



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
— Stockbridge, Massachusetts —

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



**April 2021**

Pastor: The Rev. Brent Damrow – [bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org)

Minister of Music: Dr. Sándor Szabó - (on leave)

Worship Music Leader: Noah Palmer

Administrator: Will Garrison – [office@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:office@stockbridgeucc.org)

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(413) 298-3137 | [www.stockbridgeucc.org](http://www.stockbridgeucc.org)

[www.facebook.com/stockbridgeucc](http://www.facebook.com/stockbridgeucc)

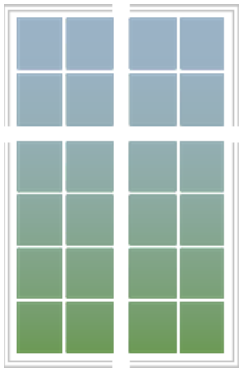
Sunday Worship: 10:00 a.m. *Online*

Wednesday: Bible Study, 1:00 p.m. *Online*

Wednesday: Morning Prayer, 8:00 a.m. *Online*

Thursday: Walking Prayer

Office hours: 9:00-1:00, Monday - Friday



# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

## April 2021 Newsletter

Dear Friends in Christ,

We have set out this Lent on a pilgrimage to encounter, to remember, to become – what have you found?

Our excursion for this year is nearly finished – but not yet! Still to come are rich opportunities through the encounters with Maundy Thursday and Good Friday – will you continue our walk? I hope so and for at least three reasons.

First, these are some of the pivotal stories of our faith. Through them we come face to face with a wide variety of characters who display a similar wideness in their choices, emotions, and actions. Some of them are awe inspiring, others disappointing, all of them a profound gift of **encounter** even as they offer the gift for self-reflection about our own living.

Second, these stories invite us in that we might **remember** moments of consequence. Some of them are beautifully intimate, others publicly tragic, all of them important for us to never forget for they reveal honesty about both life and grace.

Finally, these stories are big in scope and meaning. They transcend our moment and in doing so challenge us to loosen our grip on things we cling to that we might **become** more fully what God made us to be.

We are offering them this year in ways that evoke their truth, bring people together, and do so in safe ways. Even more than that though, these stories are a bit like steppingstones, going across the creek that divides the holy day of Palm Sunday from the other holy day of Easter. They offer passage across with

almost certainty that your foot might get a bit wet. They offer the chance to see and experience what lies between the two firm and dry banks. They even offer what Jake has taught me, the chance to intentionally step off the rock for a moment to feel the current running past. Having witnessed the

creek, reaching the far bank takes on some new meaning too.

I have marveled at the way this church has stuck together over this past year. You have shown up in so many ways to be church and to care for each other. You have persevered in a thoroughly unorthodox year

and you have shared what it has meant to you. Maybe you have never come to either a Maundy Thursday service or to a Good Friday one. Why not give them a try this year? After all, we have ended up finding connection and meaning in other surprising ways during these thirteen months.

We will reach the far bank of Easter this year and we still plan to do so outside gathered (masked and distanced) to celebrate what we have found on this journey, in our faith, and for our ongoing walk. I know that lingering in the rich opportunities of Mandy Thursday and Good Friday makes the truth of Easter more clarified, the beauty more fully rich, and the joy more complete. More information about each of these opportunities can be found later in this newsletter.

Let us continue our walk...together. Come and See!

*Brent*



## Capital Campaign Update and invitation for input

The Capital Campaign Steering Committee is moving forward with plans for a Feasibility Study, in preparation for a possible Capital Campaign later in the fall.

The core of a potential Capital Campaign is the Trustees' List of Projects totaling over \$500,000, of mostly structural and exterior projects -- largely deferred maintenance items. We are now reaching out to Boards, Committees, other groups who use the church for gatherings, and individuals in the congregation for their suggestions for other "Needs and Dreams" that might enhance their current gatherings, and look to the future, but require a capital investment.

There are two documents that might help in your thinking about this: The Trustees' List of Capital Projects that include those items needing attention; and a "Needs and Dreams" document that gives some background and more information about what we are asking. Contact the Church Office, and Will can send them to you, either electronically or in hard copy.

