

THE CENTER WORD



Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Barkhamsted

December 2023

Congregation Calls Susan Caufield as Pastor

Reverend Susan Caufield was called as the pastor of First Congregational Church of Barkhamsted by a vote of the congregation on November 12, 2023. The vote was unanimous. Reverend Caufield had been serving the church in the role of interim pastor since April 16, 2023 upon the retirement of Reverend Susan Wyman.

The meeting was held after the conclusion of the 10:00 am Sunday service. At the meeting, Sandy Davis, chair of the Search Committee, presented information on the pastoral search process and why the committee was recommending Susan Caufield to the congregation.

Several members of the congregation stood and voiced support for Susan. An enthusiastic vote concurred with this support and Susan was congratulated and welcomed as our newest pastor.



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Above- Rev. Susan Caufield (second from right) with Search Committee members (left to right) Alice Judd, Bonnie Boyle and Sandy Davis.

Through the Pastor's Window



Dear Friends - I am so grateful to be your permanent minister as of November 12, 2023.

Advent and Christmas blessings to you! We tend to be a bit busier during this Advent and Christmas season- then we'll tend to slow down as winter settles in. The one part of us that doesn't slow down after Christmas? Our need to feel we're here for a reason. No matter the season. Like we're meant for something, someone, sometime, perhaps in the future, but we're here for a reason.

Advent is the season of journeying toward the Baby Jesus in a manger. Of feeling what God's Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love mean, as we celebrate Jesus, the light of the world. I hope you may enjoy peaceful times this Advent and this winter. Your journey is never alone – it is shared with God beside you, even when you aren't sure. It's shared with each person who may cross your path in any day. They can make a difference in your life, and you can make a difference in theirs.

I invite you to share an hour of worship here in Barkhamsted Center Church, any Sunday morning at 10a.m. It's important to remember that you are loved by God. Music, prayer, and a message are always waiting for you here in this well-loved old white church in the Barkhamsted woods. Bring a prayer concern or good news to share.

May you and your loved ones have a blessed Advent and Christmas season, and a wonderful winter (no matter what the weather brings!).

Our Christmas Eve service will be during our 10a.m. worship time on December 24th. Come! Invite a friend or neighbor. And if you or a friend or loved one ever need someone to talk with, call me at (860) 324-4267. Have a blessed Christmas and winter!

Susan Caufield

(Congregation Calls Susan Caufield... continued from page 1)

John Lavieri, Church Moderator, commented that “after a long, national search, we found our best candidate close to home. Sue and her husband, Mark, have lived in this area for most of their lives, and Sue has family roots deep in the history of Barkhamsted. As a body, our members feel quite fortunate to have her leading our growing congregation.”

Sandy Davis, Chair of the Search Committee, said “from the first Sunday in April that Susan started serving as our Fill In Minister, feedback from members of the Search Committee and Church members was positive and optimistic. Some comments the Search Com-

mittee received were ‘we wish Susan was our permanent pastor’ and ‘we enjoy Susan’s sermons and style’. In my opinion, this was a great ending to an almost year-long search process for the Barkhamsted Congregational Church. We look forward to positive movement forward in our Church’s future.”

The Congregation welcomes Rev. Susan Caufield as our spiritual leader. The seamless transition from her interim role to the confirmed pastorship underscores the trust and admiration she has garnered within the community.

Operation Christmas Child - Shoebox Shopping

Each year our church participates in the Samaritan’s Purse Operation Christmas Child, filling shoeboxes with gifts that are sent to needy children throughout the world.

The Deacons purchased 100 red and green shoeboxes and provided them to the congregation. This year 42 boxes were filled, with nine of those via an on-line process.

Rev. Susan Caufield blessed the shoeboxes and Kristi

Napolitano and her children delivered them to a local drop off point in New Hartford. A special shout out to friends of Beth Zils and Leslie Cosgrove from the Cambridge House in Granby who provided eight (8) shoeboxes with \$90 in donations and expressed enthusiasm to participate again next year.

Thanks to all who participated in this wonderful program. It seems that those filling the shoeboxes are almost as thrilled as those ultimately receiving them!



Above- The collected shoeboxes are blessed by Rev. Susan Caufield, assisted by Kristi Napolitano and her children, Nicholas, Eve and Lilly.



