

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



March 2024

Pastor: The Rev. Brent Damrow - <u>bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org</u>

Minister of Music: Peter Frost - <u>music@stockbridgeucc.org</u>

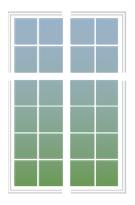
 $Administrator/Sexton:\ Will\ Garrison-\underline{office@stockbridgeucc.org}$

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(413) 298-3137 | www.stockbridgeucc.org Office hours: 9:00-2:00, Monday - Friday

${f March~2024}$ The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

Saturday	2	Al-Anon 5:00pm	6	Al-Anon 5:00pm	16	Stockbridge Festival Chorus 10:00am	Al-Anon 5:00pm	23	Stockbridge Golf Club 8:30am	Al-Anon 5:00pm	30	Al-Anon 5:00pm		
Friday	1	Service League 10:30	8	Service League 10:30am	15	Service League 10:30am		22	Service League 10:30am	£7	29	Service League 10:30am	Good Friday worship 12:15pm Self-guided	Netrection 5:50pm
Thursday			7	BWHS theater 1:00 Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	14	Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm		21	Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	Ÿ	28	Bell choir 4:30pm	Mannay 1 nursday Worship 7:00pm	
Wednesday			9	Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering the Bible 11:45am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 BWHS theater 2:15 Council 7:00pm	13	Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering the Bible 11:45am	Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Community Meal 5:30	20	Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering the Bible 11:45am	Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm	27	Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00	Discovering the Bible 5:45pm	
Tuesday	Yoga Classes are	9:00am	5	Brent's Sabbath Day BWHS theater 12:30 Lenten Group 1:00pm Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	12	Brent's Sabbath Day Al-Anon 7:00pm	AA 8:00pm Lenten Group 5:30pm	19	Brent's Sabbath Day Lenten Group 1:00pm Tuesday Club 1:45pm	Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm Newsletter deadline	26	Brent's Sabbath Day	Lenten Group 5:30pm Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	
Monday	Stockbridge Fest	Chorus renearses Sundays at 1:00pm	4	BWHS theater 2:15 Second Nature Arts 3:30	11	Second Nature Arts	3:30	18			25	"Wholehearted Faith" hybrid 9:00am	Procter Hall Working Group – Zoom 7:00pm	
Sunday	The church choir	3/31	3	Worship 10:00am Lenten Group 11:30am	10	Worship 10:00am Kids Special Music		17	Worship 10:00am Lenten Group 11:30am		24	Palm Sunday Worship 10:00am	31 Sunrise Service 6:30am Easter Service 10:00am	Egg Hunt 11:15am



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

March 2024 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

At Thanksgiving we belt out the words, "We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing." At times of grief we sing out "Shall we gather at the river?" As we approach the table of Christ we open our hearts by singing "as we gather at your table." In Marty Haugen's contemporary work

we boldly ask God to "gather us in." The Bible proclaims the truth that where two or more of us have gathered there Christ will come to meet us.

Gathering is at the heart of being church together for to gather is a physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational undertaking. To gather is to

intentionally set aside the time and set out to be together. To gather does not mean to disappear into a larger group, but rather to bring our whole selves including our differing experiences, views, gifts, challenges, shortcomings, and hopes to share with God and neighbor.

Gathering plays an especially crucial role during Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. They did back in the time of Jesus. Notice how the stories are almost always about people gathering; whether to line a street with branches, to anoint the feet of Christ, to sit around a table sharing bread and cup, to go to the Garden for prayer, to demand the crucifixion, or to the Tomb for the hard work of honoring and mourning. It is more than ironic I think that the one day that there is not mention of the disciples gathering is on Good Friday.

During March I invite you to commit to gathering. Even before Palm Sunday and Holy

Week begins there are so many ways to do so. Our weekly worship at 10:00 a.m. is a perfect chance to gather and to prepare ourselves for what is to come. There is Weekly Morning Prayer at 8:00 a.m. on Wednesdays on Zoom so you can gather with others virtually to share the reality of our lives. On March 13th there will be

our next community supper – a chance to gather in fellowship in the kitchen and/or around a table.

Palm Holy Week and Easter are replete with chances (see page 11). While the story is compelling, the music is transforming, and the liturgical elements are inviting, the

element that brings them all together in powerful ways is the gathering. Setting aside the time to encounter all of these things together magnifies the meaning and impact of each one. Setting out to be together to remember the truth of those days brings us to the story and shares the challenges and the blessings. Gathering together on Easter doesn't just proclaim the truth of life but propels us into a new life unfolding right now.

