

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

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



January 2023

Pastor: The Rev. Brent Damrow - bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org

Minister of Music: Peter Frost - music@stockbridgeucc.org

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(413) 298-3137 | www.stockbridgeucc.org

Office hours: 9:00-2:00, Monday - Friday

January 2023

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|-----------------------------|
| 1 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> | 2 New Year's Holiday office closed. | 3 <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i> | 4 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>Yoga 9:00am</i> Bible Study 1:00pm Council 7:00pm | 5 Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm | 6 Brent's Sabbath Day Service League 10:00am Youth Event 5pm | 7 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i> |
| 8 Epiphany Sunday Worship 10:00 a.m. Choir sings <i>Gathered & online</i> | 9 Office closed, staff working remotely | 10 <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i> | 11 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>Yoga 9:00am</i> Inspired group 12:00 Bible Study 1:00pm Inspired dinner 6:00pm | 12 Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir potluck and rehearsal 6:30pm | 13 Brent's Sabbath Day Service League 10:00am | 14 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i> |
| 15 Intergenerational Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> | 16 Martin Luther King Jr. Day office closed | 17 <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i> | 18 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>Yoga 9:00am</i> Inspired group 12:00 Bible Study 1:00pm Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm | 19 Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm | 20 Brent's Sabbath Day Newsletter deadline Service League 10:00am | 21 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i> |
| 22 Worship 10:00 a.m. Choir sings <i>Gathered & online</i> Youth Event | 23 Office closed, staff working remotely | 24 <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i> | 25 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>Yoga 9:00am</i> Inspired group 12:00 Bible Study 1:00pm Inspired dinner 6:00pm | 26 Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm | 27 Brent's Sabbath Day Service League 10:00am | 28 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i> |
| 29 Worship 10:00 a.m. Annual Budget Q&A <i>Gathered & online</i> | 30 Office closed, staff working remotely | 31 <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i> | | | Livestream worship at stockbridgeucc.org | |



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

January 2023 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

As you receive this, we will have just gathered to hear and remember the greatest story ever told – love come down at Christmas. Once again our challenge will be, as the carol *O Little Town of Bethlehem* relates, to let that story come to us, be born in us, and abide with us. In the United Church of Christ, an underlying theological approach is one of story – one on hand the infinite story of the divine and the human story and how they dance together.

Stories are amazing things – they weave together a narrative and invite us in. They convey more than an account of things – they convey the truth that lingers around, behind, below, and above those things. Their meaning ultimately is shaped not just by the words on the page but by how those words dance with our own lived experience, imagination, needs, hopes, and desires. Every time a story is told it finds a new birth – just like the one we just gathered to hear and remember on Christmas Eve.

The longer I serve in ministry, the more my heart and mind gravitate toward the incredible potency and import of story. In this coming year of 2023, I hope to fully dive into our stories – both those that come to life in scripture and those that are being lived by each of us now.

We will kick off the year by adding story to two

important parts of our shared life – worship and study. Through small groups, we will be diving into the book *Inspired*, Rachel Held Evans' insightful work on the Bible as sacred story. We will be giving those books away on Christmas Eve and inviting the community to learn with us. Take a look at page seven of this newsletter for more information.



In worship, we will begin to incorporate faith stories from our congregation as a part of weekly worship. As Evans so profoundly notes, “The church is not a group of people who believe all the same things; the church is a group of people caught up in the same story, with

Jesus at the center.” We will be finding ways to bring your part of the story to our collective hearts and minds. I fully agree with Evans when she writes “What I love about the Bible is that the story isn't over. There are still prophets in our midst.” We will be finding ways for more voices to bring more chapters to that unfolding story.

In the meantime, may you revel in the story of Christmas – both those the Bible tells us and those that will unfold in your homes and with your families and friends. May you, like Mary, ponder all these good things and hold them in your hearts.

In peace, hope, joy, and love,

Pastor Brent

HAPPY JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

| | |
|------------|------------------------------|
| January 4 | Lisa Nelson |
| January 5 | John Morse |
| January 7 | Jane McCormick |
| January 12 | Anne Roy Mary Jane Dunlop |
| January 13 | Jeannene Booher |
| January 14 | Jill Wheat Ned Saviski |
| January 16 | Nancy Wilcox |
| January 21 | Alexis Kennedy |
| January 22 | Pat Carlson Daniel Knauss |
| January 23 | Christine Smith |
| January 26 | Will Pohl Kenneth LaBresh |
| January 27 | Linda Colvin |
| January 28 | Chuck Gillett |
| January 29 | Vivian Wise |
| January 31 | Cathy Clark |

Music

The Adult Choir is looking forward to a week off after the festivities which included five anthems on Christmas Eve. Rehearsals will resume on Thursday, January 5th, from 7:00 to 8:30 pm. This is an excellent time to join the choir as we will be starting all new music. Let me know if you are interested. The choir sings every other week in our service, but we rehearse every Thursday.

