

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

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



April 2023

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

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

April 2023

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Livestream worship at stockbridgeucc.org						1 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
2 Palm Sunday Worship 10:00 a.m. Choir sings <i>Gathered & online</i> Youth Event 11:15 <i>SFC rehearsal 1:00</i>	3	4 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	5 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>Yoga 9:00am</i> Bible Study 1:00pm Council 7:00pm	6 Tenebrae Worship 6:30pm, sanctuary Choir rehearsal 7:30pm	7 Service League 10:30am Good Friday: Stations of the Cross 6:30pm Eden Hill	8 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
9 Easter Outdoor Service 8:00am Breakfast 8:45am Egg Hunt 9:15am Festival Worship 10:00, <i>gathered and online, with choir and brass</i>	10 <i>Spiritual Path of Aging</i> In person 4:30pm; via Zoom at 7:00pm	11 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	12 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>Yoga 9:00am</i> Bible Study 1:00pm	13 Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	14 Service League 10:30am	15 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
16 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> <i>SFC rehearsal 1:00</i>	17 <i>Spiritual Path of Aging</i> In person 4:30pm; via Zoom at 7:00pm	18 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Tuesday Club 1:30pm</i> <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	19 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>Yoga 9:00am</i> Bible Study 1:00pm Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm	20 Newsletter deadline Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	21 Service League 10:30am	22 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i> <i>Outside event in JE Room, 4:00pm</i>
23 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> <i>History program 11:30, see page 7</i> <i>Stockbridge Fest Chorus Concert 3pm</i>	24 <i>Spiritual Path of Aging</i> In person 4:30pm; via Zoom at 7:00pm	25 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	26 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>Yoga 9:00am</i> Bible Study 1:00pm	27 Bell Choir 4:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	28 Service League 10:30am	29/30 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i> ----- Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i>



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

April 2023 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

The moment of the Easter Proclamation, one of my favorites of the church year, it is almost here. Part of what I love is the joy and unity of it all – voices raised in acclamation. Part of it is the articulation of faith – publicly leaning into mystery. Part of what I love is the animation of it – it brings us together and launches us into worship. I love it! For the early church, the Easter truth did all of those things. It brought joy and unity, it clarified purpose and possibility, it embraced spirit and mystery, and it transformed a small group of people into the very body of the one Easter celebrates. Only for the eight weeks of the Easter season does the lectionary assign those stories from Acts for worship.

I love how the embracing of the Easter truth launched that small group into a radically different way of living. It affected daily routines. I don't know what the people stopped doing, but I do know they started sharing – their time, their prayers, their meals, and their resources. I don't know what they let go of, but the stories describe how they clung to love - God's and neighbors' too. They experienced joy, growth, and flourishing. They ran headlong into the very forces Jesus did – forces threatened by transformation, forces that wanted the people's heart and allegiance, forces that wanted to hold onto what was even if it was far short of what could be. They also ran into those internal forces we all hold; fearing to be wrong or maybe even worse, to look the fool. Yet, despite so many reasons to settle, the people refused. They testified, opening their hearts and their homes. They shared, and the Book of Acts whispers how all needs were met.

In our proclamation, we testify to the power of the Easter truth and its ability to launch change. While I know it can, will we let it? Or will we allow very real obstacles, including our own fear of ridicule, to

keep us from fully trying? I don't know but I am glad we will shout the Easter Proclamation yet again this year so that we might find the joy, unity, purpose, and energy to at least try.

We are bombarded by earthly powers that clamor for our allegiance. We listen to or scroll through stories of war and violence engaged for the sake of power. We are deluged by political scandal and intrigue as party and politician wrangle for a fleeting step up. Banks teeter on the brink of collapse even as more stories emerge about businesses exploiting the vulnerable for the sake of profit. We chatter about impending indictments even as we seek desperately to distract from a new dire warning of climate catastrophe. This year, as we proclaim life with our lips, let's let that go and instead embrace the truth Jesus lived and we have experienced. Let's pay less attention to the scandal du jour and more to the scandalous call to love all. Let's stop distracting ourselves from pain and worry and instead lean on the truth and the family we have found here at church that gives us real hope in hard times and real endurance when the rivers of life rage.

In one Bible Study, a participant wondered aloud, "what would happen if we lived the way the people in Acts did?" I hope this year that we find out. We will have small groups to explore Acts and those texts from the lectionary will be preached on throughout the Easter season. I am hoping that you might join in both. More than that I am hoping that we all will let the truth carry us forward as we figure out what to let go of, identify what to embrace, and discern how to live. I hope we will find new direction and meaning. I pray we will we risk something big for something good and find everything changed, just like the early church did. Come and dare!

