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# BELFRY CHIMES

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The First Congregational Church of Portland, CT

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## Worship

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Worship is an integral component of our life as a Christian community. Worship is held each Sunday at 10:00 a.m., and is live-streamed and also posted on YouTube for later viewing. Please join us.

## Covid Update

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In an effort to help mitigate the spread of Covid, masks are required when inside the church building. We continue to watch the trends and will make adjustments to scheduled activities when necessary. Watch *The Weekly Word* for updates.

## Annual Meeting

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The 2022 Annual Congregational Meeting will be held on January 30, 2022. Watch *The Weekly Word* for details.



## First Church Leads Refugee Resettlement Effort

The Board of Missions and World Service of our church took the lead to establish a community group to work in partnership with IRIS (Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services), headquartered in New Haven, for the purpose of resettling an Afghan refugee family in the Portland/Middletown area. Under the leadership of project chairperson and First Church member Beth Gould-Ruitto, the group is coordinating the support this family will need, including finding housing, clothing and home furnishings, interpretation and language services, healthcare, employment, financial, educational support, and cultural integration. All efforts work toward helping the family to become self-sufficient.

Support from the community is needed to help make this family feel welcome, establish a new life, strengthen hope, and contribute to the vitality of our community. Members of our church serving in committee leadership roles are Gail Bergan, Karen Faass, Jeannette Hodge, Cari Klick, Karen Mazza, Jan Poet, and Mary Pont. Volunteers are needed on the Transportation Committee and the Family Finance Committee. Donations of household goods and furnishings are needed, as well as financial donations.



The 2021 Christmas Pageant was creative and adapted to Covid circumstances. It was filmed outside and is available for viewing on the church's YouTube channel. The Christmas spirit you will experience while watching this event will stay with you all year long!

**Gabriel-Mary Clark**  
**Mary-Laila Dietrichsen**  
**King-Matthew Dietrichsen**  
**King-Chase Faass**  
**Dove-Madelyn Faass**  
**Townsperson-Mary Faass**  
**Sheep-Evelyn Faass**  
**King-Sean Fitzgibbons**  
**Angel-Morgan Klick**  
**Shepherd-Mike Klick**  
**Joseph-Noah MacDonald**  
**Sheep-Chelsea MacDonald**  
**Innkeeper-Lindsey MacDonald**  
**Cow-Finley McNall**  
**Baby Jesus-Hudson McNall**  
**Narrator-Lily Otero**  
**Angel-Danielle Pierce**  
**Video Technician/Editor-Brian Labby**  
**Directed by Ann Labby**

## A Message from Pastor Jane Hawken

Dear Friends,

Over the course of the pandemic, I have quoted a line to my husband, who is undoubtedly by now tired of hearing it: ***"We might be done with Covid, but Covid is not done with us."*** Upon reading such a discouraging sentiment this time of year, you might be thinking, "Well, Happy New Year to you, too!"

True, it's not the most pleasant thought to know that Covid is not done with us – especially as we embrace the new year when traditionally we feel hopeful and optimistic. Yet, here we are soon to enter the third year of the coronavirus quagmire while the Omicron variant threatens.

The hope we have as Christians is not based on external conditions nor on sunny, "glass half-full" personalities. Rather, the hope we have is born of a faith that maintains that God is with us in the bad times as well as in the good times, and all that is in between.

The next twelve months will bring challenges, disruptions, uncertainty, and loss. But the new year will also bring joy, beauty, blessings, and opportunities to help people. No matter what lies ahead in 2022, we as individuals and as a community of faith can make a positive difference by the grace of God. ***God is not done with us!***

I share with you these words from Rachel Marie Martin. May they inspire us to face the future with hopefulness, perseverance, and faith.

*Don't give up.*  
*Keep fighting for the good.*  
*Keep showing up.*  
*Keep loving.*  
*Keep giving back.*  
*Keep being kind.*  
*Keep being brave.*  
*Keep caring.*  
*Keep trying new things.*  
*Keep showing grace.*  
*Keep on believing.*  
*The world needs you.*

On each of the 365 days of 2022, keep in mind the words from 1 Chronicles 16:11: ***"Seek the Lord and God's strength, seek God's presence continually."***

Wishing you a new year filled with an awareness of the strength and presence of God.

God bless,  
 Jane

## Communication: Finding the Sweet Spot for 2022

**Finding the “sweet spot” for communication in 2022 is an opportunity for us to tell the world about the good works of The First Congregational Church of Portland.** When the pandemic emerged in March 2020, churches around the globe tried to find ways to remain relevant in the lives of their members as we all grappled with uncertainty. Our church leaders immediately began to consider ways to communicate with the congregation when it was clear that “getting back to normal” would take time.

