

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

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



February 2023

Annual Budget Meeting: February 5, after worship

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

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

Administrator/Sexton: Will Garrison – office@stockbridgeucc.org

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CE Coordinator for Youth and Children: Julian Vallen - ce@stockbridgeucc.org

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

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

February 2023

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>Yoga 9:00am</i> Inspired group 12:00 Bible Study 1:00pm Council 7:00pm	2 Inspired group 12:00 Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	3 Service League 10:30am	4 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
5 Worship 10:00 a.m. Choir sings Annual Budget Meeting <i>Gathered & online</i> <i>SFC rehearsal 1:00</i>	6 Office closed, staff working remotely Inspired group 6:00pm Zoom only	7 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	8 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>Yoga 9:00am</i> Inspired group 12:00 Bible Study 1:00pm Inspired dinner 6:00pm	9 Inspired group 12:00 Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	10 Service League 10:30am	11 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
12 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> <i>SFC rehearsal 1:00</i>	13 Office closed, staff working remotely Inspired group 6:00pm Zoom only	14 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	15 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	16 Inspired group 12:00 Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	17 Newsletter deadline Service League 10:30am	18 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
19 Transfiguration Sunday Worship 10:00 a.m. Choir sings <i>Gathered & online</i> <i>SFC rehearsal 1:00</i>	20 Presidents' Day Holiday - office closed Inspired group 6:00pm Zoom only	21 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Tuesday Club 1:30pm</i> <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	22 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm Imposition of Ashes 12:00 -1:00pm Ash Wednesday Service 6:30pm	23 Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	24 Service League 10:30am	25 <i>Stockbridge Golf Club 8:30am</i> <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
26 First Sunday in Lent Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> <i>SFC rehearsal 1:00</i>	27 Office closed, staff working remotely	28 Brent's Sabbath Day <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

February 2023 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

Sometimes in the journey of faith, the season of Epiphany can feel like New Hampshire to me. The reason for New Hampshire stems from my annual trips to Camden, ME. There is a relatively long time spent driving through Massachusetts and a relatively similar distance through Maine, but a very short trip through the corner of New Hampshire. Even though I pass by some beautiful rivers and the delightful city of Portsmouth, most of the time in New

Hampshire I find myself either still focused on whatever happened in Massachusetts or already eagerly anticipating the familiar sites I will see in Maine. Epiphany, once regarded as among the most important seasons in the liturgical calendar, now finds itself sandwiched by the memories of Christmas and the approach of Lent.

This year, I hope we will take an exit from the liturgical calendar highway to explore this gift of time. The Season of Epiphany is loaded with beautiful stories, including the Baptism of Jesus and the Calling of the Disciples. It overflows with teaching like the Beatitudes, “cities on the hill,” hiding lamps under bushel baskets, and exhortations to a more rigorous life of faith. It takes us to the mountaintop where it all comes together in dazzling possibility.

At its heart, Epiphany is focused on unlocking just who Jesus is and how he matters to us today.

A mentor of mine, Nancy Taylor, often describes God as the *consummate artist*. Together the texts of Epiphany create a stunning mosaic of truth, love, hope, and wisdom – it is a masterpiece of art. These stories and teachings are great gifts of newness each year. As Leonard Bernstein once reflected, “Any great artwork... revives and readapts time and space, and the measure of its success is the extent to which it makes you an inhabitant of that world - the extent to which it invites you in and lets you breathe its strange, special air.”



This year let us breathe in the strange, special air of Epiphany – letting go of Christmas and letting Lent arrive when it will. Jesus often reminded his followers that we should focus on today, and that is so appropriate because the Season of Epiphany has plenty of treasures to encounter. I am grateful for the many conversations I have already had with people about the first two stories of Epiphany. I have been touched by how their truths have met you in places of need or possibility.

I hope to engage with many more of you who find yourself suddenly transported by Scripture to a brand-new world this Epiphany Season. I hope that together we might pause long enough not just to watch that world pass by, but to inhabit it – even if just for these short, fleeting days.

Peace and blessings,

Pastor Brent

HAPPY FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

February 1	Ann Brink Rick Floyd
February 4	Steve Blanchard
February 10	Claire Williams Senta Brodeur Ellen Lahr
February 12	Les Freeman IV
February 13	Betsy Wheat Paul Rix
February 15	Amy Freeman Logan Higuera
February 17	Thomas Wheat
February 19	Maurice Peterson
February 24	Sophie Randolph John Ruffing
February 26	Jim McMenamy
February 28	Lily Hassmer

Art News - Color the Bible

The JE Room needs new color on its shelves. Therefore, we are embarking on an adventure of coloring and sharing pictures and Bible verses – these can be found on the table in the JE Room. Take one sheet home and color it as a spiritual and meditative activity to be shared or kept personal.

