

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

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



March 2023

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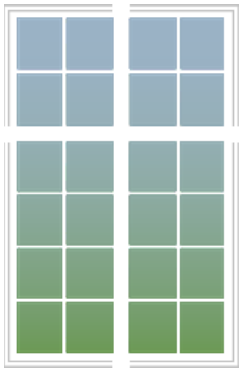
(413) 298-3137 | www.stockbridgeucc.org

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

March 2023

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
Berkshire Waldorf High School (BWHS) using JE Room for play rehearsals, as noted.			1 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm BWHS 2:30pm Council 7:00pm	2 BWHS 1:30pm Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	3 Service League 10:30am	4 <i>Al-Anon</i> 5:00pm
5 Worship 10:00 a.m. Choir sings <i>Gathered & online</i> SFC rehearsal 1:00	6 BWHS 2:30pm <i>Spiritual Path of Aging</i> In person 4:30pm; via Zoom at 7:00pm	7 Brent's Sabbath Day BWHS 1:30pm <i>Al-Anon</i> 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	8 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>Yoga</i> 9:00am Bible Study 1:00pm BWHS 2:30pm Inspired dinner 6:00pm	9 BWHS 1:30pm Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	10 Service League 10:30am	11 <i>Al-Anon</i> 5:00pm
12 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> SFC rehearsal 1:00	13 BWHS 2:30pm <i>Spiritual Path of Aging</i> In person 4:30pm; via Zoom at 7:00pm	14 Brent's Sabbath Day BWHS 1:30pm <i>Al-Anon</i> 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	15 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>Yoga</i> 9:00am Bible Study 1:00pm BWHS 2:30pm Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm	16 BWHS 1:30pm Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	17 Newsletter deadline Service League 10:30am	18 <i>Al-Anon</i> 5:00pm
19 Worship 10:00 a.m. Choir sings; New Members Welcomed <i>Gathered & online</i> SFC rehearsal 1:00 Youth Event	20 BWHS 2:30pm <i>Spiritual Path of Aging</i> In person 4:30pm; via Zoom at 7:00pm	21 Brent's Sabbath Day BWHS 1:30pm classroom <i>Tuesday Club</i> 1:30pm <i>Al-Anon</i> 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	22 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm BWHS 2:30pm	23 BWHS 1:30pm Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	24 Service League 10:30am	25 <i>Stockbridge Golf Club</i> 8:30am <i>Al-Anon</i> 5:00pm
26 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> SFC rehearsal 1:00	27 <i>Spiritual Path of Aging</i> In person 4:30pm; via Zoom at 7:00pm	28 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon</i> 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	29 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm	30 Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	31 Service League 10:30am	Livestream worship at stockbridgeucc.org



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

March 2023 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

Lent is upon us. It is such a rich and pregnant time in the church year. As creation begins to stir into life all around us, Lent is our invitation to a new life as well. Pope Francis offers a helpful frame for this season; “Lent comes providentially to reawaken us, to shake us from our lethargy.”

Central to our Lent Journey is to remember that it is a time of coming to life. If that sounds different to you, strange, or even contradictory I wouldn’t be surprised. If you are saying even as you read this, “but Pastor Brent you are skipping to Easter,” I would understand but disagree.

Lent is a time for reflection and repentance. Lent is a serious time when we remember that we are mortal, that this life will end, and that we will fall short. The season begins with marking ourselves with ashes and ends with the silence following the tomb. The music is often set in a minor key, we include confession in worship, we remember the value of sacrifice, and we refrain from saying “alleluia.” I get it, and I know that all of that is part of accepting the new life that God is offering today and that it is what animated the revolutionary life of Christ to such levels of truth that the powers of earth tried vainly to crucify not just Christ, but the life he offers. Lent is BOTH a serious time of reflection and repentance AND an invitation to the fullness of life right now while we draw breath and afterward too.

Often in Lent, there is a debate about whether we should give something up or take something on. It probably won’t surprise you that I think both are important ingredients. Letting go of things that are not life-serving or allegiance to powers that are not God is central to Lent. So too, are taking on things that bring forth life and that

foster a deeper connection to both God and neighbor. This Lent I hope you will give up something – if you want to talk about what that might be, give me a call because I would be delighted to do so. This Lent I hope you will take on something and if you are looking for that something, let me invite you.

