

THE CHURCHMOUSE

Newsletter of The First Congregational Church, Canton Center, CT

December 2022

From the Pastor

Rev. Brenda Pelc-Faszczka

A PRAYER FOR ADVENT

*Once again in this holy season, O God,
we listen to words of promise, from Isaiah long ago:*

*Every valley shall be exalted...
And the crooked places made straight.*

*Lord, even in the high and holy days that lie ahead
there will be valleys, quiet moments of aloneness,
of desolation, of remembering loved ones absent,
family members perhaps long gone,
hopes that were never quite fulfilled,
plans and promises long shattered.*

*And there will be the crooked places also,
when the worst that is in us springs to life again,
the heart twists, the mind turns in upon itself,
and we know jealousy and malice, anger or greed.
For even in these highest days
we are still ourselves,
your dreaming, hoping children
who can yet stumble and fall,
go far astray along the way.*

*Make our crooked places straight
by your power, not our own.
Exalt the valleys of our lostness
and loneliness with your love.
And when the feast is over,
the last gift opened,
the final carol sung,
stay with us and stay for us
and hold us in your newborn
yet eternal arms, forever.
Amen.*



J. Barrie Shepherd, *Faces at the Manger*

Deacons' Bench

Tim Lundgren, Deacon

This is one of the most stressful times of the year. That is because of the two separate and distinct holidays that we observe simultaneously, both of them known as Christmas. One Christmas, the secular one, has Santa Claus as its central character along with the rites of lavish gift giving, merry making, and feasting with endless songs about Christmas and Santa Claus. We are told that *"It's the most wonderful time of the year"* with the implication that we need to fall into line and be very happy and joyous all season long. The other, more sacred and profoundly meaningful Christmas is centered on the Christ child born in a manger in Bethlehem of Judea. This spiritual holiday involves in its celebration the singing of traditional songs about Jesus, the angels, the shepherds, and the wisemen. We attend Christmas Eve services, and once every seven years or so, as we do this year, church on Christmas Sunday morning.

In the animated Christmas special, *"A Charlie Brown Christmas"*, Charlie Brown is depressed and discouraged by the emptiness of the Christmas holiday season. He shouts to the ceiling on stage "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?" Linus takes the spotlight to remind him and us all what the real Christmas is all about. He tells the story of the birth of Jesus from Luke, Chapter two, verses 8 through 14.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

"That's what Christmas is all about Charlie Brown."

Some years I have been so overwhelmed with the secular Christmas that I have neglected the sacred story of the Christ child born in a stable two thousand years ago. Let us not forget the deeper meaning behind what this holiday is all about for us as Christians and to keep it close to our hearts now and forever.

Worship in December *All Sunday a.m. services at 10:00.*

To watch a service live online, go to our website homepage and click on the icon.

To review a recorded service later, see under "Connect with Us" on our website (Sunday services generally posted on Mondays), or go to YouTube.com & search "Canton Center Church" (morning service usually available there by Sun. afternoon.)

- Dec. 4** **Second Sunday of Advent; Communion**
- Dec. 11** **Third Sunday of Advent**
- Dec. 18** **Fourth Sunday of Advent; special music by choirs**
Monthly food collection for Canton Food Bank
- Dec 24** **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service**
7 p.m. **Offerings will be donated to the Canton Fuel Bank**
- Dec. 25** **Abbreviated service for Christmas Day; No Church School**

Rev. Brenda will be on vacation from Dec. 26 through Jan. 2. Deacons will lead the service on Jan. 1.

What Happened to the Holy Ghost?

When we recently added a sung doxology back into our Sunday service, after not having used one for a couple of years (our offering practice shifted during the pandemic), the one we put into use is a slightly different version from "the old one." We used to sing praise, if you remember, to "the Father, Son and Holy Ghost," after a rhyming mention as well of "the heavenly host." The version we are currently using (one of several updated versions that have long been in use in churches) provides these words instead: "Praise Holy Spirit evermore; one God, triune, whom we adore." The first two lines remain the same in both versions.

It was my pastoral judgment to use an updated version, and here's why. I am deeply committed to the idea that each generation of the church has an obligation to speak in the language and idioms of its own time: to try to help the current generation hear the church's expressions of faith in understandable forms. When we speak in archaic terms, using thought-forms that have no resonance whatsoever with the modern world, we don't help that process at all. We contribute to a perception that the church is out of touch, out of step, and uninterested in real communication. Research suggests that this is how many young people see the church.

