

THE BELFRY CHIMES

Lenten Series Wednesday Evenings March 15, 22, 29

6:00 p.m. Soup and Bread Supper

6:30-7:30 p.m. Program

The Lenten Series will be led by Rev. Julie Olmsted, our new interim minister. Pastor Julie will lead us in a close examination of the timeless hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross."

Topics will include worldliness/simplicity, humility/dying for another's sins, commitment/love. This will include references to Jesus' Jewish roots, the idea of sacrifice, the meaning of blood and communion.

Soup and Bread Suppers followed by the Lenten Series are a treasured tradition at our church.

Come and enjoy some homemade soup, hearty bread, and warm fellowship, along with an opportunity to get to know our new interim minister.

Child care will be provided during the program portion of the evening.

March Worship Services
March 5, 12, 19, and 26
10:00 a.m.

Celtic Sunday will be observed on
March 19, featuring music by
Wild Notes.

A Message from Church President Joe Aresco

As we move into March with spring right around the corner, our transition as a congregation continues. We are so happy to welcome the Reverend Julie Olmsted as our minister during this interim time.

We are excited to have Julie join us during this special period in our church life, just as the season of Lent begins. We look forward to the three-part Lenten Series which will be led by Julie and an opportunity to learn and share simple meal of soup and bread.

In the coming weeks, I will meet with the Search Committee as they gather for the first time to begin their work. One of their first tasks is to create a church profile to be used in the search for a new called minister.

During March, we will kick off our "Raise the Roof" fundraising campaign to raise the necessary funds to replace the roof on the church. I invite you to prayerfully consider what you can contribute toward this important and necessary project to upgrade the structure of our church.

The boards and committees are busy as we begin the new year. Under the sponsorship of the Mission Board, our church recently prepared and served dinner at St. Vincent DePaul in Middletown. Plans are now underway for another "God's Work ~ Our Hands" event to be held in late April. These are just a few of the activities that are keeping our congregation busy!

As always, there is so much happening at our church and I am thankful for the work that all our members accomplish both within in our church and in our community. I look forward to working with Julie as she guides us during this period of transition, and I hope to see many of you during this Lenten season.

Joe



“God’s Work ~ Our Hands” Returns In April

It’s time to get out the rakes, garden tools, sewing machines, flower vases, kitchen utensils and warm up your singing voices as the Missions Board is back again to sponsor “God’s Work ~ Our Hands” on Sunday, April 30. On this day, rather than gathering for Sunday morning worship, our doors will open and we will venture out into the community to do “God’s” work. Our church is filled with people who have so many gifts and talents and this is an intergenerational opportunity for the ENTIRE congregation to come together and join in this project.

This year, we have FIVE areas for you to choose from as you consider how to be involved.



Those who are handy and enjoy yardwork or simple “handyman” repairs will go to the homes of people who have asked for assistance with these tasks.



If you love to sing, consider being part of a sing-a-long at Portland Care and Rehabilitation Center. Kasha will provide song sheets and the choir welcomes any volunteers who would like to join them.



Our church has supported “Dress A Girl” for many years, embracing their motto “every girl deserves at least one new dress in her life.” Volunteers for this group will meet in Fellowship Hall and begin to make dresses. This is a great opportunity for those enjoy sewing. The kits are provided, and all you need to bring is a sewing machine if you have one, or one will be provided.



Making flower arrangements (and deliveries) will bring a “little sunshine” to those in our congregation who may be homebound or those we want to know that we are thinking of them and want to “brighten” their day.



The fifth area is the kitchen crew and servers ~ we have a few volunteers already signed up. These volunteers took over the kitchen last time with the best hot dogs, delicious chili, chips and several desserts. Volunteers for this area would work together to come up with a menu, set up a few tables and serve lunch to those coming back from their areas of work.

No matter what your abilities or age, there are ways you can BE the “hands” of God. On March 12, there will be a sign-up sheet in Fellowship Hall for each volunteer area. Once the details are confirmed, you will be contacted by a “mission member” and given instructions on how to proceed. T-shirts will be available to those who sign up and haven’t participated in “God’s Work ~ Our Hands” in the past.

Please join us for a “Mission Moment” on Sunday, March 12 for more information.

Kudos to Karen Faass and the Board of Missions for leading this important mission opportunity “right here in our backyard.”

WHAT AM I?

I am ailing and failing and I need a complete facelift in order to do my job! Do I need to just look good? No, I need to be fully functional, as well!

I serve the congregation in many ways: I reflect the sun to keep the summer heat at bay; I stand strong against the winds that sweep over me and threaten to blow me apart; I channel the rain into the proper receptacles; and I brace myself against all the snow, sleet and ice Mother Nature throws at me.

