

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

October 2019 Newsletter

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our days are a kaleidoscope. Every instant a change takes place. New harmonies, new contrasts, new combinations of every sort. The most familiar people stand each moment in some new relation to each other, to their work, to surrounding objects. - Henry Ward Beecher

There is something about Fall in New England that gets into our blood. The exuberant and sometimes exhausting plethora of summer opportunities fold up and go dormant for the coming winter just as many of those who flock to this paradise for them dissipate South or East. There is a quiet that emerges on the breeze and even the mountainsides call our attention to the change that is unfolding all around us. It is a season that I personally welcome and find restorative.

Change also can be challenging; grabbing hold of our hearts. It can be unsettling as our minds rush forward to imagine what this change will bring. The crisp morning that often exhilarates can also remind us of coming ice and snow that debilitates. The quiet in the air can lead to wondering about the coming long dark night and its all too common companion – despair.

In addition to the change of season and routine that is in the air, there is not insignificant change underway here in our church family. This newsletter chronicles some shifts in our pattern and routine as well as in our leadership. It can be easy to allow anxiety to creep into this moment of transition. It is one of the reasons I find Henry Ward Beecher's sentiment about our life in faith so helpful. He reminds us that

change is inherent in this thing we call church. He also reminds us that we encounter that change in the midst of ongoing relationship – love of God and love of neighbor. This body of Christ an ever-changing kaleidoscope; beauty emerging from the shifting intersection of the pieces.

While the new patterns are emerging, behind the scenes are also many familiar bedrocks of our life together. As Anne Hutchinson shared on Sunday, our Mission and Action team is responding as they always do, to the hurricane in the Bahamas as well as homelessness on our own streets in the Berkshires.

Our gifted teachers, some new and some who have been working with our children for years are in the classrooms helping our children learn who Jesus is and why he matters. Coffee is being brewed, the choir continues to make joyful noises, and we continue to share our prayers – themselves a kaleidoscope of changing joys and concerns.

Know this. In the areas of change, we are hard at work planning to minimize the anxiety that can emerge. We will do our very best to communicate the processes that are at work behind the scenes. We will invite you into our decision-making process and always make sure you know who to turn to with your questions. I will keep my door open that you can come in and share your dreams and your worries too. This fall we will live into that truth that we are an ever-changing kaleidoscope always morphing into new ways to see and be the body of Christ – God's love made manifest in this world.

Peace,

Brent



OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER

HAPPY OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

(Please let someone on the Board of Growth and Fellowship know if we missed your birthday or listed it incorrectly.)

October 2 Michael Lynch

October 3 Madonna Meagher

October 4 Casey Brown

October 5 Ella Formel

October 6

October 11

October 13

October 18

October 19

October 23

October 27

Nellie Rustick

Betsy Wise

John Tracy

John Slocombe

Tristan Osgood

Starbuck Smith

Sarah Boyd

PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS:

Jill Fleming and her daughter Sophia, Alice Ruffing's sister and family, Sarah Conly, Jean Damrow, Pat Carlson, Sibylle Baier, Diane Vogt, Gary Burke, Mary Jane Dunlop, David Eiseman, grandson of Anne and Gary Fix; Nell Ezequelle, Stan Osak, Jr., Philip Connor, Ronnie Cunningham's son Colin, Gege Kingston, Barbara Bracknell, Betsey McKearnan, Meryle Epstein, Lindsay Hermanski, and Jeanne Fleming.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE CHURCH

REPORTS FROM BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND SERVICE LEAGUE

Sexton News

If you notice anything broken or needing attention in the church building, please don't hesitate to contact Will Garrison in the office, 298-3137, or office@stockbridgeucc.org. A note on his desk works, too!

The Board of Trustees is working with the Center of EcoTechnology to better insulate the building. This project illustrates the adage "nothing is ever simple." To insulate the attic spaces, we first need to stop the moisture coming up through the dirt floor in the basement. And to do that, we need to organize the daunting array of stuff in the basement. The Trustees are asking all Boards to review their items. Individuals are welcome to look, too. Just make arrangements with Will in the office.