Gathering is always so important. Gathering during this season and these times will make all the difference. Take the time this year to commit to gathering for this full, amazing, deep, challenging, searing, beautiful, redemptive journey and I promise we will find the gift of new and eternal life bursting forth in ways we never could have imagined. Come and gather.

In gratitude and hope,

Pastor Brent

HAPPY MAR	ACH 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

It's (a) Breeze

Big ledgers filled with hand-written reports and lists, drawers filled with index cards, sign-up sheets on the bulletin board, and, of course, files and piles of papers.

These were methods used over the decades to keep track of church membership, mailing lists, calendars, pledges, gather info, and much more. Now we use "church management software" to do all this.

We use Breeze, one of the most popular versions, ("trusted by over 10,00 churches"). Marion and Will keep track of lots of information, produce reports and membership directories, and we continue to learn and share new features.



Where are the Singers?

You may have noticed that the membership of the Adult Choir is down from last year. We have lost six members since we resumed in September of 2022. In addition to these singers we have three singers enjoying extended stays, (two to six months) in Florida. Having enough singers for a productive rehearsal on Thursday evenings has been very difficult since this past September.

Here is the point of this newsletter blurb:

I think we can do better-

Looking around the congregation, there are many singers actively singing in our church community who are not singing in the choir loft on Sundays.

I do understand that of the numerous singers in Stockbridge Festival Chorus, it would be a lot for me to expect them to sing in the church choir when they already have a long rehearsal beginning at 1pm

after church on many Sundays during the year. It would also be a lot for me to expect the Bell Choir members to attend both the bell rehearsal and the choir rehearsal which would take up



four hours of their Thursday afternoon and evening. I am very grateful to Cathy Clark and Liza Catino who manage to sing and ring for us.

Even considering all of these SFC singers and bell ringers we still have numerous singers in the congregation who are not singing with the Adult Choir.

If your initial response is something like: the choir sounds great, they don't need me, know that on February 7th when they last sang there were more pros than amateurs in the loft. This past Sunday was an even split. Since September we have been averaging five singers at Thursday rehearsals.

I ask you, if you have experience and ability as a singer, please consider joining us on Thursday evenings and every other Sunday. I have been told numerous times since my first day of interviews, how important music is to our church. This is a wonderful way to serve our church community.

Peter Frost, Minister of Music



Happy Birthday to Us... Rescheduled!

The All-Church Birthday Potluck Lunch (with cake!) will now be held right after church on **May 5**—Save the Date!

Administrator Notes

Would you like to receive the newsletter via email in addition to, or instead of, a paper copy? Just let me know. The pdf version is in full color!

The church building is getting busy. If you want to use a room, please check in with me first so that I can put your meeting on the calendar.

I'll be on vacation from Thursday March 14, returning to the office on March 25.

Don't hesitate to contact me with any questions (well, except when I'm on vacation).

Will Garrison office@stockbridgeucc.org

We're Going to Need a Bigger Church

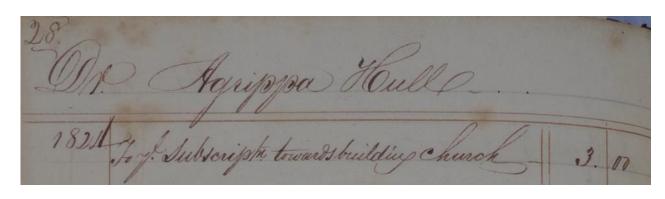
Here is an excerpt from the upcoming history of the current church building:

From Chapter Two - "We're Going to Need a Bigger Church" from *How Firm a Foundation:* An Architectural History of the Stockbridge Congregational Church 1824-2024

After the second meeting house was built in 1784, the congregation continued to grow. Rev. Benjamin West oversaw several revivals that increased membership: 52 joined in 1790-1792, and 94 joined in 1813. This growth continued after Rev. David D. Field started preaching in 1819: 39 joined in 1821, and 59 joined in 1822. This rapid expansion, combined with the deterioration of the aging second meeting house, resulted in the need for a new, larger building by 1824.

In February 1824, 51 people subscribed to fund the new building, pledging a total of \$3,069, ranging from \$3 from Agrippa Hull (see below), to \$250 from both Thaddeus Pomeroy and Joseph Woodbridge. It was not just the "men of the church" who paid for the new building. Several women contributed in their own name, including Catharine Sedgwick who pledged \$50; and Elisabeth Fairman, Abigail Pepoon, and Mrs. Elizabeth Jones, who each pledged \$20.