What am I? I am the roof covering your beautiful house of worship! No insurance will cover my expense as my failure is a sign of old age. So, I am issuing a plea to you to “go fund me” through a donation to the church to restore my good health. The goal is \$35,000 which includes funds to repair and repaint damaged areas inside the sanctuary. No gift is too small and can be given over a short period of time which may be determined based on the gifts received, as we do not want to borrow money.

My facelift is planned after school is out for the summer recess, so there is no safety issue for the youngsters in our care. My good health depends on your generosity.

Thanks and God bless you for caring!!

One Great Hour of Sharing: A Way to Help When Disaster Strikes

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ and involves you in disaster, refugee/immigration, and development ministries throughout the world. When a disaster strikes or people are displaced or made refugees by violence or extreme poverty, you are part of the immediate response and of the long-term recovery.

The theme for this year is, “It’s Time to Share.” In Galatians, the Apostle Paul encourages followers of Jesus to generously help and care for others. Your contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing put you in the right place at the right time for the relief, accompaniment and recovery of the most vulnerable. You meet immediate needs and you address the underlying causes that create those needs in the first place.

Envelopes will be in the pews for the month of March. If you would like to make a donation online, please log onto the website at www.ucc.org/one-great-hour-of-sharing. On the Donation Page, you may direct your gift to One Great Hour of Sharing and please add First Congregational Church, 554 Main Street, Portland, CT 06480 under UCC Affiliation. If you prefer, you are welcome to send a check to the church, payable to First Congregational Church, earmarked for OGHS.

Thank you!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR TO SAVE THESE APRIL DATES

Sunday, April 2: Jumbo Pretzel Sale during Coffee Hour

\$3.00 each, Plain, Salt or Cinnamon

Sponsored by Christian Education Board

Proceeds will be donated to a charity of the children's choice



Saturday, April 22, 6:00-8:00 p.m. Intergenerational Game Night for All

Fellowship, Snacks and an Evening of Games for All Ages

Many games will be available or bring your favorite!

Sponsored by the Membership Committee



Spring Coffee Hour Hosts Needed



The sign up for hosting Spring Coffee Hours is posted on the clipboard on the coffee hour cart. Please consider performing this rather simple task as an appreciation for all the congregation especially during Lent and beyond. Directions are on the clipboard and Diane Burgess will gladly assist you in planning and carrying out your Sunday event. Thank you in advance for your participation in this important culmination to our weekly worship!

SPECIAL PARKING REQUEST TO WORSHIP ATTENDEES

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 do not park in these spaces on Sunday mornings, leaving them open for worshippers who need closer parking due to health or mobility issues.

Thank you for your assistance in making worship attendance possible for all!

News for Children and Youth

Church School is now available for children in kindergarten through 8th grade. Children will begin their morning in the worship service with their families, and go to Fellowship Hall for Church School following the Children's Message.



"Prize for Five" Announced by Mrs. Labby

Come to Church School five times and win a prize!
(Does not need to be five consecutive Sundays)

Infant/Toddler Care will be provided in the infant/toddler area in Fellowship Hall beginning at 9:45. Parents may bring young children directly to Fellowship Hall before worship begins or anytime during worship.

Each child must have on file a new **registration form**. Please mail completed forms to the church, place them in the offering plate, or drop them off in the white mailbox at the nursery school entrance.

Easter Activities including games and an egg hunt will be offered on Easter Sunday (April 9) during Church School. Donations of small gifts such as coloring books, crayons, card games, and Hotwheel type cars are needed for the Easter Prize Table. Please drop items off at the church or contact Ann Labby at labbyannm@gmail.com.

A Week At Silver Lake Is A Great Way to Make Summer Memories

Silver Lake is the Connecticut camp that is operated by the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, and is located in beautiful Sharon, Connecticut. Each camper from our church will receive \$100 from the Women's Fellowship. Register during March and take advantage of the conference's Early Bird Discount of \$50. Use the code **EARLY23** and for more information, visit the Silver Lake website or speak with Ann Labby. www.silverlakeect.org

News from the Women's Fellowship

On Sunday, February 26 following the worship service, 18 women gathered together for the traditional winter meeting. Several thank you notes were received including one from Jane for her retirement gifts and for the many ways that the Women's Fellowship supports the church. Future programming was discussed and the very successful Chocolate Fest was evaluated. The decision was made to move forward with a pared down version that may include takeout items, baked goods and baskets. Faith Fraulino, Karen Rettich and Lisa Harper volunteered to lead this new version of chocolate. A date has not yet been chosen.