Old Home Day Celebrated

Our traditional observance of Old Home Day was held on September 10th starting with the worship service that included special music by Laurie Pont Hall, organist, and a special performance by Danielle Hall (no relation to Laurie - photo at right) who played the flute beautifully.

Following the worship service, the group gathered on the front steps of the portico for the annual photograph (see below). This tradition has its roots in the 1879 town centennial birthday celebration held here at our church and at the then-town hall next door.

After the photo, people reconvened to the Community Room for a potluck lunch. The day was also the wedding anniversary of Paul & Kathy Hart, and they were presented with a cake and flowers.



October Blessing of the Animals

Many beautiful animal friends and family members were blessed during the Blessing of the Animals Worship Service on Oct. 15th, led by Interim Minister Susan Caufield. The service included hymns and prayers celebrating God's gift of our creatures, and had a peaceful and joyous spirit.

Eight dogs were present and blessed in person, in their people's arms and on their leashes, and not a growl was heard. Those many dear ones blessed via cell phone and photo included dogs, cats, turkeys, and ducks. We also honored the memory of 3 dear dog friends who have passed; Pepper, Blackie, and Tuxedo, with their owners presenting ashes and photos for blessing.

Later, long time attendees, Patches the donkey, known for participating in past Christmas observances, and friend Taos the horse, were blessed up the road in their paddock. We will keep all these dear creatures, and their people, in our prayers, always. Please note that throughout the year, Susan Caufield will bless any pets - new, old, sick or needy - in your home, barn, or yard. Call her cell anytime at (860) 324-4267.



Oct. 15-Blessing of the animals.

Organ Concert a Success!

The organ concert featuring church organist Laurie Pont Hall on October 29th was attended by over 50 people, many of them newcomers to our church. Positive comments are still being received about the event, the church and the lovely reception after the concert.

The free will offering brought in \$581. Many thanks to all who helped with the set-up, cleanup, reception, publicity, handing out bulletins and welcoming people as they came in, and to all who attended. It was a fun afternoon and a special event for the church!



Above- Laurie Pont Hall warming up before the start of the October 29 concert.



Above- Laurie Pont Hall playing one of the organ concert works, with daughter Courtney serving as page turner.



Music Notes

The seasons of Advent and Christmas are here again, and they bring us the message of hope as we celebrate Christ’s birth. Troubles seem to be all around us these days. From war and political turmoil to the complexities of our ever-changing world, sometimes it can all seem to be too much.

It is now that it is especially important to focus on hope. We can do little to change the world’s problems, but we can focus on the One who can get us through them.

In times of trouble or times of joy, musicians do what we always do - we sing and play, we keep making music. Our seasonal music brings us the message of hope. The Advent hymn “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” (Pilgrim Hymnal #103) is an example:

*“Come, thou long-expected Jesus, Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us; Let us find our rest in thee”*

*“Israel’s strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart”*

The Christmas anthem “Hope In A Manger” by Terry Esau tells of the visits of the shepherds and wise men, and ends with this stanza;

*“There are men that still seek Him, there’s a child to be found.
There’s still hope in a manger, God’s love came down.
There’s still hope in a manger, God’s love came down.*

Enjoy the music of the season!

In Harmony,
Laurie

A Harvest of Seasonal Giving

Members and Friends of Barkhamsted Center Church have donated quite a harvest of gifts for many, near and far.

The October 29th organ concert by our Organist Laurie Pont Hall resulted in a bountiful special offering.



Our church participates in the Heifer Project, allowing the purchase of many of God's creatures to help others provide for themselves: We were able to donate an Alpaca, a flock of chickens, and honey bees through this program.

The congregation filled 42 Samaritan Purse boxes to be sent to needy children in all corners of the world.

Thirteen winter coats (and a hat!) were donated to the FISH shelter in Torrington.

Bins and bins of non-perishable food for the area Food Pantry have been collected, and will continue to be gathered and delivered this winter, as the need continues to be great. Our donations go to the Pleasant Valley Food Bank serving New Hartford and Barkhamsted. Currently some of the things they are especially looking for are baking supplies, cold cereal, vinegar (any kind), cake mixes & frosting, juice, jelly, canned mixed fruit, canned pineapple, canned beets, canned peas & carrots, toothpaste (they don't need toothbrushes) deodorant and bar soap.

