

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

November 2019 Newsletter

“Bring them with you.”

One of the many blessings of living in the Berkshires is that it is a place people like to visit. Jon and I are grateful for the many friends and family who come our way to see us and to be in this special place.

From my conversations with you, I know that you experience that blessing too.

When Sunday morning rolls around, the question can be “what do we do about church?”

Some of the people who visit may have grown up in the church and drifted away.

Others may have an ambivalent relationship with anything having to do with religion. Then, of course, time is limited and often there is much to do and there are many places to explore.

Here is what I encourage you to do, though: bring them to church!

There are many reasons it can be a gift to you and to our congregation. I lay those out for you as an invitation to contemplate and ponder.

First it can be a source of deeper connection for you and them. You make it clear by your connection to this place that church matters to you. Bringing people that are important in your life exposes them to this place, our worship, and the people who call it home. They will get a better sense of why this place matters to you and then when something happens here that you want to share with them, they will be able to connect more deeply and share in your joy. I know that when I am home visiting my parents, part of the joy of going to church with them is seeing it

for myself and meeting the people I know only by name and story.

Second it can be an act of sharing the joy of our welcoming, progressive, Christ-centered church with others (especially those who may have been hurt by

church or who are leery of organized religion). I am not talking about proselytizing or conversion here. What I do know, though, is that many such people who have been brought by you to this place have left with joy and hope and a new sense of this thing we call being church. It can open hearts and minds and bring joy.

Finally, it is a gift to the church. We get a chance to meet the people who are important to you; the people you pray for and talk about. It is a way for us to develop deeper connections together as we more fully share our lives together. I have experienced your joy at meeting people who matter to me. I would love to experience that same joy meeting people who matter to you.

Sometimes our culture makes us nervous about church. There can be a pressure not to talk about it and to avoid any possibility that we look like we are forcing our faith on others. Jesus never called us to force anything on anyone. But we do know the gift of God’s invitation to us, that loving, caring, open, life-giving invitation to “come and see.” It is that very invitation we can share. The next time you have family or friends coming and you wonder what to do about Sunday, I say “bring them with you!”

With love,

Brent



OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER

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

November 3 Ken Fogarty

November 5 Diane Piraino

Deb McMenemy

November 8 Betsey McKearnan

**November 11 David Anderegg
Susan Moor**

November 12 Peter Wise

November 13 Meryle Epstein

November 18 Trudy Fadding

November 25 Kristofer Kennedy

November 27 Judi Peyron

Marcia Miner

PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS:

Jill Fleming and her daughter Sophia, Alice Ruffing's sister and family, Sibylle Baier, Diane Vogt, Gary Burke, Mary Jane Dunlop, Nell Ezequelle, Stan Osak, Jr., Philip Connor, Ronnie Cunningham's son Colin, Gege Kingston, Barbara Bracknell, Meryle Epstein, Lindsay Hermanski, Jeannie Smith, Natalie Newberg, Arthur Dutil, and Jeanne Fleming.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE CHURCH

REPORTS FROM BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND SERVICE LEAGUE

Sexton News

It's heating season! That means occasional confusion about the thermostats in the JE Room, sanctuary, and offices. Generally, I set the heating schedule from my office computer. These "standard schedules" are posted in my office. If you hold an event, class, or meeting outside the usual times, feel free to contact me, and I will reprogram the thermostat(s) in question. You can bump up the heat at the thermostat if it's a last-minute need. Done correctly, the thermostat will reset itself within a few hours.

IMPORTANT: please do not engage the "HOLD" button on any thermostat. This setting ensures that the furnace will run continuously, sometimes for many hours, at the higher temperature until someone notices. The church's Berkshire Gas bill then goes up! Thanks.

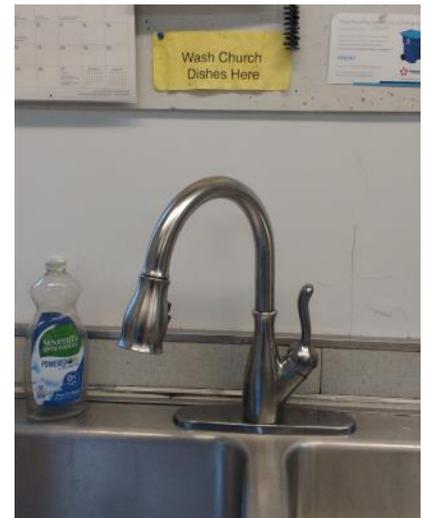
If you notice anything broken or needing attention in the church building, please don't hesitate to contact me in the office, 298-3137, or office@stockbridgeucc.org. A note on my desk works, too.

