

# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

## April 2020 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

What times these are! I offer prayers for you and for all who struggling, relaxed, confused, lonely, over-employed, under-employed, sick, caregiving, or in any other way affected by the pandemic being caused by Covid-19. Remember the words of the angels (do not fear) and the mantra of the prophets (speak truth). Just as importantly if you are in need help in any way, make your voice heard. If you have the capacity to help let us know that, too.

We are on the doorstep of the “holiest” time of the year. I put it in quotes because every time, every moment is fully holy. God does not abandon us in any moment but always draws near. What is helpful, though, is that we have gotten used to the practice of being more thoughtful, more engaged, more connected to our faith in such times. As we enter into Holy Week this year may that engagement bring the story of the cross (and empty tomb), the story of the table (and the betrayal), the story of triumphal entries (and disciples dozing off) into dialogue with our own times and our own situations.

Here at the church we are going to be focusing on bringing the traditional elements and worship opportunities of this season to our church family. We will pray, sing, study, and gather. What I also hope to do in this precious time is to launch some larger conversations and explorations about meaning and morality, about how this all might change how

we think and how we live. Jeremy sent me a wonderful article by David Brooks that I referenced in a recent Sermon. (It is called “The Moral Meaning of the Plague,” printed in the *New York Times*.) It asks great questions of each of us in what he calls this “meaningful moment.” He rightly reminds us

that we have choices to make not just about this moment but the ones to follow and not just about what to do but why.

I hope that you are thinking about these times in thoughtful ways. I hope that if you find good articles that you will share them with me. If you have ideas about conversations you want to have, let me know and we will

find ways to engage the congregation. If we, together, use this holy time in discerning ways to imagine what is possible and to hear God’s call, this church will come out of this not just stronger but in a better position to love and serve.

Keep in touch with God, with each other, and with me too. Allow yourself to let go and lean into the opportunities that are present this Holy Week. Engage your faith, your mind, and your community and I promise there will be real and concrete new life just as there was nearly two thousand years ago springing forth from the tomb no matter how imposing or barricaded it seems right now.

Blessings,

*Brent*



# OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER

**HAPPY APRIL BIRTHDAYS**  
(Please let someone on Growth and Fellowship know if we have not included your birthday or listed it incorrectly.)

April 2      Olga Schwede  
                 Hannah Alsdorf  
April 7      Bronly Boyd  
                 Casey Jones  
                 Margo Davis

April 8      Virginia Berry  
April 11     Tracy Wilson  
April 12     Olivia Doerr  
April 18     Jack Brown  
April 19     Anna Grace Nimmo  
April 22     Keith Raftery  
April 23     Seth Ivas  
April 26     Chet Douglass  
April 27     Ivy Cote  
April 30     Samuel Connor

## PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS:

Russ Fadding, Cindy Ogulnick, Sibylle Baier, Diane Vogt, Gary and Corinne 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, Betsey McKearnan, Alice McKinstry Hawes, and Jeanne Fleming.

**Rev. Dr. Nehemiah (Bob) Boynton III**, age 93, of Marshfield, MA, passed away on March 7, 2020. He was the husband of the late Frances Wilde Boynton, his wife of 46 years. Born in Boston, MA on March 30, 1926, he graduated from Phillips Academy in 1944, enlisted in the U.S. Naval Air Corps and then graduated from Amherst College in 1949. He graduated from Hartford Theological Seminary in 1953. He was Minister at the First Congregational Church in Stockbridge (1958-1967) followed by the Congregational Church of S. Dartmouth until 1991. At the age of 78, he earned his Doctor of Ministry Degree at the Andover Newton Theological School. He was truly a man dedicated to his ministry, which he lived every second of every day. We are all thankful to have been a part of the gift and the blessing that The Rev was to all of us. Celebration of his life will take place at the Congregational Church of South Dartmouth was held March 12. Published in *The Berkshire Eagle* on Mar. 11, 2020

Joyce Hovey wrote, *Bob was our minister at the First Congregational Church in Stockbridge for many years in the 1950s and 1960s. I fondly remember his visit to our home in 1964, shortly after we moved in, inviting us to visit the church. We did visit, liked it, and became involved with the church ever since. I also gratefully remember his showing up whenever we had an emergency, including suddenly appearing in the ICU of a hospital in Boston when Lee was gravely ill. What a marvelous friend!*

## NEWS FROM AROUND THE CHURCH

**Website** Please go to the church's website for information about worship, meetings, and everything else. The newly designed site should be the first stop on the information highway! [stockbridgeucc.org](http://stockbridgeucc.org)

**Sabbatical** With all the disruptions caused by the pandemic, Pastor Brent is not going on sabbatical this year. The details will be worked out at Church Council, and then shared with the congregation.

