

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

July 2019 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

“And so, with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees, just as things grow in fast movies, I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer.”

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

It is not a liturgical season, but there is a sacredness in the Berkshires with the coming of the summer. There is the most odd combination of the permission, if not encouragement to slow down and idle along with the simultaneous onrush of people and the crush of things to do. I know in my family there is already talk of afternoons on the lawn at Tanglewood and evenings at Naumkeag.

Here at the church we have been hard at work imagining a structure for worship that invites us to come in simplicity and grace; to linger in the company of God and neighbor; and to find refreshment and peace. Cathy is hard at work recruiting musicians to add meaning and beauty. The lectionary has provided a gift in the Letter to the Colossians which invites us to reimagine where our lives are centered, to live into that truth, and be filled with joy at the blessings of life.

The service will flow in three sections. We will begin with an extended time of welcome honoring what we bring with us to church and lifting our

prayers to God and one another. The center of the service will be on the reading from Colossians and the reflection that will offer a brief look at the context of the reading and then put the reading in dialogue with something in our current world and the prayers of the morning. The final section of the service will invite us to go out to the world in service and love. We will be using a different song book for summer worship that includes familiar favorites, kid-friendly songs, new words put to tunes you know,

and some brand-new pieces of music.

We are listening to the feedback you are sharing regarding the Lenten Experiment. Since there will not be Sunday School in the summer, we have designed the worship service to welcome and engage the kids (especially in the beginning and end of the hour). During the reading and

reflection, we will offer a fifteen to twenty-minute arts and crafts activity in the Nursery. We need one volunteer each Sunday to make this work. For more information, please look at page 6 of this newsletter or call the church office.

May the beauty of this sacred season invite life to begin anew and may the worship of God be at the heart of it all, empowering, inspiring and equipping us ever deeper into a life of faith, meaning, and beauty.

Brent



OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER

HAPPY JULY BIRTHDAYS

(Please let someone on the Board of Growth and Fellowship know if we missed your birthday or listed it incorrectly.)

July 1	Gary Schieneman	July 9	Tom Ruffing
July 2	Vicky Cooper	July 11	Jill Fleming
July 4	Carl Bradford	July 14	Jay Wise
	Frank Russell	July 15	Marjorie Dix
July 5	Maddie Alsdorf	July 16	Patricia Strauch
July 6	Conor Hall	July 17	Margaret Hornick
July 7	Christine Rasmussen		Teresa Gentile
July 8	Mia Freeman	July 21	Eric Germain
	Morgan Middlebrook	July 24	Aiden Germain
		July 25	Steve Hassmer
		July 28	Hazel Slocombe
			Morgan Dix

PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS:

Pat Carlson, Sibylle Baier, Diane Vogt, Gary Burke, Mary Jane Dunlop, David Eiseman, grandson of Anne and Gary Fix; Nell Ezequelle, Stan Osak, Jr., Joyce Hovey, Lindsay Hermanski, Aleva Henderson, Philip Connor, Colin Cunningham, son of Ronnie Cunningham; Gege Kingston, Barbara Bracknell, Ann Underwood, Betsey McKearnan, Jen Germain, and Jeanne Fleming.



Shopping local is a good thing. It supports our community and provides meaningful employment for many. It is good.

There are also times when shopping local is either not possible or given the circumstances, practical.

We want to alert you to a relationship the church has through the AmazonSmile program. Should you purchase things on Amazon, we invite you to enter the site by way of [amazon smile.com](https://www.amazon.com/smile) and then select our church as your designated recipient. When you purchase things that way, a small percentage of your spending comes back to the church. We are not endorsing or encouraging purchasing at Amazon, rather simply inviting those who do, to take advantage of this relationship that will help the church.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE CHURCH

REPORTS FROM BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND SERVICE LEAGUE

Board of Christian Education

June 9 was CE Sunday and the kids rocked it. In addition to participating in the service as readers, they (and some of their teachers) put on a “radio play” complete with sound crew. Tearing of clothes, an earthquake, a party...it was so exciting. Interested in having this much fun? CE is starting plans for next year and wonders if you are interested in teaching. If so, contact Diane Piraino (chair) or another committee member.

Meanwhile, we are looking for summer help to assist in supervising kids in the middle of the service by doing art projects with them. There is a sign up sheet in the JE room.

And while you're there, you can sign up for a summer reading group on *The Second Mountain*, by David Brooks, an exploration of what it means to lead a meaningful life.

Diane Piraino, Chair

Personnel Committee

There is a personnel committee listed in the by-laws of the church. The personnel committee is comprised of a member of most of the boards of the church, two “at-large” church members and the Pastor is ex-officio. They are the “reviewers” of the paid staff at the church which includes Pastor, Minister of Music, Church Administrator, Financial Secretary, and Nursery Attendant. This committee (*See below*) is sort of an HR department, and all information is confidential. The committee is as follows:

Madonna Meagher, Chair, songbirdmm@gmail.com

Jeremy Ridenour, Board of Deacons, jeremy.ridenour@gmail.com

Joan Kopperl, Board of Music, jhkopperl@gmail.com

Hal Brink, At-large, brink725@gmail.com

Carl Bradford, At-large, bradfordc39@gmail.com

Pastor Brent Damrow, Ex-Officio, bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org

Rev. Rick Floyd, advisor to the group, rfloyd@berkshire.rr.com

Your writer’s cramp probably reminds you that we have been working hard in the last month finalizing and distributing questionnaires for you to fill out. The positions of Church Administrator, Pastor, and Music Minister are the first three to be evaluated. There has been a big push to get as much feedback forms returned before the choir ends and summer casualness in church attendance begins.