Pastor Brent

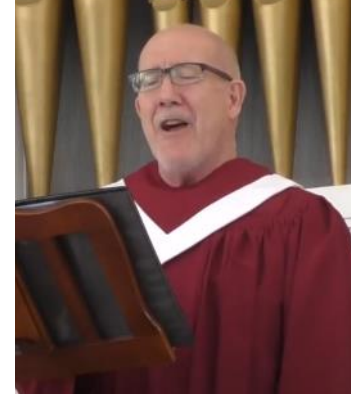
HAPPY APRIL BIRTHDAYS

April 2	Olga Schwede Hannah Alsdorf
April 7	Bronly Boyd Casey Jones Margo Davis
April 8	Virginia Berry
April 11	Tracy Wilson
April 12	Olivia Doerr
April 13	Don Rodgers
April 18	Jack Brown
April 19	Anna Grace Nimmo
April 22	Keith Raftery
April 23	Seth Ivas
April 26	Chet Douglass
April 27	Ivy Cote
April 30	Samuel Connor

Music News

I am very much looking forward to the beautiful and inspired music that we will sing together from Palm Sunday through Easter morning. The Berkshire Brass will be with us at the 10 am service on Easter. Come early so that you can hear their beautiful preludes. Our soprano soloist Amy Shake, who sang a beautiful solo March 19, will sing “I Know that My Redeemer Liveth” from Handel’s Messiah. It should be glorious. I look forward to seeing you there.

Special kudos to our wonderful bass John Demler. If you missed it, John sang an arrangement of mine of “What Wondrous Love is This?”, accompanied by Hui-Mei on the organ. This was its first performance. What a beautiful job they both did! I could not have asked for better.



~ Peter Frost, Minister of Music

Growth & Fellowship



Hello from the G & F crew! Spring is finally here – even if we have to wait for the weather to catch up! Mark your calendars for these special events coming up soon!

Easter Sunday Brunch

Sunday April 9, in the Jonathan Edwards Room from 8:30 to 9:45 am. Please come and enjoy a delicious brunch of eggs, fruit, pastries, juice, coffee and tea.

All Church Birthday Party

May 21, after service, in the JE Room
The All Church Birthday Party returns! Join the congregation in this joy-filled fellowship celebration as we parade and eat cake! Save the

date and look for notices and details in the May Newsletter and ENews.

If you have questions or you’d like to help out at Fellowship Hour, please reach out to Holland Eaton or Charlotte Rodgers. The signup sheet to volunteer is located on the JE Room bulletin board.



Bylaws!

The Bylaws Revision Task Force (BLRTF) will meet with the congregation Sunday, April 16.

At our Annual Meeting this May, the congregation will be voting on Revised Bylaws. Our Bylaws actually stipulate that they be revised at least every five years. This was not a casual requirement of our church forebears. Our Bylaws are a living document, meant to reflect not only our commitment to the past but also our embrace of the present and vision for the future—for “the world has changed, and so have we.”

The revision process began last summer when the BLRTF sought input from boards, committees, and the entire congregation. We received many thoughtful comments and suggestions, and met with all the Boards in January to discuss significant proposed changes to the Bylaws.

We look forward to discussing these with the congregation following worship on April 16, in person at the church.

Two copies of the proposed Bylaws will be available before the meeting: one “red-lined” to show everything that was added and deleted, and one (shorter) “clean” copy to show what the Bylaws would look like with all the proposed changes made. Electronic copies will be available through a link in the prior Thursday email or by contacting Will, and hard copies will be available at the church. We hope you can join us.

Cathy Clark (ceclark@aol.com 413 528-9949) for the BLRTF: John Canning, Brent Damrow, Margaret Hornick, Jeremy Ridenour and Patty Strauch

Articles of Organization

In addition to approving the revised Bylaws, the congregation will be asked at the annual meeting to approve Articles of Organization of the Church, a short document prepared by the Church’s attorney, Dennis Egan. Once approved, the Articles will be filed with the office of the Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth. As a result, the Church will become an officially incorporated entity, a status which exempts Church leaders in most cases from personal liability for activities they conduct on behalf of the Church.

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## CHURCH BYLAWS



**First  
Congregational Church**  
of the United Church of Christ  
Stockbridge, Massachusetts

The Oldest Church in Berkshire County — Organized in 1734  
Present Edifice Built in 1824

Cover page of the 1987 By-Laws.



Olga Schwede and Claire Williams during the celebration of Claire’s many years sharing her talents in the church choirs.