Many thanks to those who have donated, and those who have made sure all these gifts get to their destinations.

Advent Season



Above - The Advent season began on December 3 with the lighting of the Advent candle. John and Corky lit the candle and read the appropriate verses.



In preparation for Advent the Deacons have purchased the booklet entitled **Making Room**, published by the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. They are placed on the table at the back of the sanctuary. (They have been popular... at the time of writing this there was only one copy left. Hopefully you already have a copy! Donations toward the cost of this booklet are accepted.



Above - The church has many “elves” who quietly take care of routine tasks or provide special things- doing their work in the background without fanfare.

One such elf is Sharon Purcell, who often supplies the tables in Fellowship Hall with centerpieces or decorations. Sharon, with assistance from Alice Judd ,set up this stunning creche surrounded by red poinsettias in our community room. A special delight that will be enjoyed by all.

Christmas Pageant



The Christmas Pageant will be held on Sunday, December 17th at 10 a.m. The casting for the various roles is taking place. Kathy Hart will narrate the pageant and Harriet Winchenbaug will perform a solo accompanied by Organist Laurie Pont Hall. It is hoped to have a baby instead of a doll this year. Please help us find a couple with a baby. Please see Leslie Cosgrove, Pageant Director about taking a role in this greatest story ever told.

Following the pageant a potluck lunch will take place in the community room.



Annual Reports Due

Annual reports should be submitted to Clerk Kathy Hart by December 31st.

Greening the Church - Lighting the Christmas Tree

November 26th Christ the King Sunday, was set for the greening of the church and the lighting of the Christmas Tree. After worship service all gathered outside to say a prayer in unison and to sing *O Christmas Tree* and watch the lighting of the Christmas Tree which had grown (photo below). Joel Napolitano periodically trimmed it to maintain the proper shape.

The workers gathered in the community room to have sandwiches and meatballs in BBQ sauce and dessert before getting to work to decorate the church. The wreaths

were adorned by bows under the guidance of Orienne Barnowski, then put on the exterior front doors, the doors in the vestibule/sanctuary room and the windows in the sanctuary.

Bonnie Boyle provided the garland for the gallery breastwork. While this was happening, folks put lights on the inside Christmas tree and the children helped by placing ornaments on the tree. The lighted angel was placed on the top and all were satisfied that the historic meetinghouse was properly decorated.



Photo above - A prayer, a carol and the lighting of the Christmas tree in front of the church on December 3, 2023.





Below are upcoming birthdays and anniversaries of church members and friends. Hopefully we did not miss anyone. If so, our apologies, and please let us know.

December

Birthdays

- 16 B.J. Myers
- 22 Kathy Hart
- 26 Charles Rhoades

Anniversaries

- 28 Todd and Sandy Davis

January

Birthdays

- 3 Paul Hart

February

Birthdays

- 21 Averill Blackburn
- 23 Bonnie Boyle
- 28 Jena Greaser

Anniversaries

- 14 Don and B. J. Myers

Church Calendar



- ◆ **Sunday December 17** - Combined Sunday Worship Service/Christmas Pageant, 10:00 am, followed by pot luck lunch
- ◆ **Sunday December 24** - Combined Sunday Worship/Christmas Eve/ Christmas Service, 10:00 am
- ◆ **Sunday December 31** - Annual reports of Officers, Boards and Committees due to Clerk Kathy Hart
- ◆ **Sunday January 7** - Church Council, 11:00 am
- ◆ **Sunday January 21** - Annual Meeting (first portion), beginning 10:00 am with Sunday Worship Service

Church Offering History

Shown below are offering totals for our Church covering the past four years. We very much appreciate the generosity of those able to give. Your offerings not only provide for our Church's needs but also benefit God's people through the work of many other organizations we are able to help support.

	2023	2022	2021	2020
1st quarter	\$4,024	\$3,804	\$3,934	\$4,180
2nd quarter	\$5,736	\$3,928	\$2,830	\$3,206
3rd quarter	\$6,972	\$3,181	\$3,697	\$3,329
4th quarter		\$3,189	\$3,708	\$2,539
TOTAL		\$14,102	\$14,169	\$13,254