Money voted at this meeting includes:

- \$50 for the group's yearly donation to the American Heart Association's Annual Appeal
- Monetary gift to the church staff at Easter
- \$100 gift to each child attending Silver Lake Conference Center this summer
- Up to \$500 to replace the curtains in the minister's office
- \$2,500 toward the new sanctuary roof

A Farewell to Chocolate

By Nancy Johnson

February 4 was definitely a bittersweet event for the church when the Women's Fellowship held our 25th and final beloved Mid-Winter Chocolate Fest. We began in 1998 with a very small one room festival that brought in \$2,035.15. Each year the festival grew making more and more money for our treasury. This year was no exception as we took in **\$7,486.32**. A mere thank you does not seem enough for the many people who not only helped this year, but also those who have helped for the last 25 years. I sincerely want to thank Robin Richardson and Sue Griswold who spent many hours with me in the weeks before preparing for this final event and Diane for her superb work organizing the take-out café and securing workers and bakers. A big shout out to Matt, Norm, Steve & Mike who probably had the hardest job of all this year as our car parkers in the bitter cold. For our faithful members who helped at the workshop, baked, donated baskets, worked at the festival, took wonderful pictures (thanks Louise) or helped in any other way, please know how grateful we are for your participation. The sharing of your time and talents truly added to the success of the day.

In saying farewell, I was personally touched by all the comments and stories shared with me throughout the afternoon from longtime and new customers alike. One person said "It is so sad it is the last one. Maybe you could make an appeal to the youth in the congregation to continue this fantastic event with its delicious food." Another shared, "When I heard this was the last one, I took the day off to come. You guys do such a good job." And another longtime customer said "I don't know how you have done it for so many years. Such a wonderful job. It is always so beautiful." The best one yet came from a loyal customer who said "We hope you pull a Tom Brady." I'm not sure that will happen, but I will not rule out a new event of some kind in the future. It has truly been a pleasure to bring joy and lasting memories to so many people throughout the state for the last 25 years. We may be saying farewell to chocolate, but stay tuned as we may be saying hello to something new and just as sweet, enjoyable and rewarding.

Sincerely and with heartfelt thanks to all,

Nancy



Editor's Note:

Pictured here are Nancy Johnson and Diane Burgess, the creative and hardworking dynamic duo who have been the backbone of the Chocolate Fest. Over the past 25 years, the Women's Fellowship has raised \$137,383 by presenting us with irresistible chocolate treats, Valentine gifts and baskets!

**YOUR CHURCH FAMILY SAYS
THANK YOU
FROM THE BOTTOM OF OUR HEARTS !**



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2023 CHOCOLATE FEST BASKET WINNERS
AND THANK YOU TO THE BASKET DONORS

<u>Basket</u>	<u>Donor</u>	<u>Winner</u>
GIRL'S ACTIVITY	Women's Fellowship	Alicia H.
CRAFTY FUN	Women's Fellowship	Kim C.
SUGARPIE HONEYBUNCH	Women's Fellowship	Emma Linskey
IT TAKES TWO- PINK & RED	Women's Fellowship	Alissa Brunk
IT'S A BOY	Women's Fellowship	Emma Linskey
LUCK OF THE IRISH	Women's Fellowship	Emma Linskey
SOME"BUGGY" LOVES YOU	Nancy Johnson	Jenna Spooner
TIME FOR TEA	Jan Poet	Robin Richardson
INSIDE OUT HEARTS	Faith Fraulino	Diane Burgess
BACKYARD BIRDS	Ann Dimock & Sue Griswold	Beth Gould-Ruitto
"BEE" MY VALENTINE	Faith Fraulino	Kathy Choma
CHOOSE LOVE	Maria Mundo	Margaret Stewart
A STEW LEONARDS SURPRISE	Melissa Vibberts	Cari Klick
APPLE OF MY EYE	Robin Richardson	Kathy Choma
LOVELY IN LAVENDER	Women's Fellowship	Tom Pizzinski
SUMMER FUN	Sally Irons	Tiffany Dondeneau
CHOCOLATE LOVERS DELIGHT	Kelle Young	Ron Kowolsky
SUPER BOWL BASKET	Margaret Stewart	Tom Pizzinski
GARDEN GOODIES	Brenda Rossignol	Angela Aresco
SPICE UP THE GRILL	Cari Klick	Tom Pizzinski
YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE	Alissa Brunk	Emmy Bernard
MADE IN CONNECTICUT	Beth Gould-Ruitto & Becca Hall	Alissa Brunk

DOOR PRIZE WINNER: Dineen Rivera

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

Interim Minister: Rev. Julie Olmsted

Pastor Julie's Email: jgolmsted.86@gmail.com

Pastor Julie's Phone: 937-409-1375 (Please call before 8 p.m., except in emergencies)

Our congregation is open and affirming.

No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.