

# Belfry Chimes

Autumn 2021

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

## We Prepare to CELEBRATE!

**CELEBRATE!** It is fitting that this issue of the Belfry Chimes is all about celebrating, as we prepare for Fall 2021 and the opportunities to gather in celebration. The long awaited 300th anniversary of The First Congregational Church of Portland is fast approaching, and we invite you to save the center section of this newsletter as a remembrance of the events planned for this milestone year.

The word CELEBRATE has 43 synonyms according to the on-line Thesaurus. The list is filled with familiar words of the Christian faith ... with laud and honor as the first two words on the list, followed by others we use frequently in our life as a church family: praise, proclaim, bless, consecrate, dedicate, exalt, glorify, rejoice. When we worship, whether in person or via YouTube, we **PROCLAIM** our faith and **PRAISE** God from whom our blessings flow. When we provide a day of work through **God's Work ~ Our Hands**, we **GLORIFY** God by loving our neighbors. We **REJOICE** when babies are baptized, and we **DEDICATE** ourselves to support the children as they grow. Indeed, **CELEBRATION** is an integral part of our faith.

While we hoped that by the time the fall of 2021 arrived the Covid pandemic would be a memory in the rear view mirror, we know that it not the case. This issue of The Belfry Chimes has been prepared as if we are "full steam ahead" into the fall activities of our busy church. We recognize that although we have a full calendar of events planned, we will be flexible and ready to pivot quickly in order to provide the safest environment for all our members and friends. The dates and changes to the events outlined on these pages will be shared through *The Weekly Word*, available via weekly emails. If you do not have access to email, please call the church office. (860-342-3244) and leave a message so you may be added we can add you to our "phone chain" for quick updates and information.

Please join your church family to **CELEBRATE** our past, present, and future as The First Congregational Church of Portland.

## We PRAISE God through worship Sunday at 10:00 a.m.

Services are live-streamed and available on the church's YouTube channel. If you want to view the service in real time as it is happening, tune in at 10:00 on Sunday morning. Services are also available on the YouTube channel for viewing at a later time of your choice. Each week, details of the upcoming Sunday service are included in *The Weekly Word*, our electronic weekly newsletter

### *Here are a few highlights of upcoming fall worship services:*

#### **September 12...***Celebration Sunday*

We will welcome Pastor Jane back from her sabbatical leave and the church school year will begin for the children. Weather permitting, a "bring your own lunch" picnic will be held near the Gazebo following the worship service.

#### **September 1.....***Nursery School Recognition and Dedication*

#### **October 3.....***World Wide Communion when Christians around the world partake of Communion Confirmation Class Dedication*

#### **October 10.....***Bible Presentations to Third Graders*

#### **October 24.....***300th Anniversary Worship and Celebration*

#### **November 7 .....***"God's Work ~ Our Hands"*

#### **November 21 ...***Thanksgiving Sunday, including Com- munity Interfaith Service at 7:00 p.m.*

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.

*A message from*  
REV. JANE HAWKEN, PASTOR

Dear Friends,

Many thanks to the congregation for the gift of sabbatical time and to the church leaders, Deacons, and staff for all their work this summer in maintaining – and furthering – our ministry. A special thank you to the Rev. Eva Cudmore for her pastoral presence and her inspiring, faith-filled worship services and sermons.

I'm writing this letter in mid-August. If all goes as planned, I will be heading soon to Florida to spend two weeks with my mother. I will be accompanied by our daughter Emily and granddaughter Alice who will visit for a few days in Florida as we all enjoy a four-generation gathering.

While I am excited about this pending trip, I know that plans can change abruptly. If the pandemic has taught us nothing else, we have learned – the hard way – that life does not always go as predicted.

But of course, we have learned this lesson before. Twenty years ago on September 11, the shocking, deadly attacks changed our lives, perceptions, and our world in unexpected and unprecedented ways. In the midst of grief, fear, and anger, we found ways to cope. And we held in prayer those who lost so much, and those who faced danger and deprivation as subsequent wars raged on.