## From the Service League

On Friday, February 24, when we gathered in the classroom for our usual meeting and work-and-talk session, we each wrote a message to Jackie Hawkins in a get well card, to tell her how much we loved her and missed her and to cheer her during her recovery from surgery at BMC. We'd just heard from her daughter Brenda that she was much improved, so we were shocked and grieved, a few hours later, to learn that she had died unexpectedly as a result of post-surgical complications.

Jackie was a pillar of the church and especially of the Service League, where, even when she wasn't our official president (which she was, intermittently, during her forty years as a member) she occupied an unofficial but vital role as the heart and soul of our group. Even those in the congregation who might not have met Jackie have undoubtedly eaten food she prepared, warmed to her greetings in the narthex, or basked in her open-hearted presence and generosity of spirit in all manner of times and places in the church.



We mourned, and celebrated, Jackie in the following days and weeks, through reminiscences, by sharing in a lovely tribute written and read by Claire Williams, and by creating, at Brenda's request, a flower-bedecked butterfly (thank you, Ted Randolph, for building a beautiful stand to hold it) that was displayed at Jackie's memorial service at Finnerty and Stevens funeral home. We shared a lunch with Brent to talk about ways we might continue to remember and memorialize Jackie at the church she loved



and supported, so unstintingly, for so many years.

You may have seen the butterfly beside the communion table during the service on March 11. Here are two of our favorite pictures of Jackie, and two of our group creating the butterfly.

~ Margaret Hornick, for the Service League





## Inspiration Brings Familiar Stories to Life

In January and February, four different small groups engaged Rachel Held Evans' remarkable book, *Inspired*. In that book, Evans argues that the Bible is full of amazing stories meant to begin conversations, not end them. She showed how those stories have touched countless lives – instilling courage, fostering hope, and enabling resistance to all that diminishes. She invited readers like us to embrace the Bible's stories bringing them to our own and our own stories to the truth the Bible points to.

Subsequently, teams from those small groups have undertaken the task of bringing the stories assigned for the Sundays of Lent to life from the perspective of the characters in them. They have wrestled to stay true to the spirit of the story while bringing us into them and them into us. They infused new life into very familiar stories including Adam and Eve, the Late-Night Visit of Nicodemus, the Woman at the Well, the Healing of the Blind Man, and the Raising of Lazarus. Their goal was not to reduce the stories to any one truth but to open them up to the many truths of life;

not to simplify them, but to recognize their complexities even as life is complex.

We hope you have found meaning in their efforts. If you have feedback, please let Pastor Brent or the Deacons know. If you have found joy in them, please share that too.



Top: Elisabeth Bellows and Tracy Wilson in “The Healing of the Blind Man”

Bottom: Don Eaton and Liza Catino as Adam and Eve

## A Word from the Justice Task Force



The Justice Task Force (JTF) invites you to two special educational events in April! As you know, we are working together to develop a Land Acknowledgement. What is a Land Acknowledgement? Simply put, a land acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes

and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories.

On **April 2** (Palm Sunday) the JTF will be sponsoring the coffee and fellowship hour. Please join us and look for our information table. You'll

find lots of information that explains the history we share with the Stockbridge-Munsee band of Mohicans and the deep connection of the people who once lived on the shores of the Housatonic River to the mission church that is now The First Congregational Church Stockbridge.

On **April 23**, the JTF will host an “Overview of the Early History of the First Congregational Church of Stockbridge.” Please join us in the Sunday School Classroom at 11:30am – 12:30pm to hear a presentation from Joshua Hall. Refreshments will be served.

We hope to see you at these events as we learn and share together! For more information, please visit the Justice page of the church website on the Church Life / Service & Justice page.

## News from Mission & Action



### Habitat for Humanity Work Day March 18

A shout out to our First Church work crew on March 18: Diane Fogarty, Bruce Wilkens, Rich Geiler, Michael Monroe, and Patrick White. Many thanks to Nick Pohl for providing breakfast, and to his parents Bob and Anne Pohl who provided lunch. The team, with the help of a few others, painted the entire interior of the house – two coats! – on our third work day at the Habitat house at 40 Grove Street in Great Barrington. Patrick shared how fun and fulfilling he found the day. As he looked out the window at the adjoining park, he imagined what a profound impact our team’s work will have on the lives of the family that will eventually call this house their home.



February 26 - a heart-felt thank you to Jill Wheat for leading the kids' choir!

