

Annual Report

Program Reports for 2020-2021



CALL TO MEETING

To all members of the First Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ Stockbridge, Massachusetts

In accordance with the bylaws of the church, we hereby call the Annual Meeting of the church for Sunday, May 23, 2021 immediately following worship.

The business to be transacted is as follows:

- I. Call to Order
- II. Opening Prayer / Remembrance
- III. To act upon scheduled business:
 - A. Election of Boards and Offices of the Church
- IV. To act upon any other business that may legally come before the meeting.

Jeremy Ridenour, Clerk

Catherine Clark, Moderator

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF STOCKBRIDGE 4 MAIN STREET STOCKBRIDGE, MA 01262

ORDER OF BUSINESS

ANNUAL MEETING

MAY 23, 2021 Immediately Following Worship

- I. Call to Order
- II. Quorum Check
- III. Approval of Annual Meeting Minutes 2020 (by unanimous consent)
- **IV.** Scheduled Business
 - A. Remembering those we have lost

Nell Ezequelle Russell Fadding Alex Williamson

- B. Election of Boards and Officers of the Church (by unanimous consent)
- V. Benediction

First Congregational Church, UCC Stockbridge, Massachusetts ANNUAL MEETING Minutes May 17, 2020

This meeting was held via Livestream - due to restrictions from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Present: Brent Damrow, Pastor; Deb McMenamy, Moderator; (both in the church building) and Patricia Strauch, Clerk (via Livestream); and approximately 77 other members (via Livestream).

Call to Order and Quorum Check: Noting a quorum present online, Deb McMenamy, Moderator, welcomed us and called the meeting to order at 11:05am. There was no live reading of the Call for the Meeting. A copy had been previously provided online and by mail (if requested).

Previous Minutes: A complete package for the Annual Meeting was prepared and distributed online and by mail (if requested) prior to the Meeting. Included in that package were the minutes from the Annual Meeting of May 19, 2019 and from the Annual Budget Meeting of February 2, 2020. These minutes were approved by Unanimous Consent (after time was given for people to call or text in with any objections).

Remembering Those We Have Lost: Brent led us in a time of remembrance, silence, and prayer, for those we lost in the past year.

Election of Boards and Officers: Deb asked everyone to review the Nominating Slate of Officers, Boards, and Committees of the Church (attached to these Minutes). Deb offered thanks to everyone that she has worked with during her tenure: the Council, Brent, the Officers, Chuck Gillett and Patty Strauch, as well as the Connections Committee; and expressed her appreciation to all members of boards and committees who said yes when they were asked to serve.

The Nominating Slate as presented was approved by Unanimous Consent (after time was given for people to call or text in with any objections).

Benediction: Brent shared words of gratitude for two giants of heart and experience, who will be leaving Council. Chuck Gillett, as Treasurer, for the years and years and years of faithful service, guiding us with wisdom, fortitude, and strength. And Deb McMenamy, as Moderator, a great gift, a great joy to the Church. We are a better and stronger place for people like Chuck and Deb, and so many others. Brent then closed with a Benediction.

Adjournment: The meeting ended at 11:17am.

Respectfully submitted, Patricia Strauch, Clerk

First Congregational Church, UCC Stockbridge, Massachusetts 2021 Annual Budget Meeting January 31, 2021

This meeting was held via Livestream - due to restrictions from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Present: Brent Damrow, Cathy Clark and approximately 35 members present virtually for this meeting.

The annual budget meeting took place virtually via the Sunday worship livestreaming. At 11:09 a.m. Cathy Clark, Moderator, began the Annual Budget Meeting. With over 35 members, Cathy announced a quorum for the meeting. Brent then offered an opening prayer for the meeting. Cathy then called the meeting and announced the business to be transacted is as follows: To act upon the budget for the fiscal year 2021. To act upon any other business that may legally come before the meeting. Comments or dissenting votes can be texted into Brent Damrow.

Cathy called upon Joe Nicolosi to report on Board of Trustees. A pre-recorded message by Joe Nicolosi was then streamed. Joe reviewed previous projects by the Trustees. This year in the 2021 Annual Budget Trustees listed various projects that necessitate a capital fundraising campaign. Joe reported that they have begun to engage a fundraising professional, Jennifer Williams, to guide the church through this process. Jennifer and the Fundraising Steering Committee will explore various projects and long-term needs. Joe asked for the church's engagement in the process which he described as open and inclusive.

After Joe's report, Cathy thanked Treasurer Patty Strauch for all of her diligent work over the past year during this trying year. Cathy shared that last Sunday (1/24) a Zoom meeting was held to discuss the budget. Cathy noted that there are cause for joy, including our balanced budget and commitment to the various missions of the church.

A pre-recorded message was then shared by Patty Strauch. Patty provided a brief presentation divided into two parts: reviewing the 2020 budget and looking ahead to the proposed 2021 budget. A couple of new unexpected line items were added to the budget in the wake of COVID-19. Ongoing expenses (such as Livestreaming Worship) were added as line items of the budget. The good news is that our new financial software allows us to track expenses in a very detailed manner. Another new line item in the 2020 budget is Directed Gifts (see Christian Education, Mission and Action, and Trustees), which reflects unexpected donations to the church. For instance, Trustees received \$12,500 a large portion of which came from the Henderson Memorial Fund to repair the office education wing. We ended the year with a \$104 surplus in the Operating Budget. Patty then also reviewed the Restricted Funds. We ended the year with \$104 as a surplus budget. Patty thanked the leadership of the pastor and the council for their creativity and flexibility during this challenging year.