Hence my thoughts on the term "Holy Ghost." While many churches have updated their liturgical language to avoid, as far as possible, gendered language for God, and I share that concern too, equally problematic to me is the archaic "Holy Ghost." In all my years growing up in church, and in my decades of pastoring churches, I've never once heard a use of "Holy Ghost" outside the doxology. It is an archaic term that we otherwise literally never hear or speak. If someone were to ask us to explain "the Holy Ghost," could we? We might say, "Well, it's the Holy Spirit." And if they were to ask us to explain, then, why we don't just say "Holy Spirit" (a frequently used term), could we? Probably not. It would be evident that we were holding onto something simply because it was "traditional" and not because it was any longer especially meaningful or even clear. Better, I think, to use language that newcomers, young people, and long-time attendees alike could readily recognize.

This is a task the church always has: how to keep traditional liturgical forms while also helping them to speak to contemporary people. Sometimes this means making changes, even small ones, and this is why there have been a number of updated doxologies in use by churches for a long time, just as there have also been new and updated hymns. I think it says something positive for any church when it can adapt and evolve, genuinely caring about how it is expressing and communicating its faith to contemporary hearts and minds.

-Rev. Brenda

Music Notes

Mary Lou Keefe, Director of Music

WORSHIP MINISTRY

This year has gone by so incredibly fast and I can't believe Advent is upon us. This is the season with the most beautiful music inspired by the miracle of Jesus' birth. I think everyone looks forward to Christmas music and if that is the case mark your calendars for Music Sunday Dec. 18th, A Ceremony of Lessons and Carols, when the Music Dept will present the senior choir and guest singers and bell choir with songs of the season. We also hope to have special guest instrumentalists. Following the church service will be a very special coffee hour.



Special thanks to our senior choir and guest soloists and Jon Keefe on djembe, all who participated in the service on Nov. 20th when we presented Let the River Run by Carly Simon. The bell choir also played a very special Canticle of Faith. Guest singers were Gert Delin, Megan Keefe, Dan LeGeyst, Gina Magennis, and Scott Neumann.

The handbell choir has a new member, Betty Vignali, originally from Florida but now residing in New Hartford. She is an experienced ringer and very much looking forward to playing on Dec. 18th.

Director of Faith Formation

Dr. Hollace Bristol

FAITH FORMATION MINISTRY

On November 20th, Thanksgiving Sunday, the children participated in the monthly food collection for the Canton Food Bank. They circulated through the congregation with the red wagon and before they were one-third of the way on their usual route up and down the aisles, the wagon was full. We could have, in fact filled three wagons this Sunday. Before exiting the sanctuary, as has become their practice, the children turned around and said "Thank you!" to those assembled.

That day, our Church School activity centered around the theme of "What is enough?" The children's task was to imagine that they depended on the food bank for their food and to choose food from the wagon that they thought would be enough to feed them for three days. The conversation was so amazing, sorting the food based on preferences, number of servings listed on the package, and how nutritious they thought each item was (and there was no coaching on their choices). Then they were asked where the food came from, and, if they were to send thank-you notes to those who contributed it, how many notes would they send. They were generous in their responses, saying that a million wouldn't be enough.

Then, they were told that since there were so many hungry people without enough food that they would have to share what they chose and sort out what they would give to the other hungry people. Again, the conversation was inspiring and the food that they decided to share made a bigger pile than the food they decided to keep.

They were then asked again how many thank-you notes they would send for this smaller amount of food. To their credit, they were in agreement that they would send the same number of notes even for less food. Isn't that the lesson here: No matter how you define "enough," no matter how little or how much you think you have, gratitude and appreciation are the path to a peaceful heart. May it be so with us!

Trustee News...

Phil LeGeyt

Writing this the day before thanksgiving I'm very aware of the things that I am and should be thankful for. One big one is our church and church family. We have continued to work to get back to and grow beyond our pre pandemic size. But we do have some things that we need to realize as we move through our 2023 pledge campaign.

You should have received your letter and pledge card in the mail this week and we would like to get those back by **December 8th** as stated in the letter.

Thank you for your pledge.
Phil LeGeyt



Picture above of our beautifully decorated Thanksgiving table on Sunday, November 20th and below pictures of our wonderful Thanksgiving Pot Luck Dinner following our service.



Thanksgiving food collection update: Thanks to the congregation's generosity, we contributed 57 cans and jars of gravy and 35 boxes and packets of instant potatoes for the Thanksgiving food boxes being prepared by the Canton Senior and Social Services Dept. and the Canton Food Bank. Thank you!

