

‘Our house is on fire’: Ashfield churches ring bells for climate change awareness

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For the Recorder

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ASHFIELD — Church bells echoed throughout town for 11 minutes on Friday as part of a multi-denominational effort to call for action to address climate change.

“We’re having a climate emergency, and we’re acting like it’s not happening,” said Richard Pree, a member of the First Congregational Church and its business climate lobby, which planned the event. “Our house is on fire.”

This is the second time church members in Ashfield have gathered on the 11th day of the month to support climate action. Inspired by other local churches and a national trend of interfaith initiatives, nearly 20 people stood outside the First Congregational and St. John’s Episcopal churches with signs reading “Caring for Others = Caring for Climate” and “It’s against my religion to destroy the planet.”

The neighboring congregations partner through Ashfield Churches Together, an initiative to increase community partnership and shared ministries.



People stand on Main Street in Ashfield as the bell rings at the First Congregational Church of Ashfield on Friday at 11 a.m. for 11 minutes. Staff Photo/Paul Franz

“It is the right thing to do,” St. John’s Senior Warden Sue Craft said, “for the church to be at the forefront of climate action.”

Climate lobby member George Butler said he hopes the event maintains group spirit among the congregation.

“Sometimes it’s being out with five or six people and saying, ‘We’re still here,’” he said.

Attendees highlighted the connection between climate activism and their faith.

“We care about living things on Earth,” said Jody Hall of St. John’s. “That’s at the heart of all religious traditions.”

The Rev. David Jones of the First Congregational Church said he sees unity in fighting for the environment alongside other social justice issues. Though he did not grow up in the church, Jones said he was called to faith through racial and economic justice, and he recognizes that climate change has a disproportionate effect on communities based on race and socioeconomic status.

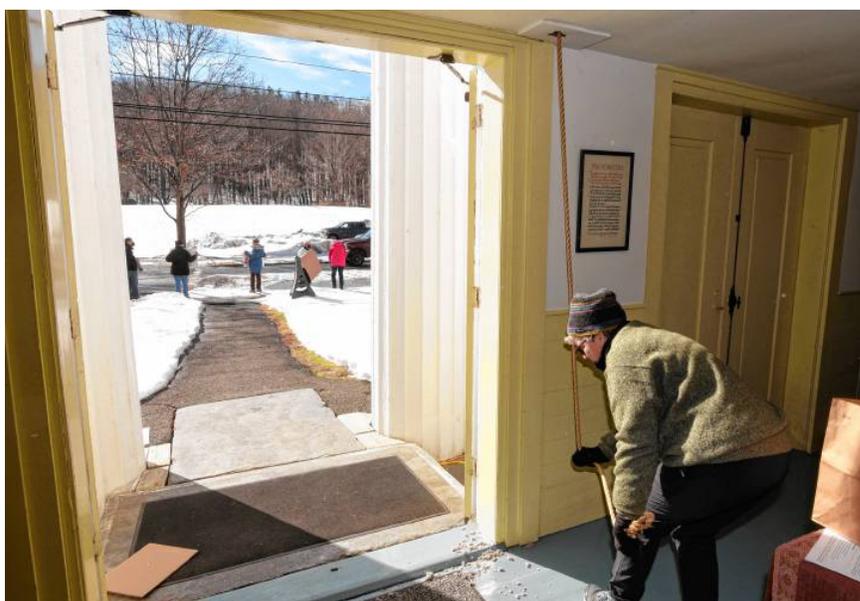
Jones said the ringing of the church bell underscores the “emergency situation” climate change presents and the symbolism of the 11th hour.

“Regardless of success, it’s important for us to do it as a spiritual practice,” Jones said.

Mary Link, an Ashfield resident and member of Mount Toby Friends Meeting in Leverett, said the event is a “symbolic way of saying, ‘Pay attention, pay attention, pay attention.’”

“I find that when there’s something I’m afraid of, the best thing I can do is take action,” she said.

When the bell ringing concluded, members of St. John’s gathered to read quotes from environmentalist Bill McKibben and a haiku about deforestation.



Ashfield resident Kristen Elmes rings the bell of the First Congregational Church of Ashfield on Friday at 11 a.m. for 11 minutes. Staff Photo/Paul Franz



Jim Wagener rings the bell at St. John's Episcopal Church at 11 a.m. on Friday in Ashfield. Staff Photo/Paul Franz



People stand on Main Street in Ashfield as the bell rings at St. John's Episcopal Church at 11 a.m. on Friday. Staff Photo/Paul Franz » Buy this Image

Next bell ringing

All are invited to attend the next bell ringing for climate change at the First Congregational and St. John's Episcopal churches on Friday, March 11, at 11 a.m.