Cathy then invited people to text in questions to Brent. Brent had Patty on the phone to field any questions that might emerge. No questions emerged at this time. Cathy then invited the church to look to page 24 of the budget report to review the 2021 proposed budget. The livestream then went back to a pre-recorded message by Patty about the proposed budget for 2021. Patty

announced that we are presenting a balanced budget. Patty shared that we plan on fully funding all Boards in 2022. There has been a generous and dramatic increase in pledges and gifts for the coming year. We are increasing our Mission and Action Budget, Denominational Support, livestreaming worship, and Contracted Services.

Rick Floyd texted in congratulations to the church leadership for its financial leadership. Again, Cathy invited members to text in questions about the budget. Supportive text messages came in from various members, but no questions emerged. Rick Floyd put forward a motion and Charlotte Rodgers seconded the motion to approve the 2021 budget. The Budget for 2021 was approved unanimously at approximately at 11:44 a.m. Cathy asked if there were any issues to come before the congregation. No other business was brought forward. Pastor Brent ended the meeting with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeremy Ridenour, Clerk

Clerk's Report May 17, 2020 to May 22, 2021

Baptisms

None

Deaths

Nell Ezequelle June 10, 2020 Russell Fadding October 9, 2020 Alex Williamson May 8, 2021

New Members

Maurice Peterson
Marion Pomeroy
November 8, 2020
Ned Saviski
November 8, 2020
Bruce Wilkens
November 8, 2020

Transfers Out

This will be updated in next year's report.

Summary:

Child Baptisms	0
Adult Baptisms	0
New Members	4
Deaths	3
Transfers Out	0
Membership as of 5/2020	203
Net Added	<u>1</u>
Current Membership	204

MODERATOR'S REPORT

May 2021

Dear Friends,

As we continue to travel through our Covid-19 wilderness, we are reminded of how far we have come, yet how we yearn to once again be in our sacred space surrounded by friends and neighbors.

While church activities have remained largely vacant from our building, our church has remained vibrant, reaching out in new ways to connect with and support each other, and the larger community.

On Sunday livestreaming services, folks join in from numerous zip codes (and even time-zones), and just hearing the names of all of us who are gathered in His name is a joy. We have heard stories from each other and listened as scripture was read from each other's own home fires.

Music, always central to our worship, was enhanced through a core group of talented and dedicated musicians, who continued to lift our spirits and spiritual connection with their gifts. When we wanted to sing a song that didn't exist, David Anderegg wrote it for us.

Deacons continued to come up with new, creative ways to enhance our worship experience including: a first-ever 54-foot Advent wreath, with an opportunity to shares messages of hope, joy, peace, and love with one another; an Ash Wednesday snowy path of repentance and surprising warmth; and an intimate Maundy Thursday service and meal shared via Zoom.

While we haven't had a Coffee Hour in longer than we care to remember, Growth & Fellowship have managed to come up with ways to encourage us to connect with each other and delivered sweets for the table and food for the soul.

Mission & Action was able to retool our Giving Tree at Christmas and has been able to help more neighbors in need during this time of so much need.

Christian Education has maintained full and rich opportunities to pray and study together, and kids have continued to have their Sunday School lessons and projects.

Trustees continued to work on their long list of (mostly, necessary) repairs and improvements to our physical structures, and formed a Capital Campaign Steering Committee, to move us forward to a possible Capital Campaign later in the year.

A Regathering Committee formed early in the pandemic, with the objective of developing guidelines and procedures for those who use the church as a gathering place. The Committee will continue to balance our desire to gather with the infection rate in the community, realizing our eagerness to be together, and, most importantly, our ultimate desire to care for one another.

Life, no doubt, would have been much more difficult without Will in the office, as he (literally) kept us connected, answered our questions, and made everything run smoothly.

And finally, on behalf of a grateful congregation, we are so thankful to have Pastor Brent as our leader. His energy, creativity and commitment has made all the difference during this trying time.

While the pathways may not yet be clear, I feel confident that with God's grace and guidance, we will continue to gather together, connect with one another, help others, and be church.

Peace,

Cathy Clark, Moderator

PASTOR'S REPORT

Paul's two letters to the Corinthians are cherished parts of scripture. They are honest correspondence including everything from gratefulness to teaching, admonishment, and cheerleading. They address a church trying to be the body of Christ amidst all the challenges and blessings of life. They are perfect for these times as we try to do the same.

⁴I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵For in him you have been enriched in every way – with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge – ⁶God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. ⁷Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. *1 Corinthians* 1:4-7

⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. *2 Corinthians 4:8-18*

What a year it has been here in the Berkshires. As you read the submitted reports, I hope that you are amazed as I have been at the resilience, the open-heartedness, the generosity, the creativity, and the clinginess (in all the best ways – clinging to God and neighbor) of this church family. It has been no small lift to maintain and even enliven our church life over the past year, and yet it has been a labor of love and blessing. Thank you to so many who have contributed in very different ways to this shared endeavor. I think even Paul would be astounded.

