

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



December 2023

Advent Craft Party and Potluck Lunch December 3

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

December 2023 The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
					Service League Holly Fair set-up 9:00-3:00	Holly Fair 10:00-1:00 Al-Anon 5:00pm Chamber Commerce Concert 7:00pm
3	4	5	9	7	8	9
Worship 10:00am Advent Celebration 11:30-2:30 SFC rehearsal 1:00pm		Brent's Sabbath Day Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering the Bible 11:45am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Council 7:00pm	Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	Service League 10:30am SFC rehearsal 1:00 – 4:00pm	Stockbridge Festival Chorus Concert 3:00pm Al-Anon 5:00pm
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Worship 10:00am		Brent's Sabbath Day Tuesday Club 1:45pm Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering the Bible 11:45am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Community Meal 5:30 Discovering 5:45pm	Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	Service League 10:30am Newsletter deadline	Stockbridge Golf Club 8:30am Berkshire Lyric Concert 3:00pm Al-Anon 5:00pm
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Worship 10:00am Christmas Pageant	"Wholehearted Faith" hybrid 9:00am	Brent's Sabbath Day Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering the Bible 11:45am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm	Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm "Wholehearted Faith" online 4:00pm	Service League 10:30am	Al-Anon 5:00pm
24 No morning worship. Candlelight Christmas	25 Christmas Day Office closed all week	26 Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	27 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00	28	29	30 Al-Anon 5:00pm
Eve - 5:00pm 						



December 2023 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

It is hard not to feel besieged. There are wars that will have lasting repercussions and are begging for our attention and engagement. There are political scandals and misinformation that challenge our very government and call out in anxiety and dread. There is the economy. There are loved ones in need. There are health challenges. There is loss, grief, and disappointment. There is much – not to mention all the preparations for Christmas that often feel more like obligation than spontaneous outbursts of joy or love.

Amid all of that, I hope that we remember that it was into times such as those that God turned toward the world and responded in love. That is what God does and will do again this year.

Every year when I speak with people about Advent there is a common refrain that they know what they need to do is slow down and simply be and yet they also know that likely they will not. This year, I worry that with everything happening it might be even more challenging.

Advent is known as a time of waiting **and** preparation. It is to wait for God's inbreaking in our lives and in our world **and** a time of engaging that we might be ready or capable to receive God's gift and decisive action. It is to prepare to meet everything in our lives and in our world not on our own, **but** surrounded in the calming, empowering, revealing, and redeeming grace of God through whom all is possible. We engage in Advent not to turn away from all our worries, burdens and fear, **but** to turn toward an integrated wholeness that we so desperately need.

So what to do? Here are a few possibilities:

As Cynthia Bourgeault invites in her work *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, start your day not with the news, but with 15-20 minutes of lectio Divina. For those not familiar, it is a process of reading scripture not to study it but to encounter it and to let the Spirit move us to a response. The reading load is small (three to five verses) and I would suggest starting at the beginning of Luke and see where it takes you. I have found that not only do those verses stay with me throughout the day, but they also profoundly affect how I see and encounter the world. A simple Google search will offer guidance or just give me a call.

- As Dorothy Bass shares in her book *Receiving the Day*, engage time as a gift. My favorite practice is to either arise a few minutes early to watch the sunrise and the day's beginning or to linger as the sun sets and the stars emerge. Each of them is to be part of an unfolding that is both beyond us and present to us. Find a good window or, better yet, bundle up and breathe in the crisp fresh air and listen to the stillness of this season.
- Start each day in a practice of gratitude, connection, and expansion. As you sip your beverage and awaken, begin with gratitude spend some time simply letting blessings rise to the surface.
 Filled with that positivity, reach out to someone with a note, a card or a text. Finally, before you get into the nitty gritty of the day, step outside not to exercise but simply to expand your heart, mind, and day.

Advent is a season we all know we desperately need and yet is also elusive. This year as the world cries out to besiege, may we instead hear the still, silent whisper of God inviting us to come home and to find a new Way to engage each other and the world in surprising love. Let us dedicate ourselves to preparing that it may indeed be so.

