

THE BELFRY CHIMES

**Please Join Us for
Worship As We
Prepare for Easter**

Sundays, 10:00 a.m.

- March 3, 2024
- March 10, 2024
- March 17, 2024
- March 24, 2024
- March 31, 2024

Holy Week Services
Maundy Thursday
March 28, 7:00 p.m.
Palm Sunday
March 24, 10:00 a.m.

Easter Morning
March 31, 2024
7:00, Gazebo
10:00, Sanctuary

Lenten Supper Series
"Tell Us Your Story"
Wednesdays, 6:00 p.m.
March 13, 2024
March 20, 2024

*"Whoever wishes to be my
follower must deny his very self,
take up the cross each day, and
follow in my steps."*

Luke 9:23

A Message from Pastor Barry McCarthy

Friends in Christ,

Eugene O'Neill wrote these three, short, significant sentences: "Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue!" Ernest Hemingway wrote in A Farewell to Arms, "The world breaks everyone, and then some become strong at the broken places."

We have entered into the season of Lent. This is a time to contemplate the brokenness of the world and ourselves and consider the wonder of God's grace in our lives. That grace is reflected in Jesus coming into the world to let us know that amidst the suffering, God is with us, God loves us, God does not forget us and, most importantly, God will never let us go.

That reality was reinforced for us during the first two weeks of our Lenten Soup and Bread talks. We heard the inspired faith stories of members whose varied life stories reflected the presence of God's grace in everyday living.

Lent lets us walk along the pathways of Jesus, put ourselves in the story, and follow him to the Cross and then onward to the empty tomb of Easter.

There are two more "Soup 'n Bread Supper" meals scheduled for March 13 and 20. Each will be followed by other members sharing their stories, please join us.

Holy Week will begin with Palm Sunday on March 24, followed by a Maundy Thursday service on the 28, at 7:00 PM which will take us from the table of the Last Supper and to the crucifixion. The ecumenical Good Friday Walk is our final preparation prior to the celebration of the Easter miracle. (Time to be determined.)

There will be two services on Easter morning: 7:00 AM outside at the gazebo in the Memorial Garden (coffee and donuts to follow) and 10:00 AM in the sanctuary.

Join us in celebrating the glue of God's grace!

In Faith,



Lenten Supper Series: "Tell Us Your Story" Wednesdays, 6:00 p.m.

In keeping with a long treasured tradition at this church, Lenten soup suppers are underway. A hearty soup and bread meal is followed by an inspirational program as we listen to fellow church members share their stories.

Please join us as these members share how their faith intersects with life and how life choices (family, job, daily living) been impacted by their beliefs.

March 13, Beau Doherty and Kelle Young

March 20, Melissa Vibberts and Jeannette Hodge

THANK YOU TO Sharon Kandro, Louise Wright, Ed Burgess and Peg Rider who shared their stories in February.

Sign up sheet to bring soup and bread is located in Fellowship Hall.

Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer them, Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me. Matthew 25: 37-40

MISSIONS BOARD SPONSORS OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE OTHERS

"Thursday Night Strike", March 14

We will serve Beef stew, rolls/garlic bread and desserts to our friends at Streetfire Ministries. There will be a sign up sheet in Fellowship Hall on our new Missions Bulletin Board.

One Great Hour of Sharing Collection

This Lenten offering supports disaster, refugee and development ministries of the United Church of Christ.

Dinner at St Vincent De Paul, April 7

The menu has yet to be planned but we will need volunteers to prepare and serve food that evening.

God's Work ~ Our Hands

GWOH is in the planning stages but we hope to organize another terrific event to BE the church in our community on a Sunday in May. The sites will include yard work, sewing for "Dress a Girl", singing at the Portland Care and Rehabilitation Center, and delivering flowers to members of our congregation/community who could use some love. Another group will prepare a delicious meal for our volunteers to provide a time of fellowship to discuss how much we all enjoyed reaching out to our neighbors.

Stay tuned for a busy and exciting Spring!!

News for Children and Youth

Church School and Infant/Toddler Care will be available each Sunday in March. 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. Teachers and helpers are needed for Church School. If you would like to help with Church School and Infant/Toddler care, please speak with Mary Clark.

March will begin the annual Penny Challenge. This year the children have chosen to have two teams, the hot dogs versus hamburgers. During the month of March everyone is welcome to choose a team and put coins in the corresponding jar that will be located in Fellowship Hall. At the beginning of April, the team that has collected the most money will choose the charity where the funds will be donated.