The Annual Meeting is a time for giving thanks and reflecting on where we have been. This report is normally dedicated to looking in the rear-view mirror. Being mindful of where we have been and how it has affected so many in this church in different ways, I want to offer a few words this year, though, about how our past affects in real ways the moments that are yet to come. Let me offer just three things as we move forward:

- **Be patient.** As we move back into more deeply shared life, it will take time to reconnect. We have been in the same storm but in greatly different boats. Some are ready to resume full speed ahead, while others need gentle breezes. Some have found great blessing in this last year, others great challenge, and most of us a bit of both. It will likely take us much longer to reintegrate than we would imagine possibly as long as a full year.
- **Be open.** We need to be open to sharing and listening to what we have found, lost, and discovered in this past year. Being able to express ourselves without needed to prove or defend, but rather to share will give us the chance to learn from each other and create new ways of being that may even be better than what we knew before.
- **Be kind.** Paul described love in First Corinthians as patient and kind. We are depleted and tired. We have not been able to be in each other's company. We have not been blessed with the same ability to engage, share, forgive, and reconcile during the pandemic. We may need to extend extra grace to one another and everything that emerges from love or kindness is better than that which does not.

I am deeply grateful, rather exhausted, and profoundly hopeful for the road before us. I look forward to encountering it slowly and together. $\mathcal{B}rent$

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

It's been a year.

Just like the rest of the world, we went virtual. We Zoomed, recorded, downloaded, Google Drived (Drove?), and attached in ways we never would have previously imagined. Jill was our Sunday School coach, signing us up and walking us through it all as we presented a year's worth of engagement for our kids in the form of video recorded lessons, music videos, coloring sheets and craft projects. Cindy put together a unit for Advent through Epiphany, complete with special guest stars. Diane assembled a unit for Lent through Easter on the life, teachings and miracles of Jesus. And Jill wound up the year with a unit on Fruits of the Spirit. Special thanks to our teachers: Paul Rix, Elizabeth Evans, Jill and Miles Wheat, Cindy and Jack Brown, Josh Hall, Ted Randolph, Diane Piraino, and Terry Wise.

We managed a gathering in September for Rally Sunday, outdoors and distanced, with family groups listening to a story from Barb, looking at kids' bibles, playing lawn games, and eating pizza. Anne assembled school supply bags for all the kids. They decorated stars with streamers and posted them in front of the church where they remained as signs of joy and hope. For many, the gathering was the first chance to see other people after months of being housebound, and the relief and happiness were palpable.

Not to be kept from Christmas caroling, Jill solicited videos from the congregation of members singing and/or playing carols. She posted it all on the website for everyone to enjoy. She was at it, again, at Easter asking what Easter means to each of us.

For February, Black History month, Diane put together a series on American Black sacred music including Spirituals, Gospel, Freedom songs and Jazz, with YouTube links to performances.

For Easter, Anne put together planting kits for children: pots, peas, sunflower seeds, spoons, and dirt. After the service, kids were invited to put it all together right away or to take it home. The message was hope and new life. (We just hope it all stayed zip-locked tight for the car ride home!)

Plans are being made for CE Sunday on June 20. Tune in to see, firsthand, what we've been up to.

~ Diane Piraino, Chair of Board of Christian Education

With the onset of the pandemic came significant challenges for our adult formation programs which have long been popular and traditionally held crowded around tables – whether classroom tables here at the church or coffee tables in people's homes. Both the themes of our programs for this year and the way they were held emerged to fit the times and the needs. We knew that things would have to be done differently, what we might not have been ready for is the way that the Spirit would stir up connections, leaders, and ideas in such amazing ways. In doing the research for this report, I was blown away by all that has happened, by all who stepped up and stepped in, and the heart behind it all.

(Note from Pastor Brent: I tried to search various places to capture the names of participants and leaders, if any have been left off, I deeply apologize and invite you to call the church office so we can update our records.)

May 2020 – Sabbath

Two different groups gathered to explore four books that approached Sabbath from very different angles. Part of the commitment to be in these groups also called on participants to explore different ways on intentionally engaging Sabbath practices. The two groups that set out with Pastor Brent included:

- Anna Duhon, Paul Rix, Cathy Clark, Bruce Wilkens, Elizabeth Evans, Jean Stackhouse, Don Eaton and Holland Brown
- Jo Ann Levitt, Becky Smith, Vicky Cooper, Elizabeth Young, and Ron Hanft

What happened next was amazing. Parts of both groups decided to keep going once the Sabbath conversation was finished, exploring other topics and inviting new folks to join in. Kim Ruffing and Terry Wise joined Elizabeth Young, Vicky, Jo Ann and Becky. Their conversations led them beyond Sabbath to deep consideration of Race and Racism (see below). Holland, Bruce, Anna, Elizabeth Evans and Paul kept their small group together too exploring new topics and deepening relationship.

Summer 2020 – Race and Racism

Responding to the world, Linda Russell helped to lead a discussion of these important topics leaning on a variety of texts. The goal was less about action and doing and more about learning, self-reflection, and conversation. This small group included:

• John and Janet Canning, Cathy Clark, Meryle Epstein, Susan Moor, Anna Duhon, Linda Hoddy, Ted Randolph, and Cris Raymond.

When the planned program was over the Spirit encouraged this intrepid group to keep going. Shirley Blanchard joined the small group and shared a 21 Day Study from the American Bar Association on the topic to keep it alive.

September 2020 – Year Long Studies

Recognizing the difficulty of in-person gatherings and wanting to find a topic that would allow folks to come together over longer periods of time to connect, learn, and share; two different studies launched engaging three small groups.

