

The Belfry Chimes

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF PORTLAND, CT

SEPTEMBER 2025

MESSAGE FROM THE PASTOR

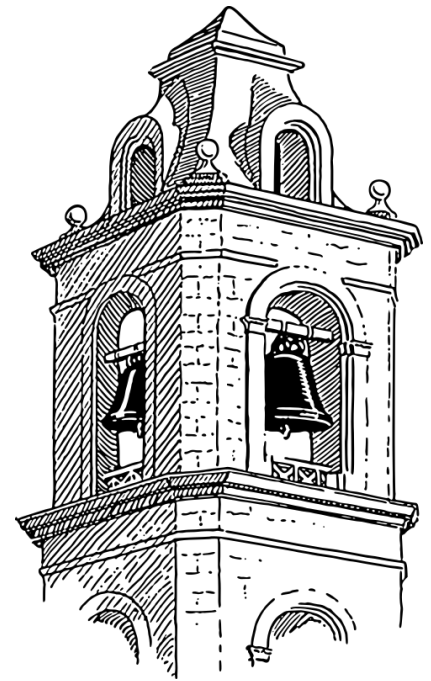
September always seems like the new year to me. Yes, the church year starts in Advent, and the calendar year begins on January 1. But in September, it feels like a fresh start as the program year gets underway.

As we transition from the quiet summer into the active fall, I am delighted and excited about all First Congregational Church has in store. Whether you are looking to grow spiritually, serve the community, or participate in meaningful fellowship, there is a place for you here.

- Are you interested in nurturing the children and youth as they grow in faith? Our children's ministries have increased so much that we have moved the Church School classroom to the larger space upstairs. We also are beginning an older Church School class, as well as starting two new youth groups.
- Are you concerned with serving those in need? The Ministry of Christian Action is gearing up to feed the hungry through St. Vincent de Paul and StreetFire Ministries. They are planning numerous other tangible expressions of Christ's love throughout the year.
- Are you interested in joining First Congregational Church? The Ministry of Spiritual Life is helping with a New Members Class on September 28, as our church community continues to grow in both faith and number.
- Do you have an ability or gift that you wish to share? The Ministry of Engagement is hosting a Talent Show on September 27.
- Are you one of the many who attend Sunday worship on Sunday online? The Ministry of Resources have been working hard behind the scenes to upgrade the sound system so that whether you are in the sanctuary or in your living room, worship will sound wonderful.
- Have you been inspired and encouraged by the many ongoing ministries? The Women's Fellowship, Men's Fellowship, Prayer Shawl group, and much more are continuing!

Truly God's blessings are with First Congregational Church! God has provided meaningful ministries, opportunities for spiritual growth, and exciting ways to spread the Good News. I look forward to beginning this new program year with you, as we serve Christ together.

Blessings,
Judith



**WORSHIP & CHURCH
SCHOOL HOURS:**
Sunday at 10:00 a.m.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Celebration Sunday	2
Christian Education	2
Service of Installation	3
New Members Class	3
Talent Show	4
Women's Fellowship	4
Family Update	5
Office News	6
Ministry of Spiritual Life	7
Calendar of Events	8

THE BELFRY CHIMES IS UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

★ First, we would like to thank Jeannette Hodge for creating and distributing The Belfry Chimes which keeps us up to date on what was happening at church. We are truly grateful to Jeannette for her years of dedication, time, and expertise coordinating and editing! ★

The Belfry Chimes is now being produced in the church office. Thank you for your patience and grace during this shift. To make a smooth transition, we want to share some friendly reminders of the guidelines for the Belfry Chimes.

- The deadline for submissions will be the 20th of each month. This is to allow adequate time so that the Belfry Chimes can be published on the first of each month.
- Submissions may be sent to the office either as a Word attachment or printed in the body of the email. Pictures may be sent as jpegs.
- The Belfry Chimes is a future focused publication, so it is primarily for upcoming events and programs of First Congregational Church. If you would like to print a short follow-up or brief thank-you for a past event, of course, that is fine. The Belfry Chimes is not the forum for committee/group minutes, nor is it used to publicize outside events.
- FCC honors privacy and so does not publish such information as birthdays or names on prayer lists. Picture releases are required to include photos of children; last names of children will not be published.
- The office will edit submissions for consistency, clarity, and accuracy.



It's a Celebration- and YOU'RE Invited!