Growth and Fellowship

Church Business

Oh my goodness! It's time for coffee hour! I have to (a) check in with Maury about the upcoming charity walk; (b) remember to let Suzanne know I can't be a greeter after all; (c) say hello to Eddie! He's been away all summer and it's so nice to see him back! And (d), (e), (f),... Sometimes, for some of us, coffee hour is a social time, and also a time to catch up with lingering and upcoming church business. It can be hectic, and fun, or both: hectic fun.

But wait. There's another responsibility, standing right there in the corner. There's a couple who just came to this church for the first time, pretending to look out the window so no one notices that they have no one to talk to. There's a young lady, a first-timer, who just got her cookies, and is now peering at the bulletin board, hoping someone will say hello. There's a man, never been here before, who looks around as if he is looking for someone, but he doesn't know anyone here.

They need our attention, too. They are our church business. They are the strangers Jesus asked us to welcome. They are the woman at the well. They are the people who need us, not next week, but right now. So, when you see them, make them welcome. It is who we are, or who we might try to become. Thanks, and God bless you for your hospitality.

David Anderegg, for the Board of Growth and Fellowship

Board of Deacons

The deacons had a lively discussion of stewardship at our September meeting. Stewardship, as you may know, is a term encompassing the ways the congregation serves the church and God. Every year we each are asked to contemplate how we can dedicate ourselves to the church, and then make pledges in a variety of ways to do so. Stewardship is, ideally, a very spiritual as well as practical process as we formulate our individual answers to the questions: *What can I give? What can I do? What can I be?*

Consecration Sunday, which is the day we dedicate our pledges of money, time, energy and spirit, is October 27. As the deacons discussed the worship elements of this special day, I realized I didn't know exactly what "consecration" meant. (My mother trained me to look words up in the dictionary; you might be surprised to know how many times the unabridged dictionary appeared at the dinner table when I was growing up!) *Consecrat* is the Latin root, meaning "*dedicated, devoted, and associated with the sacred.*"

The deacons talked about the ways people of the church show themselves to be dedicated, devoted, and associated with the sacred, day in and day out, in times of deep distress and also of great joy, and in the rhythms of the seasons throughout the year. A summary of key points for us:

We work together as a collective community, loving and serving God;

We invest in our commitment to God and the church in all kinds of ways;

We use our multiple assets—money, time, energy, skills, prayer, and faith to name a few resources—to demonstrate and strengthen our devotion to God and community.

Worship in October will focus on stewardship, and we encourage everyone to take the time to define our individual pledges very seriously: a process that, for me and others, requires a lot of thought, prayer, and stretching—financially, energetically, and spiritually. As one deacon noted, "Growth requires us to move beyond our comfort zone."

Stewardship is an act of love. As we move toward Consecration Sunday, we will contemplate that love, by deepening our understanding of the ways that service, gratitude, endurance, and humility allow us to devote ourselves to God and the world. I hope you'll find it exciting to envision new answers to *What can I give? What can I do? What can I be?* as we grow and work together as a community of worship and spiritual growth.

If you have any ideas, questions, or concerns, please talk with any of the deacons, namely:

Cathy Clark, Margo Davis, Josh Hall, Donna Jacobs,
Casey Jones, Jim McMenemy, Jeremy Ridenour, and Elizabeth Young.

Board of Mission and Action

World Church Kitchen is providing meals in the Bahamas and we are supporting them. World Central Kitchen has been on the ground feeding hungry people since Dorian came through literally destroying entire communities. WCK makes food in several communities and delivers it by helicopter and boats to remote places. WCK has almost no overhead as the chefs are all volunteers paying their own way or local folks displaced from their homes and jobs. WCK purchases food as available in the less affected islands or in Miami and brought in by private (donated) boat. Check them out at www.wck.org. Mission & Action has donated \$2000 on behalf of our congregation thanks in part to a generous gift earmarked for disaster relief. Anne Hutchinson



In response to Hurricane Dorian, World Central Kitchen has served 250,000 meals in the Bahamas.