Will Garrison, Administrator and Sexton

Board of Trustees

The Trustees are proud to announce the installation of two new faucets in the kitchen. Installed by Gennari Plumbing, these Delta faucets feature a spray attachment!

A note about hot water: although it seems sometimes that there is no hot water, it is just taking a long time to arrive. It's a long set of pipes between the kitchen and the hot water heater.



Board of Deacons

This month the Deacons talked briefly about a recent Sunday service devoted to gratitude. Pastor Brent had preached about gratitude as a practice, and had asked the congregation to share gratitude with one another. The person sitting in the pew ahead of me turned around and we moved toward each other, looking directly into each other's eyes. "I'm grateful you're here, in my life," I said, as we moved closer together. The person replied similarly. It was something that I'm not sure either of us would have dared say in ordinary social circumstances. We ended up with our foreheads touching, a perfect symbol of where gratitude can lead us: beyond fear, to openness and connection.

The Deacons invite you to join us as we decorate the church for Advent and Christmas! The first Sunday in Advent this year is December 1, which means we are planning to decorate the church November 30, the Saturday afternoon just after Thanksgiving. If you would like to help us, please plan to join us on the 30th for a couple of hours of pleasurable work and companionship. We'll have a sign-up sheet in the J.E. Room early in November for those of you who would like to help deck the halls of the beautiful church we love so much.

Like the person with whom I had that experience, I have had tough times. Mine included a long and difficult battle with depression that made me feel isolated and worthless. I eventually made my way out of the valley of the shadow of death, and for the past seventeen years I have woken every morning grateful to be alive. I might not be—and oh, what I would have missed! I'm grateful for the people who helped me through that time, for God's many gifts. I suspect the person in the pew ahead of me has similar gratitude and I believe we all have the capacity to develop the practice of gratitude that Brent encouraged us to explore.

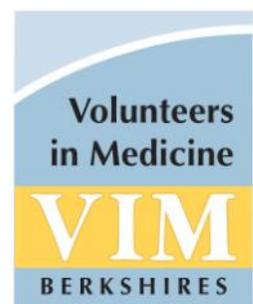
At the Deacons meeting, I mentioned that I am making a gratitude journal. In the evening before I go to sleep, I write a few words to remind myself of something wonderful that happened that day, something small or large that made me glad to be alive. The Deacons decided to see if there is interest in a one-time program at church to talk casually about gratitude and to begin gratitude journals: folks might come to a single gathering that requires no preparation or commitment. If that initial session grows into a small group that focuses on a variety of gratitude practices, great! And if not, that's fine too. I think that the gratitude gathering(s) will fit in well with the push-and-pull of the winter holidays, and I guarantee the group will be fun! Details to follow, but feel free to tell a Deacon if you're interested in coming to the (first) gratitude gathering.

Elizabeth Young for The Board of Deacons

Board of Mission and Action

Giving Tree tags will be available in the JE Room on Sunday, November 24.

On the church's behalf, Mission and Action is working to identify and support mission projects near and far. In the last month we have sent donations to Construct, Inc., Literacy Network of South Berkshire, and Volunteers in Medicine Berkshires.



Stewardship 2020 - *The Way*

During the month of October, the Gospel of Luke provided a rich base to contemplate the Way of Life that Jesus offers. Through compelling characters and evocative parables, we took our own place in the story considering ideas of faith, gratitude, endurance and humility. We, the Stewardship Committee, pray that the experience offered you the chance to contemplate the ways you support the church through your time, your talent, your prayers, and your treasure too. While Consecration Sunday happened on October 27th, we know that the life-giving part of living into our pledges is now just beginning. If you did not receive a pledge card or have not yet been able to return it, please contact

Will Garrison in the church office. He can send you a hard or electronic copy of the Pledge Card and guidelines for your use. Thank you for your generosity of heart, time, prayer and resources that will help us live into our calling to be church.