You are also invited to contact any of the committee members with suggestions, questions, or to discuss anything about upcoming plans.

We are looking forward to your suggestions and hope to have all input for possible inclusion in a Capital Campaign Feasibility Study by the end of April.

Thank you,

Cathy Clark, for the Capital Campaign Steering Committee

Capital Campaign Steering Committee:

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## Music and Worship for Easter

The season of Easter extends from Easter Sunday (April 4) all the way through Pentecost (May 23). It is a season of lingering in the joy and birth of Easter through the coming of the Holy Spirit. One peculiar aspect of the lectionary is that for the Easter Season readings from Acts replace the Hebrew Scripture reading. It is the only time in the church year that readings from Acts appear.

This year we will be using those readings each week. They highlight what the followers of Jesus were up to in the immediate time after his departure. We will lean into these readings gleaning what they show us about the nature of the “beloved community” that developed. In Easter we also find a stunning group of Psalms that will help to shape worship as well.

We owe deep gratitude to four of our musical stalwarts – Tracy Wilson, David Anderegg, Jack Brown, and Ron Hanft. While Sandor is on leave most of the musical selections have been coming from Pastor Brent and the vocalist for the given week. For the Easter Season, the fantastic four were invited to bring hymns, responses, and anthems to the texts and themes for each week. They scoured our hymnals, they explored hymnals from other traditions, they wrote new hymn texts, they suggested anthems, and then we all met to talk through them. Finally David Anderegg volunteered to come to the church and play through the unfamiliar ones so that we could make final selections for the season.

The end result is amazing. Each week we will sing a traditional Easter Hymn to start worship. We will use a variety of settings to bring the Psalm to life. The middle hymn (after the sermon) and the closing hymn resonate with the theme for the day and come from a variety of traditions (some very familiar and others beautifully new). Given that we will still largely be in streaming mode we invite everyone at home to sing along to any piece of music or simply sit back and let the vocalist sing it to you.

THANK YOU to Ron, Jack, David and Tracy- yet another example of the people of this church so freely sharing their gifts for the benefit of all.

## Singing Masks

As part of our ongoing goal to make worship as safe as possible, the church has given masks specifically designed for singers to each of our vocalists. Thanks to Noah, who made the suggestion, each of our singers are receiving these masks that are physically structured to facilitate the kind of breathing the singers need while retaining the level of protection as they make their joyful noises.



## Welcoming New Members

We are grateful for many people who have discovered this church in the past couple of years whether gathered or streamed. Some have started inquiring about joining this church and so we are inviting anyone considering that possibility to contact Pastor Brent or the Church Office (413-298-3137) to let us know.

Membership in the United Church of Christ is an important part of our life together. We see it as a covenant that joins us together as one body. As part of the reception of both current and new members make promises to each other of support, love, and fellowship. Church membership is something based in relationship and commitment. It is a forward-looking promise to walk together; support one another, this local church, and the larger church; and grow together in faith and love. Being a member brings both responsibilities and gifts – it is a public declaration of togetherness.

We look forward to hearing from you.

# OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER

## HAPPY APRIL BIRTHDAYS

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

## Board of Deacons

Our deacons are a joyful bunch, and we spend a remarkable amount of time at our meetings laughing, smiling, building on each other's ideas, coming back to a phrase or image with enjoyment throughout the 75 minutes we share twice a month. I was especially lifted recently when one of the deacons emailed me that "Easter is the most joyous day of the year." Alleluia!

Frank Russell came to our meeting last night, an emissary from the Capital Campaign Steering Committee. Frank framed an energizing request for input from us as a Board and as individuals: what are our dreams for the church? Some general themes rose immediately, and we agreed to take time to think individually and brainstorm together about worship, the sanctuary and its setting, what we have learned from our experiments during the pandemic, and what it is to be Church moving forward. What uplifting freedom in the encouragement to dream! Alleluia!

Cathy Clark's "Encounter" story in a recent Sunday worship service was full of humor. I laughed and smiled through the story of the Holy Spirit's enduring presence at a toll booth in Seattle. Cathy's sparkling eyes as she recounted the event in striking detail communicated joy in her individual moment of grace in that unexpected place years ago. The grace and the joy she felt at the time continue to live in Cathy, and now in me and the other people who delighted in her story of

a "random" act of kindness that went on through a whole day. Alleluia!