Vision Implementation Group

Sanctuary

What comes to mind when you hear the word sanctuary? Our group spent some time exploring the meaning and implications of this word to us as individuals, as a congregation, a community and a nation. Our discussion was based on a section of our congregation's VISION 2024 statement, under the heading 'Becoming the Body of Christ,' "... Following the example of Jesus of Nazareth, we throw open our doors and our lives to welcome stranger and friend. As a place of sanctuary, we honor the struggles of all who enter, and discern, celebrate, encourage and employ their unique gifts and talents."

Some thoughts about sanctuary that were raised by group members include:

- ◆ Sanctuary implies a place of refuge and safety
- ◆ It is a place where we worship
- ◆ God is present
- ◆ Individuals seek political sanctuary requesting asylum
- ◆ Some churches are designated sanctuaries to help protect refugees

We are aware of several congregations in the Berkshires that are exploring the idea of becoming sanctuary churches, or helping support churches that become designated sanctuary churches. Our group members had different responses to church sanctuaries and we wondered if it is something our congregation might like to study.

Please share any thoughts or comments with our committee members: Jo Ann Levitt, Michael Lynch, Susan Moyle Lynch, Nick Pohl, Martha Floyd and Pastor Brent Damrow.

Recall the heartfelt words of the children singing "Sanctuary" in church in September:

"Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary
Pure and holy, tried and true
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living
Sanctuary for You."

From the Service League

We've recovered from the Summer Fair and are taking a deep breath before beginning preparations for the Holly Fair in earnest - that will be December 7, by the way, so it's not too soon to mark your calendars!

Many generous donations have been pouring in, so we're having fun unpacking the surprises for Grandma's Attic - just a bit of what there is to look forward to this year! Thank you - keep them coming!

Margaret Hornick

Church Vegetable Garden

The Last Harvest

Our "Sharing Garden" produced a bountiful harvest this year which we shared weekly with CHP (Community Health Program) in Great Barrington. Our bags of freshly picked tomatoes, beans, kale, lettuce, cucumbers, parsley, basil and chives were enjoyed by the many families who visit the CHP offices. Some of our own church members shared in the bounty as well; one Sunday this summer our garden produce was available at the coffee hour and quickly found customers! We are happy to report that this was our most successful gardening season to date, and though we made our final distribution to CHP this week (on September 18th), there are still herbs available for the picking and a few vegetables

as well. So please stop by and help yourselves! The marigolds are still looking pretty with their golden and russet blooms – a welcoming sight as fall arrives. Your trusty gardening team (Stephanie Bradford, Sarah Boyd, Liz Murray, Anna Smith and Lenore Sundberg) will do the final garden clean up after the first hard frost.

Art News - *God's Autumn Colors*

Numerous artists are sharing their paintings and photographs, displaying them in the JE Room during October and November. The theme of the show is "God's Autumn Colors." Take and look and enjoy the show! Olga Schwede

Worship & Sunday School – Fall 2019

During Lent we engaged in an experiment. We conducted that experiment for many reasons. Research and our own history have suggested that children benefit from being in worship. Those benefits include developing a deep and lasting connection with worship that makes them far more likely to want to be part of the worshipping community once Sunday School has come to an end. Research and our own experience also suggest that adults can benefit from the opportunity to continue learning about faith, and that Bible study is the most effective way to draw people into deeper connection to their faith and their church.

After the experiment we gathered data. The CE Board talked with every family who has a child in our Sunday School. The Boards of Music, Deacons, CE, and Growth and Fellowship likewise reflected on their experience. Finally, twenty-nine people filled out surveys and scores of informal conversations happened. Over-all, the Lenten Experiment was well received. In the surveys people expressed appreciation for the thoughtful and dedicated implementation of the program. Here is what we learned:

Highlights included the joy of children in worship, the desire for adult ed, a chance for fellowship before worship, and the observation that for many children worship was a good experience and that they adjusted better over time.