From the Service League

We're just a little over a month away from the Holly Fair on December 7th, so we're getting down to some serious planning. As always, we welcome your help - for baked goods to sell (Nell Ezequelle will call to ask if you can contribute); for help with setting up (after the church service on December 1); for preparing tables (during the week, Monday - Thursday); on the day of the sale (salespeople always needed) and for returning everything to normal at the end of the sale on Saturday December 7. If you can help, even for an hour or two, call or send an email to Jackie Hawkins or any other Service League member and we will be very appreciative! And even if you're not available for any of the above, please come on Saturday and join the fun.

Thank you! We couldn't do it without you.

Margaret Hornick

Art News - *God's Autumn Colors*

Art work continuing into November on the theme of "God's Autumn Colors" is being shared by fine artists Jeannene Booher, John McKinstry, Olga Schwede, Gary Schieneman and Terry Wise as well as photographers Cindy Brown and Ronnie Cunningham. Enjoy this color filled art show in the JE Room. - Olga Schwede

The Sound of One Leaf Falling

photographic print

Cindy Brown



Board of Christian Education

Somehow I forgot to turn off my cell phone. I was teaching in Seventh Heaven and we were talking about going on trips — do you like to travel, do you like the packing part, what should you take on a journey? — that sort of thing. Turns out, Willa and Angel like traveling and packing. But what if, I asked, traveling meant moving to an unfamiliar house and a new school, leaving your friends behind? Willa said, “That sounds like a bad Hallmark movie.” Even though it wasn’t in the lesson plan, this was the perfect opportunity to teach the word “redundant,” but suddenly my phone rang.

“Mon Dieu!” I exclaimed, and when I answered, it was. “Ted.” Who is this? “This is the Lord.” No, really, who is it? I have you on speakerphone. “You and your Sunday school class must leave Seventh Heaven and the church family and go to a place that I will show you.” Angel, incredulous: A place that I will show you... Ha! A place that I will show you!

But we did it. We took all the sample items that we would’ve packed on a trip, and we went out the front door. Now what? Whoa, was that someone lying on the bench by the beech tree? Someone was there moaning and shivering. Angel suggested we give her the towel we had packed. She gratefully accepted the towel but didn’t want to join us.

We journeyed past a garden, but it was posted off limits by a local tribe. Here is the sign we saw:

We invited the members another tribe, the P2, to join us outside, and they did. Together we discovered a thermos of hot cocoa and a memory verse, which we practiced. Then we drank the cocoa sitting on chairs provided by the Manse tribe. We chatted with the P2’s and then headed back to church.

“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.”

Ted Randolph, reporting for Christian Education



Minister of Music Search Committee Selected by Council

The search process for our new Minister of Music is well underway. Thanks to a research team of David Anderegg, Jack Brown, Ron Hanft and Tracy Wilson we are reviewing elements of the job and compensation package to ensure that we can attract a quality candidate.

On October 20 following worship, the Council appointed a search committee consisting of Ronnie Cunningham, Michael Deegan, Linda Hoddy, Margaret Hornick, Jean Stackhouse, Miles Wheat, and Pastor Brent. We are grateful to each of them and believe the group to be representative of our congregation’s and music program’s diversity. The job has already been posted with the UCC and will be posted through many other means. Contact the Church Office if you have any potential candidates in mind. Please pray for our Committee as they begin their work. Thank you.

All Saint's Sunday Sunday, November 3

For all the saints who from their labors rest...

We gather in worship to remember them and to remember all who have gone before. It is a time for remembrance and love, grief and hope, joy and promise. We do it on a day where we remember Jesus in the act of communion and the fact that he breaks down every barrier and makes everything possible.

In prayer we will name out loud all those on our hearts and minds who have joined the heavenly chorus.

If you are not able to be with us in worship but wish to have a name(s) read, please contact Will Garrison.



Thanksgiving Day Worship / Meal Thursday, November 28 – 10:30 a.m.

Now thank we all our God with heart & hand & voices...

Thanksgiving Day is a uniquely Christian day, a day founded and dedicated to stopping and giving thanks for the bounty of God's gifts in our lives.

What better way to celebrate than in an ecumenical worship with all the churches of Stockbridge? Here at First Congregational, we will host our sisters and brothers from St. Paul's, St. Joseph's and the Marian Fathers. The worship will be full of great hymns, favorite readings and joyful prayer. Start your day in worship and see how everything changes.