As we move through and beyond Easter, that most joyous day, I am particularly grateful for joy, which keeps us strong as individual children of God and as Church. The joy does not end with Easter, which is its beginning. We all know, from the past year, that that when the world is especially grim, even brief moments of joy allow us to dream of better times. We know from Cathy's story that God's grace creates joy that can last across time and be shared from one person to another. Alleluia!

I want to end with the first and last verses from John O'Donohue's blessing, "For Equilibrium," which the deacons used as our devotional last night:

*Like the joy of the sea coming home to shore,  
 May the relief of laughter rinse through your soul.*

[....]

*May your prayer of listening deepen enough  
 To hear in the depths the laughter of God.*

As we go forth this month, let's cultivate and relish joy, use it to energize our hard work as Church, and share it with the world as God's loving gift of grace. Alleluia! Amen.

~ Elizabeth Young for the Board of Deacons:  
 Hal Brink, Anna Duhon, Don Eaton,  
 Joshua Hall, Donna Jacobs, Jim  
 McMenemy, and Ted Randolph.



## Board of Christian Education

By the time this reaches your inbox, spring will be here: crocuses sprouting, redwinged blackbirds singing in the wetlands, and spring peepers waking up. In the spirit of hope and resurrection, Christian Education has something different planned this year for Easter. After the children's service, we will be offering the opportunity for our children to plant peas to take home with them. In the coming weeks, they can watch the plants sprout and grow, eventually ending up in the garden.

It's been a long winter, and a very long year. We continue to offer family resources on the webpage, but are truly hoping to have Sunday school classes and adult groups meeting IRL (in real life) before too long.

~ Diane Piraino, for Board of Christian Education

## The Service League

Most of us have been able to get those coveted shots but somehow things still seem a long way from normal. It's not clear when we'll be able to meet again indoors, but it's certainly clear that it's still too cold to meet outdoors. There are, however, signs of life: For instance, Jane McCormick tells me that she, Helen McCormick, and Patty Fadding went out in search of material to make scrubbies, that perennial favorite at Summer and Holly Fairs. They were successful in their quest, stocked up on a rainbow of colors, and now, I'm sure, are bent over their crochet hooks while watching March Madness.

And Ann Brink reported that two weeks after she and Hal had their second shot, they celebrated by getting together with their also-vaccinated daughter Carey - and hugged, without masks, for the first time in a year, which, Ann said, "felt great, but weird". At press time, they were still waiting for other family members to get shots, but were hoping to be able to have everyone for Easter dinner. Their three grandchildren are all away at school, two in Boston, and one in St. Louis; one graduation (Camille's, at Wheaton) is scheduled, but it's still not known if it will be virtual or "real". So the Brinks, like most of us, continue in one-day-at-a-time mode. Anne Fix reported that she and Gary, after getting their second shots, "feel

freer than we have in a long time", and Anne is crafting up a storm in the fervent hope that we will be able to have our fairs this year. And my son Ted, who is working at vaccine sites in Orange County, California (think Disneyland), was able to get his vaccines early on, a big relief to his Mom.

Other signs of life? Daylight savings - love that extra hour of sunlight in the afternoon! I actually saw something that looked a lot like a daffodil poking through the half-frozen earth. Nature, and the promise of renewal, persists, even when it seems as if winter will never end. I read a book this week by the biologist E.O. Wilson, who said that, "Nature doesn't need us. We need nature". That point has certainly been driven home - and I know that this year we'll find Spring will be more welcome, and rejuvenating, than ever.

~ Margaret Hornick, for the Service League

### Asynchronous Spring Clean-up

Do you wish for a chance to work outside? Come over to the church - at a time convenient to you - to help clean up the place after a long winter.

Projects: picking up sticks, pulling out leaves from flower beds, mulching said flowers. You would rather be up close and personal with the building? There is always window washing!

Please email or call the church office to let Will know you're on the way. Thanks!!