Challenges included the difficulty for parents to be fully present, the length of the day, the feeling among teachers that Sunday School was rushed, and the concern to develop intergenerational worship that truly reaches and serves all ages dynamically.

A proposal was subsequently sent to the Boards most affected. With their revisions, it came to Council who unanimously approved it at their September meeting for implementation in October. We believe this approach incorporates the highlights while addressing the challenges.

All worship begins at 10:00 making the schedule simple/consistent with current practices.

Adult Education offered each Sunday 9:15 – 9:50 a.m.

The study will be based on the text for the sermon that Sunday.

Communion Sunday as we currently do on the First Sunday

Children will go straight to Sunday School and come back in for Communion.

Joys and Concerns – 2nd and 4th Sundays (This reflects the importance of this element in worship as well as a desire to try and be mindful of the over-all length of worship.)

Third and Fifth Sundays - No Sunday School instead Intergenerational Worship

We are researching best practices from congregations identified by the UCC.

This will also enable Sunday School teachers a Sunday off.

Modified and Light Café

Coffee will be made available and chairs set out at 9:00 for those coming to Bible Study, for parents who are dropping kids off for Kid's Choir (9:30), and for any who simply want to engage in fellowship.

Thank you to all who worked so hard to come up with a plan that is effective and provides the least disruption or change. Please give Brent or Deb McMenemy a call with any questions.

Board of Christian Education

Cookies & Crosswords, Paint & Ink

Rally Day is fun to brainstorm about: “Some of our face painters are not available. . . how about a tattoo parlor? A Bible quiz game is hard to organize, so what about Bible crosswords? And how about a new silly activity involving a food other than watermelon—cookies, say?”

Yes, brainstorming is fun, but Rally Day itself is hard to pull off. Really hard-- unless you have as great a group of helpers as we did this year. So many helped set up (and clean up after) that I am afraid to start naming names because I will surely leave some out. Many of those helpers stayed on to run the various activities. In case you missed it, here’s what we did and who did it:

REGISTRATION: Jill Wheat

PHOTOGRAPHY: Casey Jones

SEED SPITTING: Diane Piraino, Erving Henderson, Ken Ward

FACE THE COOKIE: Hannah Alsdorf, Willa Pohl

FACE PAINTING: Anne Hutchinson

TATTOO PARLOR: Jon “Ink” Geldert

CROSSWORDS: Cindy Brown

FLOATER: Ted Randolph

SIGNAGE: Ted R., Diane P., Jill W.

BAG TOSS: Unsupervised

FOOD FOR COFFEE HOUR: Diane P.

COFFEE: David Anderegg and Growth and Fellowship

COFFEE HOSTS: Self-serve!

As you can see, we did keep the ever-popular face painting and seed spitting on the agenda. The new activities were also met with enthusiasm. Hannah and Willa kept an eye on *Face the Cookie* participants. Some couldn’t resist honing their cookie technique throughout the morning. Here’s to swallowing your pride and eating your mistakes. Jon pressed much flesh at the *Here Today Tattoo Parlor, Inc.*, and mixed with *A Brush with Glory* face painting from Anne, we had a lot of body art. Cindy gamely presided over the new (*Never Say a*) *CrossWord* station, cornering many people who didn’t have a clue. At first.

Most of us seem to have no qualms about spitting in public, at least when it comes to Rally Day. Even Miss Manners gives her assent: “Gentle Reader, The fact is . . . that spitting is not in the current lexicon of permissible public pleasures, except in rare areas that are especially consecrated to the purpose . . .” Surely we have such an area! We had fifteen participants, lots of panache, and some amazing results. Everyone excelled in their own category, or to paraphrase Josh Billings, “To spit is to win.” Old distance records fell, with Khalil now leading the children with an amazing 15’-5” expectoration. For the grown-up (loosely speaking) participants, Nick Pohl took over top spot, planting a 25’-0” seed. How do they do it?? Thanks to all winners: Conor, Erving, Patty Strauch (20’- 8-1/2”), Willa, Steve, Elizabeth, Noah, Casey, Kara, Miles, Ted, Gene (an early champion), and Diane.