**Stockbridge Festival Chorus** The concert scheduled for April has been cancelled. Tracy Wilson says, *I have plans for us to shout and sing from the rafters when we are finally ready to return to sing together!*

## Board of Deacons

The Deacons had their first meeting via Zoom this month, and it was a lively and vital meeting indeed. We learned at the start of the meeting that our fellow-Deacon Jeremy Ridenour (and Megan Kolano!) have a new baby boy, Micah, and that all were doing well. And during the meeting, Deacon Casey Jones simultaneously contributed to the meeting with her usual energy, while also preparing dinner for her children. There was joy in seeing life so clearly affirmed as we all adjust to radical change in our world.

The Deacons experienced the push-and-pull of worldly challenges and holy connection as we discussed ways to have worship while protecting everyone with the physical distance required to limit risk of contagion. We focused on the need for deep, ongoing, and regular connection within the church family, when so many of us are experiencing change in our daily lives in ways that may seem isolating or overwhelming. We are aware of grief—loss, sadness, fear of the unknown—as well as opportunity to come together in community, with a focus on love, compassion, and support for each other.

We brainstormed about ways to build on our connections: how to worship together, how to have music, joys and concerns, a time for the children, a chance to see familiar people in our beautiful church building. We shared ideas about deepening our church family's connections with increased communication: telephone calls; Pen Pals; letters and cards. We talked about upcoming holy days, especially Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter, and how worship can draw us together during those deeply meaningful times in our spiritual lives.

After the meeting, I reflected on the timing of the pandemic. It feels particularly important for us to lean into the fact that we are experiencing it *during Lent*. Lent has so much meaning, even superficially: it is a time of radical change. It is a marker of ultimate challenge for Jesus and his Disciples. The story has instances of separation, deprivation, doubt and dread, and isolation in loss.

But the experiences of Jesus and the Disciples during Lent are simultaneously a story of courage and faith, of coming together, sharing, forgiving and affirming, uniting in a new way of being. As we move forward in a world confronting new sickness and death, as humans we will experience some or all of the scary things that Jesus and the Disciples faced. Perhaps this year each of us, with great deliberation and effort, can also emulate the many strengths they demonstrated so long ago?

In the days ahead, let's embrace opportunities to be brave; to serve God as we connect, love and support one another; and to experience the renewal that Easter continues to bring, always and forever.

~ Elizabeth Young

## Pen Pal Initiative

The Deacons invite everyone, of all ages, to be a Pen Pal. Keep our connections to the church, and one another, strong in the weeks ahead.

It's simple and fun. Just call or email Donna Jacobs [Donnajacobsmw@aol.com](mailto:Donnajacobsmw@aol.com) or 413-353-0027.

Pen Pals will be randomly assigned. It will be rewarding as we get to know our fellow church goers even better. Won't it wonderful to when we can meet our Pen Pals in person!

Some guidelines:

1. Say a little about who you are, where you're from, and why you wanted a pen pal., and what you like about our church.
2. Ask questions. What would you like to learn about them? A big question on everyone's mind is how we are all managing the changes and the physical distancing from people and normal routines. Try to be positive. There are a lot of blessings all around us now.
3. Sign off. Thank them for reading your letter, let them know how to contact you, and that you're looking forward to hearing from them.

To keep the conversation going, be curious. Ask questions about their life, take an interest in who they are and talk about the things that matter to both of you.

## Sunday School Coffee Hour 2020: Feeding the Five Thousand (John 6:1-11)

A boy shares the little food he has; a miracle of abundance follows.

Each year we get the Sunday school involved in creating and hosting a coffee hour. In the process, they can see the scripture come alive, and they have the opportunity to serve their church family.

Every year has had this in common: amazing impromptu collaboration.

On Friday, Lily and Theresa Tatro, Cindy Brown, and I baked barley bread, prepared some grapes, and set up fifteen tables with chairs and table cloths.

From Thursday through Saturday people responded with offers of food or help. On the day of, Diane led a short Sunday school lesson and then we moved to the kitchen, where the five kids present, Andrew, Conor, Lily T., Ruth, and Noah clamored for ways to be helpful. I kid you not.

