

Belfry Chimes

February – March 2021

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



We Prepare For Christ's Resurrection Through Worship

"Our sanctuary is a place of safety for anyone and everyone, and we welcome all persons to worship with us. We worship in a manner which is at times comforting, at times a challenge, at times a celebration, and always in a manner which helps us remember that every person is a child of our loving God."

These words are in The Statement of Mission found in the Constitution of our church. Although we are unable to gather in person for worship due to the risks posed by COVID, worship services are being offered on the church's YouTube channel: [First Church of Portland, CT](#)



Wednesday, February 17, 2021
Ash Wednesday Service

Sunday, February 21, 2021
The First Sunday in Lent

Sunday, February 28, 2021
The Second Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 7, 2021
The Third Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 14, 2021
The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 21, 2021
The Fifth Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 28, 2021
Palm Sunday Service

Thursday, April 1, 2021
Maundy Thursday Service

Sunday, April 4, 2021 • 6:15 AM
HALLELUJAH! Christ is Risen!
**Easter Sunrise Service in the
Memorial Garden Gazebo**
Easter Worship Service, YouTube

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.



**Jesus said, “Let the children come to me,
and do not hinder them; for to such belongs
the kingdom of heaven.”**

Matthew 19:14, RSV



Emma France

If you try to be kind and good, you will be blessed with life and goodness and honor.

Proverbs 21:21

It is a tradition in our church that at a fall worship service, children in elementary school receive a Bible of their own, a gift from the church. Inscribed inside the Bible is a verse that was chosen specifically for that child. This Bible verse will follow the child through Confirmation and will be part of the worship service when these children become teenagers and complete the Confirmation Class to become members of the church.

Four children received their Bibles in November after attending the Zoom Student Bible Class led by Rev. Jane Hawken and Christian Education Director Ann Labby. Congratulations to Emma, Hazel, Noah and Taylor.



Hazel Ettlinger

God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of dawn.

Psalm 46:5



Taylor Sobieski

Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.

Genesis 9:16



Noah MacDonald

God’s love and kindness will shine upon us like the sun that rises in the sky.

Luke 1:78

A message from
REV. JANE HAWKEN, PASTOR

Dear Friends,

This year, Ash Wednesday falls on February 17. Our worship service via YouTube won't include the imposition of ashes (as it is liturgically called), but we will offer a time of music, prayer, confession, reflection, and readings as we begin our 40-day Lenten journey. The word "imposition" seems particularly resonant in these Covid inflicted times. Who has not felt imposed upon by the fear and the losses, the burdens and the disappointments, the disruptions and the health scares? Some more than others have been adversely affected, but all of us have been imposed upon by the dreaded coronavirus.

Interestingly, you would think that we would be looking for some balm, some relief, some comfort, some solace in our religious practices. But what do we hear when the ashes are imposed in the sign of a cross upon one's forehead or the back of one's hand: "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return." These traditional words remind us of our mortality. With nearly 450,000 Americans dead from Covid-19 (as I write this), you wouldn't think that we would need such a reminder. But the words direct us to rely on God from birth to death. Throughout our lives, God is with us. God's love in Jesus Christ, revealed in the sign of the cross, carries us through all of life's impositions and deepens all of life's joys.

Our usual Lenten Soup Suppers will not happen in the manner to which we are accustomed. We won't be serving soup and bread as we meet via Zoom; still, we will be able to enjoy each other's company! The Board of Deacons invites you to three Wednesday evening discussions beginning at 7:00 p.m. called, "Three Words of Faith." On March 3, Karen Rettich will host the evening on "Peace." Nancy Johnson will host on March 10 with the word "Joy." And I will host the March 17 session focusing on the word "Hope." Join us for conversation on how we can find Peace, Joy, and Hope especially in these trying times.

We will observe Palm Sunday on March 28 with a YouTube service. The Deacons and I will lead the Maundy Thursday Service that will be available on YouTube on April 1. Our Easter Sunday service will be recorded in the sanctuary and offered via YouTube on April 4. The service will include word and sacrament, prayer and praise, and music – including handbells – befitting the glorious Day of Resurrection. This year we will have an in-person, sunrise service on Easter morning at the Memorial Garden gazebo. More information on these services will be forthcoming.

Our Lenten, Holy Week, and Easter observances will be different this year, but our aim will be the same as we seek to grow stronger in our faith in Jesus Christ who calls us to love God and love one another.

In the name of the crucified and risen Savior,
Jane

MISSIONS: SERVING OUR COMMUNITY AND BEYOND

STREETFIRE MINISTRIES "THURSDAY NIGHT STRIKE"

On Thursday, February 25, the Missions Board and the Confirmation Class will provide Streetfire Ministries with soup and sandwiches in order to feed hungry folks in Middletown.

