

# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

## May 2019 Newsletter

Dear Friends in Christ,

I have learned as a pastor that in the high holy times of our faith that I dare not get out ahead of the story in my preparations for worship. I have learned that to stay in and with the story as it unfolds to ensure that each part of the story is honored and has a chance to resonate. That is particularly hard in liturgical seasons like Holy Week where everything is moving so quickly. And yet, even then, I have learned that I have to not move to Good Friday before gathering on Maundy Thursday and likewise not moving to resurrection before crucifixion.

It requires patience and waiting, but it results in depth and truth. I was struck this year that on the first Easter, God did not move too quickly from crucifixion to Easter either—instead there were three long days.



During those days the followers of Jesus were left in the hard silence of death while scripture and the creeds remind us that Jesus faced death too. As always, there is wisdom to be gained by looking at how God worked as we consider our own choices.

Like all worship, Easter presented the opportunity for us to remember the story and then to enter into it ourselves. I asked the question in my sermon about whether we can linger like Mary did at the tomb to encounter the risen Christ. I now ask the question as to whether we can be patient enough to wait for resurrection in the dead end places of our own lives.

With Spring in the air and Easter upon us, there is the temptation to jump immediately to the new life that is all around us. We feel the urge to engage in spring cleaning both literally in our homes and yards, but also in our lives too. It is good.

I invite you instead to lay fallow for at least three days as hard and painful as it might be. In those three days after Jesus's crucifixion, people came face to face with the reality that he really was dead. Those three days allowed for *new* life to emerge; not just a continuation, but something truly new.

I imagine that in each of our lives there are things that need to be let go of, that need to die, before we can allow truly new life to emerge. As tempting as it is to spring toward that new beginning, we need to wait and come face to face with the difficulty of letting something go (even if we know that thing is no longer life giving or even a dead end).

May Easter bring you the hope of new beginnings and new life waiting to emerge even here at now. May it also give you the courage and patience to wait, to watch, to pray and to examine those places in your own life that need to be let go and allowed to die so that new life might indeed spring forth.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

*Peace, Brent*

# OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER

## HAPPY MAY BIRTHDAYS

(Please let someone on the Growth Committee know if we have not included your birthday or listed it incorrectly.)

May 10	Sarah Conly	May 20	Terry Wise
May 12	Erving Henderson	May 22	Jeremy Ridenour
May 15	Chuck Wales	May 24	Gene Kalish
May 18	Jean Wilson	May 26	Diane Fogarty
May 19	Marissa Peyron	May 27	David McCarthy
	Marie Raftery	May 30	Suzanne Dower
			Cary Quigley
			Marc Fadding
			Al Wermuth
			Ed Ivas

## PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS:

Stan Osak, Jr.; Carla McCormick and her family on the death of her son, Nicholas McCormick; Nell Ezequelle, Joyce Hovey; Lindsay Hermanski; Aleva Henderson; Philip Connor; Mishel Kulibaba Epstein; Cary Quigley; Gail Dunlop, mother of Mary Jane Dunlop; Colin Cunningham, son of Ronnie Cunningham; Gege Kingston; Barbara Bracknell; Betsy Wheat; Ann Underwood; Betsey McKearnan; Jeanne Fleming; Sarah and Michael Zanin; Joann Farrell and her family on the death of her mom, Pauline C. Carmel; David Eiseman, grandson of Anne and Gary Fix; and Jen Germain.



First Congregational Church is privileged to provide space for meetings of Al-Anon and AA each week. We welcome all into a place for healing and fellowship.

Al-Anon meets on Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m., in the classroom. For more information, visit the website of the Al-Anon Family Groups of Berkshire County, [www.berkshirealanon.org](http://www.berkshirealanon.org).

*The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength, and hope in order to solve their common problems. We believe alcoholism is a family illness and that changed attitudes can aid recovery.*

The Tower Group of AA meets on Tuesdays at 8:00 p.m., in the Jonathan Edwards Room. For more information, visit the website of the Berkshire Intergroup, [www.berkshireaaintergroup.org](http://www.berkshireaaintergroup.org)

*Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.*

When  
anyone, anywhere  
reaches out for help,  
I want the hand of AA  
always to be there.  
And for that:  
I am responsible.  
Bill W.



## Save the Date!

The Puerto Rico Mission Group will show slides and tell stories of their recent mission trip, during coffee hour, June 2.

A prayer written by Team Puerto Rico, while on a roof:

### A Prayer for Rooftop Volunteers



Lord,  
Don't let me fall off,  
Or fall in.

Show us the way for proper drainage,  
And make evident the cracks that need sealing.

