

Belfry Chimes

December 2021



The First Congregational Church of Portland, CT
United Church of Christ

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

The name Emmanuel refers to Jesus. Emmanuel is Hebrew for “God with us” or “God is with us.” As we gather together for worship, you are invited to await the coming and celebrate the arrival of Emmanuel.

Sunday, December 5, 2021, 10:00 a.m.
Second Sunday of Advent: PEACE

Sunday, December 12, 2021, 10:00 a.m.
Third Sunday of Advent: JOY

Wednesday, December 15, 2021, 7:00 p.m.
Christmas Calm Service

The annual Christmas Calm service will be held in the sanctuary, as well as live-streamed for those unable to attend in person. This simple service features a quiet observance of Christmas and focuses on seeking God’s comfort and peace amid the busyness and stress of the season along with the continuing burdens of the pandemic. Readings, prayers, hymns, and harp music played by Kasha will be featured. If you are unable to attend in person you may send Rev. Hawken the name for a person you would like remembered or uplifted in prayer at this service.

Sunday, December 19, 2021, 10:00 a.m.
Fourth Sunday of Advent: LOVE

Friday, December 24, 2021
4:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.
Christmas Eve Services

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come!”

Sunday, December 26, 2021, 9:30 a.m.
Our church will participate in an Ecumenical Worship Service at Trinity Episcopal Church, Portland



Both Christmas Eve Services will feature the Wild Notes with Kasha Breau, John Kalinowski and Mickey Roth performing beautiful Celtic Christmas carols on harp, fiddle, flute, accordion, organ and piano.

We, The First Congregational Church of Portland, Connecticut, are an Open and Affirming church. With God’s grace, we continue to be a congregation that includes persons of every race, ethnicity, age, family configuration, marital status, mental and physical ability, economic status, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. All are welcome to share in the life, sacraments, missions, responsibilities and blessings of participation in our community of faith.

Christmas Sweets and Treats Holiday Sale

The popular "Christmas Cookie Sale" has a new name! Please stop by the Christmas Sweets and Treats Holiday Sale, Saturday, December 11, from 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

The success of this holiday church-wide fundraiser is dependent upon church members, and there are numerous ways to help. Co-chairs Robin Richardson and Nancy Johnson wish to thank you for your support of this popular community event and invite church members to consider contributing in the following ways:

- Make several dozen Christmas cookies and package them a half dozen to a bag.
- Other sweets are also appreciated. Gingerbread men lollipops, candy covered pretzels, spiced nuts, fudge, toffee. It is not just cookies anymore!
- Please label your contributions: name of cookie, nuts/ or no nuts or any other important allergy information. Being creative with your packaging helps sell!
- Donate "Christmas" related items for our baskets and gift table. Many different themes are used for our baskets: angel, reindeer, snowman, Santa, etc. New or gently used gift items are most appreciated. You never know who might cherish something that you no longer use. Contributions may be left in the box found in the fellowship hall. The deadline for donations is Wednesday, December 8.

Sweet treat donations (cookies, candy, fudge, nuts) may be dropped off at the church on Friday, December 10 between 12:00 and 5:00 p.m., or on Saturday morning, December 11 between 8:30 and 9:30.

Then stop by on the 11th to do some holiday shopping. Choose from a wide assortment of tasty sweets and treats, holiday baskets or gifts, and 300th anniversary items. Anniversary items make great stocking stuffers! Anniversary books, Christmas ornaments and commemorative bells, as well as Avery Soda with custom made label will be available for purchase.

The First Congregational Church 554 Main Street • Portland, CT 06480

Phone: 860-342-3244

Email: first.church.pct@sbcglobal.net

Website: www.firstchurchportlandct.org

Facebook: The First Congregational Church of Portland, CT

YouTube Channel: First Church of Portland, CT

STAFF

PASTOR: *The Rev. Jane Hawken* jhawken@sbcglobal.net

DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION:

Ann Labby labbyannm@gmail.com

MUSIC DIRECTOR: *Kasha Breau*

OFFICE MANAGER: *Margaret Stewart*

Office Hours: T-W-Th 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST: *Amy Jahnke*

amy.jahnkefcportland@gmail.com

VIDEO WORSHIP ASSISTANT: *Brian Labby*

CHURCH SEXTON: *Ann Labby*

The Giving Tree Tradition: *Gifts are Needed!*

The tradition of helping those in need comes alive each year through the "Giving Tree" in our church sanctuary.