- A new study about a central theme of our tradition, Covenant, launched with two different groups. The curriculum from Abingdon Press probed the breadth of scripture through the lens of Covenant and in three successive themes: *Creating the Covenant*, *Living in the Covenant*, and *Trusting the Covenant*. The two groups largely were self-supporting and guiding allowing Pastor Brent to focus more fully on the Disciple Study (see below). The groups included:
 - o Jeremy Ridenour, Marion Pomeroy, Charlotte Rodgers, and Vicky Cooper.
 - o Elizabeth Young, Niti Martin, Don Rodgers, Ron Hanft and Jo Ann Levitt.
- The Disciple Bible Study is also a publication of Abingdon Press and it explores the Bible starting at Genesis and finishing with Revelation. This is the third time we have

offered this study at the church and once again it has proven to be a great blessing. Importantly it presents the sweep of the Bible allowing participants to see themes that emerge, to understand the context of how the faith has developed, to identify just how closely Jesus leaned on the texts from Hebrew Scripture, and the many different perspectives and ideas that are included and even placed side-by-side. The study is an immense 34 week undertaking and continues. Pastor Brent provided leadership to those who have been part of this group including:

 Ken Labresh, Casey Jones, Steve Hassmer, Susan Moor, David Anderegg, Patty Strauch, Marilyn Strauch and Mindy Dow.

Meditation – Lent 2021

Jo Ann Levitt offered to teach a class on Meditation which was a perfect fit for the reflective time of Lent. Each week she sent out materials, engaged the group over Zoom and followed up on the different approaches and techniques she was sharing. The themes included breathe, relax, and allow. One participant, Ray Bergmann summed up his experience in this way: "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." The list of participants include:

• Jo Ann Levitt, Sibylle Baier, John Canning, Barb Kershner, Ray Bergmann, Mary Jane Dunlop, Mindy Dow, and Elizabeth Young

Book Read and Conversation – April 2021

Pastor Brent on one of his study weeks read "Everywhere You Look" by Tim Sorens. The questions raised about the purpose of the church, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the call for ministry in community proved evocative and lasting. He wanted to gather some input from a cross-section of the congregation to see if any of those questions might be fruitful in any way for the larger church. He invited a group to read the book and commit to sharing what struck them and engaging in one conversation. We are still imagining how the book and/or insights shared might be useful. The group included:

• Tom Ruffing, Megan Kolano, Anna Smith, Maurice Peterson, Linda Russell, John Canning, Terry Wise, Elizabeth Young, and Cathy Clark.

Who could have imagined this past year and all that has unfolded? The challenges seemed so visible, so real, and so apparent. And yet, what emerged was nothing short of transformational. So many people shared so many gifts to lead and learn and to together be formed and re-formed. What a year – thank you all!

Gratefully and joyfully submitted by Pastor Brent

BOARD OF DEACONS

The Board of Deacons had an exciting year! We welcomed four new members: Hal Brink filling in for a year, as well as Anna Duhon, Don Eaton, and Ted Randolph. In this time when many things about the process of worship needed to be reimagined and reconfigured (repeatedly!), we benefited from a large, creative, energetic, and dedicated team. We worked together with Pastor Brent to shape meaningful and diverse opportunities to worship together during the pandemic.

We devoted ourselves to making worship accessible during the necessary restrictions: livestreaming services continued to improve with Jon Geldert's skills and leadership as well as new technology. Diego Salinetti has taken over as videographer, enabling Jon to return to a slightly more normal life after lengthy service developing and directing the livestream.

A major development focused on embedding recorded parts of the service: we had the Reverend Quinn Caldwell's dramatic sermons from his home in upstate New York while Brent was away. Remember Quinn on his cellar steps, preaching about Mr. and Mrs. Noah emerging after the flood, as we would emerge after the pandemic? That image resonates now, doesn't it?

Using embedded recordings now allows more congregants to lead us in the liturgy from the safety of their homes, a wonderful way for us all to feel closer in the intense isolation of the pandemic. The livestream services also helped us connect with people in many geographical areas, and we have been so happy to provide meaningful worship for old friends, extended family, and others who need it from afar.

Pastor Brent's leadership in developing multiple worship opportunities enabled the deacons to "think outside the church," and develop ways to have worship occur outdoors, where distancing and safety were enhanced. We had several Sunday morning outdoor services through the year, the first one filled many of us with trepidation that turned to poignant joy as we saw each other in person for the first time in month. Although masked and at greater distances than required by the state in order to maximize congregants' comfort, we felt God's presence in the love we share.

The initiation of a Sunday Evening Worship program quite different from the livestream tradition service came about with a powerful investment of energy: Brent and Jon, the Deacons, and many volunteers from the Church Family contributed to the beauty of gathering on the lawn at 5:00 Sunday evenings. Jon Geldert led us in meditative Taizé and offered hauntingly beautiful religious songs; participants shared brief stories of religious experience; there was a time of quiet reflection with a flower-arranging ceremony; different musicians, communion, prayers to share with the community in the garden; the depth of deepening our relationships with one another and God every Sunday evening.