Mr. Ralph Bigelow of Lebanon, New York, was hired to build a brick church sixty feet long and fifty feet wide with a porch in front, a brick tower fifty feet high topped by a timber steeple, for a fee of \$5,333. The new building was "solemnly dedicated to Almighty God" on January 20, 1825.



From the Service League

We normally meet on Friday mornings, but our meeting of February 9th was anything but normal. We celebrated Claire Williams' 95th birthday - with balloons, flowers, cake (thank you, Ann Brink!), candles, and song. Will took the great photo you see below. What a happy occasion!

We did manage to conduct some business before the party started, and now I want to talk about pie, not cake. No, not that kind of pie - this one is the pie chart that represents our budget for the year. We decided to divide our international slice of \$2000



between two organizations that provide relief to war-torn or disaster-struck areas. Those are Americares, which gives medical aid, and World Central Kitchen, which provides meals. Locally, we budgeted \$500 each for Construct, The Elizabeth Freeman Center, the Backpack Project, and the South Community Food Pantry. And a big slice (\$4000) goes right back to the church, to fulfill our commitment, this year and last, to the capital campaign. We also donated \$1000 to the church's scholarship fund. We thought you'd like to know - because you helped bake the pie!

We were also delighted to welcome Donna Jacobs to our group. And we would welcome you too. In addition to members, we welcome ideas, so if you have any for crafts or other salable goodies, we're already in production mode for the Holly Fair!

Margaret Hornick, for the Service League

One Great Hour of Sharing

On March 10th we will join with UCC churches across the country to give to One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS).

OGHS is one of four special mission offerings of the United Church of Christ. This Lenten Offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ within Wider Church Ministries. The news reminds us daily of the broken places in our world that need tending.

For the past several years, the UCC special offerings (except the Christmas Fund/Veterans of the Cross), have come from our mission budget. Beginning this year, Mission & Action, with Council approval, will return to engaging the congregation in joining other churches to give directly to OGHS. Bulletin inserts will be provided to learn more. Please look for specially marked envelopes for your gifts.

We hope you will give prayerfully and generously.

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, STOCKBRIDGE MA Summary of 2024 Budget

As Revised and Approved at the February 4, 2024 Budget Meeting

2024 BUDGET MEETING UPDATE:

At the Budget Meeting held on February 4, 2024, there was a Motion to amend the proposed 2024 Budget.

This Motion resulted in a total increase of \$1,739.27 in Salary/Benefit Expense for the Minister; broken down as follows: \$1,412.32 in salary increase; \$218.91 in benefit increase; and \$108.04 in tax increase.

You can see this expense increase reflected in the Summary 2024 Budget on this page.

If you would like to see a full copy of the 2024 Budget, please contact Will Garrison in the office, and he will provide you with a digital or paper copy at your request.

	Budget 2024
INCOME	
Pledges Pledges Growth/Additional	\$ 238,000 \$ 5,000
Pledges - One-Time Gifts Loose Offering Facility Use Donation	\$ 14,640 \$ 11,000
Fundraisers Gifts/Donations Golf Club Donation	\$ 4,000 \$ 4,500 \$ 1,600
Interest Income Income	\$ - \$ 278,740
FUND TRANSFERS Endowment Fund Transfer Supplemental Endowment Program Fund Transfer Interest on CDC Loan	\$ 67,103
Music Minister Fund Transfe CE Director Fund Transfer Carryover	\$ 16,000 \$ 2,469
Fund Transfers Total	\$ 85,572
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 364,312
EXPENSES	
Total Salaries/Benefits	\$ 234,002
Total Christian Education	\$ 7,000
Total Growth & Fellowship	\$ 4,000
Total Deacons	\$ 8,804
Total Music	\$ 10,290
Total Mission & Action	\$ 17,950
Total Admin/Council	\$ 15,120
Total Trustees/General Ma	\$ 82,521
Capital Reserve	\$ 2,500
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 382,187
NET INCOME	\$ (17,875)



News from Mission & Action

Church World Service Hygiene Kits

Filled with Hope. Packed with Love
At coffee hour on March 10, Mission & Action will share the opportunity to put together hygiene kits which Church World Service uses around the world to help those facing natural disasters, homelessness, or other difficult situations. When you share a CWS kit, you show love and compassion to our most vulnerable neighbors. You help people get the supplies they need when they need them the most. This was a much enjoyed activity last year, back by popular demand! A free will donation basket will also be available to help defray the cost of materials and shipping.