May the paint and sealer dry fast before the rains come.

May our work provide a dry and comfortable home  
for the patient homeowners that have welcomed us here.

Bless our aching feet,  
and backs.

And thank you for the clouds that block the scorching sun,  
and the garden hose we use to drench our heads with cool water.

Thank you for the brief passing breeze,  
and the members of our team;  
Both of which give us the courage,  
and the strength  
to continue our work.

Amen.

# ***NEWS FROM AROUND THE CHURCH***

## ***REPORTS FROM BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND SERVICE LEAGUE***

### **Service League**

Due to the great generosity of members of the Congregation, we sent not only the School and Hygiene kits which we were committed to assemble for Church World Service, but also provided Emergency Cleanup Buckets to be distributed following natural disasters. These 5-gallon buckets cost \$75 each, and contain gloves, disinfectant, dust masks, trash bags, and other supplies needed to clean up homes that have been damaged by fires and floods. With the extra funds you provided, we purchased two buckets through CWS. You've helped to ease the distress of people struggling in dire conditions. Thank you!

Meanwhile, closer to home, we're preparing for the Summer Fair in August. Think of us when you're planting your summer flowers and vegetables, or when you're doing your spring cleaning - Grandma's Attic wants to help you get rid of those things that you no longer need or use - someone else will appreciate them, and you'll be helping us raise funds for mission projects!

And THANK YOU for your support!

Margaret Hornick, for the Service League

## Board of Christian Education

Through Lent we shifted worship time to allow adults to participate in Sunday school and our children to participate in worship. What did you think? In the coming days, we will be surveying families, teachers, and the entire congregation to find out how it felt to you.

There will be no Adult Ed during May, but kids will be in Sunday school through May 26. June 2 will be Christian Education Sunday and the whole congregation can see what both adult and children's programs have been up to.

After a beautiful Easter Sunday service, kids tumbled out the front door and scattered across the lawn in search of Easter eggs, low and high. The rain had stopped, the sky was blue and Easter bonnets abounded. Ah, spring, the resurrection, a new beginning.

And speaking of new beginnings, we are looking for new board members to start with us in June. Please prayerfully consider whether you can help us in this important work.

Diane Piraino, CE chair



## Personnel Committee

The Personnel Committee of our church continues our task to develop a format for employee reviews of the paid staff. We have been meeting every two weeks since February creating templates for reviews for Administrator Will Garrison; Pastor Brent Damrow; and Minister of Music Catherine Schane-Lydon.

We'll need your help as we solicit congregational and peer input. A comprehensive survey form will help you to define what is important to your life in this church. You will be asked to circle those 10 factors out of 40 optional aspects of church life you find most important. This is the same UCC profile form that our church did eight years ago when we were searching for a called Pastor. Knowing how we may have changed our priorities as a congregation is important for all of us and especially in the upcoming reviews.

A questionnaire will be available to everyone to give feedback to the incumbents in each of these positions. We ask for your written responses be constructive and thoughtfully detailed. We need you to have you sign these and either give them to a personnel committee member directly or place them in a locked box available in the JE room. No person being reviewed will have access to the questionnaires related to them. The data will be compiled by the committee and then the committee will meet with the employee to discuss his or her performance. Confidentiality will be strictly observed.

Everyone, including non-members are invited to give their perspective. Your impressions are important. Questions or comments can be directed to:

Madonna Meagher: [songbirdmm@gmail.com](mailto:songbirdmm@gmail.com)

Hal Brink: [brink725@gmail.com](mailto:brink725@gmail.com)

Carl Bradford: [bradfordc39@gmail.com](mailto:bradfordc39@gmail.com)

Joan Kopperl: [jhkopperl@gmail.com](mailto:jhkopperl@gmail.com)

Jeremy Ridenour: [jeremy.ridenour@gmail.com](mailto:jeremy.ridenour@gmail.com)

*(Pastor Brent also serves on the committee. Specifically he is helping guide their over-all direction and in the reviews of staff under his direction. Feedback about the staff can also be directed his way. He is looking forward to receiving feedback about his role and will not have access to any feedback forms related to him.)*

Thank you! Madonna Meagher, Chair Personnel Committee



## Board of Deacons - LENT and HOLY WEEK and EASTER (oh my!)

I woke up in the middle of the night after Easter Sunday, realizing that I have so much to be thankful for as I look back at the special time we've just celebrated – Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. For me, the journey to Easter began on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, where we said our bittersweet goodbyes to Pastor Patty Fox. Many thanks to Patty for getting so many children involved in the service. I loved the mild chaos as they milled around finding people to serve communion to. From the hands of babes, the feast of God tasted even sweeter. Our hearts and congratulations go with Patty as she becomes pastor of the West Stockbridge church.