We implemented live streamed and YouTube worship services and hired Brian Labby on a very part time basis to record and upload worship services to YouTube. We implemented a web-based email system and began to reach out at least weekly to more than 200 church members and friends. We hired Amy Jahnke on a very part time basis to manage our electronic communication (website, Facebook, church wide emails.) Amy immediately created *The Weekly Word*, a weekly newsletter which is filled with important information about worship and church events, as well as concerns of the congregation through the prayer list.

We created an enhanced Belfry Chimes that is mailed out for three very important times in the church year: Celebration Sunday in early September, Advent/Christmas, and Lent/Easter. We are now ready to embark on the return of the monthly Belfry Chimes, which will be sent electronically to those on the e-mail list. We will print and mail a paper copy to our members who do not have email access. For those who have e-mail access but prefer to have a paper copy, printing at home is an option or you may request a printed copy be mailed to you.

**Please help us tell the world that our church is spreading the news of God’s love through worship, mission, and fellowship. Share *The Weekly Word* and *The Belfry Chimes* with your friends. Share our YouTube channel and website with your friends. Tell the world! We are “being the church” through word and deed!**

## Women’s Retreat - March 19, 2022 AMAZING GRACE FOR WOMEN

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”*  
Ephesians 2:8.

The Bible explicitly says that grace is a gift from God. It is the unmerited, loving favor and graciousness of our Creator. And do we have a gift for you. The Women’s Fellowship invites you to celebrate the grace of friendship at a one-day retreat to be held on Saturday, March 19 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Guest House Retreat and Conference Center in Cheshire, CT.

A church retreat can provide a much-needed change of scenery, creating a space where new relationships are built and new ideas can be contemplated without the distractions of daily life. It is a time to enjoy the company of other women whose lives are fueled by the amazing, transforming love of God in a relaxed atmosphere.

What do you need to bring? Just yourself and maybe your knitting, a book to read, puzzles or games, in other words, whatever you like to do in your free time. There will be a brief formal presentation, but mostly we look forward to an extended time when we can connect with one another after a long pandemic absence. and will include a delicious luncheon. Space is limited so please contact Nancy Johnson as soon as possible to reserve your spot. Remember that God’s amazing grace is yours now and will be throughout all time. What a difference that makes—an amazing difference! Let this retreat make a difference in your life!

The cost for this day retreat is \$30 per person and will include a delicious luncheon. Space is limited so please contact Nancy Johnson as soon as possible to reserve your spot. Remember that God’s amazing grace is yours now and will be throughout all time. What a difference that makes—an amazing difference! Let this retreat make a difference in your life!

## Church School Collections Make An Impact

The enthusiasm of the church school families and the creative ideas of Ann Labby resulted in three recent projects that have impacted the lives of those in need, both near and far. Read on for the details of these efforts.

### Connecticut Children's Medical Center

Being a hospitalized child is no fun, and the gifts of games, books, and activities from our church have provided some entertainment for patients at CCMC. Thank you for all who donated, and to Monique France for delivering these gifts.

### Portland Food Bank

With the cold weather upon us, the donations of food, socks, hats, mittens, gloves and boots given to the Portland Food Bank for distribution will help numerous Portland families. Thank you to all who donated!

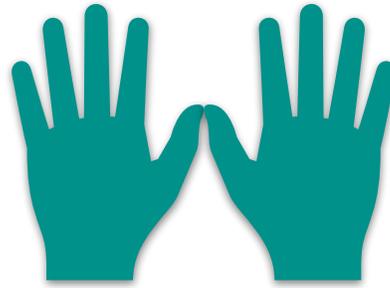
### UNICEF

The UNICEF collection boxes enabled our church to donate \$98.87 to UNICEF! Great job!

### COMING IN FEBRUARY

#### Are you a dog or cat lover?

In February there will be two collection containers in Fellowship Hall. The **red container is for CATS** and the **blue container is for DOGS**. Just drop your change into your preferred container, and at the end of February we will see which container has the most money. The church school students will donate the money to a mission project of their choice. All members of the church are encouraged to participate. Votes and donations may be dropped in the white mailbox at the Nursery School entrance.



## "Many Hands Make Light Work"

This idiom dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century and means that a job can be accomplished in a shorter order if more people take the effort to complete a larger task. (See: [writingexplained.org](http://writingexplained.org))

Let's work together into our 301<sup>st</sup> year and persist in the important jobs needed for the vital and caring ministry of the First Congregational Church.

The Nominating Committee wishes to thank everyone who has committed to continuing with the important work of the various leadership roles in our church. This dedicated committee of two is working diligently to fill vacancies on the roster of Board and Committee Members for 2022. There are one and two year terms available in various areas of management including the Boards of Stewardship, Deacons, Christian Education, Facilities Management, Music, and Missions and even the Memorial Garden and Nominating Committees! Terms will be voted at the January 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting and be effective for a February meeting. Please say "YES" when you are contacted by Diane or Laura, or call them today to let them know you are interested in God's important work here in Portland.