Mission & Action: Recent Expenditures

- \$500 for Afghanistan earthquake relief through UCC Disaster Relief Fund, from National/International Needs budget
- \$500 for Gaza war relief through UCC Disaster Relief Fund, from National/ International Needs budget
- \$500 for Ukraine war relief through UCC Disaster Relief Fund, from National/ International Needs budget
- \$500 for Construct Warm Up the Winter fundraising campaign, from Local Needs budget
- \$500 for Pittsfield Homeless Shelter in Fenn St. Methodist Church, through ServiceNet, from Local Needs budget

Thank You Letters

From Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation: Thank you for the gift of \$528 from First Congregational Church of Stockbridge to The People's Pantry. This donation will help to fulfill the Pantry's mission of respectfully serving our neighbors who are experiencing food insecurity by distributing healthy food, much of it locally sourced. You have helped the Pantry to strengthen the community for all of us.

-and-

From Beth Moser, President of the Pantry's Board:

Thank you very much for your generous donation to the Pantry. Your continuing support allows us to provide healthy food to our neighbors facing food insecurity. As the number of people in need grows, we depend more than ever on our friends to keep the Pantry going. Thank you again, and best wishes.

Literacy Network families, for our Christmas Giving Tree gifts

Dear Friends.

My family is very grateful to you for the great gesture you made in presenting us with presents. We are very happy that you thought of us. We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

-and-

Dear Congregational Church members, I want to thank you for the generous presents we received in this special time of the year. The gift cards helped my family and me have a better Christmas. I know your generosity helped other families as well. Thank you so much.

Thank You Letters, continued.

Cathedral of the Beloved, Pittsfield

We are SO very appreciative of your gift of \$500. As you requested, \$250 covered the cost of deli sandwiches plus sides and beverages following a



Sunday service, and \$250 was dedicated to Laundry Love – our program at the North Street Coin Op which allows homeless and low income residents to do their laundry. We have been further blessed to welcome members of your church to our Sunday worship, preparing and presenting meals that follow our service. Your contributions greatly support us in building up God's beloved throughout the city. We are so very grateful for your support.

United Church of Christ Disaster Relief Fund Thank you for your \$100 donation to the UCC to support disaster relief in Hawaii. Your love of neighbor has been made tangible. Through your gift, families who have been displaced and need shelter and necessities have received support. Your gift enables the church to be present with people amid this life-changing catastrophe, offering immediate and long-term relief and support. 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.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Thank you for your contribution of \$250 to AFSP. 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.

Riverbrook Residence

Established in 1957, Riverbrook is the oldest all-women residence in the Northeast. The historic home is located on Ice Glen Road in Stockbridge. Riverbrook is a model of care for women with Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Vision and Hearing Impairments and other developmental challenges. Riverbrook Residence, Inc. was incorporated as a non-profit in 1996.

It is a true community, where women with a wide range of intellectual and developmental disabilities are encouraged to reach their full potential.

Our church has a long history of relationship with the women living at Riverbrook. Ann Roy has worked for many years developing programs and creating bonds with the women who live there. Currently, Beth Rodgers, a member of our church, has resided there for 12 years. Jeremy Ridenour, clerk, and Cindy Brown, cochair of the Mission & Action Board, offer a Spiritual Group every two weeks, with seven women attending. Charlotte Rodgers and Jeremy serve on the board of directors.

We are blessed to have a <u>community</u> work partnership with Riverbrook. Each week several women are paid to come to our church to clean the kitchen and the JE Room. They also help prepare the monthly newsletter for mailing. The women are proud of the work they do and receive satisfaction from their jobs and the opportunity to see friends in the community. Other community partners that are providing meaningful work to Riverbrook include the Red Lion Inn, Austen Riggs Center, St Paul's preschool and the Congregation of Marian Fathers.

At the Congregational Meeting on Feb 4, 2024, the Congregation voted to approve the amendment of the Church Bylaws to add the following:

ARTICLE XIV: LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND COMMITMENTS

A. Land Acknowledgement

This Church was founded in 1734 as a mission to the Mohican people with the intent that they would live and worship in harmony with European settlers. What began as a hopeful experiment led, within fifty years, to this Christian tribe being dispossessed of, and driven from, their homeland.

As followers of Christ, we are called, in the words spoken by Isaiah, to "maintain justice and do what is right". Accordingly, we offer this land acknowledgment using the language approved by the Stockbridge-Munsee Community:

It is with gratitude and humility that we acknowledge that we are learning, speaking, gathering, and worshiping on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people, who are the indigenous peoples of this land. Despite

tremendous hardship in being forced from here, today their community resides in Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all.