We are very aware of the power of singing and the power it holds when transmitting viruses. The choir is following a practice of testing each Sunday morning if we plan to sing without masking.



I have very much enjoyed my work with the choir these first few months and look forward to making beautiful music in 2023!

~ Peter

Youth Group Happenings

As a follow up to the party, the Youth Group is planning an expedition to deliver the decorated ornaments, and maybe sing a carol or two, to various church members who may especially appreciate a little extra attention this season.

We still have space available for the next Youth Group activity, which will happen on Epiphany (January 6, 2023) and will feature Light! We'll meet at church at 4:30 sharp for hot cocoa and chocolate chip cookies, and, oh yeah! for a brief discussion about the importance of light in our celebration of Christmas and Epiphany. Then, up the hill we go to Naumkeag to experience light in a wonderful way at the **Winterlights** exhibit there. The **Winterlights** event is open to the youth of the church (age ten and above), and they may invite a

friend. To sign up, contact Will Garrison at 413-298-3137, ext. 1, or office@stockbridgeucc.org Questions? Check with Jill Wheat, songsailormusic@yahoo.com.

Ted Randolph for the Youth Group



Financial Notes

No spoiler alert is needed if I tell you that life is full of many moving parts. There is so much to keep track of. For me, that includes being able to find, at a glance, where I am with my annual church pledge. Please see the Annual Pledge Giving Record included in this newsletter (back page). You may find this tracking sheet helpful. It is completely optional and is included here for you to use (or not use) as you wish.

For folks who still prefer using giving envelopes, we have a number of unused boxes of envelopes from previous years. Simply email me, and I'll gladly set a box aside for you. The only time you need to write your name on the envelopes is when you are giving cash.

Please become friends with the "Memo" line on your checks. This helps us to direct your monetary gifts as you intend! Thank you!

Year-end note: A statement of your 2022 financial gifts will be mailed out to you by the end of January. To be counted as 2022 giving, all contributions must be dated on or before December 31st, 2022, and received by January 15.

Marion Pomeroy, finance@stockbridgeucc.org



Marion Pomeroy, Martha Floyd, and Cindy Brown were three of the elves helping with this year's successful Giving Tree project.

Reviewing Staff Performance

The church has a Personnel Committee which has the responsibility of conducting an annual review of the performance of each of the church's permanent staff members. Why? We want to create a supportive and dynamic environment so that each staff member can work to their best potential with high job satisfaction. Our process will include both providing feedback to the staff member and receiving feedback from them. By receiving feedback on their performance and suggestions regarding future performance, employees can become even more effective. Thus, the committee has developed what it feels, is a thorough, fair and reasonable process to accomplish this:

First, we and the staff member agree upon an accurate and comprehensive description of job responsibilities.

Second, we ask several parties to provide the committee with a written assessment of the staff member's performance on key responsibilities of the position. The employee is always asked for a self-evaluation. Peers and the supervisor of the employee are asked for their reflections on how the individual is doing and for suggestions as to how that person could perform even better. Feedback from the congregation is also requested.

Third, the Personnel Committee will combine the feedback received from these sources into a comprehensive report and will then hold a comprehensive discussion with the staff member to explore ways in which the employee could be even more effective.

As a last step, the Committee will recommend appropriate adjustments in duties and compensation to the Church Council and Board of Trustees.

Personnel Committee: Jeremy Ridenour (Chair), Carl Bradford, Vicki Cooper, Bob Doerr, Don Eaton, Ken Ward, Pastor Brent

Advent Crafts

I can still remember our kids' sense of excitement, driving back from a Thanksgiving weekend with grandparents in Boston, and knowing we were headed straight to church for an Advent Craft Party. That sense of excitement has carried over to a new generation of kids, if the response to this year's event is any guide. We had thirteen younger people participating in four crafts: potato printing, making stained glass votive candle holders, assembling Advent calendars, and decorating salt dough cookie ornaments. The Party this year was planned by the Youth Group planners with help from Julian Vallen, and was open to youth of all ages.



Inspired – *Small Groups*

Rachel Held Evans (1981-2019) is a treasure. She is known for her books and articles about faith, doubt, and life. She has been featured in everything from the Washington Post and NPR to BBC and Christianity Today. She served on President Obama’s Council of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. She was a great source of inspiration on my sabbatical in remembering the beauty of what church and faith can be as well as the challenges we often bring to our shared life.



For me, *Inspired* and its exploration of the Bible struck a beautiful balance between honest human struggles in encountering sacred texts and scholarship on those same texts. As the book cover relays, “If the Bible isn’t a science book or an instruction manual, then what is it? What do people mean when they say the Bible is inspired? When Rachel Held Evans found herself asking these questions, she began a quest to better understand what the Bible is and how it is meant to be read. What she discovered changed her and it will change you too.”