Even normal disturbances such as accidents, weather calamities, health problems, financial hardships, and relationship struggles bring disruption to life as we know it and to the future we imagine for ourselves.

Robert Burns, the great, 18th century Scottish writer, penned a memorable line in his poem "To a Mouse." He wrote 236 years ago: "*The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men / Gang aft agley.*" The language might be a bit unfamiliar, but the meaning holds true: our best-laid plans often go astray.

Burns's line came to me as I was thinking about our intended "schemes" at the church in the upcoming months. We have wonderful plans for worship services, events, fellowship opportunities, mission, church school, confirmation, the Nursery School and recognition of its staff, and the 300th Anniversary celebration. We know that COVID precautions and concerns might impact and alter some of our plans, but we will find ways to continue on in a spirit of hope and faith.

We are taught in the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.*" Hebrews 13:8 This is a helpful verse to bear in mind as we contend with making changes, alterations, and modifications.

As we head into the future, where our best-laid plans might go astray, may the steadfast love and constancy of Christ – the One who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever – grant us the power, resilience, and fortitude to faithfully face the future as it unfolds.

See you in September! God bless,

Jane

*A message from*  
REV. EVA CUDMORE,  
SABBATICAL PASTOR

Dear Friends,

Over the last couple of months I have had the opportunity to be part of the thoughtful community of First Congregational Church in Portland, and you graciously welcomed me. During this time, I've also been given the privilege to come alongside some of you as you have been dealing with significant events in your lives. I hope and pray that my presence has been comforting as it is always a little unsettling when the Pastor is away. I also hope that this time has been a bit of a "palate cleanser" for when Pastor Jane returns and both you and she will come together with new inspiration and vision for moving forward as a community.

And as I move forward, and at this particular time it is not completely clear where I will go, I am grateful for your generosity towards me as I am still discerning the way. Your openness to me has given me encouragement and incitement to move forward within the UCC in general and showing me that starting something new does not need to be scary when guided by the Holy Spirit.

I've been reminded that when God offers a new way, it is not always because what was before was bad or insignificant, but rather that there is always more to come, always new paths to follow, and new friends to meet along the way.

As we've been looking at Jesus' I Am statements, I too have been challenged to rediscover that even though God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, He is never stagnant, and neither is life together with Him. The "green pastures" and the "still waters" (Psalm 23) are always part of a journey which includes at times being besieged by enemies, and which also winds through the valley of the shadow of death. My time together with you has for me however, been one of "restoring of the soul."

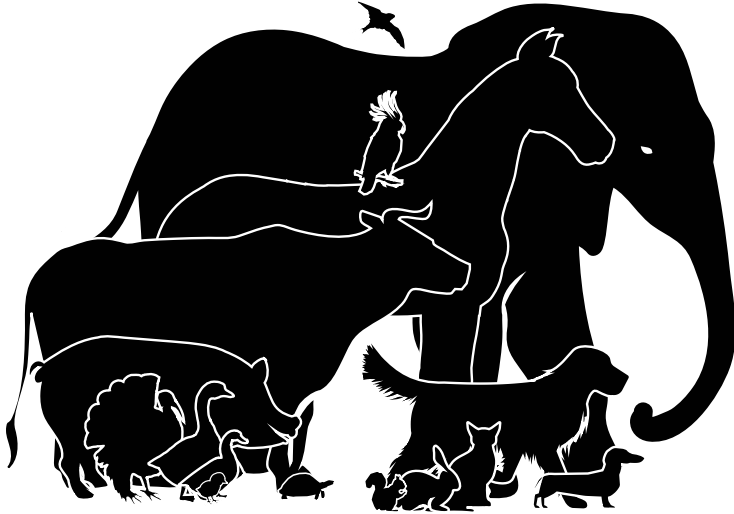
*"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

*(Philippians 1:3-6)*

Thank You for your trust, and Thank You for the privilege of being your pastor for a brief time,  
*Pastor Eva*



# The Annual Tradition Continues: The Blessing of the Animals *Sunday, October 3 • 1:00 p.m.*



How many animals do you see?