Diane Burgess (860) 342-3872 and Laura Winakor (860) 301-7568 (or leave a message for them at the church office), [first.church.pct@sbcglobal.net](mailto:first.church.pct@sbcglobal.net))

### CAN YOU HELP?

#### Here are some items needed for Refugee Resettlement:

Lamps, curtains & curtain rods & hardware (we'll just take any size at this point and use what fits.), bathroom mirrors, umbrellas (long golf style), kids' books, kids' games (specifically Connect Four, Twister, Candyland, Uno, Yahtzee), mattress pads (6 twin size, one queen), box style floor fans, flashlights, closet hardware. Please contact Cari Klick if you can donate any of these items.

## 300th Anniversary Year Comes to a Close

### Anniversary Thanks

On behalf of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee, I would like to thank the congregation for the many ways you helped to make our historic year special. You supported us through our fund-raising efforts, attended our sponsored events, provided many acts of kindness, and helped us celebrate at our October 23-25 anniversary weekend. The year may be over, but the work continues well into the future. Last month I received an email from a former church organist who served this church 1956-1957. Her intent was to purchase a book and ornament, but we have had lengthy emails and, in the process, I have gathered historic information I was not aware of. As the 2022 Church Historian, I plan to continue researching our history, as well as, organize and preserve all of our precious archives.

I would also like to thank the Church Council who recognized me at the December meeting. They shared their gratitude for my work in leading the committee over the last three years and presented me with a gift card as a token of their appreciation. As a longtime member of this church, I was honored to share my knowledge and gifts during this very special anniversary year. Together let us be thankful for those who came before us and laid a strong foundation for us to grow upon. As we move forward into the future let us continue to celebrate the mission and ministry of The First Congregational Church that has lasted for 300 years!

Blest Be the Tie That Binds,  
Nancy Johnson



The quilt banner pictured above was created by Church School children and the Confirmation Class. Each participant made a square, and the banner was assembled by Brenda Rossignol. Thank you to all who contributed to this keepsake banner.

### 300 Acts of Kindness

The 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee wishes to thank the congregation for the many acts of kindness they provided during our historic year. We met our goal in December and now our kindness board is bursting with 305 colorful hearts filled with thoughtful gestures of giving to others. A list of what was given can be found on the anniversary board in the fellowship hall.

### Sweet Success: Annual Christmas Cookie Sale

The Sweets and Treats Holiday Sale was held in December, and even in the midst of the pandemic, was a great success with a profit of \$1,258.00. Thank you to the shoppers, everyone who contributed cookies and items to sell, and those who supported the project with monetary donations. Special thank you to co-chairs Robin Richardson and Nancy Johnson.



## 24th Annual Mid-Winter Chocolate Fest

February 12, 2022

10:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

By Nancy Johnson

As noted in the December Belfry Chimes, plans are underway for our annual event with a new look. Some of the changes include the following:

- ♥ A new time with a limit of how many people will be shopping at a time. We are encouraging our customers to register for a shopping time that will be given in 45-minute increments. In order to register for a time they will go to our church website ([www.firstchurchportlandct.org](http://www.firstchurchportlandct.org)) and fill out a form.
- ♥ There will be a Chocolate Mousse Café Take-Out only, but will include some of our favorite desserts from the past. Talk to Diane Burgess if you would be willing to bake for this.
- ♥ There will be no Kids Craft Area this year, but a craft/grab bag will be available for sale so children can make their craft at home.
- ♥ There will be a fewer baskets to avoid overcrowding in that room and we will manage how many people will be allowed in at a time.
- ♥ We will continue to offer Baked Goods, Jewelry, Cards, Candy, and Gift items for adults and children.

A letter was sent out to our mailing list on December 20 notifying them of these changes. We informed them that if they preferred to attend without registering, they may need to wait before they are able to enter. We also encouraged them to check our church website when the time gets closer in case we needed to cancel or postpone due to the weather or the Covid situation and that masks are required.

### How can you help?

- ✓ **Valentine and Gift items** needed. We would love any new or gently used items that fit this category. There will be a box in the fellowship hall for your donations. Needed by Sunday, January 23.
- ✓ **Themed Gift Basket** donations appreciated. Please let Nancy know as soon as possible what you will be doing. Needed by Sunday, January 30.
- ✓ **Bake Sale** items are always a big hit. Chocolate and/or non-chocolate. **Best Sellers:** Cookies, Pies, Breads
- ✓ **Candy donations** of fudge, brittle, toffee or other creations welcomed.
- ✓ **Workers needed!** We will need people to work, monitor the parking lot, and clean-up. Please speak to Nancy Johnson.

Please note that baked goods and candy can be brought to the church on Friday, February 11 from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. or Saturday morning between 8:30 and 9:30 a.m. Please address any questions to Nancy at any time.

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