As we embark on a new year both in the liturgical calendar and the secular one too, we have an opportunity to come to our sacred texts with fresh perspectives. I am convinced that whether you are a Bible devotee or whether the book scares you, the kinds of questions and answers Rachel brings forth will have meaning. Here are some opportunities to engage. We anticipate some more to be announced and led by different folks – pay attention to our website and weekly e-mails for those details. Here are the plans for the two sections I plan to lead:

- **Wednesday Mid-Day Conversations** (Noon – 12:55 Hybrid)

Wednesdays January 11, 18, 25 & February 1, 8, 15

In each of these hour-long sessions, we will explore two chapters of the book. There will be the chance for people to raise questions about the stories and the Biblical or theological implications raised by Evans. Just as important, though, will be the chance for us to linger in imagination about what it means for our own lives and how we might encounter the Bible in life-giving ways.

- **Wednesday Dinner Club** – (6:00 – 8:00 anticipated; in-person)

Wednesdays January 11, 25 & February 8

These sessions will involve participants banding together to prepare a simple meal and share it. Through that extended time, we will engage in lively conversation about the book and its meaning for us and our church.

Kim Ruffing will lead a Zoom/hybrid option on a weeknight that works best. Contact Kim or the church office if you are interested.

News from Mission & Action

The Christmas Giving Tree

Thank you to our congregation for participating in the Christmas Giving Tree! We purchased 94 Christmas gifts for 12 families (33 people – 19 children and 14 adults), through 4 organizations – Construct, the Elizabeth Freeman Center, Literacy Network, and the Berkshire Housing Authority.

You made a brighter holiday for some of our South County neighbors. The Mission & Action Board thanks you for remembering those in our community that needed an extra hand this year. May the Hope, Peace, Joy and Love of Christmas be in your heart and actions all through the new year!

The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund

Thank you to all who donated to the Christmas Fund through the offering taken at the Christmas Eve service or with the specially designated offering envelopes. We will report the final amount when tallied.

Habitat for Humanity Work Day

SIGN UP NOW! Saturday, January 14th, 9-3

Help Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity work on their first house in Great

Barrington! If you would like to take part, look for a sign up sheet in the JE Room, or call Martha Floyd 413.445.5704.

Thank You from United Church of Christ National Office

Thank you for your generous donation to the United Church of Christ to support disaster relief for those who have experienced storm damage in Pakistan, Kentucky, Puerto Rico, and Japan. Your gift of \$4,000 was received in October. Because of your kindness, we will help people rebuild their communities and bring comfort to their lives.

Your gift enables the church to be present with

people amid catastrophic and life-changing situations, offering immediate relief and providing long-term recovery support. Working through a network of global and local partners, the church lives out its call to care for our neighbors as we strive together toward a just world for all.

- Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, General Minister and President, UCC

Mission Funds dispersed in December:

- Winter jacket for homeless person \$86.98
- Turkeys and drinks for Thanksgiving Dinner \$46.17
- Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity \$500.00
- Warm up the Winter (Construct Fuel Fundraiser) \$400.00
- Yule for Fuel (Pittsfield Area Council of Congregations Fuel Fund) \$200.00
- Baby Crib for Husaini Family, our Afghan resettlement family \$300.00
- Suicide Prevention \$725.00

Help us spend your Mission Dollars-Survey coming in 2023!

In 2023 we will be soliciting your help in choosing the priorities for how Mission and Action spends our budgeted dollars. In January, look for the pie charts in the JE room showing what we have spent in 2022- for Local spending and National/ International spending. We will be asking you to vote for your favorite agencies/ topics and suggesting new avenues for giving. Stay tuned for details!



More Thank You's from The People's Pantry

Our shelves are full and our hearts are full. Thank you for being part of this amazing community supporting our work. We appreciate what you have done and are glad you are our neighbors.

- Your Friends and Neighbors at The People's Pantry

Stockbridge UCC has been one of the longest and most consistent supporters of The People's Pantry. Work teams, cash, food, a pandemic's worth of toilet paper, pantry volunteers, drivers – the church has stepped up with every ask. Thank you for facilitating Jesus' work in the world.

- Diane Piraino, member of Board of Directors



LitNet

Your continued support makes it possible for LitNet to empower our adult learners to find their voices and navigate their daily lives. It gives our learners the tools to become an integral part of our Berkshire community.

- Merle Duskin Kailas, President, Board of Directors

We are grateful that LitNet continues to be supported by our church! Thank you!!