### Check-ins and E-mail Blasts

It is a joy to have you check-in during online services. But we are aware that there are sometimes technical issues with texting in your name on Sunday mornings. If you are having trouble with this, please contact the church office. Thank you.

Each week the church sends out one or two emails to over 200 addresses. If you no longer receive emails, please let Will know. He'll make sure you get back on the list. Just call the office, 413/298-3137.



## Holy Week and Easter

Please visit

[www.stockbridgeucc.org](http://www.stockbridgeucc.org) to learn more and to register.

### Maundy Thursday

This is an intimate day of worship to remember the beauty of the Last Supper and the tragedy of betrayal

and denial. To honor the spirit, we invite you to sign up to be a part of a small Zoom gathering, choosing from gatherings that begin as early as 5:30 or as late as 8:00. We even have one designed for the youth in our church and their families. People Meet and eat over Zoom and then go through a beautiful liturgy that incorporates both communion and a Tenebrae service of light.

### Good Friday

We will walk the Stations of the Cross on top of Eden Hill at the Marians. Arrive any time between 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. and we will have prayers to guide your way. The path is relatively level and manageable. Information will be posted on our website.

**Easter Sunday** - We will offer two outdoor services (registration required, deadline 4/3 at 4:00pm):

- 9:00 a.m. Children/Family Service – this short thirty-five to forty minute service will be aimed at kids, youth and their families. There will be a couple of messages for the kids (no sermon), simple songs to sing, and other activities that engage the Easter story and the kids on the lawn.
- 11:00 a.m. Festival Worship – Complete with the flowered cross, vocalists, story, sermon, and instrumentalists this service will celebrate the resurrection with joy! Service will be on the front lawn (weather permitting) and live-streamed (regardless of weather).



The Board of Mission and Action is pleased to announce the opening, on March 31, of a Pop-up Pantry to assist those in our community who have been impacted by the pandemic. This project will **provide emergency, short-term food supplies free of charge to anyone who needs them.**

Our new shed, located at the rear of the church by the back entrance, is ready to go! We will be stocking the shed for use 24/7 with pre packed bags of food for families and individuals.

**We need your help to set up a crew of volunteers** to keep things moving along smoothly. You can help in many ways, with minimal time commitment:

- ◇ **Volunteers to check the pantry daily**
- ◇ **Volunteers to work in the building to sort, fill and label bagged food**
- ◇ **Volunteers to shop for food**
- ◇ **FOOD DONATIONS** (see list on the church website for shelf stable non-perishable items)
- ◇ **FINANCIAL donations**
- ◇ **Clean grocery bags** (reusable or double paper)

To **volunteer** or get more info, call Charlotte Rodgers at 978-618-5767 or visit [stockbridge.org](http://stockbridge.org)

***Please share this information with anyone you know who may be in food crisis.***

## On Mindfulness Meditation

By Jo Ann Levitt

*To be 'mindful' means to accept and to be fully present for life as it is. Peeling away judgments about how things should be, mindfulness carries with it a merciful, broader perspective of events, a sense of relaxation, and the ability to witness life with equanimity & peace.*

Did you know that at least ten people in our congregation are now meditating on a regular basis—both on their own and also during our weekly Thursday evening Lenten group classes? Speaking as the facilitator, I have to say that it's been a wonderful *ride!* I've been remembering or relearning things I once knew well, having taught meditation for years.

The following is a synopsis of one of our week's practices; perhaps you can give it a try on your own.

### (1) BREATHE

First and most important: slow your breath. Learn to do deep breathing in a way that helps you relax and release tension. Gradually lengthen the amount of time it takes to breathe in, and then lengthen the exhalation even longer than the inhalation. Ideally you are now breathing no more than 5-6 full, deep breaths per minute. This brings about the greatest heart-mind coherence. It takes time to receive the full benefit—and the calm—of slow, focused breath-work. It may help if you time yourself during initial practice.

### (2) RELAX

Scan the body for any residual tension. Give your body permission to relax and to let go. Affirm that it's possible to access a deeply relaxed state (and continue using the breath work initiated in step one.)