We chopped and sliced and poured and plated and plated food, digging out more greenware than has seen the light of day in decades. We set many tables. Eventually Diane and I had to send the kids into church so we could have a breather. All the kids helped to serve the food at the beginning of coffee hour, bringing plate after plate of food to each table of Jesus' followers. And a couple of kids did a ton of work after: clearing (thanks, Andrew) and restoring the room (thanks, Lily).

Anne Hutchinson brought all manner of olives and she made the delicious tuna salad, some of the barley bread, and the roasted barley grains. Not to mention a frozen whole trout?! Her sheer enthusiasm was a great support as well, and she took first shift on the dishwasher. Jon Geldert provided a sumptuous platter's worth of period foods. The Wheats brought a large quantity of sliced apples. The Halls brought clementines and the Hassmers brought beautiful, hand-cut carrot sticks. Theresa and Lily brought the Girl Scout cookies—Thin Mints, Samoas, and 'Smores. Ted and Diane brought Fig Newtons, kippers, sardines, Pepperidge Farm Goldfish, Swedish Fish, hummus, cucumbers, grapes, and cheese. Cindy Brown served tables throughout the feeding, and helped clean up afterwards, including

taking all the tablecloths and dish cloths home to launder. Phew!

We had walk-on helpers: Ronnie Cunningham helped the Tattros clean up the JE Room and put away chairs and tables. Patty Strauch also lent a hand wherever needed. We were still at it when Lenten Study got out, so Steve Bankert took over on the dishwasher and Sybille Baier helped corral stray dishes, both dirty and clean. Thank you all!

Who knows what next year's Sunday school coffee hour will bring, but I have a feeling it will involve an abundance of cooperation, service, food, and joy.

Ted Randolph for Christian Education

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*This Side of Paradise: A Letter from F. Scott Fitzgerald, Quarantined in the South of France during the influenza pandemic of 1918*

by Nick Farriella (a parody, sent by Cris Raymond)

Dearest Rosemary,

It was a limpid dreary day, hung as in a basket from a single dull star. I thank you for your letter. Outside, I perceive what may be a collection of fallen leaves tussling against a trash can. It rings like jazz to my ears.

The streets are that empty. It seems as though the bulk of the city has retreated to their quarters, rightfully so. At this time, it seems very poignant to avoid all public spaces. Even the bars, as I told Hemingway, but to that he punched me in the stomach, to which I asked if he had washed his hands. He hadn't. He is much the denier, that one. Why, he considers the virus to be just influenza. I'm curious of his sources.

The officials have alerted us to ensure we have a month's worth of necessities. Zelda and I have stocked up on red wine, whiskey, rum, vermouth, absinthe, white wine, sherry, gin, and lord, if we need it, brandy. Please pray for us.

You should see the square, oh, it is terrible. I weep for the damned eventualities this future brings. The long afternoons rolling forward slowly on the ever-slick bottomless highball. Z. says it's no excuse to drink, but I just can't seem to steady my hand. In the distance, from my brooding perch, the shoreline is cloaked in a dull haze where I can discern an unremitting penance that has been heading this way for a long, long while. And yet, amongst the cracked cloud line of an evening's cast, I focus on a single strain of light, calling me forth to believe in a better morrow.

Faithfully yours, F. Scott Fitzgerald



**Palm  
Sunday**



**Maundy  
Thursday**



**Good  
Friday**



**Easter  
Sunday**

# Holy Week 2020

This year while our Journey may take a different shape, it will follow the same path with Jesus from the palms to the table to the cross and to glorious resurrection. Below are the options for your engagement and connection. May this be a time of truth (even if hard truths) may this be a time of movement (even if carrying heavy loads) and a time of openness (even to letting go that new life might be born). While we will send out information in the weekly e-mails, PLEASE use our website ([www.stockbridgeucc.org](http://www.stockbridgeucc.org)) for more information and links.

- **Palm Sunday** – Sunday April 5 – 10:00 a.m.
  - ◇ Gather something from your yard or house to waive as we join the throngs on the streets of Jerusalem to triumphantly welcome Jesus!
  - ◇ We will also share communion so have some kind of bread and some kind of liquid on hand.
  - ◇ We will start by honoring this day in our time before making the joyful transition to staying with Palm Sunday that it might be a source of strength for us (as I believe it was for Jesus) in the days of Holy Week to Come
- **Morning Prayer** – Monday – Saturday 8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.
  - ◇ Following the daily lectionary for each day we gather on Zoom to gather, share, pray, and listen.
- **Maundy Thursday** – April 9, Time tba
  - ◇ Gather around the table for this Tenebrae service of light. Have a candle ready as we remember the story of meal, prayer, betrayal, and denial.
- **Good Friday** – April 10, Noon
  - ◇ Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Take your place at the foot of the cross to gaze and love poured out.
- **Easter** – April 12 Sunrise 6:30 a.m. Festival Worship 10:00 a.m. **He is Risen!**
  - ◇ The sunrise service is gentle, surprising and simple – we will do it on the Zoom platform so people can be with one another. Come and see!
  - ◇ Festival worship with Andrea Bargabos (Soprano) will be loud and joyful and exuberant. Watch as new beginnings come from seemingly dead ends.