Upon completion, please return your creation to the table, and it will be displayed on the shelves. Try to complete them by February 12.

You might enjoy this meditative experience by yourself, shared with a partner, a friend, or your children while listening to music.

Please sign your work and include a note on the back to share your spiritual experience in doing this activity. Colored pencils and fine markers are available to be shared.

May this activity turn your white winter days into bright and colorful masterpieces.

Please call Olga Schwede at (413) 644-9846 should you have questions.

A Note from the Deacons

Merry Christmas and Happy 2023! I just wanted to say this one last time until next year. The past few years have been challenging for our church yet we have sprung back. Pastor Brent's Christmas Eve service was wonderfully warm and welcoming. So many were comforted by the return to this dear tradition, which I know many of us have been missing. We welcomed nearly 250 on Christmas Eve. Much appreciation to everyone who participated in many roles and for those who came to worship God on the most special of all Christian Holy Days.

February is upon us, and the Deacons are asking for a little assistance for the four Sundays of this month. Please reach out to Don Eaton at deaton2007@gmail.com if you would enjoy helping us with the services.

Just as a friendly reminder, Pastor Brent and the deacons want everyone to feel comfortable coming to service in person on Sundays. Anyone

wearing a mask is welcome to sit anywhere in the sanctuary. However, the deacons have dedicated the pews on the far west side of the sanctuary for those who prefer to sit only amongst others who are also masking. Many thanks.

Ash Wednesday is February 22 this year; please save this date. Our plan is to hold an indoor service in the early evening for all who are comfortable. Pastor Brent will also be offering a imposition of the ashes between 12:00 and 1:30pm, in the sanctuary. Please come for a time of quiet reflection.

Another date to save is April 9, Easter Sunday of course! I look forward to flowers and the gold & white of Resurrection Sunday that symbolizes purity from sins. (Isaiah 1:18) "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

Peace from Don Eaton & the Board of Deacons

Lent

Wednesday, February 22 – Saturday, April 8

Once again you are invited to participate in the holy time of Lent where alongside Jesus we journey to the cross and beyond. Lent is a time of reflection, repentance, and reconciliation that is well spent together in community. This year we plan to add Lenten Fellowship Groups to the mix. You are invited to participate as fully as you desire and are able.

Ash Wednesday – February 22

Imposition of Ashes – Noon until 1:30 p.m. – Sanctuary

Pastor Brent will be in the Sanctuary offering ashes. The sanctuary will be set to foster quiet reflection while gentle music plays in the background. Come at any point during this period and stay as long as you like.

Worship – 6:30 p.m. – Sanctuary

Gather for this meaningful, intimate, and reflective worship service. Through prayer, song, and story we set our eyes on the journey before us. We will let go of our sins, celebrate grace, and receive ashes.

**We are still discerning what/if any on-line opportunities might be offered on Ash Wednesday. More information to come.*



Simple Soul Suppers

****Still being planned.****

These small groups would gather weekly for the season of Lent to share a meal, discuss the past week's scripture and sermon, reflect on our shared Christian journey, and generally get to know each other better.

Groups will be able to pick the days/times for their meals. While we imagine these taking place in people's homes, groups can also choose to meet here at the church. The goal is to keep it simple and put the focus on connection and relationship.

More information as well as the process for signing-up or forming a group coming soon!



Lenten Devotionals

These popular books offer short readings, reflections, and prayers for each Day of Lent. They are a gift of the Board of Christian Education and will be available beginning Sunday, February 12. We have ordered 50 copies so there should be plenty. We ask family units to share as possible. If you would like Will to hold one for you or would like one brought/sent to you, please contact the church office.



Sunday School

I had an unexpected experience on New Year's Day.

I went to church early, having signed up at the last minute to be the third deacon. In the back entry hallway, there was Jake, somewhat a-flutter, looking through the craft cabinets. I asked if he needed help finding anything, but he declined, saying that he was just gathering supplies for his Sunday school lesson. I felt a sudden twinge of guilt, as I had been approached via email just a few days before about teaching on this day. My response had been to shop for an excuse, which I found in the form of an empty deaconing slot that I had promptly signed up for.

I made my way to the front of the church to check in with my fellow Narthex habitués, Sarah Conly and Michael aka Deacon Deegan, but when I found them, it was clear they had it all under control. So I decided I might as well be schooled by Jake.