In gratitude and hope, Pastor Brent

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A Note from the Financial Secretary

Please welcome Ella, assistant to the Financial Secretary... making sure that your contributions are kept safely under paw and claw until deposited. For questions about your year-end statements, please contact me at finance@stockbridgeucc.org or call the church office. ~ Marion Pomeroy



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

"Grace upon Grace." John 1:16

It is our tradition to donate part of our Christmas Eve offering to the Christmas Fund each year. This year we will also receive the offering for this worthy cause on December 17th. Look for specially marked envelopes to place in the offering plate.

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ 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. This offering is one of the 5 UCC donations our congregation makes.

United Church of Christ congregations and



members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need.

Thank you!

Christmas Choir

Would you like to sing on Christmas Eve? If you are a chorister who is currently unable to sing in our church choir, but you love to sing arguably the most beautiful sacred repertoire, meaning Christmas music, please join us. If you can make it to a minimum of three out of the five rehearsals listed below, please join us.

Rehearsal schedule: Thursday, December 7, 7:30 -8:30 Thursday, December 14, 7:30 -8:30 Thursday, December 21, 7:00-8:30 Sunday, December 17, 11:15-12:00 Questions? Contact Peter Frost.

Christmas Pageant

We plan an amazing pageant on December 17 as part of our regular worship service.

We invite folks of all ages and all acting experiences to participate. There will be parts for those who want to have full speaking roles, some who want to be extras in a scene, a couple of roles for narrators, and still some more for those who want to just dress up and be a part of it all.

If you would like to participate, please contact the church office.



Capital Campaign Continues into 2024!

Organ and Steeple Repair:

Yes! It will soon be time to begin another phase of the Capital Campaign – with the repair of our beautiful and historic organ and steeple. Both of these projects are ready to go and funded, so look for updates as the work commences.

JE Room/Kitchen Update:

One of the most exciting projects of the Capital Campaign is the refurbishment of the Jonathan Edwards Room and Kitchen. We have lots of feedback and ideas from the surveys you submitted earlier this past summer. After speaking with many interested candidates, we have a JE Room/Kitchen Working Group identified to work on an actual plan for the project. This group met in November to review the feedback and self-selected themselves into a) those who are ready to join Working Group, b) those who prefer to not be on the Working Group but are willing to assist with specific tasks, and c) those who chose not to be involved at this time.

The JE/Kit Working Group will be appointed at the December 6 meeting of Church Council and includes: Margo Davis, Michael Deegan, Will Garrison, Brian Hyatt, Niti Martin, Charlotte Rodgers, and Terry Wise. They will work with a design and build professional and focus on:

overall feasibility, identifying priorities and longer-term goals, assess costs to fit within the available budget, and work with Trustees who will oversee the project.

The Working Group expects to



begin planning work early in 2024 to evaluate the suggestions we've received and assemble a prioritized scope of work, time frame and funding. This planning phase will take most of 2024 - to assess all the options, the costs and the available resources. There may yet be a role for you to get involved in this important project that serves the church and the community. Stay tuned for updates and information!



Candles for All Saints Day. Photo by Cindy Brown

From the Service League

I know, I'm repeating myself - but some things bear repeating and a reminder of the upcoming HOLLY FAIR is one of those things. We're just over a week away from the big day, but the Service League members have been working and planning for months. We'll be having a greenery workday on the Wednesday after Thanksgiving, and we'll be creating general chaos in the JE Room and the Education Wing on Thursday and Friday as we set up tables to display the goodies. We've been unpacking some truly intriguing treasures donated from a collection of antiques, for Grandma's Attic, and it's all going to come together on Saturday, December 2, from 10 - 1.

Did I hear someone say, "How can I help?" Glad you asked you know we welcome baked goods on the day of the Fair, and we also always welcome helpers - no minimum commitment required! Don't be surprised if you get a recruiting phone call from Nancy Wilcox or Helen McCormick - but no matter what, come and join the fun on December 2. Thank you! We could never do it without you.

Margaret Hornick, for the Service League





Saturday, Dec.2 10am—1pm

HOBBY

FAIR

baked goods | crafts & gifts holiday greens | Santa Grandma's Attic



Advent and Christmas 2023

This year we meet the reality of our world with the truth of God's indwelling. There are several ways we invite you to be engage with us and with our faith this year:

Advent Worship – Sundays November 26, December 3, 10, & 17

This year, the narrative lectionary focuses the readings on the prophet's proclamation of coming salvation. Deacon Drea Pecor offers this helpful thought about worship, "Amidst the tumult and painful chaos of today's world, it doesn't seem possible, or even fair, that we would anticipate a miracle, but that is just what we are doing. As we move through this season, we will invite you to bring regular things to be transformed by and become symbols of the scripture of the day. There will also be traditional, comfortable, recognizable signs of this season around us, all of which will challenge us to witness and participate with them in ways that meet these times and bring new life."