Holy Holidays offered unique challenges this year, and again Pastor Brent led the Deacons through planning processes that encouraged us to identify what the holy day means and how we might offer opportunities to experience that meaning in our peculiar pandemic circumstances. Thus, through brainstorming, a great deal of rollicking conversation, and the need to add an additional diaconal meeting to our schedule each month, we identified focal points for each of these major holidays, and working in collaboration with Brent and many volunteers and participants, we created these special highlights:

Advent: The Wreath and the Labyrinth (Thank you, Michael Deegan and Sarah Conly for turning our dream into a reality! The wreath made of trees and the fairy-lit labyrinth paths provided spiritual process, presents, progress, beauty, contemplation, and community.

Christmas Eve: Outdoors, in the cold, with ice, snow, bells, candlelight, and "Silent Night" in person and streamed.

Ash Wednesday: A pilgrimage around the church grounds, walking prayerfully with reflection on one's sins, watching those wrongs go up in flames, and then receiving the blessing of forgiveness.

Maundy Thursday: Pandemic-style meant eating together in small groups on Zoom, and then sharing the story of the Disciples' betrayal and Christ's sacrifice with the Tenebrae candles blown out one by one.

Good Friday: Together, yet safely distanced, walking the beautifully intense Stations of the Cross at the National Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Stockbridge.

Easter: Double the joy with a family service for and featuring children, and a festive service outdoors with new versions of old traditions: trumpet music, the flowering cross, a prayer for those lost to COVID, and then resounding Alleluias ringing in the air.

As the Deacons move forward, we are focused on establishing a pattern and strategies for worship that include livestream, outdoor worship, multigenerational worship, and ultimately a gradual return to worship in the sanctuary. We are committed to continuing to livestream the service.

The Board of Deacons is particularly aware of the blessings of having Will Garrison in his multiple roles at church. Will's warm competence at the other end of the phone line has kept us sane; his dedication, kindness, organization, patience, humor, and resourcefulness are only a few of the qualities he brings to his work with the Church.

The Deacons are thankful for the Regathering Committee's ongoing hard work to make sure we all stay safe in creative, vibrant worship opportunities.

The Deacons also are thankful for Jake Damrow, whose expert perspective on being a child and willingness to participate in the Time for the Children every Sunday have enriched the worship experiences for young and old alike.

The Deacons appreciate all the skills, energy, and time that Hal Brink and Jim McMenamy have shared with the Board over their terms of service: thank you both for sharing your expertise and wisdom with us!

Finally, the Deacons are profoundly grateful for Pastor Brent's outstanding leadership in worship and pastoral care throughout this extraordinarily demanding year. His creativity, energy, vision, faith, and love have not only kept the church going, but enabled it to thrive. His generosity in postponing his intended sabbatical to guide us through these fraught times was a gift that we cannot acknowledge enough. Thank you, Brent—and we wish you a very happy, restful sabbatical this fall.

~ Elizabeth Young, on behalf of the Board of Deacons

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Trustees are responsible for the care of our finances, buildings, and grounds. Our goal is to keep the church safe, functional, welcoming, aesthetically pleasing, and historically restored whenever possible. Some highlights of the past year include:

- Architect Karen Hunt was hired to document occupancy ratings for each space in our facility and design exit signage to comply with Town of Stockbridge building requirements. An engineering group was contracted to design emergency lighting for all exits. The Town also requires a design for accessibility to the JE room and Sanctuary before a permit will be issued for Front Steps project. Stone mason Ron Petkus has been engaged to reset the front steps of the sanctuary as soon as the permit is issued.
- Basement cleanup is continuing as the first step toward moisture abatement & Insulation. An application was initiated with National Grid 2020 and Berkshire Gas for resources to support this process. Berkshire Gas will cover \$13K of the total \$25K cost.
- Safety measures for Covid: In February and early March changes in practices and additional safety measure were applied. The building was closed. Brent and Will began taking turns splitting the office days/hours with very specific safety measures in place. All chemicals used in cleaning were reviewed and approved as Covid-19 acceptable.
- A Capital Campaign Steering Committee recommended hiring professionals to guide the fundraising process. Jennifer Williams (Williams Consulting Services) was contracted to lead the process. Jennifer will also draw on the grant writing experience of Sarah Tanner's Financial Development Agency. The plan to proceed through the Feasibility Study was approved by Trustees, Church Council and Finance. In this study, members of our church will have the opportunity to express their views on where and how funding should be applied to meet the various needs and missions of our church. During the study, interviews with various church members will inform the choice of leadership, timing and financial goals of the campaign. See "Capital Campaign Annual Report" for more details.
- Trustees, Council and Finance approved establishing a \$100K revolving line of credit in order to gain access to funds prior to our capital campaign. Financing may be arranged through UCC Cornerstone Fund, an arm of the United Church of Christ.
- Several upgrades & repairs were completed:
 - Kitchen plumbing
 - Occupancy Loads & Exit signage
 - Live Streaming Upgrades
 - Wi-Fi & Telephone systems upgrades. All areas of church buildings now have internet access.
 - New-to-us (reconditioned by MacFarlane Office Equipment) copier and printer with advanced features.
 - Safety and convenience upgrades in the Manse

- In the queue for next Year:
 - o Clearing out the Basement and completing the insulation project.
 - o Completing Front Steps repair / restoration.
 - Functional and restorative improvements to the Manse, Sanctuary and JE room per the Capital Improvements Report (Capital Improvement Report 210506.XLXS).
- ~ Joe Nicolosi, Chair, Board of Trustees

MISSION AND ACTION

Mission and Action began the year in the midst of the global pandemic. We spent time in thoughtful discussion about how our work could impact the local community – realizing that many of our typical projects would need to be modified as everything shut down and moved to virtual activity.