### (3) ALLOW

Allow all feelings to be fully felt & fully present. Rather than judge or deny them, simply witness feelings as they arise and move through; the same is true for your thoughts. Witnessing is one of the key components of being able to

meditate “mindfully.” Thoughts do not disappear; however, your relationship to them gradually softens and becomes more neutral, more open and less judgmental.

Ray Bergmann, who's been with us the past four weeks, commented on his experience: *The Mindfulness Meditation class has helped me to unite mind, body and spirit. The techniques are presented very clearly and there are opportunities to practice and have roundtable discussions. The benefits realized so far have been better focus, enhanced decision making and more powerful intercessory prayer.*

Elizabeth Young writes: *The Meditation Group that Jo Ann Levitt led once a week during Lent helped me deepen my ability to experience peace and calm in times of stress and sadness. It also fostered relationships with people I didn't know very well before the group started, and with whom I now feel a warm fellowship. I woke up every Thursday during Lent thinking, "Oh good! I have the Meditation Group tonight!" I hope the Church family will have more opportunities to benefit from Jo Ann's expertise, gentle instruction, and warm support in future meditation groups!*

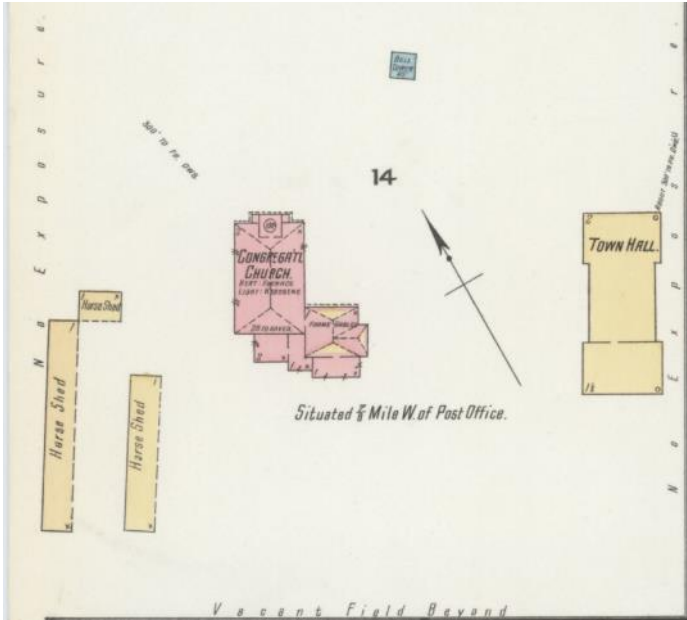
### Artists' Work for a Church Fundraiser

Artists are called to participate in an in-person Art Show May 2 from 1:00pm – 6:00pm. Art can be of various media, including paintings, graphic designs, photography, collage, mixed media, sculpture, or woodwork. Each piece should be as close to 12"x12" as possible, and will be priced at \$100 each. Artists may contribute one or two pieces, of which one will be sold as a fundraiser for the church and another for personal sale. Contributions of \$100 or more are welcomed.

The art pieces should be submitted Saturday, May 1 from 1:00pm to 4:00pm. Art Show coordinators Madonna Meagher and Olga Schwede welcome all church artists and artist friends to participate.

Questions? Call Olga at 413/644-9846 or the church office 413/298-3137.





**Church property, 1905** The Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Co. created detailed maps of cities and towns to help insurance agents determine the degree of hazard for each property. Thus the church building is shown as brick with wooden gables, and heated with kerosene lamps. The wooden horse sheds would soon be replaced by the current Manse. Thanks to Joshua Hall for providing this detail from the Library of Congress' [website](#).

**Below:** The Berkshire Waldorf High School students have returned for the spring semester. They will be studying here Monday-Thursday until early June.



**Above:** Diego Salinetti, our Livestream Technician, uses this new blazing fast computer, the cameras, and sound board to provide seamless online worship service on Sundays.

**Right:** Don Eaton and Bruce Wilkens assembling the new Pop-up Pantry shed, located near the door to the office wing. Made in Israel, this Monfort 757 comes with an extreme weather kit.

It will soon be equipped with shelving to hold bags of groceries for anyone who needs an emergency supply of basic foods. See page 6.