On November 26th bring a stick that is between 1' and 4' in length.

On December 3rd bring a single flower stem or ornamental blades of grass.

On December 10th bring an object from home that symbolizes a new beginning or good news.

On December 17th bring something to donate to a food pantry.

Holly Fair - Saturday December 2 10:00am - 1:00pm. See page 6.

<u>Advent Potluck and Craft Fair</u> – Sunday December 3 (following worship) All are invited to a Potluck Lunch, beginning about 11:30 after a brief coffee hour. Please sign up in the JE Room to let us know you're coming and what dish you're bringing. The Craft Party will end at 1:30 or so. This

event is open to all - children and adults of all ages are welcome. Questions? Talk to Terry Wise or Ted Randolph.

<u>Christmas Pageant</u> - Sunday December 17 Our church family will bring to life the pageant, *Be Still and See* as part of worship. Thanks to David Anderegg who wrote the script, Michael Deegan who is directing, Sarah Conly for costumes, and Peter Frost for Musical Support/ Direction.

<u>Christmas Eve</u> – Sunday December 24 We will not hold worship in the morning, so that we may prepare and gather for Christmas Eve Worship. At 5:00 p.m. the Candlelight Lessons and Carols Service will be held with special music, a time for children, and the service of light.

<u>Advent Devotionals</u> There will be digital copies of this year's Advent Devotional upon request, with limited paper copies available. There is a sign -up sheet in the JE Room. As part of our farewell worship service led by Rev. Barbara Kershner on November 19, Mary Hoeltzel and Terry Wise presented a Prayer Shawl to Barbara at coffee hour. Barbara was a member of the Prayer Shawl Ministry when we were an active group.



The Christmas Giving Tree

As we enter the season of Advent, we invite you to share in the tradition of the Christmas Giving Tree, which offers a wish list of gifts you can purchase that will help make a brighter holiday for some of our South County neighbors. Mission & Action has contacted Construct, the Elizabeth Freeman Center, Literacy Network, and the Berkshire Housing Authority to receive Christmas wish lists from some of their clients.

The Giving Tree is in the church's Jonathan Edwards Room, beginning on Sunday, November 19. You can choose one or more gift tags from the tree, sign off on the spread sheet located next to the tree, and then <u>return your gift(s)</u> under the tree, wrapped and with tag attached, <u>by Sunday,</u> <u>December 10</u>. (Pack a gift receipt with your gift, where appropriate.) We recommend a price range of \$25-\$40 for each gift, but use your discretion.

If you are unable to shop, you can also donate to the Giving Tree by sending a check, payable to First Congregational Church, noting "Giving Tree" in the memo line. Mission & Action elves will be shopping for the gifts not selected.

If you have any questions, contact Cindy Brown (phone: 413-298-5365, email: <u>cindytoddbrown@gmail.com</u>, text: 413-446-2623.

The Mission & Action board thanks you for remembering those in our community that need an extra hand this year. We wish you the Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and Spirit of the Season!

Instructions for the Christmas <u>Giving Tree</u>

1. <u>Choose one or more gift tags</u> from the tree. Each tag has a code (eg.- A1, C3, etc.)

2. Sign the tags off on the gift list spread sheet.

- Find your tag's code on spread sheet (eg.-A1, C3).

- Fill in all white spaces for that tag:

- Date taken (eg.- 11/13)

- Your name
- Your phone #
- Your email

3. <u>Purchase gift(s).</u> Get a gift receipt if possible.



4. <u>Wrap gift(s)</u>, including gift receipt. <u>Attach tag</u> to package.

5. <u>Put gift(s) under the JE Room tree</u>, deadline Sunday morning, December 10.

6. Mission & Action Board will deliver gifts on Monday, December 18.

POP UP PANTRY NEWS

Our congregation's Pop-Up Pantry, in a shed behind the office wing at the church, is always open, and enjoys a brisk business! This outreach provides access to non-perishable, shelf stable food items to anyone in need. **To avoid freezing during cold weather**, we are bringing canned, bottled, liquid items into the church building into bins in the back hallway. They will be accessible to anyone in need during office hours, Monday-Friday, 9:00-3:00. The dry goods (which don't freeze) will remain in the outdoor shed, accessible 24/7.