Brian's Angels: The next opportunities to help make food for Brian's Angels have been scheduled. We will meet on December 9th from 11:00 to approximately 12:30 to make sandwiches. On January 20th, we will meet from 10:00 to approximately 12:30 to make a hot meal. If we have enough volunteers, we will also make sandwiches on this date. Sign-up sheets will be on the kitchen door. Thank you for helping with this important mission.

The missions of First Congregational span the community to the globe. In the past month we have received several communications from several of our missions recipients as to the impact of your gifts of time and talent.

- South Park Inn thanked us for the warm hats and gloves we gave them as they reach out to individuals and families that are experiencing the challenges of homelessness.
- Christy Pidgeon of the Canton Food Bank thanked our youth and our church for the monthly contributions to the food bank and its ongoing mission for families in need.
- Open Hearth thanked us for our donation to support men in Hartford challenged with underemployment, homelessness and/or substance use.



December Missions

We will be continuing our long-standing tradition of collecting **warm hats and gloves** to decorate the Christmas tree in the sanctuary starting November 27. Please bring items in a plastic bag so they don't get pine needles or sap on them. These will be donated to **Canton Social Services and Gifts of Love.**

Do you know of someone in need?

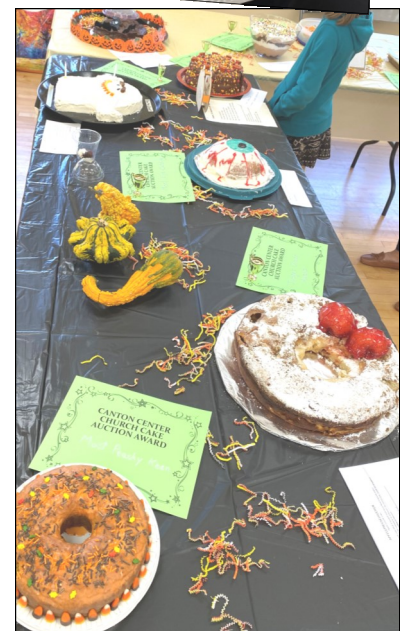
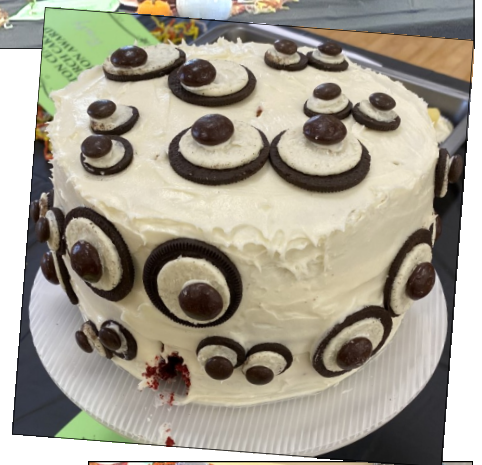
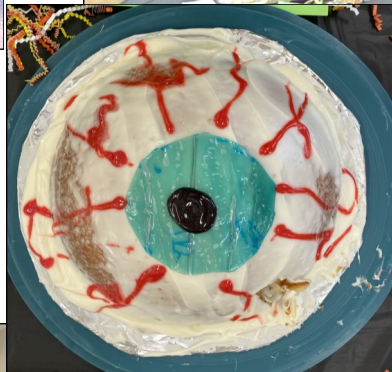
In what ways would you like to reach out to serve those in our community and greater world?

Members: please consider how you would like to reach out to those in our close community or greater community and contact Gina Magennis with your ideas so that we can develop with you missions work.

CAKE AUCTION RESULTS!!!

Thank you so much to all our bakers for all the BOO-tiful and SPOOKY Halloween themed cakes that graced our Halloween themed auction! Thank you too to our incredibly talented auctioneer, Paul Stansel and his sidekick, Martha! Everyone appreciates your donation of time, voice and humor that made this Missions and Stewardship fundraiser a success. The grand total you ask?? \$1015.00 to help us with the many missions we support.

Thank you to all who participated!





Shop for Christmas and Help the Church and Others!



It's the most wonderful time of the year!

Gift cards are one of the most popular choices for gift giving occasions, especially Christmas. Whether you are looking for a present for that “hard to shop for” relative, a hostess gift, a little something for a teacher or co-worker or even a small stocking stuffer or grab bag gift – the scrip table is a great place to find just what you need! Cards are offered in various denominations and some start as low as \$5 or \$10. There are nearly 600 retailers and restaurants to choose from – many local stores, national chains and online shops as well. When you purchase a gift card from our church’s scrip program, a percent of the face value of every card goes to our general fund. You are supporting our church every time you buy a gift card!