- Linda Russell, Clerk, LitNet



The Berkshire Coalition for Suicide Prevention

This year saw long lines and excited patrons who waited patiently to go through our Haunted Mansion, as a fundraiser for the Berkshire Coalition for Suicide Prevention. Our sponsors have always jump started our fundraising and once again you have come through for us. Many, many thanks! We celebrate each and every one of you.

In September, we were proud to bring a world renowned speaker on suicide prevention to Wahconah High School. This program and many others are why our organization is so important. All the funds raised stay directly here in Berkshire County for suicide prevention programs.

Your donation is helping our teens find the resources they need to help them get through the hard times. Each dollar you donate and each conversation on suicide prevention is making a difference. Thank you!

- Joann Farrell

Happy Birthday(s)!

Special birthday greetings go out to two people who have been members of this church for the longest time of any active member. Connie Montgomery (12/24) and Claire Williams (2/1) are each celebrating their ninety-fourth birthdays!! We owe such deep gratitude for the many ways they have served and continue to contribute to the life of this church. Reach out and share your wishes and prayers with them!

By the way, we do not have records of birthdays records for everyone in the congregation – so feel free to let the office know so we can celebrate with you too!

Save the Date

The Annual Budget meeting will be after worship on February 5. On the agenda will be approval of 2023 budget and a vote on articles of incorporation. The budget reports will be available January 22, with a Question & Answer session after worship on January 29.

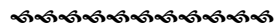
An Experiment

We will be closing the church building each Monday in January. Two of the days, January 2 and 16 are federal holidays, and for the other three Mondays the staff will be working remotely. No external users are scheduled on Mondays. The experiment? To see if we can help the budget by turning down the heat.

Please note that although staff will be working remotely, the usual office number (413/298-3137) will work - calls get patched through to staff cellphones. The staff email addresses will also work as usual.



A hard-working crew painted the church's Little Library then enjoyed a story read by Vicky Cooper.



Another hard-working crew. John's Excavating finished pouring the concrete ramp and steps on December 19. Cold work! They poured around high-tech heating wires that melt snow and ice.





Photos by Cindy Brown



Some of the volunteers are: Barbara Kershner, Anna Smith, Olga Schwede, Linda Hoddy, Cindy Brown, Vickie Cooper, Terry Wise, Elizabeth Young and Jo Ann Levitt.

Also helping were Stephanie Bradford, Diane Piraino, Janet Canning, Ted Randolph, Charlotte and Don Rodgers, Patty Strauch, Maria Carr, Hope Williams Hansen and Donna Jacobs. There were many

From the Service League

Over 100 people braved the wet weather on Sat., Dec. 3 to come to the Holly Fair. Even with the bad weather and Santa coming down with Covid that morning, it was a good day with a steady flow of customers! Many of them started lining up at the door, in the rain, well before 10:00am when we opened the door.

There aren't enough words to express our many thanks to all the volunteers who helped the Service League at the recent Holly Fair.

anonymous donations made to Grandma's Attic and the bake sale.

Thank you all for everything you do whether it's a donation, volunteering your time or helping any way you can. Please let me know if I've neglected to mention you or anyone else.

Another bright spot to the day was seeing Patty Fadding. She is recovering from major heart surgery and just couldn't stay away! We were very, very happy to see her.

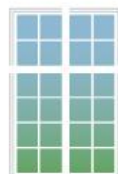
~ Ann Brink for the Service League

2023 Annual Pledge Giving Record
First Congregational Church of Stockbridge
P.O. Box 825, Stockbridge, MA 01262

See page 5 for note.

Optional tracking sheet for your personal use.
 Contributions may also be made online at stockbridgeucc.org

| WEEKLY | Amount/Notes | WEEKLY | Amount/Notes | MONTHLY | Amount/Notes |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| January 1 | | July 2 | | January | |
| January 8 | | July 9 | | February | |
| January 15 | | July 16 | | March | |
| January 22 | | July 23 | | April | |
| January 29 | | July 30 | | May | |
| February 5 | | August 6 | | June | |
| February 12 | | August 13 | | July | |
| February 19 | | August 20 | | August | |
| February 26 | | August 27 | | September | |
| March 5 | | September 3 | | October | |
| March 12 | | September 10 | | November | |
| March 19 | | September 17 | | December | |
| March 26 | | September 24 | | | |
| April 2 | | October 1 | | | |
| April 9 | | October 8 | | | |
| April 16 | | October 15 | | | |
| April 23 | | October 22 | | | |
| April 30 | | October 29 | | | |
| May 7 | | November 5 | | | |
| May 14 | | November 12 | | | |
| May 21 | | November 19 | | | |
| May 28 | | November 26 | | | |
| June 4 | | December 3 | | | |
| June 11 | | December 10 | | | |
| June 18 | | December 17 | | | |
| June 25 | | December 24 | | | |
| | | December 31 | | | |



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