

# THE BELFRY CHIMES

## O Come, All Ye Faithful

Throughout the season of Advent, we will light the candles on the Advent wreath as we uplift Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Sunday worship services begin at 10:00 a.m.

All services will be available on the church's YouTube channel.

*December 3, The First Sunday of Advent: Hope*

We will welcome Rev. Dr. Barry McCarthy as our Intentional Interim Minister.

*December 10, The Second Sunday of Advent: Peace*

This service will include music by the Bell Ringers.

*December 13, Christmas Calm at 7:00 p.m.*

*A Service of Music, Reflection and Remembrance*

This simple service features a quiet observance of Christmas and focuses on seeking God's comfort and peace. The service will include readings, prayers, beautiful harp music played by Kasha, and the lighting of candles in remembrance of loved ones.

*December 17, The Third Sunday of Advent: Joy*

This service will include a Christmas Pageant featuring the church school children.

*December 24, The Fourth Sunday of Advent: Love*

The 10:00 a.m. worship service will include music by the Bell Ringers.

The Christmas Fund Offering for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund will be received at this service.

*Christmas Eve, 4:00 and 10:00 p.m.*

The 4:00 service will feature live music by "In CaFlootes", 3 flutes and piano.

The 10:00 candlelight service will feature live music by "Wild Notes" and the Choir.

The Christmas Eve offering will support the Portland Fuel Bank.

*December 31, New Year's Eve*

*A Service of Lessons and Carols*

**A Message from Our New Interim Minister,  
Rev. Dr. Barry McCarthy**

*The hinge of history is  
in a stable in Bethlehem*

My friends in Christ,

I don't know who came up with the little bit of wisdom printed above, but I've always liked how it was stated. The true history of the world is not what we find in history books. That historical record of the past is of little importance compared to the magnitude of the Son of God's birth. The historical record, with its fill of wars, disasters, and diseases, as well as the building up of wondrous things, explorations, and discoveries all pale in comparison to the gift we've each received by the birth of a baby boy named Jesus in Bethlehem.

The world stopped and restarted after that birth. The Holy One of all was revealed to the world, and God's love became known through Jesus. God in Christ came for each of us that day long ago.

It is my joy, as your new intentional interim minister, to be a part of both your congregational journey to new leadership and our individual journeys to know the Lord of that stable in Bethlehem.

As a brief introduction, I grew up in Wallingford, attended Xavier and UConn, and worked for a daily newspaper. In my late 30's I felt called to ministry and attended Lancaster (PA) Theological Seminary (M. Div.) and later Andover Newton Theological School (D. Min.) I've been both a settled pastor and an intentional interim minister in many congregations in CT, RI, MA, and NY. I'm married to my beloved Wendy and live in East Hampton with our two black Labrador Retrievers Molly and Trouble. We have two grown daughters and two grandchildren living out of state.

We all have individual stories to share about life and our faith journeys but, as a congregation, we also have our communal stories of faith together. This Advent and Christmas I invite you to join together once again to partake in the wonder of the story and reclaim it as our own. Gather in worship and participate in the joyful celebration of a wonderful miracle. Let us step beyond the history of the everyday, and walk with the One who came for each of us in that stable in Bethlehem.

Blessings of the season,

*BARRY*



**Please join us on Sunday,  
December 3 for worship at  
10:00, followed by Coffee  
Hour, as we welcome  
Rev. Dr. Barry McCarthy as  
our Intentional Interim  
Minister.**

## A Parting Message of Gratitude and Love from Pastor Julie Olmsted

Dear friends,

I have been overwhelmed by the show of thanks and love you have given me in the past few days. Sunday's service and coffee hour was such a celebration of connection, appreciation, and respect. From my whole heart, I thank you and will hold you all in prayer in the coming days and months. From the music by the dear and unmatched Kasha, to the gorgeous card made by the children, to the amazing cake that I ate entirely too much of, to all the gifts, cards, and blessed words you have shared with me privately, I cannot tell you how much it has meant to me.