Last year we hosted a Thanksgiving Potluck dinner after worship in the J.E. Room. It was a joyous affair and we are open to doing it again. If you would be interested in coming or helping, please RSVP by November 15 so we can plan accordingly.



Connections Class

Saturday, Nov. 16

9:30 a.m. - Noon

Have you been visiting this church for a while and thinking about calling it home? Then you are invited to come to a gathering we call Connections!

In this class we will have the chance to talk about the ways that this church and the United Church of Christ fit into *Christianity* including both our bold and progressive history as well as our open and hopeful vision for the future.

The class will include conversations with one another, Pastor Brent, and lay leaders. You will learn more about each other, the church's rich history, as well as the many programs, small groups, opportunities for service, and other ministries that are available to you *whether or not* you decide to join. We will close our time together with a light meal.

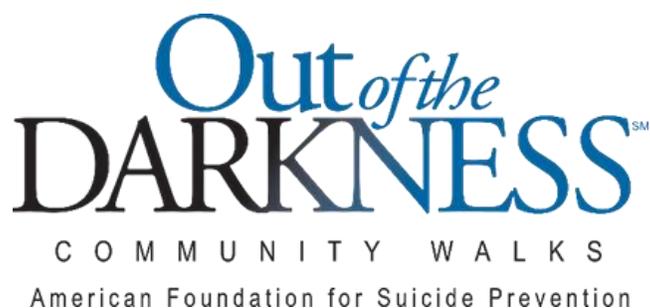
Please RSVP to Will Garrison (298-3137 or office@stockbridgeucc.org) if you plan to attend. Childcare is available for those who might desire it. In the Congregational tradition, joining a church is an event that takes place as part of worship and involves the whole congregation. We are planning to take new members into the church on Sunday, December 1. Questions? Please contact Pastor Brent.



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 are starting to plan for the dates in 2020: 1/23; 3/12; 4/30; 6/18; 8/6; 9/24; and 11/12. To sign up for either one or to get more information, please contact Jill Fleming (jillbfleming@yahoo.com). Thank you!

Thank you to everyone who participated in the "Out of the Darkness Community Walk" on October 5, in Pittsfield. Together with an allocation of \$1,000 from the Board of Mission and Action, your support is helping the work of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Berkshire Coalition for Suicide Prevention. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in America, especially for our youth, 15-19 years old.



American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) is an organization that is helping people to understand the risk factors and warning signs for people of all ages and educating everyone about how to reduce the rise in death by suicide.

The money raised goes to educational programs, research, 24-hour suicide hotlines and support services. It has helped a tremendous amount of people to get the help they need. I am not alone in my gratitude for the First Congregational Church's commitment to suicide awareness and prevention and reducing stigma for those suffering from mental illness and the loss of a loved one from suicide.



On a recent afternoon, two ladies dropped by the church. They turned out to be sisters, visiting from California, who attended First Congregational Church in the 1950s. I pulled out some old photographs in hopes they could identify some of the people. Elizabeth Tyler identified herself as one of the junior high students, fifth from the left. Others included Penny Lowden, Jeannie Campbell, and Deanna Williamson.

This photo, circa 1955, was taken in a private home, presumably that of teacher Miss Schilling, pictured here.

- Will Garrison

By 1955, First Congregational Church needed more space. Church leaders put together a capital campaign, complete with a case statement. These photographs are just two examples of images that illustrated the need for room. Classes met in private homes (above), and in the basement of the Manse (right).

The John Sergeant Memorial wing was finished in 1957 at a cost of \$60,000. This included the enlargement and refitting of the kitchen. The Jonathan Edwards Room was created from three smaller rooms.



And in other news...

The memorial service for Aleva B. Henderson will be held Friday, November 29, 4:00 p.m., at First Congregational Church, Stockbridge.

Tanya Schneider, the daughter of Virginia and David Schneider, an associate professor of biochemistry at Connecticut College in New London, recently received a substantial three year grant from the National Institutes of Health to fund her continuing research focused on combatting antibiotic resistance.

Dr. Beth McCormick, daughter of Jane McCormick, received the Worcester Foundation for Biomedical Research award at a September 12 ceremony at University of Massachusetts Medical School. Dr. McCormick is a professor and vice-chair of the Department of Microbiology & Physiological Systems at UMASS Medical School. She is a pioneer in the field of cellular microbiology, publishing many research papers.