Easter Sunday: On March 31, Easter Sunday, the children will begin worship with their families, and following the Children's Message, will then be dismissed to the Fellowship Hall where they will have an Easter Egg Hunt, crafts, games, and prizes.

Welcome Teens 7th Through 11th Grade

Sunday March 3, 4:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Let's meet in our "Teen Hang Out Room" in the upstairs classroom area of First Church.

The refrigerator is full with cold drinks and snacks.

The couches and chairs are comfy and you can even put your feet up on the coffee table.

Every teen 7th through 11th grade is welcome. Bring a friend or two. You can be from any church or no church.

This is just a time for faith and fun for teens, a way to relax and meet new friends.

We look forward to seeing you on Sunday, March 3!

If you have any questions feel free to contact either

Ann at (860) 614-4826 labbyannm@gmail.com or

Louise at (860) 450-6041 retwrightl@gmail.com

ATTENTION ALL WOMEN: Save This Date Saturday, April 27, 2024, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.



Our Women's Fellowship has been asked to host the annual SNEUCC Women's Connection Spring Gathering. This gathering will focus on mental health and supporting the Becoming WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, Engaged) initiative of the SNEUCC. The program will feature speakers, workshops including assembling kits for Church World Service, and a marketplace that gives you the opportunity to purchase items made by women from other churches. As hostesses for the day, we will provide welcoming snacks in the morning and serve lunch at noon. We hope that some women will want to participate in the gathering, but we will also need people to help in the kitchen, help serve, and be available at 3:00 p.m. for clean-up. It is a special honor to

have women from Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts gathering at our church and we hope you will want to become involved in some way. Please contact Nancy Johnson and let her know how you can help.



SMILE IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN!

It's been 7 years since we last published a church directory! It is important that we have an updated directory when our new minister joins us, and we've decided to "create our own" rather than contracting with a vendor. A schedule of "photo shoot sittings" will be forthcoming, with plans to begin this project on Sunday, March 17.

By-Laws Revision Committee To Hold Gatherings To Solicit Feedback March 3 and April 3

The By-Laws Revision Committee has met several times over the fall and winter and has completed a draft of proposed changes. The committee will host two gatherings to discuss the changes and solicit feedback from the congregation. The first gathering will be a second hour on Sunday, March 3, beginning around 11:30. The second gathering will be on Wednesday, April 3, at 6:30 p.m. Both meetings will be held in Fellowship Hall. Come to learn more and lend your voice to these changes.

Mark Your Calendar: Spring Clean-up April 13

The Board of Facilities chairperson Rob Lentz has announced that the spring cleanup at the church will be held on Saturday, April 13 from 9:00 until noon (rain date April 20). Please join this hard working group for a few hours of fellowship as they ready the Church for Spring and Summer. As many hands make light work, kindly save the date and join this "fun" activity. More information to follow...

COFFEE HOUR NEWS FOR SPRING

Thanks to all of those who provided goodies for the Winter Sundays including: The Membership Committee, Beth Gould-Ruitto, Nancy Spooner, Anita Carpene, the Mardi Gras Bakers, Melissa, Nick, and Brian Vibberts, Jamie Gooch, and Bethanne Vergean.

March and April sign ups are posted in Fellowship Hall so please consider signing up to supply an item for all to enjoy. It is as simple as adding your item to the cart in the kitchen on your way to worship! A wedge of sliced cheese and some crackers, a bowl of fruit or fresh veggies, or a baked item (homemade or store bakery!) on a plate is all that's required! Any one or group that wants to "host" can set up the table in advance. Let Diane Burgess know when you are willing and able!!! Thanks in advance for your time, contributions, and willingness to share with the congregation.



Mardi Gras Fest: A BIG SUCCESS !!!

Led by Chairperson Faith Fraulino, the Mardi Gras Fest was a huge success!

Thank you to Faith and all who participated, from the kitchen crew led by Chef Jeff Fraulino, to the bakers and candy makers, the cafe servers, the basket donors and creators, the donors of "treasures", the workers at the event, the set up and clean up crews, and of course the customers!! It was a great day by all measures, resulting in adding \$5168 to the Women's Fellowship! Of that total, \$1000 has been donated to the Portland Fuel Bank. Plans are being made for Mardi Gras Fest 2025, and thank you to Faith who has agreed to once again chair the event.