Each year, the Portland Food Bank collects and distributes gifts to local families in need. Our church receives a list of gifts to be purchased, and through the kindness and generosity of church members, hundreds of gifts have been purchased through the years.

This year, church members and friends may "sign up" to purchase a gift by going "online" or by removing a tag from the Christmas tree in the sanctuary on Sunday, November 28 or December 5. To "take a tag" online, the link to the "Giving Tree" is available on the church's website.

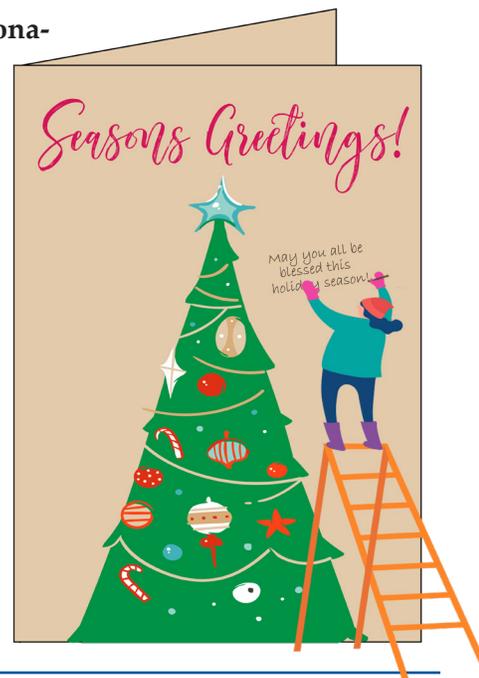
All gifts (unwrapped and with tags) must be returned to the church by Sunday, December 12.



Jumbo Christmas Card

A large card posted in the church narthex for members to sign and send their greetings to others within the church family has been a Christmas tradition in our church for nearly 50 years. The money saved by not buying and mailing cards to fellow church members has been used to support many worthy causes through the years.

This year, the donations received (in the container provided next to the card) will be used to support the Refugee Resettlement for a family from Afghanistan.



Dear Friends,

When members join the church, we proclaim our Covenant that begins, ***“In the gracious presence of God and in the living spirit of Christ, we affirm our covenant with God and with one another.”***

Our community of faith began when a faithful few gathered three centuries ago to form a church society in East Middletown, later known as Chatham and finally Portland. As our 300th anniversary year comes to a close, we are grateful to the Anniversary Committee, under the able leadership of Nancy Johnson, who did an extraordinary job of making the church’s history come alive as we celebrated the vision of those who came before us.

Inspired by our founders’ dedication, we reaffirm our own commitment as found in our Covenant, ***“We commit ourselves to worship, work and learn together, and to reach out to friends and strangers alike, following the ways of Jesus Christ as they are revealed to us.”***

Built on the firm foundation of 300 years of ministry and mission, we are poised to move from 2021 into 2022 with a renewed determination “to reach out to strangers” as we find ways old and new to serve those in need. How will we do this?

We will continue to make a difference locally by providing warm and comfortable meeting space for recovery groups, joining the church school children in the collection of items for hospitalized children or winter hats and gloves for those who seek warmth from the cold, providing prayer shawls to those in need of comfort, preparing hot meals for Streetfire Ministries, and by participating in the “God’s Work, Our Hands” day of service in the spring.

We will change lives of people seeking refuge in our country as we embark on a community project to settle an Afghan refugee family. Led by the Board of Missions and World Service of our church, the Portland Refugee Resettlement Group has been formed with church member Beth Gould-Ruitto serving as chairperson. There are many ways for church members and friends to support this enormous project.

The final statement of our Covenant with one another is ***“To these purposes we offer our time, our gifts, and our talents.”*** As we are intentional in our gift-giving at Christmastime, let us be intentional about all the ways we can offer our time, our gifts, and our talents for the work of Christ in the world.

