

THE BELFRY CHIMES

**Please Join Us for
Worship Services
Sunday at 10 a.m.**

December 31

This service will include the hand bells, and we will ring in the new year with our neighbors from Trinity Church and True Vine Church

January 7

**Epiphany Star
Celebration in Fellowship
Hall following worship**

January 14

January 21

January 28

**The Annual Meeting will
be held in Fellowship Hall
following the worship
service.**

Services will be led by
our interim minister,
Rev. Dr. Barry McCarthy



The Adoration of the Magi tapestry dating from 1894 from the Manchester Metropolitan University, England. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Epiphany is the day Christians remember the coming of the Magi to visit Jesus, bringing their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. It occurs on January 6 every year, the 13th day of the Christmas season. The word "epiphany," from the Greek word *epiphania*, means appearance or manifestation.

In New Orleans, Twelfth Night begins another season of celebrations that comes to fulfillment at Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday). Epiphany itself, January 6, becomes the kickoff day for that season, but is also often observed with a full celebration in church, complete with incense, elaborate processions, choral celebrations, and Eucharist.

On Sunday, January 7, we will hold an Epiphany Star Celebration in Fellowship Hall following worship, featuring music, caroling, and festive coffee hour refreshments.

A Message from Pastor Barry McCarthy

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and days of auld lang syne?
And days of auld lang syne, my dear; and days of auld lang syne.
Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and days of auld lang syne?*

*We twa hae run about the braes and pu'd the gowans fine.
We've wandered mony a weary foot, sin' auld lang syne.
Sin' auld lang syne, my dear; sin' auld lang syne,
We've wandered mony a weary foot, sin' auld lang syne.*

*We twa hae sported i' the burn, from morning sun till dine,
But seas between us braid hae roared sin' auld lang syne.
Sin' auld lang syne, my dear; sin' auld lang syne.
But seas between us braid hae roared sin' auld lang syne.*

*And ther's a hand, my trusty friend, and gie's a hand o' thine;
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet, for auld lang syne.
For auld lang syne, my dear; for auld lang syne,
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet, for auld lang syne.*

My friends in Christ,

What in the world does all of that mean? Robert Burns' writing down of the old Scottish song *Auld Lang Syne*, has given us the gift of a song that generations have shared on New Year's Eve. I must say, however, that the lyrics to *Auld Lang Syne*, comprised of contractions of an old Scottish dialect, are not the easiest to comprehend. I've never been quite sure what the heck I've been singing about. However, despite its semantics, the song still makes me reminisce about the people and places I've experienced and the decisions made along the way that have shaped my present.

The start of the New Year is a natural time to reflect on the past and wonder about the future.

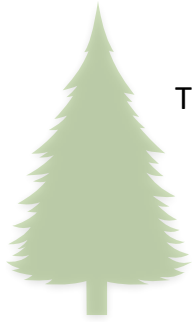
To be among you has been a wonderful blessing of the Spirit! I've thanked God for bringing me to your doorstep and introducing me to a committed and joyous congregation.

As I look forward to the future with you, it is with great anticipation for "the joy not yet revealed." Together, we are on an ever-unfolding journey of discerning God's call to bring the good news of life into all of those places we travel. Where will we travel and what will we accomplish in God's name? We may not know until some future time when we sing "*Auld lang syne*" Till that time, let us move forward to what is in front of us.

May God's blessings be upon each of you in 2024. Cheers!

Glad Tidings and Happy New Year!

Pastor Barry



THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY

The First Congregational Church of Portland is a most generous congregation, in spirit and giving time to help others, as well as in financial generosity. At this time of year, home mailboxes are filled with opportunities to provide financial support to many worthy causes. Thank you to everyone who responded within our church by donating to the various opportunities presented to our congregation.

The Giving Tree that adorned our sanctuary this December with festive lights and 44 gift tags was a sign of our long-standing tradition of providing Christmas gifts for many families. Thank you to everyone who provided gifts for the 22 families represented on our giving tree. And special thanks to Jan Poet who delivered all the gift bags to the Portland Food Bank on December 18, for distribution to the grateful families. “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 Christmas Fund Offering which provides assistance to retired UCC clergy and church workers received \$740 from the collection at our church. This provides much needed support to those who have given so much during their ministry through the United Church of Christ.

The Christmas Eve Offerings received at the two evening services totaled \$1,033. These offerings were designated for the Portland Fuel Bank.

The Jumbo Christmas Card donations reached \$740 this year, exceeding the amount collected last year and is also designated for the Portland Fuel Bank.

The Flower Committee’s Christmas Flower Dedication provides a wonderful way to honor or remember someone special, and support a local mission at the same time. This year’s flower dedications resulted in a \$300 donation from the Flower Committee to the Portland Food Bank.

These traditions demonstrate the spirit of generosity that flows through our congregation. Because of your heartfelt kindness and gifts, we were able to bring the joy of Christmas to 22 families in our community, and to help provide food and heat to local families, in addition to joining with other UCC churches to provide support to retired church workers.



The “live Christmas pageant” was held during the worship service, on December 17.

News for Children and Parents

Church School and Infant/Toddler Care will be available each Sunday in January. School aged children will begin upstairs with their families and will be brought downstairs for church school after the children's message. Infants/toddlers can be dropped off in Fellowship Hall before the service or at any point during the service.