A special "thank-you" to Sally Irons, Tom Linskey, Karen Rettich, James & Jessica Grzegorek, Margaret Coe, Joe & Patty Pizzichemi, Linda Cunningham and Cathy Probolus in helping prepare for the "Thursday Night Strike" on January 28. It was a frigid night and hot chicken soup and sandwiches were welcomed and so appreciated by Streetfire. Coming out on such a chilly and windy night to help those in need warms the heart.

PLEASE SUPPORT

One Great Hour of Sharing

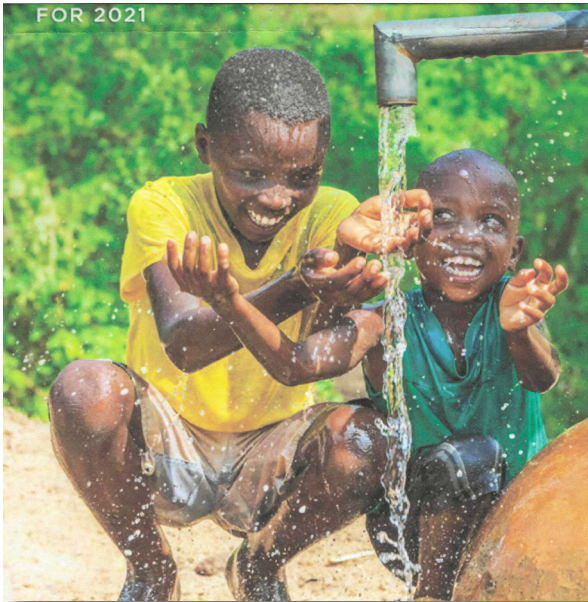


SCAN ME!

As we cannot be in our church pew listening to a "Mission Moment" with regard to "One Great Hour of Sharing," we are bringing this "moment" to you in a different setting. This is a special offering of the United Church of Christ, and this year's theme is entitled, "Let Love Flow." One Great Hour of Sharing ensures, even in the midst of uncertainty, the power of love will change the lives of those who are the most vulnerable among us.

OGHS provides assistance to those suffering from natural disasters, supports sustainable development projects all over the world, helps farmers who are trying to build a sustainable life, provides clean water for drinking and sanitation to families in rural areas all across the world and assists refugees who have been displaced by economic conditions, war and climate change. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought job losses to many families who are now on the brink of homelessness; OGHS brings hope to them in the midst of suffering.

To donate, log on to their website at www.ucc.org/oghs_resources or, using your smartphone, scan the QR Code above. On the Donation Page, you can direct your gift to OGHS and you can also add First Congregational Church, 554 Main Street, Portland, CT 06480 under UCC Affiliation. If you prefer, you can send a check to our church payable to First Congregational Church and earmark it OGHS. "Let Love Flow" ~ THANK YOU!



FOR 2021
Water is life, and potable water is vital for every form of life on the planet. Your donations will build wells to help sustain farms and vulnerable communities for years to come.

THE WEEKLY WORD DEBUTS

The Weekly Word made its debut on January 30. An electronic publication that will arrive in your email inbox at the end of each week, **The Weekly Word** will include the links to the next day's worship service and church school, as well as the prayer list and other items of interest pertinent to the worship service. **The Weekly Word** is designed to keep our church

community informed of important information, upcoming events, and brief announcements. This is a "work in progress" so please share your feedback and let us know how we can improve. Kudos to Amy Jahnke, who created the format for **The Weekly Word**, and will be the editor of this new First Congregational Church publication.

Nursery School to Reopen in September 2021

The First Church Nursery School has been a part of the Portland community for the past thirty years, and the closure for the 2020-2021 school year due to the COVID 19 pandemic was indeed a difficult decision made by the Nursery School Board. For the past 10 months, board members Sue Perrotti, Lindsey MacDonald, Amanda Dudzinski, Erica Buggie, Robin Richardson, and Kim Mearman have remained focused on re-opening the school for the fall 2021 term, despite the new challenge of hiring new staff following the retirements of Director and Head Teacher Diane Burgess and Teacher Nancy Johnson. With thanks to Diane Burgess's guidance, the re-licensure application was submitted and the school's license was renewed through January 2025.

Two committees were formed to plan for the reopening and hiring of a new head teacher. Those planning for the reopening are Kim Mearman, Ginny Hodge, Emily Foote, Amanda Dudzinski, and Amy Jahnke. Members of the hiring committee are Kim Mearman, Ginny Hodge,

Emily Foote, Lindsey MacDonald, Sue Perrotti, and Amy Jahnke.

The word is out that the Nursery School plans to reopen, and interest is high. At this time, it is expected that the school will be filled for the Fall 2021 term, with a waiting list put into place. The important task for the next couple of months is to identify a head teacher. The successful candidate must be at least age 20, and have a Child Development Associate degree or 12 credits in Early Childhood or Child Development, plus 1,080 hours of experience with the 3-4 year old age group. If you know of someone who might be interested, please pass this information along and ask the person to contact Amy Jahnke.



CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRIES

Easter Event for Children

Who: All children are invited

What: Easter Egg Hunt
with prizes for all!

When: Saturday, April 3, 10 a.m. – 12 noon.

Where: Field behind the church, gather near the Memorial Garden Gazebo

Masks and social distancing will be required.



Online Church School

Church school is available to all children 4 years old and above. The program can be accessed on our YouTube channel at your family's convenience. The link is sent out each week in **The Weekly Word**. If you would like to view past classes please contact Ann Labby who will forward the YouTube links to the lessons. Children may request materials or may choose to watch the class each week. All materials will be delivered to the student's home upon request. If your child would like to receive materials, please contact Ann Labby at labbyannm@gmail.com.

Quilters Needed

The church school students are making a quilt for the 300th Anniversary. We have the materials and the children will make their own squares. We need someone to help us sew it together. Please contact Ann Labby if you can help. Email: labbyannm@gmail.com

Kindness Creates Warmth

Thank you to the students who collected socks, hats and gloves that were donated to Streetfire in Middletown. Your donations have brought comfort and warmth to the recipients of your kindness.



Penny Challenge Coming Again



In 2020, the church school children collected \$99.77 for the Portland Fuel Bank, in the Penny Challenge of the Dogs vs the Cats. Watch for an announcement from Ann Labby about the 2021 Penny Challenge.

300th Anniversary News

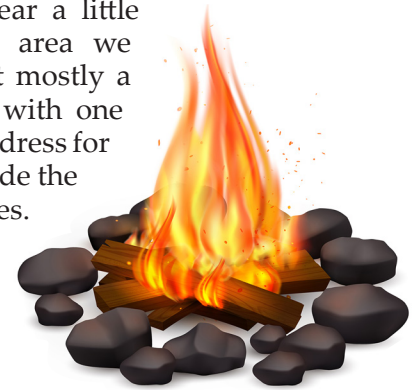
The Anniversary Committee continues to meet and plan for this upcoming year and at the present time is offering two ways for church members to be involved. Reach into your memory bank and consider the questions below, and email your answers to the church or to Nancy Johnson. Your input is very much appreciated. The Committee invites you to attend a special event on February 20 (see article at right). For further information about anything pertaining to the 300th Anniversary, please contact Nancy Johnson at 860-342-4098 or nlj1952@comcast.net.

February Firepit Fun

~ Saturday, February 20th, 6:30 p.m. ~

There is something special about a campfire – it draws us in with its magic, heat, and blazing light. Sitting around a fire in the dark pulls us together and helps us reconnect with each other and with nature. The 300th Anniversary Committee would like to invite you to an evening when we will do just that. Join us as we gather in the back field of the church around a warm fire and lighted luminaries.

This will be a time to hear a little history of this beautiful area we are fortunate to have, but mostly a time to enjoy fellowship with one another. Bring a chair and dress for the weather. We will provide the atmosphere and the S'mores. If you'd rather, just drive by and say hi. We would love to see you! In case of inclement weather, we will gather on the 21st.



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- 1) What are some of your First Church-related memories?
- 2) What have been some of the best times for you at the First Congregational Church of Portland?
- 3) If any, what would you consider to be the challenging times during the life of the church?
- 4) What do you see as the major changes that took place over the years while you were here?
- 5) What are your remembrances of the music at church?
- 6) What do you recall about Christian Education?
- 7) What memories do you have related to Missions and/or Ecumenical Involvement?
- 8) What do you recall about past anniversary celebrations?
- 9) What would you like to see happen during the celebration of our 300th anniversary in 2021?
- 10) Please tell us one or two of your fondest memories that you carry with you of First Church?
- 11) Are there any other remembrances of First Church that you would like to share?

Looking for PLAY Pictures and Vintage Items!

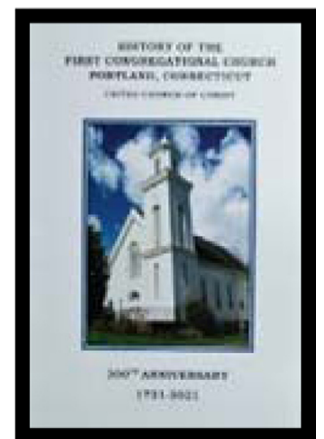
A memory book is being created of all our past plays. To complete this project, photos are needed from the following productions: Music Man – 1988, Camelot – 1993, Annie – 1995 and Oklahoma – 1997.

Also, vintage items are being collected for an upcoming event being planned by the Anniversary Committee. If you have pictures or vintage items to contribute, contact Nancy Johnson.

Anniversary Items Still Available for Sale!