Jake had a well-organized and well-supplied plan by now, which he followed step by step with a confident touch. Ryleigh Fillio and I were the only two in attendance. Jake started us off with goldfish, graham crackers, and water for snack, then the Bible story, followed by a Happy New Year coloring sheet that he had created and photocopied. Next, we adjourned to the bean bag chairs for a craft project making streamers out of crepe paper and yarn. Jake showed us how to knot the yarn to better effect.

Now it was show time! We stood up, chose a musical instrument, and started dancing and waving our streamers. Jake asked if I might play some appropriate music from my phone, which fortunately I knew how to do. After awhile the dancing may have devolved into a rambunctious chasing game, but soon we settled down, had a little more snack, and then cleaned up. Ryleigh said she liked having a kid for a Sunday school teacher.

So did I.

Ted Randolph



From the Service League

Usually in January we rest on our laurels and recover from the Holly Fair. But we can't kick back without telling you the final results from that annual event - and you deserve to know, because without you, it wouldn't happen.

So here's the report from December. We're going to call it "The Service League by the Numbers." Net proceeds from the Holly Fair: \$6600. Amount paid toward our pledge to the Capital Campaign: \$2000.

But not everything can be quantified, and that includes our gratitude to all who volunteered, donated, and shopped. To put it in round numbers, we'll just say, "Thanks a million!"

Mark your calendars!

Date of the Summer Fair: 8/12/2023.

Date of the next Holly Fair: 12/2/2023.

~ Margaret Hornick, for the Service League

Celebrate our pastor!

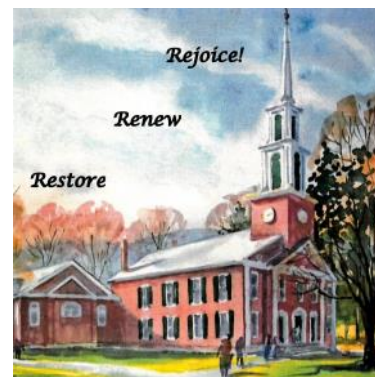
On Sunday, February 12, we have a special service in honor of Rev. Damrow's 10th anniversary in our pulpit! The service will be led by members of the Board of Deacons and the Council. Please join us in saying "Happy Anniversary" to Brent! (And after worship, there will be cake.)

Capital Campaign Continues

You may not be hearing as much about the Capital Campaign now, but work is definitely ongoing. The universal access ramp to the JE Room is the most visible evidence, both from Main Street and the driveway. Once it is completed there will be no physical impediment to our message of “You are welcome here!”

We are now in the second year of this three-year campaign. Trustees continue to be faithful stewards of funds as they proceed with the projects. Plans call for work to begin on the organ and JE Room this year. Pledges and donations are also ongoing throughout the three years. Some new (and additional) pledges have been received—and are always welcome! Many year-end donations in fulfillment of pledges help ensure work can begin. As of December 31, 2022, 121 pledges totaled \$755,060, or 88.8% of our \$850,000 goal from members and friends. We have also received two large grants. One is for \$100,000 from the Community Preservation Act funds from the town of Stockbridge, designated for the universal access ramp, and another \$100,000 grant from a Family Trust.

We can rejoice as work on the ramp, the manse, the JE room, the organ, and other exciting projects continue to unfold. We are grateful to the individual members and friends who have already pledged to be part of this campaign. And we welcome anyone who missed an earlier opportunity to participate, or who finds that they can make an additional gift!



~ Janet Canning, Capital Campaign team member

PS—At the end of the campaign we would like to print a booklet with an alphabetical list of pledgers who did not request anonymity. The list will also include tributes in memory or honor of others. No amounts will be listed. At this stage we just want to check that spelling and tribute information is correct. If you have already pledged, you will be receiving a simple list for corrections in the coming weeks.

Connections Class Saturday, February 4 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

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

We will have the chance to talk about what membership means and what it is and isn't. We will look at how we and the United Church of Christ fit into *Christianity* including both our bold and



progressive history as well as our open and hopeful vision for the future.

The class will include conversations with one another, Pastor Brent, and lay leaders. Our hope is that you will learn more about each other, the church's rich history, as well as the many programs, small groups, opportunities for service, and other ministries that are available to you **whether or not** you decide to join. We try to offer this class twice a year, so if now is not the right time, another opportunity will come soon.

Please RSVP to Will Garrison (298-3137 or office@stockbridgeucc.org) if you plan to attend. Childcare is available for those who might desire it. Questions? Please contact Pastor Brent.