# New Small Groups Forming SABBATH



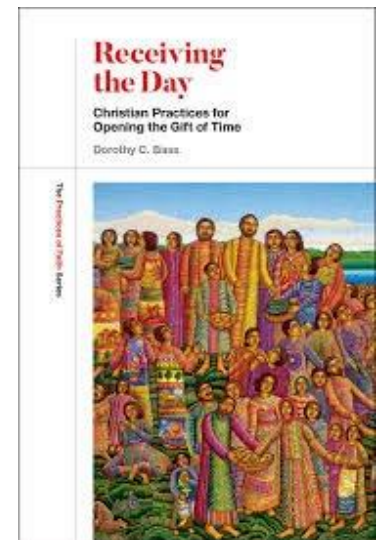
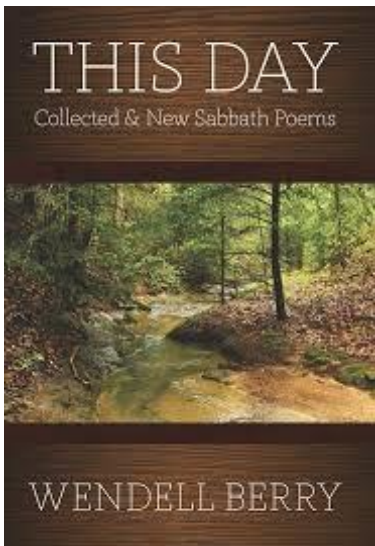
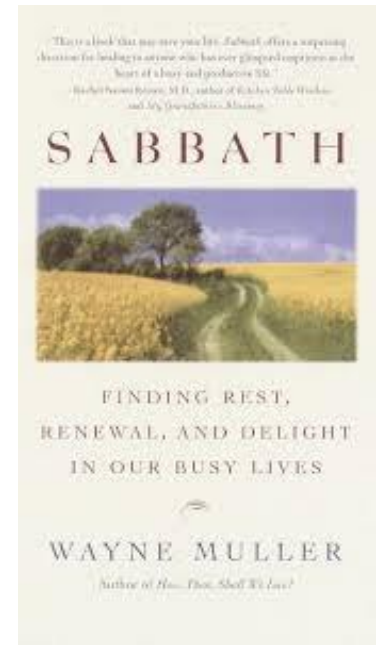
During these times of physical distancing, work at home, and staying in there is new energy around the topic of slowing down. Folks are already sharing how they are using this time to connect to people, read a favorite book again or even clean long neglected spots. All are good. Within the Ten Commandments is the teaching to “remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.” Sabbath is a slowing down in an intentional way to remember who we are and to whom we belong. By resting from our compulsion to create, produce, consume or distract – sabbath offers a grounding that will last even when the pace of life resumes (as I promise it will).

In groups of eight we will explore this topic from a Biblical/Theological standpoint (Walter Brueggemann), a practical standpoint (Wayne

Muller), a poetic standpoint (Wendell Berry), and a close look at the idea of time in our faith tradition (Dorothy Bass). Each participant will pick one standpoint to engage and read one author. In each group two different people will be reading the same book to make sure we are covered and to allow for different insights to emerge. In our small group time on Zoom we will share what we are

learning, challenge ourselves to set aside time for Sabbath, and relate our experiences doing so.

Due to the nature of these groups we need participants to be able to commit to the four sessions and to be able to read their chosen book. To sign up, simply e-mail Pastor Brent. Once we have eight people signed up, we will pick dates and times for our gatherings and get started. If we enough interest for another group, we will launch that one too. We have the books in the office and can handle them cleanly and leave yours in a Ziploc bag behind the church for you to pick up. Questions? Give Brent a call or send him a note.