As always, Mission & Action needs your help with donations of shelf stable food and also toiletries. You can leave donations in the marked blue donation bin in the back hall. We also need monetary donations to help fund our grocery runs. Thank you for sharing with your sisters and brothers in need.

MISSION & ACTION RECENT EXPENDITURE

\$250 to American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.



Thank you to Jill Fleming for her Moment for Mission on November 5. Individuals can still donate to this organization, by supporting Jill's walk, through this link. If you are reading a paper version, please

contact Will in the church office for information.

THANK YOU FROM THE PEOPLE'S PANTRY

To All at the Congregational Church of Stockbridge,

Thank you, once again, for your generous support of The People's Pantry. It is truly appreciated. The Pantry is helping to feed over 500 people each week, and we cannot do this important work without the support we receive from our friends and neighbors such as you.

~ With best wishes, Beth Moser, President

THANK YOU FROM BERKSHIRE **COALITION FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION**

Dear Mission & Action.

We were able to raise over \$10,000.00 this year thanks to our many sponsors. All dollars raised stay right here in our community and go directly to BCSP. This organization is key to building communication between our youth and the adults in their lives. The coalition brings many programs into our schools as well as into our community.

We want to give a big shout out to everyone involved in raising generous donations. YOU, our sponsors, are there for us supporting our community and our kids. Hats off to each and every one of you! Rest assured 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 that starts about suicide prevention is making a difference.

~ Thank you! Joann Farrell

Stockbridge Golf Course Hits a Hole-in-One!

Many, many thanks to the Stockbridge Golf Club for donating several boxes of shelf stable food items to our church's Pop Up Pantry. It's the end of their dining room season until the spring, and they didn't want the food to go to waste. And a special shout out to Tom Ruffing, a congregation member who is also on the Golf Club board, who delivered the much needed non-perishable food items to our Pop Up Pantry. Grateful thanks to all!

God in the Wilderness

A monthly Walking Pilgrimage The date for the next walking pilgrimage is Wednesday, December 13, 2023 at 4:00pm. Meet at the parking lot at the Marians.

Even God didn't work 24/7. God rested on the seventh day. Nature is a great teacher and role model for finding balance between work and life, serving and relishing as well as the urge to over-manage instead of trusting what we cannot see. We seek refuge in the wilderness to refuel our life in faith.

Facilitated by Margo Davis, MSW, LICSW Questions? margobradleydavis@gmail.com

All-Church Advent Craft Party and Potluck

On December 3 all are invited to a Potluck Lunch, beginning about 11:30 after a brief coffee hour. Please sign up in the JE Room to let us know you're coming and what dish you're bringing. The Craft Party will end at 1:30 or so. This event is open to all children and adults of all ages are welcome. Questions? Talk to Terry Wise or Ted Randolph.

Growth & Fellowship

BIRTHDAY CARDS: On December 10, cards for that month's birthdays will be available during Coffee Hour for signing and wellwishing.

A LOT OF NEWS ABOUT COFFEE HOUR

- YOUR FEEDBACK: We are glad that coffee hour (or fellowship hour, as some like to think of it) continues to be important to so many. One way people show this is by offering feedback on how to make it even better, with suggestions like, "Don't serve Ritz crackers as they're too crumbly." Noted! Another great suggestion came after a recent coffee hour was held in the Sunday school room. Someone mentioned that, drawbacks aside, one advantage to this location was having more places to sit. Noted again! G & F will now make sure that one or two card tables, with chairs, are set up in the JE Room during Coffee Hour.
- OUR FEEDBACK: With all respect, we need you to show that you value coffee hour in another way -- by signing up to host. Signups for hosting coffee hour are at an all-time low, or at least it feels that way to our Board, a grand total of four people. If you don't know how to host, have simply fallen out of the habit, or don't understand the new online sign-up process, we can help with all that! (See below)
- SIGNING UP IS A BREEZE: G & F will hold a sign-up event on December 10 during Coffee Hour. We will have a laptop on hand and will be glad to show you the simple process for signing up online using the "Breeze" system. Want to sign up the oldfashioned way? While there is no longer a paper sign-up sheet, a phone call to Will is still an option for signing up. Once signed up, a member of G & F can show you the ropes, if need be.
- KUDOS: Thanks to anyone who has been signing up to host, or who brings homemade goodies from time to time to add to the mix.