In the late spring and through early August, we helped to organize and fund the Open Table meals program, in collaboration with The Lost Lamb restaurant in Stockbridge. This program provided an average of 85 meals once per week. Many in our congregation donated their time and financial gifts to support Open Table, and it was a joy to provide this outreach!

In the fall, Mission and Action sent funds to the UCC Disaster Relief Program for emergency outreach to those impacted by hurricanes and wildfires in the US. We provided financial support for the church to fund the Fire Safety Project – which upgraded exit signage and lighting in the building. The Giving Tree holiday program went virtual (with the generous help of Will Garrison and Anne Hutchinson) supporting families – some referred by The Elizabeth Freeman Center, Construct, Housing Authority, and Pastor Brent.

In response to the continued impacts of Covid, Mission and Action members discussed the need for emergency food. We decided to develop the concept of a Popup Pantry that provides shelf stable, nonperishable food available 24 hours per day. Anyone can access this food, with no questions asked. The Popup Pantry opened on March 31, and on average about 2 bags of food are going out each week.

Mission and Action continues to provide financial support to The Peoples Pantry along with encouraging donations to this pantry each month in our newsletter update. We expanded the funding to the Pastor's Discretionary Fund as those needs increased. As we continue to assess unmet needs in our own community, we are outreaching to local nonprofits that we've funded in the past.

As this year ends, we want to thank you for your gifts to Mission and Action. As we continue our work to support those in need, we encourage you to reach out to us if you are aware of an unmet need.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlotte Rodgers, Chair Sarah Conley, Patty Fadding, Nick Pohl, Patricia Strauch, Bruce Wilkens, Sara Zanin

GROWTH AND FELLOWSHIP

The mission of the Growth and Fellowship Board is to develop, increase and preserve the bonds of community among members of the church. Although "Growth" is part of our name, we have not instituted special efforts to grow our membership in recent years, mostly because our excellent worship, music and mission work serve us well in attracting new members. That leaves our Board the room to focus on fellowship within the church family.

In the pre-pandemic past, our primary activities were to find and support hosts for the weekly coffee hour following Sunday worship. We also hosted annual celebrations, including the All-Church Birthday Party, the Strawberry Social in June, and the All-Church Picnic in July. This year, we had significant disruptions and cancellations of all our activities as a result of the pandemic. We have continued to write birthday cards and to help Rev. Damrow as needed in occasional outreach to church family members.

Our three bigger (if not actually big) events this program year were the All-Church Birthday celebration in October, the Christmas bread project and the Easter bake-for-your-neighbor event. The birthday party was a smash thanks to Holland Brown, with pre-ordered pieces of delicious cake beautifully boxed for pickup by church members, and an online Happy Birthday sing-along. The Christmas project saw G and F members baking and delivering a Christmas bread to every member of the church family, which was much appreciated by members and friends alike. The Easter project had a smaller turnout, but it was fun, with neighbors baking for neighbors in a round-robin giveaway.

As of this writing, we are just beginning to imagine what actions we can take to sustain fellowship as the church returns to live outdoor worship. We are tanned, rested and ready...and looking forward to seeing you all again soon!

This year, we wish to thank retiring Board members Ann Brink, Michael Deegan, and David Anderegg for their years of service.

Respectfully submitted,

David Anderegg, chair

Michael Deegan, Susan Moor, Vicky Cooper, Ann Brink, Holland Brown, Mishel Kulibaba Epstein and Brian Hyatt

MUSIC

The Board of Music works with the Minister of Music and Pastor Damrow to enhance the worship experience for our congregation and visitors through use of the adult and children's choirs, hand bells, organ, piano, and other special guest musicians and artists.

The 2020-2021 church year has continued to be a dramatic one for the music program. We have continued to adjust to the departure of Catherine Schane-Lydon the previous year as well as the continuation of the shift in our worship services from the pandemic restrictions. Our new Minister of Music, Dr. Sandor Szabo started in July of 2020, but then needed to take a leave of absence in the fall of 2020, to return in January 2022.

We were blessed to have professional music leadership from within the membership of the congregation who could step up while Sandor is on leave. We are particularly indebted to Ron Hanft and to Tracy Wilson for pulling together some wonderful services for the Christmas season. From January to June, we have been fortunate to have as a guest Noah Palmer. He has been with us on a regular basis to add his considerable talent to the broadcast worship services.

Because of the pandemic, the adult choir and the children's choir have been unable to sing during the worship services, and we are eager for their return when the science permits it. Jill Wheat has worked hard to provide music resources through our online children's worship resources and will be pulling together the children to sing during summer 2021 outdoor worship services.

The bell choir was able to gather to provide worship music on several occasions, most notable at outdoor services on Christmas Eve and Easter. Under the ongoing direction of Mary Jo Erickson Connor, they have added so much to our worship this past year.

Without being able to have the choir gather and sing, we have enjoyed individual vocal soloists on Sunday mornings during the year. Our thanks go to the experienced and professional work of Andrea Bargabos, Nellie Rustick Meier, Deryl Godshall, John Demler and Jack Brown.

The Music on Main performance series was suspended again this year in light of the pandemic. Hopefully, this special series might resume in the future with Dr. Szabo's guidance.

Our church continues to attract a membership that values the quality of our music program. This has been a challenging year, and it has been remarkable that high standards have been presented every week in support of our worship.