Each year, our church offers a simple, yet meaningful, service called "The Blessing of the Animals." You are invited to bring your pet to the back field of the church on Sunday, October 3 at 1:00 p.m. Please bring your pet on a leash or in a cage or crate. In addition to offering a prayer of blessing for each animal, we will also offer a prayer of remembrance for beloved pets who are no longer with us.

*"And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good."*

*Genesis 1:24,25*

## Thinking Of Becoming A Church Member? *Sunday, November 14 • 11:30 a.m.*

Are you thinking of becoming a member of our community of faith? We would love to welcome you to our church family on December 5 when we will receive new members during the 10:00 a.m. worship service. We invite anyone interested in knowing more about membership in The First Congregational Church of Portland to attend an informational/get-acquainted meeting on Sunday, November 14 at 11:30 a.m. At our second meeting, we will discuss our church's history and governing structure, and it will be held on Sunday, November 21 at 11:30 a.m. Childcare will be provided at both meetings.

Please speak to Rev. Hawken if you would like to join or if you would like more information. Email the church at [first.church.pct@sbcglobal.net](mailto:first.church.pct@sbcglobal.net) or call the church office at 860-342-3244 and leave a message. Please respond by Tuesday, November 2, and also let us know if you need childcare.

### Fall Cleanup begins!

*Saturday, October 16 • 9:00 a.m.*

Join members of the Facilities Management Board to help spruce up the grounds of the church this fall. All helpers are gladly welcomed. Bring gloves, rakes, pruners and tarps. Mark these dates on your calendar: October 16 starting at 9:00 a.m. to get the yard in tip-top shape for the anniversary celebration.

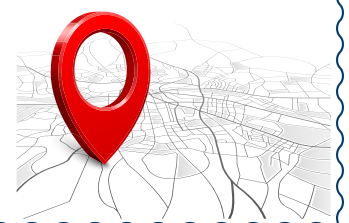
Then join us on November 20 at 9:00 a.m. to rake leaves, clean gutters and prepare for winter.



### Keep the Church Informed of Address and Phone Changes

If you have moved, discontinued your land line, or gotten a new cell phone number, please notify the church office. Keeping our records up to date has always been a challenge, and now that the majority of our written communication is done electronically, it's easy to lose track of address changes.

If you do not have e-mail and would like to receive a paper copy of *The Weekly Word*, please contact the church office.







# We CELEBRATE the Children and Youth Among Us...

Director of Christian Education Ann Labby has been busy planning Church School and numerous other activities for the coming year. Activities are planned for in-person gatherings, with contingency plans ready to be implemented if necessary. For further information about any of the programs featured in the Belfry Chimes, please contact Ann at [labbyannm@gmail.com](mailto:labbyannm@gmail.com).

## *Celebration Sunday: September 12*

Church school begins on September 12. The Opening Ceremony theme will be "A New Start" and students will receive in the mail a cut-out of a rainbow with instructions. Any child who does not receive a rainbow may pick one up at the church office or contact Mrs. Labby. Students are asked to bring their rainbow to the worship service on Celebration Sunday. The Children's Message will focus on the story of Noah's Ark, and children are reminded to bring their FAVORITE stuffed animal and their rainbow, which will be featured as part of the Children's Message.

## *Church School Plans for Fall*

Church School will be offered in-person on Sunday mornings in Fellowship Hall. Just as in school, masks will be required. Children who wish to participate remotely may do so by joining in via Zoom for online live participation. REGISTRATION forms are required each year, and help us know how much curriculum to order. Registration forms may be found on the church website and should be returned to the church as soon as possible. ADULT and HIGH SCHOOL AGE VOLUNTEERS are needed to help with the class once a month.

## *Volunteers Needed*

If you attended "Sunday School" as a child, you probably remember your teachers with great fondness. Please consider giving one Sunday morning a month to help teach our church's children. Indeed, there is no greater privilege than to help children learn about the love of God from a caring person within their church family. Contact Ann Labby if you are willing to volunteer one Sunday a month.