Despite the very cold weather, the youngest workers festively dressed in colorful costumes to encourage passersby to drop in!



Rev. Barry and Wendy joined in the fun of the day.

Thank you to all who donated baskets for the raffle, to Nancy and Robin who put the finishing touches on the baskets, and congratulations to the winners!

- Super Bowl Basket donated by Margaret Stewart, won by Ann W.
- When Life Gives You Lemons by Robin Richardson, won by Karen G.
- Be My Valentine by Women's Fellowship, won by Christie C.
- Feathered Friends by Beth Gould-Ruitto, won by Angela H.
- Trader Joe's Delights by Elaine Law, won by Denine B.
- Kid's Rainy Day Dream by Jeannette Hodge, won by Solara A.
- Peace and Quiet by Deb Hunt, won by Seraphina K.
- Creative Casseroles by Women's Fellowship, won by Angela A.
- Pet Lovers by Brenda Rossignol, won by Anne O.
- You Are My Sunshine by Nancy Johnson, won by Pat J.
- Made in Connecticut by Beth Gould-Ruitto and Becca Hall, won by Pastor Barry
- For the Love of Cooking, And then Some by Cari Klick, won by Christie C.
- Blueberry Basket by Jan Poet, won by Ann B.
- We All Scream for Ice Cream by Robin Richardson, won by Declan K.
- Over the Rainbow by Faith Fraulino, won by Melissa V.
- Italian Pasta Night by Anita Carpena, won by Jan P.
- "For the Birds" Lover by Kelle Young, won by Amy J.
- Artsy Crafts by Patty Pizzichemi, won by Melissa V.
- Italian Dinner by Ann Dimock, won by Babs S.
- A Stew Leonards Surprise by Melissa Vibberts, won by Ann W.
- Happy Mardi Gras by Karen and Mary Faass, won by Fred T.

**WOW!!! Customers raved about the variety of baskets!
Raffle ticket sales totaled \$1,592!!**

Mardi Gras Customers loved our food offerings, especially the New Orleans fare in the Cafe, which sold out after sales totaling \$1816!

Baked Goods and Candy Sales Netted a Sweet Total of \$1367!

CALLING ALL KNITTERS!!

The Prayer Shawl Ministry has resumed Tuesday afternoon knitting sessions. If you are a knitter, please consider joining this group on Tuesdays at 1:00 p.m. for fellowship to the sound of clicking needles and conversation.



Annual Easter Bake Sale Saturday, March 30, 2024 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

Cookies, Cakes, Pies, Candy, and Robin's Cardamom Bread
We need all sorts of Easter treats and many customers
to make this a successful fundraiser for the church!

Drop off for your items:
Friday, March 29, 3-5 p.m.
Saturday, March 30, between 8:15 & 8:45 a.m.

**THIS EVENT WILL SUPPORT THE CHURCH'S MISSION BY
RAISING FUNDS FOR THE CHURCH BUDGET**

A Message from Church President Joe Aresco

As we journey through the Lenten season, I want to share a few thoughts with you. To begin I would like to thank Faith and all those who helped, participated in or attended the wonderful Mardi Gras Celebration. It occurred to me that this event was a perfect example of what our church is experiencing in our minister transition. As we said goodbye to our beloved longstanding Chocolate Fest, we made a change and welcomed a new and different event in the Mardi Gras Fest. The creativity, resourcefulness, and willingness to jump in and help by members of this congregation never ceases to amaze me!

We continue through the Lenten Season with our soup suppers. If the rest of the evenings are like the first night, it will be a great time of fellowship, sharing, and conversation. I hope many of you can find time to attend one or more of these evenings.

Our search committee continues its dedicated work toward calling a new settled pastor, and we pray for a fruitful response to our requests. The bylaws revision is working hard on changes and updates to our current bylaws. There are two planned gatherings where they will present their recommendations, and I hope you will plan to attend. These meetings will be a great opportunity to provide feedback to the committee, as these new bylaws will dictate the way our local church governs itself moving forward. Similar to our minister transition, a change in bylaws will not be easy and may take some time to get used to. However, these changes are needed to continue to move our church forward.