In our community of faith, we are blessed by the presence of one another. During Advent as we prepare to receive the Christ Child, God’s greatest gift, let us see each and every person as a gift. Together, let us affirm our history that inspires us, our mission that calls us, and our faith that binds us together. “Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.”

We wish for you the blessings of hope, peace, joy and love,

Jane

Jane Hawken, pastor

Jeannette

Jeannette Hodge, president

Reflections on a Wonderful Anniversary Weekend

By Nancy Johnson, Chairperson, Anniversary Committee

The 300th anniversary weekend held October 23-25 was a memorable celebration with each event thoroughly enjoyed by all. On a chilly Saturday morning, the Time Capsule Ceremony was held at the southwest corner of the church attended by approximately thirty people. Jane provided a meaningful reflection, a 300th Anniversary Proclamation was read and presented to the church by then First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield and a Dedication Litany was shared by all. An historic display in the fellowship hall was viewed by several of the guests.

Sunday worship was attended by a little over 100 people. It was a very touching service with bells ringing, the choir and congregation singing, a message for all ages about the "Cloud of Witnesses" given by Rev. Dwight Juliani and his little green men, greetings from former ministers were read, honoring our long-time members was included, and an inspirational sermon entitled "Commemorating the Past, Celebrating the Present, Creating the Future" was given by the Rev. Jane Hawken. The luncheon held in the fellowship hall following the service was filled with an atmosphere of excitement and joy, unending smiles, new friendships made, and cherished remembrances shared

with one another. The expressions of appreciation found below sent the next day were gratefully received by the committee.

"What a magnificent Sunday with all of your years of detailed planning played out so masterfully!! And to see the church being maintained with such love and beauty."

"Just wanted to congratulate you and your committee on a wonderful 300th celebration. I know it took lots of planning, time and commitment over a few years."

The day could not have been more perfect and the precious memories of that day will linger in our hearts and nourish our souls for years to come.

We closed our weekend of celebrations on October 25, the actual date of our founding, that was observed with a quiet Commemorative Ceremony. This was held in the Memorial Garden when ten people gathered together under the gazebo amid lighted luminaries. The names of the original founding members were read and a bell rung after each name. This was followed by a unison reading of the Original Covenant. Music was sung, a moment of silence was shared in the stillness of the night and the evening ended with Bob Hale's favorite benediction.



Rev. Dwight Juliani and his "little green men" shared a timely message for children of all ages.



Longest standing members Ann Hale (68 years) and Phyllis Clark (64 years) took time from the busy day to reminisce about years past.



More than 100 people attended the celebratory worship service in person, with many more watching on YouTube. It was a glorious celebration of 300 years of ministry and mission!

*“Let mutual love continue.
Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”
Hebrews 13: 1-2*

Our Church Takes The Lead To Sponsor A Refugee Family

The Mission Board of our church is taking the lead to help sponsor an Afghan refugee family. We are grateful to Beth Gould-Ruitto who has stepped forward to serve as the chairperson of the Portland Refugee Resettlement Project. This is a community-wide group that will work in collaboration with **IRIS (Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services)**, a New Haven based organization.

Bringing a refugee family into our community is a multi-pronged project with numerous committees responsible for the myriad of details necessary to prepare to receive a family, and then once the family arrives, to help them get a new start in a strange new culture. Leading this effort is no small task, and Beth has hit the ground running. A recent organizational meeting drew more than 45 interested community members. If you are interested in becoming involved, please see the list of committees at right, and contact Beth via email at egouldruitto@aol.com. Watch *The Weekly Word* for regular updates on the progress being made in this endeavor.

The committees being formed include:

- Fund Raising
- Finance
- Family Finance
- Calendar Coordination
- ESL (English as a second language)
- Interpreters
- Cultural Integration
- Healthcare
- Housing Search
- Housing Set-up
- Clothing Donation
- Technology Support
- Transportation
- Volunteer Coordination
- Youth Education



St. Vincent de Paul Special Backpack Project Underway

St. Vincent de Paul in Middletown offers a variety of services in Middletown, including the Amazing Grace Food Pantry. In addition to operating the busy food pantry, Amazing Grace has taken on the role of filling over 300 backpacks for kids in Middletown. They are packed on Thursday and given out on Friday, and volunteers are needed to fill the backpacks.

