cunningham,
Facilities Chairperson

I am very pleased to announce that, as of April 25, we have reached approximately 93% of our \$35,000 goal to re-shingle the sanctuary roof and repair water damage inside the church. This is wonderful news, and as a "can do" church, there is confidence we will reach the goal. The support for this necessary major repair has come from only 24 family units. If you have not already made a donation, please consider showing support for your church with a gift in any amount. All it will take is small checks by at least that many more members to make this endeavor truly successful. Donations can be put into the collection plate or mailed to the church indicating roof repair fund. Sincere thanks to all who have or will participate.

News for Children and Youth

Church School is available for children in kindergarten through 8th grade. Children will begin their morning in the worship service with their families, and go to Fellowship Hall for Church School following the Children's Message.

Infant/Toddler Care will be provided in the infant/toddler area in Fellowship Hall beginning at 9:45. Parents may bring young children directly to Fellowship Hall before worship begins or anytime during worship.

SIGN UP POSTER for Church school teachers and helpers for the coming year is located in the Fellowship Hall. Please consider how you might be able to help. Thank you!

SAVE THE DATE! SUNDAY, JUNE 11, 2023: CHRISTIAN EDUCATION SUNDAY

On this date, the children have prepared a special program for us as we celebrate Christian Education Sunday. This date also marks the retirement of Ann Labby, our Christian Education Director, and we will honor her for 18 years of service to the church. More details will follow.



GRADUATION TIME IS COMING!

We want to acknowledge all the 2023 graduates among us ... please send names and details to the church office or call Margaret in the office with information.

860-342-3244

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP POT LUCK AND MEETING: MONDAY, MAY 22 at 6:00 p.m.

By Nancy Johnson



Great attention is given to the foods we use to nourish and sustain our bodies, but equally important are the thoughts we use to nourish and energize our mind, spirit, and soul. Just as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, seeds and nuts are preferable choices over hamburgers, fried foods and donuts, so too exist preferable nourishing foods for the soul. It does to matter how physically fit our bodies are if we do not have tranquility, peace, and harmony within our souls.

Please join us for this lovely evening of delicious food that will nourish your body and your soul. We would ask that you bring your favorite hot dish or salad to nourish your body for the dinner portion while the beverage and dessert will be provided. Following the dinner, we will have a short program that will nourish your soul and then we will conduct our very important business meeting.

"Food is not enough. There must be food for the soul."

- Dorothy Day

A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR A STUDENT SEEKING COMMUNITY SERVICE HOURS

The Memorial Garden Committee and the Nursery School are looking for someone to mow the grass. The areas include inside the playscape fence for the Nursery School and inside the boxwood hedges for the Memorial Garden. Ideally if there is a high school student out there looking for community service hours, this is a low commitment job of maybe an hour a week. Job starts immediately and will continue until the fall as needed. Please email amy.jahnkefcportland@gmail.com with questions.

An Update from the Pastoral Search Committee

We have had our first meeting and have discussed some preliminary goals. We are tasked with listening for God's guidance throughout this process, listening to our Congregation and to the community at large. Pastor Julie will be leading renewal gatherings which will be important for everyone to attend. We need to know where our church is now, but also importantly, where we see it in the future. We ask for your prayers as we begin this important work.

In Christ,

Gail Bergan, Mary Clark, Beau Doherty, Jeff Fraulino, Beth Gould-Ruitto, Cari Klick, Mike Klick, Elaine Law, Rob Lentz, Kristin Medvecky, Karen Rettich, Judy Thompson, Louise Wright

Have You Wondered About Our Contributions to the Conference?

In our church budget, there is a line item called Conference - Proportional Giving. Have you ever wondered what that means and how those funds are used by the Conference? Our church is a member of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ (SNEUCC) and as such, we are part of an extensive network of local churches. The conference provides support and guidance to us, as evidenced during a time of transition as we are currently experiencing. They offer sharing, training and programming opportunities for church staff and leaders, and they are uniquely positioned to respond quickly when tragedy strikes as humanitarian and mission needs arise around the world. And of course, our youth benefit from the beautiful Silver Lake summer programs and confirmation retreats.

In the words of the Rev. Dr. David Cleaver Bartholomew, Director of Stewardship for the SNEUCC:

"Together, we will continue to respond to God's call to mission and ministry and being a beacon of hope. Together, we will continue to be united as the body of Christ known as the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ. May God continue to bless you and your congregation in your various ministries even as you continue to be a blessing to others!"

Please A FEW MINUTES to watch this expression of thanks and gratitude from our SNEUCC Treasurer, Mr. Calvin Price: <https://vimeo.com/819978362>



“God’s Work ~ Our Hands” A Great Success Again this Year!

The Fellowship Hall was abuzz with excitement on Sunday, April 30, as more than 70 church members and friends prepared to go into the community to participate in the second “God’s Work ~ Our Hands” day of service. Everyone gathered (pictured above) and began the morning by raising voices to the African American spiritual “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me.” This was followed by inspirational words and a time of prayer led by the Mission Board ultra-organized leader Karen Faass. Volunteers received their assignments and were sent on their way to bear witness to God’s love in our community.

Teams of volunteers accomplished lawn clean-up at six homes in Portland before the skies opened in pouring rain. Led by Kasha, a group of singers ranging in age over 9 decades entertained residents at Portland Care and Rehabilitation Center, much to the delight of those in attendance.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch (the church), the hum of sewing machines filled the Fellowship Hall as a cadre of seamstresses and their helpers made dresses for the Dress A Girl project. The scent of fresh flowers filled the Fellowship Hall from the corner where beautiful bouquets were being arranged for delivery to the homes of some church members.

At the end of the morning, the volunteers returned to the church for a hearty lunch prepared by the kitchen crew. All in all, it was a day when indeed our hands did God’s work!

The First Congregational Church of Portland, CT
United Church of Christ
554 Main Street, Portland, CT 06480
860-342-3244
Email: office@firstchurchportlandct.org
Website: www.firstchurchportlandct.org
Facebook: The First Congregational Church of Portland, CT
YouTube Channel: First Church of Portland, CT
Interim Minister: Rev. Julie Olmsted
Pastor Julie's Email: jgolmsted.86@gmail.com
Pastor Julie's Phone: 937-409-1375 (Please call before 8 p.m., except in emergencies)

**Our congregation is open and affirming.
No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey,
You are welcome here.**