This Lent, I feel a call to our Sanctuary – the place we come to worship, to handle the fullness of life, to be transformed by the presence of Christ, to join together as a family, to equip ourselves for life, and to remember who we are and to whom we belong. This Lent I am going to set aside one hour each week (Wednesdays from 10:30-11:30 a.m.) to honor the Sanctuary through acts like cleaning, dusting, polishing wood, and caring for that sacred space. I invite anyone who wants to join me to come and take that task on. As I attend to these tasks bathed in soft music, I will BOTH contemplate my own life (including where I have fallen short) AND embrace the invitation to the new life that often springs forth in that very room. In that space that has meant so much to so many, I will let go of the seduction of the false powers and givers of life in this world and instead remember whose house I am in, and the lengths God goes to offer life. I invite anyone who wants to join me to come in that spirit too. To the sound of gentle music, in the presence of love, and with grateful hearts, we will give back to a place that gives us so much and shake off our lethargy so that we might embrace the beauty, depth, purpose, and joy of life! I will BOTH let go AND take on. I hope you might join me!

Come and see.

Pastor Brent

HAPPY MARCH BIRTHDAYS

March 2	Andrew Hall
March 8	Joy Douglass Jim Erwin
March 11	Stephanie Bradford Don Paine Maria Carr
March 13	Bruce Mandel
March 14	Steve Alsdorf
March 19	Ted Randolph Doug Williams
March 21	Angela Vuagniaux
March 23	Julie McCarthy
March 24	Charlotte Rodgers
March 25	Gege Kingston
March 26	Thomas Randolph
March 28	Donna Jacobs
March 30	David Wampler
March 31	Noah Hassmer Mary Jo Erickson Connor

Music News

We are very much looking forward to the somber music of Lent, and the glorious music of Holy Week. We have invited the Berkshire Brass to play during the 10am Easter Service. It will be glorious.



Calling all singers to join us for this inspired music. If you can only make a temporary commitment to the choir, joining through Easter would be a great time. We rehearse Thursdays from 7-8:30 pm. I will be rehearsing the music for lent during the first half-hour of each rehearsal. Holy Week music will begin approximately at 7:30 each Thursday evening.

Please join us. If you do not have previous choir experience, contact me via email at: peterfrostmusic@gmail.com.

Sing to the Lord a Jubilant Song!

Peter Frost, Minister of Music

Wednesday Virtual Bible Study

Every Wednesday afternoon several of us meet by Zoom at 1:00 PM to study the Scripture text that the preacher for the following Sunday has chosen. We would love to have you join us.

What happens during this hour? First, we have a prayer and greet each other and check in on how



our week is going. This may take fifteen or twenty minutes. Then, somebody volunteers to

read the Scripture passage. We take a quiet minute to think about it. What struck you? What did you find interesting or curious? What questions do you have about the text? Then, someone else reads it, often from a different English translation.

Then we talk about it. That's pretty much it. We enjoy each other and our conversations are lively and fun. We often learn new insights into the Bible. It is great preparation for Sunday worship. Often toward the end we guess where the preacher will go with the text or texts.

You may be an expert on the Bible or maybe you have never opened it before, but you will be welcomed and valued in this group. It's a safe space where we listen to and share with each other. We have people of all ages and backgrounds. We have one regular member who lives New Jersey and two who live in Connecticut.

There is no cost, and no sign up. Each week stands on its own, so if you can't always come, that is fine. Just go to front page of the church website, Events . The Bible passage for the week is also there. We'd love to welcome you on Wednesday!

Blessings, Rick Floyd

Art News - Color the Bible

You still have time to join the fun of coloring and sharing pictures and Bible verses. The materials 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, return your creation to the table, and it will be displayed on the shelves. You might enjoy this meditative experience by yourself, shared



with a partner, a friend, or your children. Please sign your work and add a note on the back to about your spiritual experience. Colored pencils and fine markers are available.

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

Questions?

Call Olga Schwede at
(413) 644-9846.

The Importance of Being Earnest

Stop into the church on most weekday afternoons and you'll see and hear small groups of high school students from the Berkshire Waldorf High School running lines for their upcoming production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Step into the large room and you can see students cozy on the couch, discussing their characters. Or, watch the students putting the scene on its feet, trying to imagine how they will transfer their blocking from this wonderful space to a theatre.