### Church Pop-Up Pantry Needs Donations

Our church’s Pop-Up Pantry, which is in a shed at the back of the church building, provides 24/7 access to non-perishable, shelf stable food items to anyone in need. Next time you go grocery shopping, we encourage you to pick up a few items for our Pantry, and leave them in the blue storage bin in the back hall of the church building. We would love donations such as the following:

Canned fruit, veggies, tuna, chicken, pasta sauce, pasta, peanut butter, crackers, box cereal, box rice, mac & cheese; gluten-free items such as crackers, pasta, and mac & cheese; toiletries such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, bar soap, lotion; paper products such as Kleenex, toilet paper, paper towels; plus miscellaneous treats such as nutrition bars, cookies, bottled drinks, cooking oil, baking ingredients.

We also encourage financial donations. You can make your check payable to “First Congregational Church,” and on the memo line put “Pop Up Pantry.”

And we collect non-perishable food items and financial donations for The People’s Pantry of Great Barrington. There is a second blue storage bin in the back hall. And a check will also be payable to “First Congregational Church,” with “People’s Pantry” on the memo line.



## One Great Hour of Sharing Offering & Church World Service Hygiene Kits

During worship on March 19, Cindy Brown of Mission & Action gave a Minute for Mission about the One Great Hour of Sharing annual offering. This ecumenical offering began over 70 years ago, and is still going strong. The idea was that once a year, churches all over the country would take this offering on the same Sunday in the same hour of worship – one great hour. The purpose of the offering is to share what we have, in order to assist people all over the world who are in need – funding disaster relief, refugee assistance, and development ministries.

We reminisced about the little cardboard banks that Sunday school students have been using for decades, giving children the opportunity to share their pennies, dimes and quarters, which are dedicated in worship and then sent on to help people in need all over the world. Remember those Lenten “to-do” list calendars? Day one: For each meal you ate today, put a dime in your bank to help feed the hungry. Day two: For each sink with running water in your house, put a quarter in your bank to help those who are thirsty to have clean water. For each blanket in your house, put a nickel in to keep a refugee warm. For every shirt you own, put a penny in to help provide clothing for others. If you had a check-up with your doctor this year, put a quarter in to provide medical care for those who are sick. Not a bad way for God’s children of all ages to think about how they can share what they have.

It brings to mind a Bible passage in Matthew, chapter 25: Jesus says: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me. Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

For the past few years, our congregation has put part of our annual pledge money into the Mission & Action operating budget, and we have given \$500 from that budget to this offering each year. Mission & Action wanted to remind you

about this important ministry that your pledge dollars are helping to support.

One of the groups that works together with One Great Hour of Sharing is Church World Service. And one of their missions is to provide hygiene kits to disaster victims. Hygiene kits offer some help when supplies like toothbrushes and soap are hard to come by.

So at coffee hour, we had the chance to participate in a fun hands-on mission project, putting 50 hygiene kits together (washcloth, hand towel, comb, band-aids, toothbrush, soap, nail clipper). The kits were then sent to Church World Service, who will send them all over the world, wherever they’re needed. There was also a free will offering basket to help with the cost of the kits. This offering amounted to \$210, which paid for 36 of the 50 kits. **Bravo!**



**On March 19 we welcomed three new members to First Congregational Church, UCC.**



Doug Williams was born and raised in Farmington, Connecticut, and grew up hiking Greylock and Everett with his parents and paddling the Housatonic River with his grandparents. For the last eight years he lived in Berlin,

Germany, and traveled around Europe singing in concerts and opera. Having creative roots in the Berkshires from performing and training at Tanglewood, Shakespeare & Company, and the Mahaiwe Theater, Doug always wanted to live here. Now he's in Great Barrington just down the street from his high school friend Louie, who is also becoming a member of the church. Doug is still singing; this season he made his debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He's also an actor and performer. You may have heard his voice or seen his face in commercials for products from a meal delivery service to a deodorant. He loves now having nature right outside his door and geology is a particular fascination. This curiosity for old rocks has taken him on several backcountry adventures in the vast Great Basin of the intermountain west.



**Louie Forouhar-Graff**

I live in Great Barrington, MA. I work as a psychiatrist in Torrington, CT. Most important to me are family, friends, and the exploration of this strange experience we call life. I've explored a lot of different areas of knowledge - medical training, psychology, new age perspectives, energy healing and practices, t'ai chi, qigong, yoga, Buddhism, meditation - and just keep exploring because I can't help myself. I like movement, singing, dancing and basically fun. I enjoy nature when my friends graciously drag me out into it. I grew

up in a Congregational church, and it feels great to return. I love the honest connection within this church and I look forward to continuing to get to know those within it.