Mission & Action will be supporting the Berkshire Community Diaper Project in May. Please consider a

donation to support the purchase of diapers for Berkshire County babies! Why? At least 30% of low income families find it difficult to afford the cost of diapers. With the pandemic crisis and rising unemployment, the need is even greater. Government programs (such as SNAP and WIC) do not pay for the

purchase of diapers. Research demonstrates that diaper need is associated with significant depression of the caregiver, which then can negatively impact the health and mental health of their child. Here’s how you can help right away:

Donate online [berkshirecommunitydiaperproject.com](http://berkshirecommunitydiaperproject.com)

Mail a check payable to BCDP, PO Box 5, West Stockbridge, MA 01266

A colorful diaper donation box (coming soon) at the church!

## News from People's Pantry

The People's Pantry, the South County source for free food for hungry people, has gone through enormous changes over the last two weeks.

We are serving twice as many individuals as at the beginning of March. The people who are food insecure has changed overnight from primarily elderly and disabled on limited incomes to young families who suddenly have no income. Many are recent immigrants who had been working multiple jobs with no benefits and will not qualify for unemployment.

How we procure food has changed just as rapidly. Formerly we received a shipment from Western Mass Food Bank once a month, purchased staples at Big Y weekly ordering by case lots, and received culled produce and day-old baked goods from Guido's and Big Y twice a week. These donated veggies and fruits, bread and desserts were the mainstay of our food bounty, usually 2000lbs each week. Suddenly, the store shelves are empty, leaving no bread and little produce. And we can't buy cases of food at Big Y.

And our seven volunteer teams are also under pressure. Many have worked together since the Pantry was founded more than 20 years ago. Many are now elderly, and the Pantry is an unsafe place for them to volunteer.

Thus, many problems: more hungry people including many more children, our usual food sources were not available and no safe way to use our existing volunteers.

Into the brink stepped many, many angels found through word of mouth, Facebook posts, church and synagogue emails:

- Berkshire Botanical Garden sends a truck weekly to Hatfield to pick up food. The local farmers through the Farmers Market and Berkshire Grown have donated produce and eggs, and Guido's is purchasing produce for us.
- Local farmers are selling to us at wholesale and heavily reduced prices – this also helps the farmers, as they can't sell as much to restaurants. Many restaurants donated their produce in stock when they closed.
- Individuals have donated enormous amounts of nonperishable food.
- We have a new volunteer core drawn from workers now working from home.
- A volunteer set up an online sign up page. We now need about 30 volunteers each week.
- Many of us from First Congregational have volunteered including Ted Randolph, Margaret Hornick and Cathy Clark.
- Sophie Randolph is updating our website so we can reach more people with information and requests.

We have adapted our procedures. We prepack bags of food and bring them outside where shoppers indicate their produce and meat requests to gloved volunteers six feet away. We work under a tent (donated by Mahaiwe Tents) in rain and snow.

You can help! Donate to the Pantry through the church, volunteer at [volunteer.peoplespantry@gmail.com](mailto:volunteer.peoplespantry@gmail.com) and visit our webpage [thepeoplespantrygb.org](http://thepeoplespantrygb.org)

Organizing all of the above has been more than full time for me for these two weeks.

Anne Hutchinson







**Prayer for a Pandemic**

May we who are merely inconvenienced  
 Remember those whose lives are at stake.  
 May we who have no risk factors  
 Remember those most vulnerable.  
 May we who have the luxury of working  
 from home  
 Remember those who must choose between  
 preserving their health or making their rent.  
 May we who have the flexibility to care for  
 our children when their schools close  
 Remember those who have no options.  
 May we who have to cancel our trips  
 Remember those that have no safe place to go.  
 May we who are losing our margin money  
 in the tumult of the economic market  
 Remember those who have no margin at all.  
 May we who settle in for a quarantine at home  
 Remember those who have no home.  
 As fear grips our country,  
 Let us choose love.  
 During this time when we cannot physically  
 wrap our arms around each other,  
 Let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace  
 of God to our neighbors.  
 Amen.


People's Pantry: the Berkshire Botanical Garden's van getting supplies from Hatfield; under the big tent, and waiting in line - six feet apart.

We offer worship at [stockbridgeucc.org](http://stockbridgeucc.org), Sunday 10:00 a.m.

[FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH](#) Stockbridge, Massachusetts
 
[SUNDAY LIVESTREAM](#)
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[PHOTO GALLERIES](#)

**Sunday Worship Livestream**

Thank you for joining us for worship! The live stream will begin at 9:45AM. More information is below the video player.



Sunday Worship - March 29, 2020

**Notes on Today's Worship**  
 The world continues to shift beneath our feet. Yet we cling once again to the words of Jesus, that wherever two or more are gathered in his name—even online—he is there.