B. Commitments

The approval of this Land Acknowledgement demonstrates the commitments of The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Stockbridge, Massachusetts to continue engagement and collaboration with the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. This will involve ongoing education as we become aware of tribal issues. We respect the history and cultural significance of this land and, as stewards, intend to consult with the Stockbridge-Munsee Community prior to engaging in ground disturbing activity as described in the Addendum.

We commit, as well, to continue our own education around social justice issues and to find opportunities to provide appropriate responses and actions to build a more inclusive and equitable space for all.

Have you been visiting this church for a while and thinking about calling it home?



Please contact Pastor Brent to talk about how to make this step in your faith journey. There is a group joining the church near Easter. We try to offer this twice a year, so if now is not the right time, another opportunity will come soon.

Pastor Brent can be reached at bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org or

413-298-3137 x11

Wednesday Community Dinner

Eating together nourishes our bodies and our souls. All are welcome to a dinner on **March 13** at the church. The food will be ready at 5:30 p.m. and served until 7:00 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

Palm Sunday – March 24 –10:00a.m.

Join the crowd to welcome Jesus as he enters the holy city of Jerusalem. A Palm Processional will kick things off as we honor Christ and look forward to the Holy Week that follows.

Maundy Thursday – March 28 Evening Worship (time TBA)

Gather with the disciples in the upper room to share the Last Supper with Jesus. Go to the Garden of Gethsemane to join in the story of love, prayer, betrayal, and denial. The service will conclude with a service of light and include Communion and beautiful music.

Good Friday – March 29 – 12:15p.m. & 5:30 p.m.

<u>Lunchtime Service 12:15 p.m. – 12:45 p.m.</u>

Take our places at the foot of the cross to bear witness to the fateful events of the trial, beating, crucifixion, and burial. We will have the chance

to confess the ways we continue to betray or deny Christ. We will face truth in love.

Evening Guided Meditation 5:30 p.m. (we will keep the sanctuary open until 7:00 p.m.)

This contemplative self-guided time of prayer bathed in soft piano music will bring each person likewise to the foot of the cross with the same chance to confess and reflect. We will livestream this time and provide the guide on-line as well.

Easter Sunday – March 31–6:30a.m. and 10:00 a.m.

<u>Sunrise Service 6:30 a.m. – The Sanctuary</u> <u>Balcony</u>

Christ is Risen! Using a beautiful text from Isaiah we will gather facing the sunrise to celebrate the Easter truth of life and resurrection. A time of simple food and fellowship will follow.

10:00 a.m. - Festival Worship

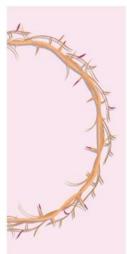
With special music and cries of Alleluia we will sing, pray, and celebrate Easter! Following worship will be the **Egg Hunt for children** and a time of **food and fellowship**.

Holy Week & Easter 2024

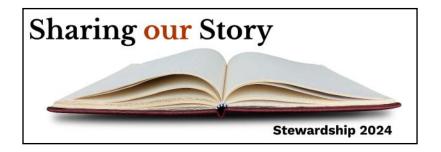












Dear Church Family and Friends,

The membership at the February Annual Budget Meeting approved the 2024 budget of The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge. Thanks to the Budget Committee for their work and thanks to everyone for their positive vote and support.

As you know, the approved budget is approximately \$18,000 in deficit, including the additional compensation for Pastor Brent to keep up with inflation. The Stewardship Committee would very much like to close and eliminate that deficit before we get too far into the year. We, you, all of us, can do that!

A quick back-of-the-envelope calculation shows that if every one of our 100 pledging units pledged or gave an extra \$180, we would eliminate our deficit. Of course, any amount would be most welcome. We know that some may not be able to increase their giving, but if those who can, do, and some give even more, we will get there.

Please help!! The church has reduced program budgets and is running efficiently and effectively. However, we still have this deficit to meet.

We ask you to consider an increase to an existing pledge, a one-time donation, or make a new annual pledge. It all will be counted and appreciated.

This church is active, alive, and meaningful to many in the Berkshires - and beyond. Let's keep it that way!! From the Stewardship Committee,

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The 2024 Church Deficit Pledge Revision/Gift Form

•	Increase to existing pledge:	\$
•	One-time cash donation:	\$
•	New annual 2024 pledge:	\$

- Mail this form with your pledge or check to: The First Congregational Church, PO Box 825, Stockbridge MA 01262
- Or you can go to the "give" page of www.stockbridgeucc.org/give to make an online payment
- Or use this Venmo code.
- Thank you!