Then a somber but lovely Ash Wednesday service helped us on our journey in earnest. And even though Lent is a time of serious contemplation, I've got to say that the Sundays during Lent were filled with light. The church building was buzzing with activity in every room during our experiment with Sunday school for all ages at 9:30 and worship for all ages at 10:30. Every corner held Sunday school classes for children, and also the adults studying Isaiah with the inspiring leadership of The Rev. Rick Floyd and The Rev. Brent Damrow. One Sunday, I was in the Isaiah study and could hear the choir rehearse across the hall and the children's class talking behind the green partition, while other age groups studied down the hall and up in 7<sup>th</sup> Heaven, and the bell choir practiced in the sanctuary. Such energy!

And the worship services! First of all, the thought and artistry in Brent's sculpting of these services was masterful. And so much participation from children, helping the deacons ring the steeple bell to call the neighborhood to church, lighting the candles to represent the beginning of worship, handing out bulletins, taking the offering, and leading us in the Call to Worship with great poise. I witnessed everyone in the congregation smiling with the joy of it. I see some terrific deacons in our future. And Terry's two roads helped us beautifully on our journey. How about the children's Prodigal Son feast? Kudos for the Cleverest Coffee Hour. Ever. In the History of the World.

Palm/Passion Sunday was amazing, with a dramatic reading of the story. Having the children bring forward all the symbols of the story was very meaningful. And as Jeremy snuffed the candle and Cathy put the black cloth over the cross, many were moved to tears. Thank you to those who went the extra mile by helping Brent lead services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Special blessings to those who got up early to help with the Easter Sunrise service.

The 10:00 am Easter Worship Service was a time of beauty, wonder and alleluias. Jackie's flowers were gorgeous. We all loved the unveiling and unpacking of Terry's alleluia butterflies. I found it very humbling to read the scripture about the empty tomb ... had to will myself not to cry during that history-pivoting story. Brent's reflection was meaningful and amazing. Thank you to all deacons on duty for ushering and taking the offering for a recent record 261 congregants. Ran out of bulletins, but that's kind of a cool problem to have. The choir was inspiring, especially the Hallelujah Chorus with rainbow ribbons waving. And thank you to all (Amy, Casey, Ted, et al) who worked with the Easter bunny to prepare an adorable and well-orchestrated Easter Egg Hunt with so many brightly colored symbols of God's abundant love.



And Easter Sunday is, of course, not just a sweet ending to a nice story that happened long ago. It's only the beginning of new life and power bursting forth, with Jesus calling us to go out into the world and share his message with the world, living his kingdom of love into being. He is risen indeed!

*Cindy Brown, chair of Board of Deacons*

# EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS

## Art News

### “Meditative Mandala Creations”

A group of artistic enthusiasts is being formed on Thursday May 9<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. followed by three successive Thursdays in May. The purpose of this group will be to participate in a meditative process and creating a mandala design.

Many religious art creations include mandalas which have their roots in the Hindu religion and are also represented in the Christian faith’s rose windows in cathedrals and churches throughout the world as well as in God’s nature of flowers and snowflake designs, etc.

The process of creating a mandala design is very easy to learn and may be elaborated to extremely complex designs. The first session will be limited to five people, so please sign up in the JE Room (see the bulletin board) ASAP for the May 9<sup>th</sup> session. You may wish to bring your own supplies of a pencil, eraser, ruler, colored pencils or pens and a compass; paper and other supplies will be provided. Please contact me at (413) 644-9846 if you have any questions.

Olga Schwede



## Church Grounds Cleanup Day(s)

Over a couple of Saturdays in April, a dozen hard-working volunteers put on their work gloves and set to cleaning up the church grounds. Thanks to all who helped! (And there will always be a next time should you be inspired.)



## Sundays in May—Full of Grace

During the month of May, each Sunday will have great opportunities for engagement. Here are some highlights of what is coming:

- ◇ **May 5th**—Baptism of Gwendolyn Evans and Annual Birthday Party
  - ◆ Together we will welcome Gwendolyn to the church and make promises to her and her family.
  - ◆ In Cinco de Mayo style we will feast and celebrate anyone who had a birthday last year.
- ◇ **May 12th**—Gould Farm Sunday
  - ◆ Before worship, all are invited to a special Mother’s Day Pancake Breakfast featuring Gould Farm products and served by the Board of Mission and Action. Donations for your meal will gladly be accepted and all proceeds will go to Gould Farm.
  - ◆ In worship we will remember the teachings of Jesus to care for and serve others. Part of that will be thinking about how we engage a place like Gould Farm with our hands and hearts.
  - ◆ Following worship, we hope to be able to introduce the congregation to the wide opportunities for engagement with Gould Farm.
- ◇ **May 19th**—Annual Meeting Sunday
  - ◆ In worship we will encounter a text that reminds us that we are in a long line of faithful. We will remember those who have gone before, those who have long served this congregation, and those who will follow us.
  - ◆ After worship we will celebrate the year that has been, share some new and exciting programs, elect new leadership and enjoy the pleasure of each other’s company.