## *"Introduction to the Bible" Class: September 26* ★

An Introduction to the Bible class will be held September 26 at 11:30 a.m. for students in third grade (and above if the child has not yet received their Bible from the church). This brief Bible Study Class will focus on teaching children how to use their Bibles. Parents will receive a letter with the details about the class and Bible presentations. If your child is interested and you don't receive a letter, please contact Ann Labby.

## *Infant/Toddler Room*

At the time of this writing, it is uncertain if we will offer this service in September. Families interested in care for children of this age during the worship service are asked to contact Ann Labby to discuss. 860-614-4826.

## *Student Worship & Communion Training: October 3*

A Communion Training Class will be held during Student Worship on October 3, where children will learn about the meaning of the Sacrament of Communion. Each child is asked to bring a souvenir from a vacation trip or someplace the child has visited, which will not be kept, but will go home with the child.

## *UNICEF Carnival and Potato Luncheon: October 31*

The Church School UNICEF Carnival will be held on Sunday, October 31 during Church School. Parents are reminded to send children with their pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters to donate to UNICEF as they participate in the various Carnival activities such as face painting, games, and pumpkin decorating. Following the Worship Service, baked potatoes with all the fixings will be available for \$5 each, including a drink. TO GO potatoes will be available. Funds raised through the Baked Potato Luncheon will be donated to a Mission Project chosen by the church school students.

## *Movie Night for Children: November 13*

Children are invited to Movie Night on Saturday November 13 at 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. in the Fellowship Hall. Snacks will be served. While the children are enjoying a movie and a snack, parents will have a couple of hours for a dinner out or shopping, or just relaxing!

## *300th Anniversary Children's Quilt*

Throughout the summer cloth quilt squares were sent to the church school students to decorate for the 300th Anniversary. Many squares have been returned and they are amazing! There are still a lot of squares that have not yet been returned, so if you have quilt squares at home, please decorate them and return them to the church by placing them in the white mailbox at the Nursery School entrance. Any child who did not receive a square and would like one to decorate, please contact Ann Labby and she will deliver it to you with fabric markers. [labbyannm@gmail.com](mailto:labbyannm@gmail.com)

# We GLORIFY God by serving others

## *“God’s Work ~ Our Hands”*

It is time again to grab those gloves, rakes, paint brushes, handyman and yard tools, along with the sewing machines and music folders (as well as firing up the grill) and venture out into our neighborhoods to perform simple tasks and bring “God’s Work ~ Our Hands” to life for a second time.

**On Sunday, November 7**, we will, again, come together and **“BE”** the church and “hands” of God. No matter what your abilities or age, **EVERYONE** is needed; let’s see that striking “sea of blue” in our Fellowship Hall on this special Sunday morning as we bring our enthusiasm, kindness and compassion to support those who need a helping hand. Our first “God’s Work ~ Our Hands” was a resounding success with 80 volunteers who filled Fellowship Hall. Each person was vital in turning this idea into reality; there is a job for **EVERYONE!!**

There are many ways to participate ... assembling Church World Service kits, yard clean-ups, painting, participating in a sing-a-long at the Portland Care and Rehabilitation Center, easy handyman repairs, simple sewing project (making pillow cases for New Horizons ~ material has already been donated), preparing lunch for everyone and visiting members of the church who would love conversation and company ... all are ways in which to volunteer your time.

There will be a sign-up sheet in Fellowship Hall on Sunday, October 10, 17, 24, and 31; please

indicate what type of task you would like to do and, if you have a particular talent (such as carpentry, sewing, etc.), mention that on the sheet. Once the sites are confirmed, you will be matched to a site, contacted by a board member, and given instructions on how to proceed.

On that **Sunday, November 7**, instead of worshipping in the sanctuary, we will gather in Fellowship Hall at the usual time of 10:00 a.m. where Pastor Jane will lead us in prayer and then set out to the different sites to do God’s work. At the completion of your task, you are invited to return to Fellowship Hall and enjoy a complimentary lunch (prepared by our own volunteers) and fellowship. On our last mission, the room was buzzing with excitement as most ventured in, a little wet and soggy from the rain; however, enthusiastically shared stories of this event.