If you are willing to volunteer any amount of time, please contact Kathleen Kelly (Director of Amazing Grace) at (860) 347-3222. Your time will be greatly appreciated. In addition to contacting Kathleen, please contact Karen Faass (faass@comcast.net), as the Missions Board would like to acknowledge your gift of time. “Thank you” to Ann Dimock, Cathy Probolus, Mary Pont and Sarah Richards for your “gift of time” in helping with this project.



Looking for the Perfect Christmas Gift for Someone on Your List?

Are you searching for the perfect gift of the season for someone on your list? A gift that reflects the season of hope, peace, joy, and love is the perfect way to honor that special person on your Christmas list, and help a family desperately trying to rebuild their lives.

Please consider honoring that special someone on your Christmas list, by making a donation to the Portland Refugee Resettlement Project being led by our church in collaboration with other Portland churches and community members.

Here's how it works: You make a donation to First Congregational Church specifically marked “Portland Refugee Resettlement Project,” and then you send a Christmas card to that special someone letting them know you have made a donation in their honor. Your simple gift will touch the lives of both the recipient of your card and the refugee family whose lives have been in upheaval and are desperate for a new start in a new country.

*Thank you to everyone for supporting all our Mission projects ~
together we make a difference!*

Women's Fellowship News

By Nancy Johnson, Women's Fellowship President

24th Annual Mid-Winter Chocolate Fest: February 5, 2022

Plans are in the works to bring back this annual event with a new look. A meeting was held on Tuesday, November 2 in the fellowship hall when ten women gathered to share their thoughts and ideas. Here is what was decided for the February 5, 2022 Chocolate Fest:

- New time will be 10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. People will be encouraged to register for a shopping time given in 45-minute increments. Amy Jahnke will take care of the online registration. Customers limited to approximately 50 people per shopping time.
- There will be a Chocolate Mousse Café Take-Out only
- No Kids Craft area
- Baskets will be limited to 20 and customers limited to approximately 15 at a time in that room
- Other booths include Baked Goods, Jewelry, Cards, Candy, Craft items for adults and kids

We realize that any of our decisions may need to be adapted to the sign of the pandemic times as the festival nears. We will have a box in the fellowship hall after the holidays for donations of Valentine and gently used gift items. If you would like to donate a basket, work the event or have any other questions, please contact Nancy Johnson.

**CHOCOLATE FEST WORKSHOP:
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12, 6:30 P.M.**

Register Now for Women's Fellowship March Retreat

Our retreat that was scheduled in 2020 is finally going to happen on Saturday, March 19, 2022. This will take place at the Guest House Retreat and Conference Center in Chester. Guest House is located in the scenic Connecticut River Valley situated on 17 acres. Their woods, a Certified Wildlife habitat, has two trail loops and a labyrinth. This day-long retreat will include a delicious luncheon buffet. The cost of the retreat is \$30 per person. There is limited space, therefore contact Nancy Johnson to let her know you are interested.

Church School News

Special Pageant "Story of Jesus"



This year's Christmas pageant was filmed in the church's beautiful Memorial Garden and will be presented by video during the Sunday, December 12 worship service. The video will then be uploaded to our church's YouTube channel for later viewing.

Children Collecting Items to Help Others

The church school students have two special collections underway, and invite all church members to participate by donating items. Collection boxes for both projects are located in the Fellowship Hall. Please help the children fill the collection boxes to overflowing!

During the month of December, the following items are needed and will be donated to the Portland Food Bank: socks, hats, gloves, mittens (for all ages). Items should be new or very slightly used.

An on-going project to collect items for the Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford is underway, and will continue into the new year. Needed items are books, crayons, coloring books, activity books, and card games. Items for the Children's Hospital must be new.