Finally, I am pleased to share the joyous news that Pastor Barry has agreed to stay with us at least through the summer. When he stepped in as our Intentional Interim Minister in December, he committed to stay with us through Easter, at which time we would discuss our next steps. I have heard feedback from many members about what a wonderful job he is doing, and I wholeheartedly agree. It is great news that he will continue to be with us as we move through the next few months.

I encourage you to pray on how you can become involved in the life of our church. There is a place for everyone in order to keep the church moving forward.

Sincerely,

Joe Aresco (joe@arescoconstruction.com)

Search Committee Update

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE SEARCH COMMITTEE for meeting their goal of submitting the Pastoral Search Profile to Isaac Lawson, our area conference minister for the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ on January 31, 2024. Isaac reviewed the profile and sent it back to the Search Committee on February 23, 2024, with no recommendations other than minor formatting changes. The profile should be posted for potential candidates to view by March 1, 2024. A huge thank you to Elaine Law and Beth Gould-Ruitto, co-chairs; Mary Clark, Beau Doherty, Jeffrey Fraulino, Cari Klick, Michael Klick, Rob Lentz, Kristin Medvecky, Karen Rettich, and Louise Wright for leading the congregation through the process to call a settled pastor!



Easter Plant Sale and Fundraiser

The Flower Committee is pleased to announce that we will be holding our traditional Easter Plant Sale and Fundraiser. Plants are \$12 or \$18 each and we will need the order forms and payment by **March 17, 2024**. Note the price increase/difference depending on the plant choice. Thank you for your continued support!

PLEASE PRINT YOUR NAME, ADDRESS, PHONE # AND DEDICATIONS:

Your name: _____

Phone number: _____

1. Purchase/Dedication #1 (circle one) 6" Daffodil (\$12) 6" Tulip (\$12) Easter Lily (\$18)

Circle one of the following Dedications: In Memory of In Honor of In Celebration of

Dedicated To:

2. Purchase/Dedication #2 (circle one) 6" Daffodil (\$12) 6" Tulip (\$12) Easter Lily (\$18)

Circle one of the following Dedications: In Memory of In Honor of In Celebration of

Dedicated To:

Number of Plants Ordered: _____ Total Cost: \$ _____

Additional Donation: \$ _____ Grand Total: \$ _____

Payment method (circle): Cash Check # _____ (Payable to First Congregational Church)

All flowers will be used for an altar display for Easter services. **Plants can be retrieved following the Easter Sunday 10AM service.**

Thank you for your support and your contributions to the beautiful floral display for the Easter Services!

~ 2024 Flower Committee (Kyle (chair), Brenda, Erin, Patty, Amy & Reagan)

Calendar of Events

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

Matthew 18: 20

WEEKLY GATHERINGS:

Sunday 10:00 a.m.	Worship Service
Sunday 7:00 p.m.	Alanon Meeting
Second Monday evening	NA Service Meeting
Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	Prayer Shawl Ministry
Wednesday 7:00 p.m.	Living Clean Meeting
Third Thursday evening	NA Hospitals and Institutions Regional Meeting
Thursday 6:30 p.m.	Choir Practice

MARCH MEETINGS AND EVENTS:

March 3, 11:30	By-Laws Committee Second Hour Presentation
March 3, 4:30 p.m.	Teen Gathering
March 3, 7:00 p.m.	Membership Committee
March 5, 6:30 p.m.	Church Council
March 12, 6:00 p.m.	Board of Deacons
March 13, 6:00 p.m.	Lenten Soup Supper
March 14	Streetfire Ministries “Thursday Night Strike” Dinner
March 17	Celtic Sunday Service and Coffee Hour
March 20, 6:00 p.m.	Lenten Soup Supper
March 24	Deadline for April <i>Belfry Chimes</i>
March 28, 7:00 p.m.	Maundy Thursday Worship Service
March 29, 12 noon	Good Friday Interfaith Walk
March 30, 9:00 a.m.	Easter Bake Sale
March 31, 7:00 a.m.	Easter Early Morning Outdoor Service, Gazebo

LOOKING AHEAD:

By-Laws Revision Committee Presentation, April 3
St. Vincent De Paul Dinner, Sunday, April 7
Spring Clean-Up, April 13
SNEUCC Women’s Connection Spring Gathering, April 27

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

The Weekly Word: Amy Jahnke, editor

Belfry Chimes: Jeannette Hodge, editor

Rev. Dr. Barry McCarthy, Intentional Interim Pastor