Let’s see and feel that blue “electric” spark that dominated our hall two years ago with the gifts and talents of each and every person; it was truly a powerful moment!

More information will follow in “The Weekly Word!”

Thank You to the Board of Missions for their sponsorship of this important mission project: Karen Faass – chairperson, and members Heather Faass, Beth Gould-Ruitto, Lisa Harper, Jane Hawken, Sally Irons, Cari Klick, Jan Poet and Joe Pizzichemi.



### The First Congregational Church

554 Main Street, Portland, CT 06480

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**Website:** [www.firstchurchportlandct.org](http://www.firstchurchportlandct.org)

**Facebook:**

The First Congregational Church of Portland, CT

**YouTube Channel:** First Church of Portland, CT

**PASTOR:** The Rev. Jane Hawken  
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**DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION:**  
Ann Labby [labbyannm@gmail.com](mailto:labbyannm@gmail.com)

**MUSIC DIRECTOR:**  
Kasha Breau (860) 983-6065

**OFFICE MANAGER:**  
Margaret Stewart

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Brian Labby

**ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST:** Amy Jahnke  
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**CHURCH SEXTON:** Ann Labby





# Women's Fellowship CELEBRATES A Long History of Service

The Women's Fellowship of our church has a long history of service, dating back to the 1800's when the group was known as The Ladies Benevolent Society. When this charming photograph was taken in 1924, the group was known as the United Workers. Today's group is known as The Women's Fellowship, and although the name has changed through the years, the commitment to serving the church remains constant.

Today's Women's Fellowship is made up of a devoted group of women who share their faith, their gifts and lovingly serve others in many ways, including the Prayer Shawl Ministry, cheer cards, scholarships for Silver Lake campers, numerous donations to missions and church needs, baking, hosting receptions, and of course the renowned Chocolate Fest. The group meets periodically throughout the year, and holds an annual retreat. The 2022 retreat is scheduled for March 19 in Chester.

The officers of the Women's Fellowship 2021-2022 are Nancy Johnson, President; Phyllis Clark, Vice President; Ann Dimock, Treasurer and Sandy Baines, Secretary.



*Women's fellowship has served our church for over 120 years!*



## Women's Fellowship Meeting *Monday, September 20, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. in Fellowship Hall*

Life is a puzzle. Putting it together is a challenge and we all know how challenging life has been during this pandemic period. Pieces of our lives have literally been lost through separation, mental anguish, pain, illness, even death. It has sometimes been hard to find those pieces that fit the puzzle, that bring joy and happiness to our very being. Let the Women's Fellowship be the piece that might be missing in your life.

All women are invited to the annual September meeting to be held in the fellowship hall on Monday, September 20 at 6:30 p.m. This very important meeting will include a discussion of the annual Chocolate Fest that will have a different look next year. The meeting is sure to nourish your soul, and a piece of dessert will be provided to nourish your body.



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

## Nursery School Will Re-open With New Director

The long-awaited re-opening of the First Church Nursery School is slated for September 8, with church member Laura Winakor leading the way as she assumes the role of Nursery School Director. Laura and her family are familiar faces at First Church (husband Dave and children Jonah, Jacob and Grace) and have been active church members over the past twenty years.

Laura comes to her new position with 21 years of experience in four early childhood settings, having spent the past 10 years as a head teacher at Hilltop Nursery School and Daycare in Cromwell. Laura's vast experience as an early childhood educator will serve her well in the role of Director of the First Church Nursery School.

When coming into a new position, it is important to have an experienced staff member at your side that is familiar with the "ins and outs" of your new environment and knows where to find things! The go-to person and partner for Laura will be nursery school assistant teacher/office manager Amy Jahnke, who has been in that role for 7 years. With the team of Laura and Amy, the First Church Nursery School is well positioned for the future, and ready to welcome two classes of children for the 2021-2022 school year.



*Pictured above are Amy Jahnke, Assistant Nursery School Teacher, and Laura Winakor, the new Nursery School Director.*