Volunteers Make the Difference

The annual UNICEF carnival was a fun time for those who attended, including the teen helpers who were on hand to make it a special time for the children.

Thank you to those who donated non-perishable items for the Portland Food Bank. There are many food insecure families in Connecticut, including some of our Portland neighbors. There are many ways to support the Food Bank, including through Christmas flower dedications.

Volunteers are needed to serve on the Christian Education Board, and there are also opportunities for those who wish to teach Church School. Please contact Ann Labby if you are interested.

Meet This Year's Confirmation Class

Faith formation is one of the most important roles of a local church. Led by Rev. Jane Hawken and Director of Christian Education Ann Labby, this year's confirmation class is comprised of six students who are in the eighth and ninth grades. They will be learning about church traditions, teachings, and history as well as attending worship services either via YouTube or in-person. While plans might need to be altered due to Covid-19 precautions, activities will include mission and community service projects, visits to the synagogue, mosque, and funeral home, leading a Sunday worship service, attending

a weekend retreat at Silver Lake Camp, participating in a baptism re-affirmation ceremony, and celebrating Confirmation Sunday on June 5, 2022!

Each confirmand chooses a sponsor who will work with the student throughout the year. This year's confirmands and their sponsors are Evan Brown – Sponsor Suzanne Roberts, Amelia Dietrichsen – Sponsor Diane Burgess, Casey Dudzinski - Sponsor Scott Pellin, Emelia Eckert – Sponsor Erin Hall, Paige Fitzgibbons – Sponsor Amy Jahnke, and Aiden Jahnke – Sponsor Kelle Young.



Casey Dudzinski



Amelia Dietrichsen



Paige Fitzgibbons



Emelia Eckert



Evan Brown



Aiden Jahnke



The confirmands and their sponsors

Your Church Needs You!

The words of our Covenant beckon us to action as our church emerges from the past 22 months of dealing with the impact of Covid. Offering our time, gifts and talents has never been more important than it is now as we move into our fourth century as a church community. Worship is central to our life as a community of faith, whether you participate in-person or via YouTube. The work of operating the church is dependent upon active boards and committees, and the Nominating Committee is working hard to ensure that all groups have a full roster of members. At this

time, there are openings on Deacons, Christian Education, Missions, Stewardship, Flowers and Nominating. Please contact Diane Burgess (860-342-3872) or Laura Winakor (860-301-7568) to discuss how you might fill one of these important roles for next year. We need adequate financial resources in order to support the ministry and mission of our church. While all contributions are gratefully received at any time, please consider making a financial commitment by returning your pledge card, which will allow the Finance Board to prepare the church budget for 2022.

The Belfry Chimes
 First Congregational Church of Portland
 554 Main Street
 Portland, CT 06480



Merry
 Christmas

Please fill out this form and return it to the church. PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY.

DEDICATION #1 (choose one):
 In ___ Celebration of ___ Honor of ___ Memory of
 Names of dedicated persons _____

DEDICATION #2 (choose one):
 In ___ Celebration of ___ Honor of ___ Memory of
 Names of dedicated persons _____

DEDICATION #3 (choose one):
 In ___ Celebration of ___ Honor of ___ Memory of
 Names of dedicated persons _____

From (your name): _____

Total number of dedications: _____

Total cost (\$10 each dedication) _____

Additional Donation: _____

The Flower Committee is once again receiving Christmas dedications for your loved ones. This is your opportunity to place a dedication in loving memory of, in celebration of or in honor of the December 19 and Christmas Eve Bulletins, while also helping the Portland Food Bank. A large poinsettia will be placed on the communion table, and a portion of the funds collected will be donated to the Food Bank.

You may place a dedication by mailing this form to the church by Friday, December 10, 2021 with a check made out to First Congregational Church with "Christmas Flower Dedication" in the memo line. Dedications will also be accepted via email to Alissa Brunk at Alissa.brunk@gmail.com. Checks and forms may be placed in the drop box outside of The Nursery School. Please be certain to label envelopes as "Flower Committee".

The cost of dedications is \$10 each. Thank you for your support!

Flower
 Christmas
 Dedications