Respectfully submitted,

Jack Brown (chair), on behalf of committee members Gary Schieneman, Bob Doerr, Joan Kopperl and Ronnie Cunningham

RE-GATHERING COMMITTEE

May 7, 2021

Dear Friends,

It has been a challenging year as a church. We have not met as a whole congregation inside the sanctuary for the past 14 months, and that has impacted us individually and as a community.

The Regathering Committee was formed to consider how best to approach the issues of our spiritual and social needs to gather as well as the safety of ourselves, our fellow worshipers, and our greater community. We applaud the efforts to make live-streaming available to us each week at home. It has been no small feat to execute this production each week. Many of us have appreciated the experience at home, in our PJs, with a cup of coffee in hand, but we also crave being in a sacred space, surrounded by our siblings in Christ.

The Regathering Committee (RC) was formed with representation from Council, staff, and the boards of Deacons, Growth and Fellowship, Christian Education, and Music, as well as Pastor Brent. The intent was to look at the ramifications on all these groups, of regathering. We have considered not only our congregation, but the use of our space by outside groups, again concerning safety and need. We have hosted the Waldorf School and AA, with strict safety protocols and intense cleaning, believing they provided an essential community service.

Indulge me in a brief medical digression. Although the northeast was the first region to be severely impacted by COVID19 in the early months of 2020, the Berkshires were relatively spared. Our worst-case counts were actually post-holidays this year and we are still recovering from that. As of today, we have been averaging 18 new cases/day/100,000 people (our county population is just over this) over the past two weeks. This leaves us in the Very High Risk category for unvaccinated people, with the recommendation of no large or indoor gatherings. We are no longer seeing institutional outbreaks, thanks to mass vaccination, and so these numbers reflect community spread. But there is good news. Our vaccination rate is well above the national average and Massachusetts's per cent of vaccine-reluctant people is the lowest in the country. As of last week, vaccines are available to anyone aged 16 and older with no wait.

Given that information, the RC is looking at a temporary approach of limiting indoor gathering to vaccinated people until the rate of community infection is much lower. With tools available to evaluate the safety of a space depending on size, ceiling height, ventilation, etc... we hope that a significant number of vaccinated congregants can gather indoors by late May. We understand that some of our younger congregants are still not two weeks post final vaccine and that that will exclude them from indoor attendance. We also understand that there will be others reluctant to attend indoors, independent of vaccine status. Accordingly, live-streaming will continue for all services.

It becomes increasingly clear that outdoor gatherings, even among the unvaccinated, are extremely safe with masking and distancing. We are delighted with the arrival of good weather, finally, that we will be able to gather together on the front lawn as a community. We believe that this will be safe and meaningful. We hope this balance of indoor services, outdoor services, and live-streaming will best meet all of our needs.

Throughout, we have been guided by medical expertise from Dr. Anthony Fauci, the CDC, Johns Hopkins Medical Center, data collection from the New York Times, and scientific and theological papers. The information on this pandemic changes constantly and we have tried to keep abreast of it. The risk of infection is never zero, but we have tried to develop plans that would minimize it. Ultimately, it is up to each of us to decide what feels safe to us. We encourage you to respond to the church survey on your thoughts on attendance, as it will shape our decision making.

Peace in these difficult times.

~ Diane Piraino

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN STEERING COMMITTEE

Our Community and Vision

Stockbridge United Church of Christ is a thriving church community serving its members and the Berkshire community as a whole. We try to serve God faithfully and invite all to join us, either as visitors or members. Our church has an active life, full of music, studies and discussions, worship & faith and service to the members & others.

In order to sustain and grow our activities, however, we must maintain our facilities and plan and invest in the future. We have a beautiful and very useful church, but it is a building that is older (dating to 1824) and requires significant maintenance, including much that has been deferred over the years as outlined by Historic Preservation Associates. People before us built and maintained the facility so that we can use it faithfully, but it is our job to maintain and improve it to meet our future goals and for those who will follow us. These are our physical "Needs."

Maintaining and rebuilding our facilities to meet today's requirements is not sufficient. Our facilities must reflect our vision of tomorrow and provide us with the capability to expand our worship experience and our activities. Furthermore, we must think not just in terms of our buildings, but we must consider investment in items that facilitate our growth perspective, items such as audio/visual capabilities, furniture and fixtures, space refiguring, and facility flexibility and usefulness. We must also consider items that reach out to new members/users who may feel differently than many of us about what is attractive and useful. These are our "Dreams."

Introduction

To achieve our "Needs & Dreams" a Capital Campaign Steering Committee was formed in December 2020 and subsequently hired two fundraising consultants: Jennifer Williams (Williams Consulting Services) and Sarah Tanner (Financial Development Agency) as approved by Trustees, Church Council and Finance. Jennifer will work with the Steering Committee and

blend the attributes of both groups. During this campaign, members of our church had the opportunity to express their views on where and how funding should be applied to meet the various needs and missions of our church. During the feasibility study, interviews with various church members will be used to determine the leadership, timing and financial goal of a possible Capital Campaign.