If you haven't already done so, be sure to pick up a copy of the First Church History Book (\$20.00) and a pewter ornament (\$12.00).



300th Anniversary Banner

The 300th Anniversary Banner was introduced to the congregation at the January 3rd worship service. It was lovingly created and made for us by church friend Laura Burgess with the finishing touches applied by committee member Diane Burgess. It is meant to carry a message of light and hope especially needed in these pandemic times. The cross is placed in the center symbolizing Christ as the center of our lives. It is quilted with stitches emanating from the center like rays of the sun sending the light of Jesus in all directions. The fabric squares (and there are almost 300 of them) surrounding the cross reflect the colors of the rainbow, always a sign of hope in our lives. The committee chose to place the words "Let Your Light Shine" on the back as a reminder that we are meant to shine the light of Jesus to the world. We are called to offer hope, encouragement, kindness and compassion as it has been done in this church for the last 300 years.



Tidbits of Church History

By Diane Burgess, Anniversary Historian

February 3, 1746 – At a meeting of the Society on the east side of ye Great River, 36 inhabitants of the society voted that it was necessary to build a larger meeting house and 7 voted in the negative. This second meeting house was built near the present Prospect Street and Bartlett Street which was later called Meeting House Hill. The building was completed by 1751.

February 15, 1869 – The Society relinquished interest in the Old Quarry Burying Ground near the present day Commerce Street. Later the headstones were moved to the Trinity Church Cemetery in the northern section near Spring Street.

February 5, 1956 – A "Day of Dedication" was celebrated upon the completion of the project which renovated the sanctuary and added Fellowship Hall and a kitchen facility to the back of the church. The parking lot was yet to be realized.

February 3, 1996 – The first Annual Mid-Winter Chocolate Festival was held in Fellowship Hall and has continued each year until 2021 when the event was cancelled due to the global pandemic. Hopefully the event will return in 2022.

February 1, 2006 – The Rev. Jane Hawken began her ministry at the First Congregational Church UCC of Portland, CT.

March 20, 1722 – William Cornwall Sr. and Jonathan Judd were chosen as "tithing men" responsible for looking after the disorderly during the Sabbath and during the exercises between the meetings.

March 1, 1861 – As the Civil War was just beginning the church voted to invite the Rev. Andrew C. Dennison to be "the colleague Pastor to take pastoral care and charge of the Church." Rev. Dennison served the church until February 1868 when he resigned to become a missionary among the freed men and aid in the instruction of

teachers and preachers at the Biddle Institute for Freed Men in Charlotte, North Carolina. His wife died in August of that year and Rev. Dennison then returned to Connecticut to become the pastor at Middlefield Congregational Church where he remained until 1884.

March 1, 1869 – The Committee to build a parsonage stated that a lot opposite the church had been purchased from Erastus Strong and it was voted to proceed with the plan to build the house. On March 15th it was voted to proceed with the building contract for E.B. Taylor (Sue Larson's great-great grandfather) to construct the new parsonage.

March 1964 – A renovation of the Vestry below the sanctuary was accomplished to create a Church Office, Minister's Office and classrooms.

March 10, 1970 – The 250th Anniversary Committee elected officers for the 1971 celebration.

March 25, 1973 – The Reverend Edward T. Clapp and his wife Ruth were honored for their 32 years of dedicated service to the church.

March 1981 – "The Sound of Music" was performed and became the first of 8 musicals to be performed in the next 16 years. Proceeds from the performances were to be used for Portland youth programs and projects in the future.

March 1986 – The church approved an addition to the rear of Fellowship Hall to create new office spaces, a kitchenette and meeting rooms.

March 2020 – The Church was closed due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and virtual services were instituted to continue throughout the year and into 2021. Church meetings and Board and Committee meetings were held by Zoom video conferencing. The church voted to install the necessary equipment for live streaming the church services beginning in 2021.

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



Grab your favorite beverage, settle into your comfy chair and join the conversation! The links for coffee hour appear in the email communications sent out weekly. Mark your calendar or set a reminder on your phone. Coffee hour begins at 11:00 a.m. Check **The Weekly Word** for dates.



Join us for Virtual Coffee Hour!

March 3: "Peace"
 with host Karen Rettich

March 10 : "Joy"
 with host Nancy Johnson

March 17: "Hope"
 with host Rev. Jane Hawken

A Lenten Series with a Twist!

Join the conversation on how we can find Peace, Joy, and Hope, especially in these trying times.

Make your favorite soup and join us online!



The Lenten Soup and Bread Suppers followed by a presentation/discussion have been a tradition in our church for many years. This year, our Lenten gatherings will be happening in the comfort of our own homes, via Zoom video conference. Please join the Board of Deacons for "Three Words of Faith", a three week series of conversations on these words. The conversations will be held Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m., via Zoom video conference on the dates below. The links to join in will be sent out in **The Weekly Word**.