**Elisabeth Bellows**

I grew up in Lexington, MA and Hanover, NH. I attended the First Congregational Church in Norwich, VT and sang in the church choir. I moved to California in 1981 to complete my medical training in Psychiatry. I settled in the San Francisco Peninsula with my husband Vince Bellows and we raised two sons, who are now 29 and 31 years old. We moved to Stockbridge to be closer to family in March, 2022.



I am so delighted to be retired from my Psychiatry practice because now I have the time and energy to devote to my hobbies. I am an avid gardener and I love to do all kinds of arts and crafts, quilting, and board games. I enjoy singing serious choral music as well as folk songs. I have studied classical piano off and on most of my adult life and recently made the inner commitment to resume playing. What you don't know about me is that beneath my "serious" demeanor, I love to be silly and playful. I look forward to getting to know all of you.

## What's happening at 4 Main St?

Answer: A lot!

Each month we'll feature a different group that uses the church building.

Costumes filling the rack in the hallway, excited gaggles of kids in the JE Room and other rooms

practicing their lines - yes, it's that time of year when the theater students from the Berkshire Waldorf High School prepare their spring play. This year it's "The Importance of Being Earnest," set for the Unicorn Theatre March 31, April 1 and 2. For more information go to the school's calendar at [berkshirewaldorf.com](http://berkshirewaldorf.com).

### An Invitation

It has been almost exactly three years since we, as a church, have been adapting our methods of connection to the realities of the pandemic. It has been a time of challenge. It has been made even more complex by the truth that the pandemic poses different risks in different ways to different parts of our church family – there is no single best solution to anything.

We have found some blessings amid these challenges. We have welcomed folks from afar who have not just streamed worship, but have become active parts of studies, small groups, and service opportunities. People who are not able to be physically present have been able to join in through technology. We have learned how to be flexible – utilizing the outdoors, improving the air quality indoors, and even changing Christmas Eve worship one year to the 23rd because of weather concerns.

We have learned that there is no such thing as going back – only forward. We have been deeply blessed by those who have stepped forward to launch new programs and to research how to do them. To date, we have spent considerable time adapting those systems to make improvements. It is good. We hope to make it even better.

At the March Church Council meeting, we began discussing a number of things related to this topic.

- We have started exploring how to encourage the right balance of getting together face-to-face when possible and when advantageous. Gathering has profound relational value and is a catalyst for connection.

- We have also begun discussions about how to enrich our current offerings so that those who cannot be here have a more full and robust experience through technology. This will include both how remote folks connect to worship, meetings, and studies and how we might also connect better to them.
- We are trying to discern what are both the benefits and drawbacks of in-person, hybrid, and distance gatherings, the need or desire for them, and what we gain or give up in each case (considering both the impact on the individual and the impact of the larger church community).

While the Church Council will continue to engage these topics, it is a conversation that requires the whole church. We will likely be developing ways for you to give input. We will continue to provide ways for people to connect including hybrid or remote options.

In the meantime, I encourage you to think and pray about this issue. I encourage you to share what you have learned during these three years. I encourage you to come physically to our gatherings as much as possible. I understand that there are very real reasons why people cannot be at the church, for those of us who can, try to come both for your sake and our collective one. Share with me or others how we can make remote connections richer or deeper. If you are connecting to worship or other events let us know you are there. Keep being church for church is always dynamic. Please call me with any questions or input. If you would like to be part of a team to live into these questions, let me know that too!

In gratitude and hope, Pastor Brent



## Holy Week and Easter

April 6 (Maundy Thursday) at 6:30pm - Tenebrae Worship in the sanctuary.

We gather to remember the story of Jesus' last night with his disciples. The service will end in silence.

April 7 at 6:30pm Good Friday - Stations of the Cross

Gather at the National Shrine of the Divine Mercy on Eden Hill to walk the stations together. The path is approximately 1/2 mile long and relatively flat.

April 9 - **Easter**

8:00am Outdoor Service

8:45-9:45am Easter Breakfast

9:15am Easter Egg Hunt

10:00am Festival Worship



**STOCKBRIDGE  
FESTIVAL  
CHORUS**  
in Concert

Sunday,  
April 23, 2023 at 3 pm

**REQUIEM by John Rutter**  
Jordan Rose Lee, soprano

**PSALM 103 and UBI CARITAS**  
by Steve Murray

**TRACY WILSON, conductor**  
Forty-five voice choir with chamber ensemble

First Congregational Church  
of Stockbridge, 4 Main Street

\$20 Recommended donation  
\$10 Members of local community choirs  
Free for children 18 and younger  
Church is fully handicap accessible  
Designated seating for masked audience members  
Call 413.298.3137 for more information

On February 12 we celebrated the 10-year journey shared by First Congregational Church and Pastor Brent.