Status & Planned Phases of the Campaign:

- The first phase has been to formulate a Needs and Dreams document which initiated with the Steering committee, expanded out to all the other committees and groups in March & April.
 - Status: I have to say: when it comes to sharing your Needs & Dreams you have not been shy. We have received overwhelming amount of input from various groups.
- The Next Phase, May July, we will:
 Review the specifics of Needs & Dreams, obtain cost estimates and establish goals & priorities.
- Feasibility Study Preparation, September
- Feasibility Study Interviews, Sep 30 Oct 3.
- Church vote to proceed with campaign, Oct 24.
- Campaign Kick-off, November 2021.
- Celebration Sunday, Mar 13, 2022

THE CHURCH GARDEN

The church garden prospered over the summer of 2020 under the tender care of Sarah Boyd, Stephanie Bradford, Liz Murray, Anna Smith and Lenore Sundberg. With soil enriched with compost and other amendments in the four raised beds, vegetables were planted, watered, harvested and delivered to CHP (Community Health Program) in Great Barrington every Wednesday from early July to mid-September. Green beans, cucumbers, Swiss chard, kale, tomatoes, basil, parsley and chives helped fill the shelves outside the CHP offices for anyone in need. Some church members were also able to enjoy vegetables and herbs from the garden.

PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY

Our in-person knitting sessions came to an abrupt halt with the pandemic. I, for one, have been working on a new prayer shawl at home, but I miss our congenial times together to work and talk. We do have a few shawls completed, so if you know of anyone who should receive one as a celebration or a solice, please let me know.

~ Terry Wise

SERVICE LEAGUE

The Service League, along with all other groups, saw its activities interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. We met outdoors as long as weather permitted, then disbanded for the winter, and only within the last few weeks have been able to reconvene, thanks to vaccines, in the JE Room. We have not been able to carry out our usual fund-raising activities, as the Holly Fair and Summer Fair were of course cancelled. We did, however, have a successful "pop-up" Fair in front of the Stockbridge Library in December, and are planning two more (June 12 and August 14) this year. Most of the group craft-making activities have become individual efforts as we work from home, but we are happy to be able to get together again for lunches and business meetings, as well as all-important fellowship and mutual support, on Friday mornings. Our donations to local mission projects have continued, on a reduced scale, with support to the People's Pantry, Elizabeth Freeman, Sonsini Shelter, and other local causes. We hope to be able to return to our normal fund-raising, and mission support, this year.

~ Margaret Hornick

LEADERS FINISHING THEIR TERMS

The following are folks who are finishing up their service. We are deeply grateful for their service and invite you to share your gratitude as well.

Christian Education

Anne Hutchinson, Diane Piraino, Cris Raymond

Deacons

Jim McMenamy, Hal Brink, Elizabeth Young

Growth and Fellowship

David Anderegg, Michael Deegan, Ann Brink

Mission and Action

Patty Strauch, Sara Zanin, Patty Fadding

Music

Jack Brown, Joan Kopperl

<u>Trustees</u>

Mary Hoeltzel, Alice Collins

Other Committees

Pastoral Relations: Diane Piraino, Ron Hanft

Connections: Jo Ann Levitt, Margaret Hornick

NOMINATING SLATE OFFICERS, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES OF THE CHURCH May 23, 2021

This list includes confirmed nominations as of May 19, 2021. The Connections Committee will share any additional nominations up to and at the vote.

CHAIR OF CHURCH COUNCIL/MODERATOR

Cathy Clark

CLERK Jeremy Ridenour

TREASURER Patty Strauch

FINANCIAL SECRETARY Ron Hanft

HISTORIAN Joshua Hall

LIBRARIAN Terry Wise

Bold indicates those to be voted on by the congregation.

BOARD OF DEACONS

CLASS OF 2022CLASS OF 2023CLASS OF 2024Margo Bradley-DavisAnna DuhonMichael DeeganJoshua HallTed RandolphJill FlemingDonna Jacobs

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

CLASS OF 2022CLASS OF 2023CLASS OF 2024Elizabeth EvansBarbara KershnerTerry WiseKen WardPaul RixElizabeth YoungJill Wheat

BOARD OF MISSION & ACTION

CLASS OF 2022CLASS OF 2023CLASS OF 2024Charlotte RodgersNick PohlCindy BrownSarah ConlyBruce WilkensCarl Bradford
Martha Floyd

BOARD OF GROWTH AND FELLOWSHIP

CLASS OF 2022CLASS OF 2023CLASS OF 2024Vicky CooperHolland BrownBrian Farrell

Susan Moor Brian Hyatt

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

<u>CLASS OF 2022</u> <u>CLASS OF 2023</u> <u>CLASS OF 2024</u>

Bronly Boyd Becky Smith Ron Hanft
Christine Rasmussen Joe Nicolosi Cris Raymond

Kara Smith Don Rodgers

BOARD OF MUSIC

<u>CLASS OF 2022</u> <u>CLASS OF 2023</u> <u>CLASS OF 2024</u>

Gary Schieneman Robert Doerr **David Anderegg**Ronnie Cunningham **Deb McMenamy**Marry Harland

Mary Hoeltzel Tom Ruffing

PASTORAL RELATIONS

Margaret Hornick, Miles Wheat, and Diane Piraino

CONNECTIONS

David Anderegg

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Jeremy Ridenour, Carl Bradford, Hal Brink, Madonna Meagher, and Joan Kopperl

COMMITTEE OF DELEGATES

<u>SNE CONFERENCE</u> <u>BERKSHIRE ASSOCIATION</u>

Class of 2022:
Margaret Hornick

David Anderegg

Class of 2022:
Margaret Hornick

David Anderegg

David Anderegg