Join us on Sunday, September 7 for Celebration Sunday when we all gather together again after our busy summers. It will be a special Sunday of teacher dedications, bestowing of Bibles and a "Jesus Rocks" themed Fellowship Hour after the service where you'll be able to create your own "boulder" (baked potato with fixings), as well as a special dessert. Let's hope for great weather so that we can have fun outside too including corn hole and water games for kids (as well as the young at heart!)

Bring your bathing suit, towel and a lawn chair and come celebrate the morning with your church family!



We are delighted to announce that beginning September 7, we will be opening a new Sunday School classroom for children entering Kindergarten through 9th grade. This new space will provide a fresh and engaging environment where children can grow in faith and learn together.



SERVICE OF INSTALLATION

For Judith Cooke as Settled Pastor of
First Congregational Church of Portland, Connecticut

Sunday, September 21, 2025, at 2:00 p.m.
Tea Party Reception Following Service

We warmly invite our church family to celebrate the Service of Installation for our settled pastor, Judith Cooke. The installation is a brief service coordinated by the UCC, which recognizes the covenantal relationship of pastor, congregation and denomination. It is a joyous event which marks a meaningful milestone in the life of our church and your presence will ensure that we celebrate Judith with prayer, devotion and fellowship. After the service, please join us for a reception hosted by the Search Committee which will consist of a tea party, one of Judith's favorite pleasures and savor a delicious cup of Judith's favorite tea.

If you would like to contribute a tea party food for the reception, such as scones, finger sandwiches, petit fours or chocolate covered strawberries, please email Beth at: egouldruitto@aol.com

NEW MEMBERS CLASS

Sunday, September 28, 2025 ~ 11:30 – 12:30
Conference Room by the Offices
Childcare will be provided.

New Members will be received in worship on October 12, 2025

Are you interested in becoming more connected with a vibrant faith community, or perhaps you're simply curious to learn more about First Congregational Church and what we believe? You are warmly invited to join our upcoming New Members Class!

At the class on September 28, the group will learn about

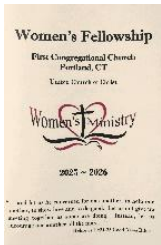
- First Congregational Church's missions and core beliefs
- How our church nurtures faith for people of all ages
- What our ministry teams and church groups offer
- How you can be involved in the life of our community of faith through service, fellowship, or leadership

Whether you are considering joining or simply want to explore what it means to be part of First Congregational Church, we welcome you to join us. If you have questions or are unable to attend the September 28th meeting, please speak with Judith.



The Ministry of Engagement is seeking your talent for our multi-generational Talent Show to be held on Saturday, September 27th. Your act will be just a few minutes of First church fame for the entertainment of all in attendance. Do you have a comedy, dance, or musical routine? Can you share your expertise in martial arts, hula hoops, jumping rope, yo-yo skills, or lip sync a song? Let Mary Clark (maryclark2455@outlook.com) know by September 2nd if you'd like a slot in this entertaining evening of family fun. Doors open at 6:30 for refreshments and the show starts at 7:00. Be part of the entertainment or join us to enjoy the talents of our fellow parishioners.

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP BOOKLETS AVAILABLE!



Beginning in September, please pick up a Women's Fellowship booklet that will be found in the sanctuary and in the fellowship hall. Read about the programs we are offering, learn about the Prayer Shawl Ministry now in its 20th year, and gather information about our 3rd Mardi Gras fundraiser that will be held on February 7, 2026. The fellowship of women in our church includes every woman, young and old, member or "friend" of the church. We hope all women will be inspired to participate in some way this coming church year.

CALLING ALL KNITTERS!



The ladies of the Prayer Shawl Ministry will resume knitting on September 9 at 1:00 p.m. in the meeting room across from the office. We invite anyone who is interested to join us. No experience is necessary. Yarn and needles will be waiting for you.

Prayer Shawls available! We do have a supply of prayer shawls available to be given away to someone who might be going through a challenging time in their life or for someone celebrating life's joys. Please contact Nancy Johnson to arrange a time to receive one. Also, please know that we would appreciate receiving monetary donations at any time to be used for the cost of yarn and supplies. Checks can be made out to the Women's Fellowship. Thank you for your support of this caring ministry.

PHILATELIST WANTED



A generous friend of the church has donated her father's stamp collection. Would you be able to look at the collection or bring it to a dealer to ascertain its worth? We are hoping that its sales will provide the church with money to contribute to the budget. If you can help in this way please contact Beth Gould-Ruitto at egouldruitto@aol.com or 860-543-9280.