Yesterday (11/19) it was Elizabeth Young (host) and Corinne Burke (*Star* Baker).

DECEMBER 3: There will be coffee hour, but it will be a bit shorter to accommodate the **Advent Craft Party and Potluck**. Sign up in the JE Room, or call Will (413) 298-3137.

NAME TAGS: Believe it or not, we are making progress on getting name tags in circulation again. Charlotte and Donna have carefully gone over the existing batch of tags to eliminate any that weren't being used—a long overdue process necessary our system to work smoothly. They have also made up a list of members who need a name tag, but don't have one - yet! The longterm goal is to have a beautiful, custom-made name tag cabinet mounted on a wall in the Narthex (which wall is TBD). We have a couple of examples of such cases, and the cabinet style would allow the tags to be hidden from view when not needed. The short-term goal is to make name tags available in the Narthex, using the existing system, as soon as possible.

Ted Randolph for Growth and Fellowship



A variation on the theme of Coffee Hour. The Youth Group enjoyed a tea party at the Taft Farm Corn Maze, November 5.

Editor's note: On November 15 the church was filled with clergy participating in a wellness retreat sponsored by the Southern NE UCC Conference. Rev. Terry Ogawa sent this letter to all members of the SNEUCC.

Dear Northwest Region,

There is a lot in the world about which we need to pray, from Gaza and Ukraine to food insecurity and housing shortages in our own backyards. There is also much for which to be thankful, from global interreligious and ecumenical solidarity to the blessings of church volunteers and Thanksgiving services that remind us to serve others—or to serve in such a way that owns and repairs for our own colonialist history.

But I cannot help myself—I am on such a high, and I am so thankful for the incredible Clergy Wellness Retreat that we held in the Northwest Region of the Conference in Cooperation with the UCC Pension Boards on November 15th with the incredible hospitality of the staff and volunteers at First Congregational Church of Stockbridge, UCC. What an amazing day of reconnecting with the Holy in the name of sustained ministries and well-ministers.

Rev. James Lumsden, recently returning to ministry after a five year hiatus in the name of wellness, offered rousing renditions of songs from Tom Waits to "Seek Ye First" to a sending song from South Africa: "Come with me for the journey is long...," even as he shared from his own journey.

Attendees were invited to find a contemplative Christian prayer practice that works for them and their schedules. "Start with one minute! Start with two minutes," invited Rev. Matt Carriker. He also pointed to the work of Dr. Kirk Jones, "Think about life at a savoring [or sacred] pace."

The spirit of welcome, savoring, and care pervaded every part of the day. A luscious feast of Lebanese food was offered by Naji's Mediterranean Cuisine. Naji told me when I offered sympathies that his restaurant closed, "Life's too short, my dear. Now I can spend time with my kids even though they are 27 and 30 now. When they were little, I was always at the restaurant."

While we spoke, Naji's helper filled the First Congregational Church of Stockbridge's salt shakers so the hospitality could be complete at each table. Participants came back from break to a dining room set with tablecloths and hospitality in the name of "no more sad meals," as one of the clergy who helped plan the 2022 Clergy Wellness Retreats declared about.

Chair Yoga, ukulele lessons, and contemplative prayer practices were on offer in the afternoon. By the end most participants could plunk out, "Simple Gifts" on the ukulele; found the tension in their necks and shoulders unwound; and/or were reminded of the value of contemplative prayer that contributes to Loving God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength (Mark 12:30-31).

You never know what you'll find when, despite all the things on your to-do list, you take a chance on wellness, but I promise, if you do, the long journey will be made better and lighter with the help of siblings in Christ.

May you find much for which to be Thankful in this season.

Blessings, Rev. Terry Yasuko Ogawa, Area Conference Minister

Wednesday Community Dinner

Eating together nourishes our bodies and our souls. All are welcome to a dinner on **December 13** at the church. The food will be ready at 5:30 p.m. and served until 7:30 or so. People may arrive whenever is best for them and stay as long as they like. The food will be simple, nut-free, and include a vegetarian and gluten-free option.

No one is obligated to bring anything. Those who wish to contribute, help cook, or bring a dish can.

In gratitude, Pastor Brent