News from Mission & Action

Church Meal Train

Blessed are the givers, and grateful are the receivers

Thank you to the congregation for organizing the meal train for me, for nourishing me physically, spiritually and emotionally. My husband Ken continues to heal well after his surgery. We both want to thank you for the meals and friendly face deliveries! Having meals taken care of for myself is one less thing I have had to figure out, and it has helped me take care of myself as I care for Ken. I greatly appreciate each of you and the time and expense you have contributed to help us. As I enjoyed your meals, I thought of you and recognized how blessed we are for all the love and support we are receiving. Ken and I know we could not have gotten through this difficult time and those challenges still ahead without the love, support and prayers from our friends and family. And we have our church family watching over us, too. Thank You. ~ *Diane Fogarty*

Thank You from Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Faith, You answered our call, and as a result, so many hardworking families' lives will be changed forever. Your gift of \$500.00 will stay local as we build locally to create affordable, safe, and efficient home ownership opportunities for those who need it most in Central and Southern Berkshire County. As we build homes in Great Barrington and Housatonic, we depend on your generosity as an essential part of the work we do together. You have made a difference. You have turned possibility into reality. ~ *Blessings, Carolyn Valli, Pittsfield*

Thank You from Construct

Thank you for your donation of \$400. Your gift will go directly to supporting community members in need of emergency assistance for fuel, utility, and rental payments, including covering emergency accommodation costs and keeping those who are homeless safe. Standing together and caring for each other, our community has overcome numerous challenges this year, and your gift is meaningful and appreciated. Here's to you! Together we are changing lives.

~ *With gratitude, Leigh Davis, Development Director, Great Barrington*

Thank You from Hands in Outreach

Dear First Congregational Church, Thank you for your contribution of \$100. This will help in our goal to empower marginalized girls and women in Nepal. We write with deep gratitude for this kindness. ~ *Warmest wishes, Ricky & Laura, Hands in Outreach, Sheffield, MA*

Thank You again from United Church of Christ National Office

Dear Friends at First Congregational Church, Thank you for your recent generous donations to the UCC. Your gift of \$250 for hurricane disaster relief, \$250 for Somalia famine relief, and \$500 for Neighbors in Need will help our neighbors in the U.S. and internationally recover from disasters. Working with international partners, we provide refugees and displaced persons with sources of clean water, food, education, health care, small business micro-credit, advocacy, and resettlement. We also assist with emergency relief and rehabilitation. And the Neighbors in Need grants have supported community needs ranging from direct service to individuals and families to community organizing. United in prayer, action, and giving, we stand as a people of faith in love and compassion. Thank you for spreading God's hope, peace and love through your financial assistance as the UCC continues to build a just world for all.

~ *In faith, Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, General Minister and President, UCC*

Help Spend Your Mission Dollars

We are asking for your help in deciding where our mission dollars will go in 2023.

Be on the lookout for a pie chart in the JE room depicting how Mission & Action allocated our budgeted funds in 2022. There is also a list of programs and projects that we funded with special gifts designated specifically for these projects.

The congregation will be instructed how to vote for the area of outreach that is most important to them by placing stickers on the appropriately labeled sheets that will be posted! Stay tuned!

Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity

A shout out to the ten person First Congregational Church work crew on January 14 - Terry Wise, Ted Randolph, Louis Forouhar-Graff, Rich Geiler, Carl and Stephanie Bradford, Diane Fogarty, Bruce Wilkens, Jon Geldert and Martha Floyd. The team laid sub flooring and cleared basement debris on our second work day at the Habitat house at 40 Grove Street.

Our thanks to The Great Barrington Bagel Company and Deli for donating bagels. Special thanks to three generations of the Pohl family: Bob, Anne, Will & Nick for donating and delivering a delicious lunch to the team.

If you missed out on the fun and food, consider joining us for our next work day on Saturday, February 25!



Annual Budget Meeting

Living into our possibilities and promises while living within our means is always a delicate balance, as it was in 2022 and in our budgeting process for 2023. While who we are may seem to have little to do with our Annual Budget, how we use all our resources (time, talent, treasure, and heart) is very much a matter of importance. Our budget reflects the difficult choices made between all we want to accomplish with the resources we have to do it.

To read more of Moderator Cathy Clark's report, see the full set of budget reports and the proposed 2023 budget. Ask for a paper copy, call the office, or go to the [church website](#).

**** Call to Meeting ****

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. There will be a Question & Answer session after worship on January 29.