For the second year in a row, we are thrilled to be able to rehearse in the church. It feels like home to us! Hope to see you all at our production just down the road at the Unicorn Theatre. Performances will be 3/31 and 4/1 at 7 p.m. and 4/1 and 4/2 at 2 p.m. For more information, contact the high school at 413.298.3800 or at berkshirewaldorf.com

~ Beth Robbins, Berkshire Waldorf High School

Dear Friends,

While many *elders* contemplate hair loss or memory loss or other difficult signs of aging, there is also a profound *turning inward* that occurs in our later years. In fact, some of the earliest definitions refer to spirituality as “being brought inside oneself,” or “returning to the Source. With that in mind, I am happy to announce the formation of a brand new group, *The Spiritual Path of Aging* designed especially for those past 60 who're interested in exploring the aging process from a spiritual point of view.

Actually there will be two groups: same topics, exploring varied themes including wellness, creative expression, community, contemplative practice, plus issues dealing with loss, change, and other insights and revelations—all related to spiritual growth and transformation. The first group will meet at the church in person on Mondays 4:30 to 5:30 PM starting March 6. The second group will meet on Zoom (for those finding it too far or too difficult to travel) also on Mondays 7-8 PM beginning March 6.

Both groups will run for a total of ten weeks. We have much ground to cover & there will be dedicated readings, prayer, meditation, dialogue, journaling as well as an ongoing group process that I will be facilitating in the *sacred space* that we create together. Because there are special notebooks with readings you'll be receiving before the course begins, I would appreciate hearing back from you on or before March 1st. (For those wishing to join the Zoom class, the earlier you sign up, the better, so we can make sure you receive these binders in a timely fashion.)

Kindly sign up on the bulletin board in the Jonathan Edwards room or let Will know you wish to join. Also please indicate which of the two group options you prefer. Feel free to contact me if you have certain questions or would simply like more details. (413-298-7023 V/M, or c/o 4jlevity@gmail.com)

Looking forward to a *spirited* time with you!

With love, Jo Ann Levitt

News from Mission & Action

Disaster Relief for Earthquake, Sent to Turkey and Syria

The aftermath of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, with the death toll at more than 41,000 so far, is impossible for us to imagine. Our hearts ache with the people of Turkey and Syria, and we lift them up in prayer. The Mission & Action board has reached out with our financial support, and has sent \$1,000 to Turkey and \$1,000 to Syria to help recovery efforts, through the United Church of Christ disaster relief program. We haven't heard the end of the extent of the damage from this seismic event. Amid the uncertainty caused by this awful disaster, we can be certain that with our financial support the United Church of Christ will be there helping those in need.

Veterans of the Cross Christmas Eve Offering

Our Christmas Eve offering for the Veterans of the Cross totaled \$2,351.50. Thank you for your generosity! This Christmas Fund has been caring for retired UCC clergy and lay employees for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees whose small pensions don't cover the cost of living.

One Great Hour of Sharing Offering

One Great Hour of Sharing is an annual offering taken by the United Church of Christ, and this year is celebrated on March 19. Mission & Action will donate \$500 to the work of this special offering, which funds agriculture and food programs, water projects, disaster relief and economic development, all over the world. Thank you for your pledge dollars that go toward this offering, helping us to share the riches that Christ has given us. On March 19, Mission & Action will share information on the work of OGHS during worship and at an info table. Also, during coffee hour, we will share the opportunity to put together hygiene kits which Church World Service uses around the world to help those facing natural disasters.

Congregational Survey on Mission Spending

If you've been to church lately, and more specifically, coffee hour, there's a good chance that you have seen a member of the Mission and Action board standing by a table handing out stickers. These stickers were a part of a survey to find out what resonates with the congregation. International Aid, Local Housing, Non-Profit Aid, and Food Insecurity are the 4 areas of need that the committee focused on last year. With the help of the congregation, as we head into the new year, Mission & Action wanted to see which of these areas are resonating with people. People were able to vote by placing stickers on newsprint sheets for the various categories. There was also a place for church members to write down other ideas, too, so hopefully a broad range of voices from the church have been heard. The work of Mission and Action is ultimately the work of the congregation, and the board hopes that this sticker-filled survey will bring church members closer to the work that their generosity makes possible.