To my savvy, competent and compassionate partner in crime Margaret, what a GEM and a GIFT you have been to me! Margaret and I were kind of like the Bobbsey Twins here in the office. We have so much in common and would often even show up in the same colors and styles. More importantly, we worked together seamlessly. You helped me so much and I always looked forward to coming to work!

Thank you to all in leadership who have been supportive and partnered with me in the short time that we had. You KNOW who you are, so no need to mention names!

I am sorry I was not able to stay with you until your settled pastor was found. Just remember how much I have enjoyed being with you, laughing with you, praying with you, and praising God together. You are dear to my heart, and I have nothing but gratitude for the time we have shared.

You are a wonderful church and with faith and speaking the truth in love (with each other and everyone), you will find a pastor who sees the light in you as I do.

All good things from above to you now and in the future.

Yours in faith and love,

Pastor Julie



Pastor Julie's final Sunday at our church began with no heat in the sanctuary, and the worship service being moved to the Fellowship Hall. The morning ended with a festive reception in her honor, with attendees gathered as church president Joe Aresco thanked Pastor Julie for her inspiration during the first phase of our church's "in-between time."

## It's Beginning to Look A Lot Like Christmas at First Church

### The Giving Tree

Helping the Portland Food Bank make certain that all the children of Portland have gifts under the tree on Christmas morning is a time-honored tradition for The First Congregational Church of Portland. Our church helps by collecting gifts for a number of families in need.

The Giving Tree adorns the sanctuary with festive lights and gift tags. To participate, simply remove a tag from the tree and replace the tag with an ornament made by the First Church Nursery School children. Record the tag number and your name on the "sign-out clipboard" located by the tree. The tag will tell you the age and gender of the person as well as a suggested toy or size of clothing.

Unwrapped gifts labeled with the original tag need to be placed under the tree by December 17.

**Thank you for helping to make a joyous Christmas for those in need.**

### Christmas Sweets and Treats Holiday Sale Saturday, December 9, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

**Your help is needed to make this event a  
successful fundraiser for the church!!**



How can you help?

- Make several dozen Christmas cookies and package them a half dozen to a bag or container.
- Other sweets are also appreciated: lollipops, candy covered pretzels, spiced nuts, fudge, toffee. It is not just cookies anymore!
- Please label your contributions: name of cookie, nuts with specific kind/or no nuts or any other important allergy information. Being creative with your packaging helps sell!

**Note:** Your cookie contributions can be dropped off at the church between 3:00 - 7:00 p.m. on Friday, December 8 or Saturday morning, December 9 anytime 8:30 a.m. and after.

Thank you in advance for contributing to this popular community event and helping your church out at the same time. Please contact Nancy Johnson or Robin Richardson for more information.

### Come One and All To The Festival of Trees!

Friday evening, December 8, from 5:00 - 7:00 p.m. the fellowship hall will be lit up with a collection of beautiful trees. Bring the family and enjoy viewing the many themed trees including Swedish, USA, Bird, Angel, Wheat Weaving, Farm, Candy Cane, Santa and more.

**Women's Christmas Program**  
**A Festival of Trees and Traditions**  
**Wednesday, December 6**

**6:30 p.m. Tree Viewing Time and 7:00 p.m. Program**



Warm yourself in the Christmas spirit and celebrate the Advent season surrounded by a display of beautifully decorated trees, while listening and sharing (if you wish) stories of your holiday traditions. The fellowship hall will be filled with a variety of themed decorated trees - small, large, tabletop, and wall. (See page 4 article about the Festival of Trees for a sneak preview of the trees you can expect to view.) Please contact Nancy Johnson if you would like to share a themed tree.

There will be an opportunity for attendees to share stories of their traditions, which may be stories of the ornaments you unwrap, the songs you sing, the gifts you give or the recipes you bake each year. Sharing these stories will honor the lives these traditions have touched.