On December 31, children will attend worship with their families.

The Christmas Pageant on December was fantastic! Thank you to Mary Clark who organized and directed the event, and to Ann Labby who assisted.

January 7 is the last day for the collection of mittens, hats, scarves. The collection box is located in the Fellowship Hall.

Christmas Sweets & Treats Holiday Sale: 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, and your shopping made the event a huge success! Special thanks to Robin Richardson and Nancy Johnson, who took donations of “items no longer needed” by church members and through their magic, created treasures for sale! Including the sales on the day of the event and the following two Sundays, the total amount raised was **\$1,511**, exceeding the amounts raised in past years. **THANK YOU ONE AND ALL!**

Coffee Hour: A Time for Fellowship

Each Sunday, following the Worship Service, we gather for Coffee Hour in Fellowship Hall. Thank you to all who hosted and supplied Coffee Hour snacks in December, providing an inviting table and warm welcoming atmosphere for our members and guests. Special thanks to Diane Burgess, the quiet driving force behind the success of this important part of our time together.



There is a sign up sheet available in Fellowship Hall for a January slot, either as a host or by contributing a snack. Thank you for considering how you might participate, and contact Diane Burgess if you are willing to assist in any way. dianemayburgess@gmail.com

Constitution and By-Laws Review Underway

The By-Laws of our church call for a By-Laws review to be completed every three years. Since they were last reviewed and revised in 2018, three years hence would have been in 2021, just as we were emerging from the Covid pandemic! Thus, the by-laws review was tabled until the time seemed right, and a committee was appointed in the summer of 2023. Committee members are Kelle Young, chairperson; Nancy Johnson, secretary; Diane Burgess, Matt Dietrichsen, and Mike Enright. The committee is exploring a new governmental structure for our local church that takes into account the changing demographics and lack of availability of members to make long-term commitments to serve on boards and committees. Much thought and research has gone into the direction that many churches are taking to create ministry teams, encouraging every church member to help in an area of their interest. In the coming months, there will be more information coming to the congregation from this busy committee.

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HAVE RETURNED THEIR PLEDGE CARDS.

**If you haven't yet returned your pledge card and have misplaced it,
please call the Church office to request a new one.**

**The Finance Committee is preparing the 2024 Budget for the Annual Meeting in January,
and projecting our income is an important component of the budget.**



Mardi Gras Fest

February 3, 2024

9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Plans are well underway for the Mardi Gras Fest, sponsored by the Women's Fellowship, to be held on Saturday, February 3, with a snow date of February 10. With Faith Fraulino as the chairperson, and Chef Extraordinaire Jeff Fraulino in the kitchen, the day will be filled with fun, good times, and great New Orleans food!

The Mardi Gras Cafe` Menu will include authentic New Orleans gumbo, beans and rice, New Orleans bread pudding with sauce, orange cream cake, and of course, a delicious King's Cake.

The ever-popular basket raffle from Chocolate Fest days will return with some of the popular themed baskets on hand, as well as some new ones! Treats to go will be available at the candy booth and the baked goods booth. The beautiful photo greeting cards will be available for purchase, as well as gift items at the Valentine Booth.

As the saying goes, "It takes a village" and that is definitely the case with this event. Lots of helpers are needed, so watch The Weekly Word for details and think of what you can do to lend a hand. Contact Faith Fraulino to let her know how you want to be involved.

A portion of the funds raised at the Mardi Gras Fest will be donated to the Portland Fuel Bank, to provide warmth to our neighbors.

What is Mardi Gras?

Mardi Gras dates back thousands of years to boisterous pagan celebrations of spring and fertility in Rome. When Christianity arrived during the medieval years, religious leaders decided to incorporate the popular local traditions of these pagan celebrations (parades, eating, drinking) into traditions and they became a prelude to Lent. The French later dubbed the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday as "Mardi Gras", which translates to "Fat Tuesday", reflecting the practice of the last night of eating rich, fatty foods before the ritual Lenten sacrifices and fasting of the Lenten season.

Mardi Gras first made its way to North America in 1699, when French-Canadian explorer Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville named his campsite Point du Mardi Gras. The birthplace of Mardi Gras in the USA was in fact in Mobile, Alabama where starting in 1703, French soldiers and settlers enjoyed Mardi Gras festivities in the newly founded capital of the French Louisiana territory, Mobile.

The capital of the French Louisiana territory was moved to New Orleans, where the first recorded Mardi Gras street parade took place in 1837. After violent acts nearly shut down the celebrations, New Orleans businessmen formed a secret society (Mistick Krewe of Comus) that showcased a themed parade with elaborate floats and performers and a lavish post-parade gala in 1857. The evolution of Krewes and parades over the past 166 years into part-cultural tradition and part-party is what shapes Mardi Gras celebrations across the United States.

Cities known for their Mardi Gras festivities are New Orleans, Mobile, and St. Louis. This year, we will add Portland, Connecticut to that list with our Mardi Gras Fest so mark your calendar for February 3!

The First Congregational Church of Portland, CT

United Church of Christ

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Rev. Dr. Barry McCarthy, Intentional Interim Pastor