The Scrip table is set up in the parish hall every Sunday during coffee hour. Stop by for all your gift card needs! You can pick up a list of all the cards that are available to order and take it home with you, or you can visit www.raiseright.com to start making your list. Please note that the deadline to order cards is **December 12th** to ensure they are here in time. Last minute shoppers can visit the table on 12/18 to see what’s available in inventory to pick up same day.

We are also actively collecting Target and Walmart cards for Wellmore through **December 4th**. Let’s help make it a very Merry Christmas for these families in need.

If you’re not in church, you can always call or email me (860-693-0134 or c.levine@comcast.net) or you can place an order online or through the RaiseRight app. Reach out to me for our church’s unique enrollment code if you wish to place an order electronically.

Thanks, as always, for your support! Merry Christmas!

Casey

AN OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE IN OUR DENOMINATION: THE FARMINGTON VALLEY COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

The regional body of the United Church of Christ that we belong to, the Farmington Valley Association, is looking for a new lay member for its Committee on Ministry. This very important committee, made up of both clergy and lay people, has oversight for the standing of clergy and congregations in the Association, including: processes of ministerial authorization and support (such as ordinations and installations), seeing that clergy are engaging in continuing education (boundary training, racial justice training), pastoral formation (seminarians), and generally keeping communication with pastors and churches to support the well-being of those relationships.

The committee meets once a month, with a break in the summer, at the West Avon Congregational Church, usually on the second Tuesday of the month from 12:30-2:30 p.m. This is a great opportunity to become more involved with how our denomination works at its most local level. If you might be interested in serving, or would like more information, please contact the Rev. Susan Gibson (pastor of The First Church of Christ, 1652 in Farmington, and a member of the committee): sgibson@firstchurch1652.org, or 914-787-9444 (cell).

SUPPORT TO OUR MINISTRIES



Thank you to:

Nancy Alford and Joan Noel
for the Thanksgiving Sunday
table display.

Marianne Burbank & Tim LeGeyt
for the donation of the sanctuary tree
in memory of:
Marianne's grandfather, Harry Humphrey
and father, Sam Humphrey
and Tim's grandfather, Mort Bristol

Jim Potter and family,
for the decoration of the church
for the season.



POINSETTIA PLANTS \$ 8. each
Please fill out the form below and return to the office if you are
interested in providing Poinsettias for our Dec. 18 & 24 Services.

2022 CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA ORDER FORM



Name: _____

of poinsettia plants ordered _____ x \$ 8.00 = _____

(Please attach cash or check made payable to: FCCCC by Sunday, December 11.)

In Memory of:

In Honor of:

In Celebration of:



DECEMBER 2022

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Memorial Reception 12:30 pm <i>(P. Andersen)</i> Handbell Choir 5:30 pm Scouts 6:30-8 pm	2	3 W. Bristol 100 Birthday Party 1:00 pm AA 11:00 p.m.
4 Worship & Communion 10:00 am Court of Honor Sanctuary/Parish Hall 2:00 pm	5 Choir 5:00 pm ACA 7:00 pm Al-Anon 7:00 pm	6 AA 7:00 pm	7 Diaconate 7 pm	8 Handbell Choir 5:30 pm	9	10 AA 11:00 p.m.
11 Worship 10:00 am	12 Choir 5:00 pm Trustee 7:00 pm ACA 7:00 pm Al-Anon 7:00 pm	13 AA 7:00 pm	14 Council Meeting 7:00 pm	15 Handbell Choir 5:30 pm	16 Prime Timers Lunch & Holiday Concert 11:30 am	17 AA 11:00 p.m.
18 Worship 10:00 am Food Collection Sunday	19 Choir 5:00 pm ACA 7:00 pm Al-Anon 7:00 pm	20 AA 7:00 pm	21	22 Handbell Choir 5:30 pm	23	24 Christmas Eve Service 7:00 pm (Offering to Canton Fuel Bank) AA 11:00 p.m.
25 Worship 10:00 am No Church School 	26 <i>Church Office Closed</i> Choir 5:00 pm ACA 7:00 pm	27 AA 7:00 pm	28	29 Handbell Choir 5:30 pm	30	31 AA 11:00 p.m.



The First Congregational Church
(United Church of Christ)
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Change Service Requested



Worship every Sunday at 10:00 a.m.

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