The refreshment table will feature a collection of cookies from those traditional recipes that you must have because Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without it! Just one dozen of your favorite will do. As you bake for the Christmas Sweets and Treats Sale which will be held just three days after this program, set a dozen aside to share for dessert. Please know that if you do not wish to share in any way, you are welcome to come and enjoy the festive evening as you join with others to celebrate the warmth and joy of the holiday season.

**The Christmas Fund for  
the Veterans of the Cross  
and the Emergency Fund**

Each December our church receives the Christmas Fund offering administered by the United Church of Christ, our national denomination. This fund provides pension and health premium supplementation to lower-income retired church workers, emergency assistance to clergy or lay church employees in need, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks to hundreds of annuitants; administered by the Pension Boards of the United Church of Christ.

We will receive donations for the Christmas Fund during the month of December and dedicate the gifts on December 24. Envelopes are located in the pews or gifts may be mailed to church office. Please make checks payable to First Congregational Church earmarked "Christmas Fund."

**Jumbo Christmas Card 2023**

The 2023 Jumbo Christmas Card is about to be unveiled!

Again this year, a beautiful handmade Jumbo Christmas Card will be available in the Narthex and at Coffee Hour for all to sign. How did this tradition begin?

In the mid 1980's, this idea emerged from a Women's Fellowship workshop called "Unplug the Christmas Machine" when attempts were made to simplify the holiday and benefit a local need in the process. Since that time, church members and friends have signed the Jumbo Christmas Card and added a donation to the attached container. The idea is that instead of sending greetings to one another, each person can donate the money that would normally be spent to purchase and mail cards. The donations are collected throughout Advent, and then after Christmas, sent to a local charity determined by Board of Deacons.

Be sure to read the card in the Narthex (and also available at Coffee Hour) to appreciate all who have participated.



## Christmas Flower Dedications

The Flower Committee is once again accepting Christmas dedications for your loved ones. This is your opportunity to put a dedication **in loving memory of, in celebration of or in honor of** loved one in the bulletins for the December 17 and Christmas Eve services, while helping the Portland Food Bank as well.

Flower Committee members will be available to receive your dedications in Fellowship Hall following worship on December 3, 10 and 17. Alternately, you may mail the form and a check made payable to First Congregational Church with "Christmas Flower Dedication" in the memo. The drop box outside of The Nursery School is also available to drop off checks and forms. Please label the envelopes for the "Flower Committee." The cost of dedications is \$10 each. All orders must be placed by December 17.

### Thank you for your support!

Dedication #1: In Celebration of \_\_\_\_ In Honor of \_\_\_\_ In Memory of \_\_\_\_

Names of dedicated persons (please print clearly) \_\_\_\_\_

From (your name): \_\_\_\_\_

Dedication #2: In Celebration of \_\_\_\_ In Honor of \_\_\_\_ In Memory of \_\_\_\_

Names of dedicated persons (please print clearly) \_\_\_\_\_

From (your name): \_\_\_\_\_

Dedication #3: In Celebration of \_\_\_\_ In Honor of \_\_\_\_ In Memory of \_\_\_\_

Names of dedicated persons (please print clearly) \_\_\_\_\_

From (your name): \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of dedications: \_\_\_\_\_

Total cost (\$10 each dedication) \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Donation: \_\_\_\_\_

## REMINDER ABOUT PARKING FOR WORSHIP SERVICES

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 park in the lot behind the church and leave the spaces by the driveway 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!**

## A New Twist for Coffee Hour

A new approach to Coffee Hour is coming your way!

Coffee Hour is an important part of Sunday morning; it is an after-worship opportunity to greet your fellow church members and to engage in conversation while enjoying refreshments before heading home. The Membership Committee recently fashioned a new way for you to help and with less work for all.

A sign up sheet for December and beyond is in Fellowship Hall for you to consider one of four ways you can contribute your time or goodies.