### **Berkshire Conversation Project Wraps up Successful Dialogue Launch**

As we gathered for worship on Ash Wednesday in 2018, word drifted in about another mass shooting – this time in Parkland Florida. That following Sunday, Pastor Brent invited all to gather and consider what, if anything we were called to do in response. Through bi-weekly meetings at the Stockbridge Library a broad community organization began to form and slowly the commitment to try and engage in dialogue.

From that the Berkshire Conversation Project was born with a focus to consider safety in our schools and public places as it relates to firearms. Its mission is to create a safe space for listening deeply to the stories and concerns of our fellow community members by engaging one another in respectful dialogue. It strives to gain a greater understanding of the issues involved and to explore a path toward a stronger sense of community and freedom from fear.

In March and April more than twenty people gathered every other Wednesday evening to utilize a structured format to share our own stories and histories related to firearms, to lift up the strength of our community and schools, to consider the kind of environment we yearn for in relationship to



learning and firearms, and to consider what, if anything, we now feel compelled to do.

The process was a great success and the group strongly feels there is a future for our work. We look forward to sharing more once we have had the chance to review and celebrate.



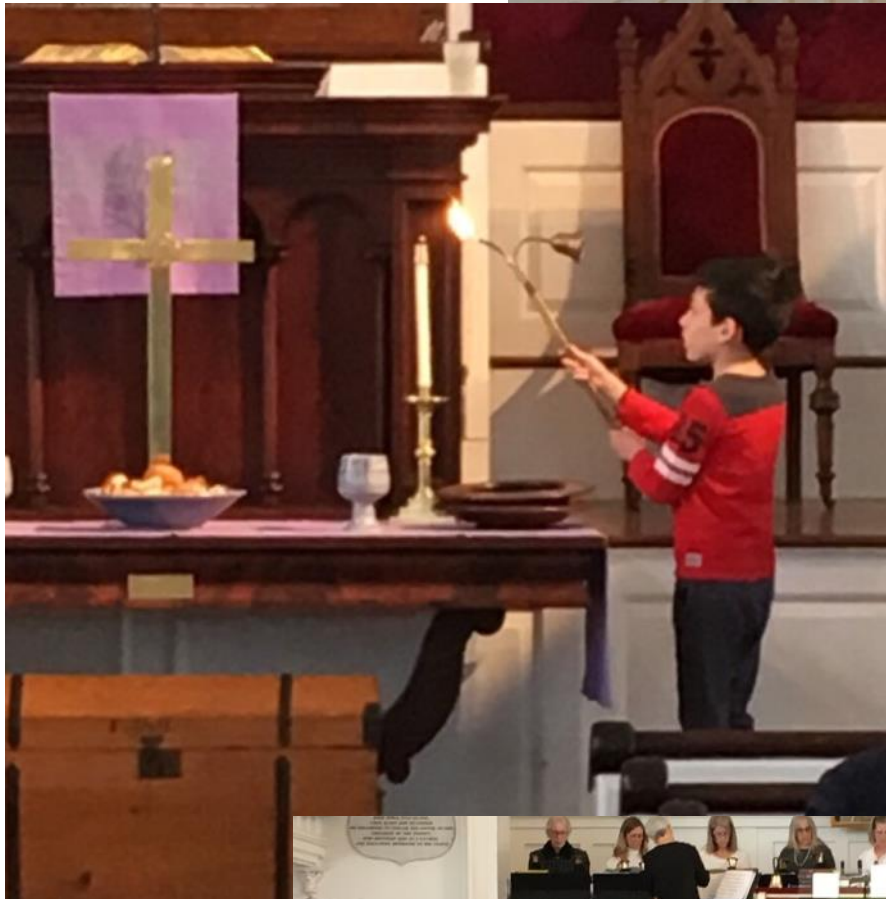
Pictures (from top to bottom)

Bells bring a musical element to Lent.

The youth respond to a parable with an amazing coffee hour!







Pictures (from top to bottom)

Kids leading worship:

Processing with Palms

Bringing the light of Christ

Collecting our gifts





Easter brings life and joy to the First Congregational Church. Alleluia!