SAMIMI FAMILY UPDATE

In the Summer of 2021 as the US pulled out of Afghanistan, we were all haunted by images of the thousands trying to reach the airport in Kabul to flee the takeover by the Taliban. We strongly felt God's call to take action and in September of 2021 our church spearheaded an effort to resettle a refugee family. As we realized the scope of the undertaking, we reached out to the community for help. Area houses of worship, businesses and over 50 volunteers came together to prepare to welcome a family in need. In March of 2022 we celebrated the arrival of the Samimi family. We have continued to be a support to the family as they have settled in Middletown.

Last year the Samimi family was finally granted Asylum and Special Immigrant Status as Mr. Samimi had worked administering contracts with the Department of Defense. In September, the Samimis submitted their application for their green cards. They have not yet received their green cards, which even though they are here legally, makes them more vulnerable to the actions of our current government.

Zuhra, 14 and Suheil, 16 are entering grade 10 at Middletown High. They both volunteer in several different areas and regularly attend enrichment opportunities. Both are now a part of the Upward Bound program which is held at Wesleyan University. In May Zuhra was asked to read poetry in Persian and in English for a program sponsored by Cuatro Puntos. The dance is beautiful, and the poetry is inspiring. Zuhra did an amazing job.

If you would like to watch, here is the link. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_wgLCOntrGKdF7XI-XlchD44goXJA7K3/view

Sohrab, 9 and Sodoba, 7 are very dear active children. Sohrab, who loves cars and soccer, will enter the 4th grade this fall, and Sodoba, who loves crafts and dolls will start 2nd grade. Both children enjoy reading and going to the library.

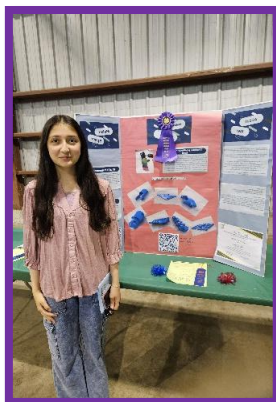
The 3 older children regularly attend religious classes at the Broad Street Mosque where they are studying the Koran.

Khatera, who was a teacher in Afghanistan, started a new job this year at a Child Care Center. She is taking a course to certify herself to be a paraprofessional and will soon start classes at Middlesex Community College.

Ajmal was recently laid off from his position as the Chief Financial Officer at Turquoise Mountain Charity due to the cessation of USAID funding. He is busy networking and filling out applications. His expertise is in finance and administering grants. He has always worked at Non-Profit enterprises.

The Samimi family is extremely grateful to our church for our continued support and encouragement. We ask for prayers as Ajmal continues his job search, for their safety and their comfort as they navigate the unsettling immigration situation, and for thanksgiving for bringing this family into the care of our church.

Beth Gould-Ruitto, Chair, Portland Resettlement Group





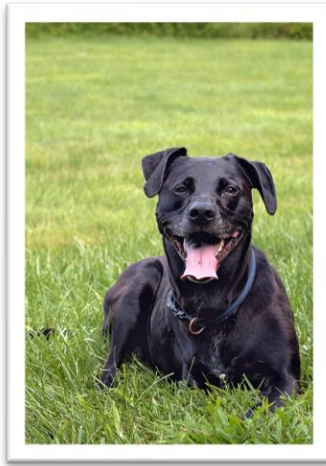
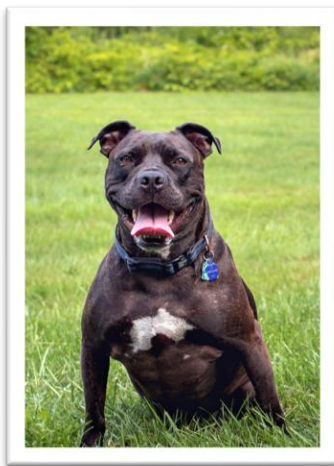
GENIUS! FELLOWSHIP HOUR HAS A BRILLIANT IDEA!

There is a new and exciting way to sign up for
Fellowship Hour- Sign Up Genius!

Sign Up Genius is easy and convenient! Click on the link
below and just add your name to the item you want to
bake --- or buy! We appreciate your help!

[https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0548A5AB2DA4FC
CE9-57933019-september](https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0548A5AB2DA4FCCE9-57933019-september)

PAWSITIVE OUTLOOK



God created dogs to remind us that sometimes, all we
need is a wagging tail, and a big sloppy kiss to find our
way back to happiness ---- and maybe forgive us for
stealing snacks!