The first way you can help is as host/hostess, and you would be responsible to arrive about half an hour prior to the service to set up the tables with napkins, decorations, plates and cups that are already available in the kitchen. The ground coffee and cream are supplied and in the refrigerator and the coffee maker is usually plugged in and ready to brew.

Three other people would provide the refreshments and before worship begins, dropping them off in the kitchen covered and ready to serve.

1. Cheese squares and a box of crackers
2. A fruit or veggie/dip
3. A "bread" such as a coffee cake, muffins, cookies, bagels, donuts, or slices of a quick bread.

A kid friendly snack and assorted other items including gluten-free choices are also available in the metal cabinet in the kitchen.

Diane Burgess will be of assistance at any time! Please consider how you would like to contribute to this weekly after-church hospitality ministry and sign up or contact Diane. [dianemayburgess@gmail.com](mailto:dianemayburgess@gmail.com)

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**Church School and Infant/Toddler Care** will be available on December 3 and 10. Infant/Toddler care will be offered on December 17. Children will attend worship with their families on December 24 and 31.

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## **Streetfire's 11th Annual Celebration**

Streetfire Ministries will hold its 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Celebration on Saturday, December 16 at 4:00 p.m. at First Church, 190 Court Street in Middletown. This celebration is an invitation to all served by Streetfire Ministries, whether during the "Thursday Night Strikes" or dinners at St. Vincent de Paul, and to welcome them into the holiday spirit with a warm meal and caring heart.

Deacon Wallace Collins asked if our congregation would like to help in providing the following items. They are in need of paper/plastic goods, gift cards (Stop and Shop), blankets (slightly used is fine), toiletries (travel size is fine), and underwear for men and women. Festive individual "candy bags" are also requested as a parting gift to give all patrons who attend the evening's event. If you would like to assist with this event, there is a box set up in Fellowship Hall to receive all donations.

If you would like to serve during the evening, please contact Karen Faass ([faass@comcast.net](mailto:faass@comcast.net)) for more information.

## **Winter Clothes Drive for Portland Food Bank Underway**

There is a collection box for hats, gloves, mittens or socks on the back counter by the piano in Fellowship Hall. Thank you!

## **A Message from the Pastoral Search Committee**

We asked and you listened! Our survey closed on November 12th and we are overjoyed to report that we received 82 submissions from you, our congregation. This essential information will help our committee create a profile of our church that will help us attract the best candidates to interview and ultimately call a new settled pastor for our amazing church. Thank you!

## **Mid-Week Bible Study to Continue**

The mid-week Bible study that was held during November was so well received by participants that it will continue to meet on Wednesday afternoons at 1:00 p.m. in the meeting room across from the church office. This is open to all who wish to attend.

## **Looking Ahead: Mardi Gras Fest to Debut on February 3, 2024**

Mark your calendar for February 3, 2024 for the Mardi Gras Fest, the newest Women's Fellowship Fund Raiser. With Faith Fraulino at the helm, and Jeff Fraulino in the kitchen making the gumbo, you can be sure it will be a fun event with great food!

The success of past such events has been dependent upon the assistance of the entire congregation, so please consider how you might assist and contact Faith at [fkfraulino@sbcglobal.net](mailto:fkfraulino@sbcglobal.net).



# Welcome, New Members!



New members and their children gathered around the celebratory cake during Coffee Hour following the worship service on New Member Sunday. New members joining the church on that day were Ann Snow, Darlene Larson, Jamie Gooch, Stacey and Andy Ariza, Tiffany Dandeneau, Elizabeth Waller, Melissa and Joe Kelley.

## ***The First Congregational Church of Portland, CT***

United Church of Christ

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The Weekly Word Editor: Amy Jahnke

Belfry Chimes Editor: Jeannette Hodge

Intentional Interim Minister: Rev. Dr. Barry McCarthy

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