An Experiment, continued

The church building is closed each Monday in February. February 20 is a federal holiday, and for the other three Mondays the staff will be working remotely. 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.

Administrator Note

Each Thursday we send out an email "blast" with the latest news and announcements. If you aren't receiving it, please contact the church office.



The **Youth Group** at First Congo had a busy run during Advent and Epiphany. The January newsletter reported on the various activities that took place in December and included an invitation to join an Epiphany celebration of light using the Winterlights show at Naumkeag as the main activity. This event actually took place on the day of Epiphany, Friday, January 6. Terry Wise and I purchased twenty-five tickets when they went on a member presale in mid October. At that point we didn't know who was coming, and, as these things go, we still didn't know until they showed up on the day of. Fortunately, all the pieces fell nicely into place, including the eleventh hour appearance of two written discussion guides, one from Brent who was in Wisconsin at the time, celebrating his dad's eightieth birthday. The other was prepared by

Jill Wheat, just in case. The lesson for me, then, was one of flexibility and faith. Ten youth and eight adults ended up going on the trip. We gathered at 4:30 to have two kinds of cookies (thank you, Terry Wise and Ruth Wheat), hot chocolate, and a pep talk about the meaning and symbolism of light in the Bible in general, and Epiphany in particular. This was a nice back and forth discussion. We then divided into three groups of kids, each with a chaperone, and some leftover adults to be the rearguard. Brent had managed to get us a bus of our own to pick us up AND drop us off at the church, which greatly eased our logistics. That we would have a great time once there was almost a given, but I'll say it anyway: We all had a great time. The pictures here surely won't do the scene justice, but will give some idea of our experience.

Ted Randolph for the Youth Group



The Youth Group rocked the house with fun activities and fellowship on January 22. After a short lesson on "Many Parts Make a Whole": 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, The Body of Christ, the youth shared board games, group activities, and pizza. More events coming this year!



Family News

Here is an update about the Afghan family now making their home in the Berkshires.

Twenty people gathered at the home of a member of the Unitarian Universalist of Southern Berkshire to celebrate the pending birth of Fatema and Husain's baby girl, due January 26. There were beautiful decorations, special food and lots of joy.

They were overwhelmed by and very appreciative of the outpouring of support. Our church, through Mission and Action, gave them a crib- with conversion kits to transform into a bed as the little girl grows. They also received a car seat and stroller, a changing table and lots of special baby "trimmings."

It was heartwarming to see the network of folks that has supported and nurtured the family this past

year as they settled in to their new surroundings. They are making great progress in their journey to resettlement- both Fatema and Husain now have their drivers licenses and this week they traveled to Lawrence and received their green cards!



A Word from the Justice Task Force

The Justice Task Force (JTF) has been meeting monthly, discovering and discussing the history of the Stockbridge-Munsee band of Mohicans, known as The Muh-he-con-ne-ok, or “The People of the Waters that Are Never Still.”

The People of the Waters that Are Never Still have a rich and illustrious history which has been retained through oral tradition and the written word.

Our many moves from the East to Wisconsin left Many Trails to retrace in search of our history. Many Trails [see right] is an original design created and designed by Edwin Martin, a Mohican Indian, symbolizing endurance, strength and hope. From a long suffering proud and determined people.

Through meetings with Bonney Hartley, Tribal Historic Preservation Manager for the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Nation, and local historian Rick Wilcox and by reading lots of documents, we are learning more about the deep connection that the people who once lived on the shores of the Housatonic River had to the early church that is now the First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge.

In 1738, the Mohicans gave John Sergeant permission to start a mission in the village. Eventually, the European inhabitants gave this place the name "Stockbridge," after a village in England. It was located on the Housatonic River near a great meadow bounded by the beautiful Berkshire Mountains in western Massachusetts. In this mission village, a church and school were built. Other people who wished to hear the missionaries' teachings also came to live in the village. Some of these were the Wappingers, the Niantics, Brothertons, Tunxis, Pequot, Mohawk, Narragansetts and Oneidas. As some of these tribes merged with the Mohicans, the tribal group came to be known as the Stockbridge Indians.

As our group works together to develop a Land Acknowledgment, we are also exploring ways to engage with the Stockbridge-Munsee band of Mohicans to collaborate on culturally significant issues. One thing we’ve learned is that taking meaningful actions will be an important piece of a Land Acknowledgment. A series of informational sessions are being planned for the spring.

To learn more, please visit the Justice page of the Church Life / Service & Justice page at the church website stockbridgeucc.org.



Sections in italics are excerpts from the Origin and Early History found on the website of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians website at: Mohican.com