Ted Randolph, reporting for CE

Golf Tournament a Huge Success

A record number of golfers took part in this installment of our Scramble and dozens of volunteers came together on a stunning September day to benefit the buildings and programs of our church. Led by a great committee including Jim McMenemy (chair) as well as Deb McMenemy, Jorja Marsden, Keith Raftery and Nick Pohl, this event goes beyond raising funds to engaging and building relationships with the community.



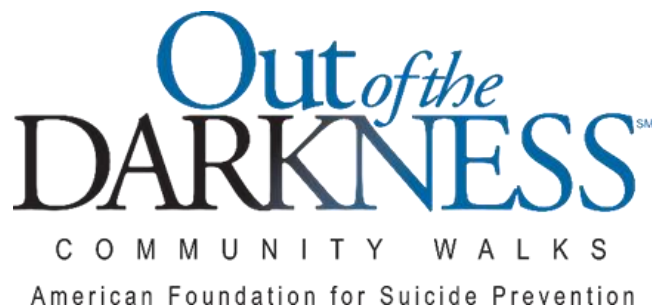
In addition to those who took to the fairways and greens, so many others were part of making the day a success. Volunteers greeted those who came to take part, the Service League along with Keith and Marie Raftery and other volunteers made a serve a delicious meal, and still others helped with tasks like stocking the golf carts, putting out signs, creating an oasis on the fifth hole, selling mulligans and running a silent auction. Still, others donated items to be auctioned off including rounds of golf, landscape services, gift baskets and dinners. Some were donated

by members of the church and the rest were solicited by church members utilizing their relationships. Individuals also donated funds to underwrite the breakfast, sponsor contests, sponsor golfers or just contribute to the cause. Finally, our gratitude goes to the Stockbridge Golf Club who hosted us and helped the event be such a success. Any way you look at it, the Golf Scramble was a great event and will be a great boost to ministries. Thank you!



First Congregational Church team at the Construct Walk, September 22.
Left: Cathy and Brent waiting to dig into the delicious cake!

Mission and Action invites the congregation to participate in the Walk out of the Darkness on **OCTOBER 5**, starting at the Pittsfield Common at 9:00 a.m. It brings people together to raise awareness about suicide and aid in its prevention. Questions? Contact Jill Fleming.



Volunteers Needed

In addition to collecting food for the People's Pantry, we also send a team to the People's Pantry in Great Barrington to staff it. We still need people for a couple of dates coming up: **October 10 and December 5**. To sign up for either one or to get more information, please contact Jill Fleming (jillbfleming@yahoo.com). Thank you!

TRICK-OR-TREAT FOR UNICEF

Halloween is coming, which means ghoulies and goblins to collect your change (folding money is welcome, too!) to help children around the world. On Sunday, October 27, the children will dress in their costumes in their Sunday School classrooms and join the last part of the service. They will Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF during fellowship in the JE Room. The children will primarily stay in the library area so that you can find them.

On Sunday, November 3, the boxes and their contents will be dedicated during the All Saint's Day Service. Mark your calendar!

And in other news...

Cindy and Jack Brown are pleased to announce their daughter Fiona's engagement to Anson Olds. Also, Fiona has just begun her Master of Social Work program at Westfield State University and accepted a new position as a research assistant at the Austen Riggs Center.

Thanks to Ted Randolph for removing the overgrown winged euonymus (burning bush) behind the park bench near the Chime Tower.

Chuck Gillett was the genial host to a MACUCC "Church Treasurers Gathering" on September 21, in the JE Room. The Rev. Dr. Jonathan New, Associate Conference Minister for Stewardship and Finance, helped a dozen treasurers explore their roles and responsibilities. Chuck reports that the participants, some who were a bit nervous about their role in their churches, left feeling emboldened and empowered.