People's Pantry in the News

The *Berkshire Eagle* newspaper recently interviewed Anne Hutchinson: "The People's Pantry in Great Barrington has seen staggering increases to its numbers. Anne Hutchinson, vice president for operations at the pantry, said the number of clients served doubled between December 2021 and December 2022. The pantry had its biggest day ever just recently, serving 132 households – roughly 400 people – in one go. The pantry feeds about 2,000 people per month, Hutchinson said. It takes four freezers to keep the supply fresh. The pantry just got a new one last week. The need has intensified during the winter, in part because the price of natural gas has gone up. 'People will hopefully have enough money for gasoline in their cars and heat in their homes,' Hutchinson said. She said the pantry spent \$234,000 last year, and expects that the increase in food costs will run 25-35% more this year. The Pantry raised \$300,000 last year. It will likely need to increase its year-round fundraising efforts, something that wasn't necessary until the pandemic, she said. The organization runs on the good nature of 35 volunteers, and several local partners who donate their crops and time."

Thank You from People's Pantry

Dear Friends, We thank you for contributing to our Help-Fill-the-Bag fundraiser. We are incredibly grateful for your generosity that is helping us fulfill our mission of serving our neighbors experiencing food insecurity. Your donation of \$3,000 helps us continue to distribute healthy food to the ever-increasing number of people in our community who are struggling to make ends meet.

~ Beth Moser, Board President, People's Pantry, Great Barrington

Thank You from American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Dear First Congregational Church of Stockbridge, Thank you for your contribution of \$725 to AFSP's Berkshire County Walk. We are honored to partner with you in fulfilling our mission of saving lives and bringing hope to those affected

by suicide. Your investment allows us to continue to create a culture that is smart about mental health and to build initiatives to further understand and prevent suicide.

~ Ashly Alberto, Vice President of Development, AFSP

Thank you from Pittsfield Fuel Fund

Dear Rev. Damrow, Thank you for your congregation's donation of \$200 to the Pittsfield Area Council of Congregations Emergency Fuel Fund. Your gift is greatly appreciated and much needed. This emergency fuel fund provides a 100-gallon fuel oil grant once each season to needy families who have exhausted their other emergency fuel allocations. 'We can't change the nature of the world, but we can create small miracles!'

~ Carole Suland, Treasurer, PACC

It's a Girl!

Afghan Resettlement Family News

Welcome Niyayesh, born January 23rd to proud parents Fatema and Husain.



From the Service League

As much as we love holding our fairs and raising funds with your help, what we really love is spending all that money to support causes here and abroad. So at our last meeting, our treasurer, Anne Fix got out the checkbook and sent contributions to:

- World Central Kitchen, which provides meals to refugees in wars and natural disasters, currently supporting displaced Ukrainians - \$1000.
- Americares, also supporting persons displaced by the earthquake in Turkey and Syria - \$1000.
- The Church's Scholarship Fund, helping our own college students each year - \$1000
- And \$500 each to Construct, the Elizabeth Freeman Center, the South Community Food Pantry, and the Back Pack Project.

And that leaves us with a bit in the bank just in case another pressing need arises. This is what all those cookies, cast-off treasures, wreaths, and crafts can do!

And just so you know we're not all work and no play, we celebrated Claire Williams' 94th birthday that day. She is an inspiration to all - see photo below.

~ Margaret Hornick, for the Service League



Planned Giving

What a blessing this church receives from the donations of time, talent and financial support from members and friends of First Congregational Church. This past year's capital campaign and last fall's stewardship campaign brought light the two familiar legs of the three legs of financial support for FCS. To bring light to the third leg, the church has formed a Planned Giving Committee constituted of John Canning, Frank Russell and Tom Ruffing. Planned Giving is normally an end of life topic but can be considered at anytime.

The Planned Giving Committee will be addressing the congregation during Lent as to how such giving can create opportunities to make a substantial difference in the long-term life and health of our church.

The Planned Giving Committee

John Canning, Frank Russell and Tom Ruffing



Connections

Welcome New Members - March 19

Have you been visiting this church for a while and thinking about calling it home? Please let us know if you would like to attend a gathering we call Connections! Pastor Brent can schedule a class for those interested.

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. 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.

Please contact the church office (298-3137 or office@stockbridgeucc.org). Childcare is available for those who might desire it. Questions? Please contact Pastor Brent. New members will be welcomed at the worship service on March 19.