Models: Sarge & Cooper Wright



If you would like to see your pet featured in the Belfry
Chimes, email office@firstchurchportlandct.org.
Your pet might be next!

♥
grateful

“Thank you all for my well wishes as I
recuperate from my recent knee
surgery. It means a lot to me to have
the support of our church family as I
continue to recover.”

-Bob Griswold

The Ministry of Christian Action (aka
“MOCA”) would like to send a VERY BIG
THANK YOU to the Men’s Fellowship for
agreeing to paint the upstairs’ smaller
classroom and at a future date, the
current Bride’s Room. You fellas are
helping to make our church school
dreams come true!!

The church has received the following
thank you notes:

- Q plus, an organization that
supports LGBTQ youth in
Connecticut.
- The UCC for donations made to
hurricane disaster and California
wildfire relief.
- St Vincent De Paul for the March
dinner
- Kevin Randell for work done for
his mother during God’s Work,
Our Hands Sunday
- New Horizons domestic violence
shelter
- The Levesque Family

Thank you to our church family for the
many ways you care for others!!

PRAYER MINISTRY

A new Prayer Ministry began a few months ago, and we invite you to become a Prayer Team member. Prayer is an essential part of the Christian life, and at First Congregational Church, we lift our prayers for one another in faith and love. The Ministry of Spiritual Life is coordinating this new email Prayer Ministry, in which the church family may ask and receive prayer. We thank Karen Rettich who has volunteered to take the lead with this new ministry.



Here is how it works:

- ◆ If you have a prayer request, simply email it to firstchurchprayerchain@gmail.com. Then Karen, our Prayer Ministry Coordinator, will send the request to the Prayer Team members who will lift their prayers to God's care.
- ◆ Your confidentiality is important. All prayer requests will be shared within the group in a spirit of trust, and all members honor this by keeping shared requests confidential (unless otherwise specified.)
- ◆ The prayer requests received will not be included in Sunday worship, unless the person making the request advises Judith that they want it shared more broadly with the congregation.
- ◆ **Joining the Prayer Team is easy.** Simply email firstchurchprayerchain@gmail.com to indicate that you would like to be part of this meaningful ministry, and you will be added to the list. Then when specific requests are made, you will receive emails asking for your prayers. The Ministry of Spiritual Life is glad to be able to offer this new Prayer Ministry, and we hope you will participate in this meaningful way of sharing in prayer as a community of faith.



FLOWERS FOR WORSHIP!

Giving a flower arrangement for a church service is one way to add beauty to the service and bring joy to our worship. You also may want to remember a loved one by recognizing their birthday, anniversary, or other special occasion by providing a dedication in honor or in memory of a family member or friend. You can pick out a date on the sign-up sheet in the fellowship hall. Fill out the requested form and you will be all set. Your help will be very much appreciated by the Ministry of Spiritual Life.



CELEBRATING OUR 304TH ANNIVERSARY

It has become a tradition to celebrate the anniversary of our church's founding each year on the Sunday before the actual day we were formed. Therefore, we will do so on October 19 this year. During the worship service that day we will recognize our longtime active members of 40 plus years. A small historical display will also be able to be viewed in the fellowship hall during coffee hour. Mark your calendars now and join the celebration!



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

REGULARLY SCHEDULED:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Worship Service | Sundays at 10:00 a.m. |
| • Choir Practice | Thursdays at 6:30 p.m. |
| • Al-Anon Meeting | Sundays at 7:00 p.m. |
| • NA Board of Directors Meeting | Second Sunday 1-5 p.m. |
| • NA Service Meeting | Second Monday Evening 6:30-9:00 p.m. |
| • Ministry of Spiritual Life | Second Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. |
| • Living Clean Meeting | Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. |
| • Ministry of Resources | Third Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. |
| • Men's Fellowship | Second Thursday at 7:00 p.m. |
| • NA Hospitals and Institutions | Third Thursday at 6:45 p.m. |
| Regional Meeting | |

OTHER SEPTEMBER MEETINGS AND EVENTS:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Celebration Sunday | Sunday, September 7 at 10:00 a.m. |
| High School Youth Group | Sunday, September 7 at 6:30 p.m. |
| Women's Fellowship Potluck | Monday, September 15 at 6:00 p.m. |
| Service of Installation | Sunday, September 21 at 2:00 p.m. |
| Talent Show | Saturday, September 27 at 6:00 p.m. |
| New Members Class | Sunday, September 28 at 11:30 a.m. |

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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