Music News During worship on September 22, we thanked and blessed our Minister of Music, Catherine Schane-Lydon as she spent her final Sunday with us before becoming the Director of Music at Bethany Reformed Church in Albany. Cathy has shared her heart and her gifts with us for over five years. During that time the choir has offered such gifts as the Faure Requiem, the Freedom Trilogy, and the Gospel Mass. She also oversaw the process to restore our Steinway Piano as well as our handbells. She brought heart and a smile to her efforts to make each Sunday relevant, meaningful, and beautiful.

A full choir loft helped to bring life to the anthems and hymns which were handpicked by Cathy for the occasion. The entire congregation spoke and sung blessings to her, while David Anderegg composed and led the choir in a Benediction for the Choirmaster. Following worship, everyone feasted on a beautiful and delicious cake made by Jane McCormick. We send Cathy forth with gratitude and with prayers for her ministry to unfold in New York.



So, what happens next?

Thanks to Jack Brown and many gifted members of the congregation we have an active plan that will take us through the end of this calendar year as we embark on the search for a new leader for our Music Ministries. Jack has volunteered to help select anthems and rehearse the choir on Thursday nights at 7:00. A team of folks including Tracy Wilson, Ron Hanft, and David Anderegg will be handling the important duties of accompaniment on Sunday mornings. Tracy has also agreed to plan and play for Christmas Eve.

This gives us the chance to make sure we are prepared to welcome our next leader. On September 29 as well as October 6 we will hold “Listening Sessions” when the congregation is invited to share their insights, desires, hopes and concerns related to our music programs. As a result of those meetings, we will refine the job description and appoint a search committee. While that committee is hard at work, the Board of Music, the Personnel Committee and the Church Council will be clarifying and enhancing the roles of the Board of Music and the Minister of Music Relations Committee to make sure that support systems are in place for whoever comes into the role. There will be the chance for broad congregational engagement in the process. If you have any questions about this process, please contact Deb McMenemy (Moderator), Jack Brown (Chair, Board of Music) or Pastor Brent.



Stewardship 2020

Dear Friends,

In John's Gospel, Jesus calls himself the Way. In that simple and beautiful moniker are so many important implications. Among them are these truths – a way is a *path and a journey* (more about questions than answers; more about movement than arrival), a way is *consistent and defined* (there are certain core truths and attitudes that undergird that path and journey), a way involves *choice* (choosing a direction of movement, choosing to open heart and mind to truth, and the commitment to engage) and that choice requires *ongoing examination, reflection, prayer and adjustment* as the path unfolds.

It is through that lens we invite you to consider how you will share your gifts of time, talent and treasure with this church in 2020. Relying on four different parables from the Gospel of Luke, together we will visit the choices that we are called to make in following the way of Christ; choices involving service, gratitude, endurance, and humility. Through those choices we will challenge you to examine and reflect upon your giving.

We will encourage you to consider how your giving represents a path or journey (how it evokes movement in your faith). We will challenge you to contemplate how you define it (and what the core principles are that guide your giving). We will then ask you to make a choice for the coming year; choice that honors where you have been in your giving but also engages in new examination, fresh reflection, honest prayer and is open to adjustment.

As in the past, we will be inviting members of our church family to share their experience of stewardship during worship and we hope that their stories will help you in your process. In Mid-October we will mail out a packet of information that includes some resources as well as your pledge card. On that pledge card we will ask you to identify financial resources you can commit to the church as well as to identify gifts of time, talent or prayer that you can share. We know that there are times in peoples lives where they have an abundance of time, treasure, and talent and that there are times when we need all the help we can get. What we ask of you is to engage faithfully in this process and make a decision that brings you joy and stretches your faith. On October 27 we invite the entire congregation to bring their cards in that we might consecrate them and our commitments to the church.

In the meantime, know that we will be engaging in the same process with open hearts too!

Sincerely,

The Stewardship Committee

Alice Collins, Chuck Gillett, Mary Hoeltzel, Christine Rasmussen, Kara Smith, and Pastor Brent