The Personnel Committee has asked for feedback from:

The Congregation: Church Administrator, Congregational Self-Study (information for Pastor review), and Minister of Music.

Peer Reviews: Church Administrator, Pastor, and Minister of Music.

Self-Reviews: Church Administrator Will Garrison, Pastor Brent Damrow, and Minister of Music Catherine Schane-Lydon.

We also held two after church meetings on June 23rd & 30th (while Brent was away) for you to express your thoughts and feelings about how the Pastor is doing and overall church is being run. If you didn’t attend one of those sessions, or didn’t fill out a questionnaire, it’s not too late. We welcome you talking individually to any one of us or emailing us with any additional comments.

As a reminder why all these positions are being focused on at this time, I remind you of my last entry in the newsletter. Our church has not lived up to its commitment giving staff reviews on a timely basis. Our Pastor has never had a review since he was Called as our minister six years ago, and our Minister of Music was last reviewed four years ago. Those two positions are critical to our worshiping and growing in Christ each week. Our Church Administrator is brand new and deserved a six-month review.

It is clear that we are not the same church body as we were over six years ago. We need each and everyone coming to our church to fill out the questionnaire/feedback forms. If you think about it, doesn’t every employee deserve to have updates and guidance on job performance? Isn’t it nice to hear about strengths you bring to a job?

Please be part of this important work, we are all the employers of these fine employees. All your comments and signed feedback forms are confidential. Please place your forms in the lock box located in the JE Room under the signup sheets on the closet door.

Respectfully submitted,

Madonna Meagher, Chair Personnel Committee



Service League

Last call before the Summer Fair! We're still collecting contributions for Grandma's Attic, and giving a last heads up: Saturday, August 10, 10:00 - 2:00, come to the Jonathan Edwards Room to shop for fresh flowers and produce, baked goods, crafts, a delicious lunch, and more. If you get a call from Nell Ezequelle asking for a donation to the baked goods table, please say yes (but no nuts, please).

The school and hygiene kits we sent to Church World Service joined with over 100,000 others to be transported to individuals and families in refugee camps around the world. These supplies are so desperately need and deeply appreciated. We couldn't have done it without you!

Thank you, as always, for your support!

Margaret Hornick

Sexton Hired to Care for the Church

At the June Meeting, the Church Council at the recommendation of the Board of Trustees unanimously and enthusiastically voted to establish a trial job description for a Church Sexton and to hire Will Garrison to fill that role, in addition to his duties as Administrator.

This comes after a multi-year process of exploration, discussion and planning on behalf of the Trustees to imagine a position that can continue to provide cleaning while also helping with set-up needs/external events and establishing a mechanism to care for our buildings and grounds. The proposed solution is designed to stay within the budget currently allocated for cleaning alone. While the Trustees and Council believe that the job description and cost analysis are accurate, they are hiring Will in a six-month trial period beginning July 1st with a thorough review to be conducted in October.

In addition to day-to-day duties, this model will put a set of eyes on the building in a way where we can address small issues before they become large, ensure the safety of the building in inclement weather, and make sure that the buildings are beautifully cared for and representative of the vibrancy of our congregation. As Trustee Jon Geldert reflected, "Having a paid staff person on site to both maintain and oversee the long-term health of our buildings and grounds will ensure that fewer things fall through the cracks. It will also give the Trustees a partner who can more effectively implement Trustee objectives than an all-volunteer board could on its own."

As part of this process, the approved job description calls for Will to attend monthly Trustee meetings and closely collaborate with them on larger projects. Already Will is collaborating with the Trustees to consider a new system of interior and exterior signage to make the building more welcoming and user-friendly to our visitors and congregation. Church Moderator Deb McMenemy stated, "The Church Council is delighted that the Trustees have found a way to create and fund a Sexton position for the Church. We consider ourselves very blessed to have Will Garrison willing and available to fill this role. He is experienced in the care of historic buildings and he has already demonstrated an excellent ability to care for the Church and anticipate our needs. How fortunate we are."

Please welcome Will into his new role. If you have any questions or want more information, please contact the Chair of the Board of Trustees, Joe Nicolosi; Deb McMenemy; or Pastor Brent.



Board of Deacons

The new Board of Deacons began their June meeting with a reading from Sue Monk Kidd about connections:

We are each a thread woven into the vast web of the universe linked and connected so that our lives are irrevocably bound up with one another. I looked at those faces around the circle in a new way. The old adage, “I am my brother’s keeper”—or in this case, my sister’s keeper—melted into something new: I am my sister.

The new Deacons are already experiencing loving care as we learn how to serve the church by preparing the sanctuary for the Sunday worship service. We’ve had lots of support: instruction; a checklist of duties; experts to consult. At least one of us (*me*) has received a loving smile of reassurance after making a mistake in the service. We’re learning a complex routine to make worship beautiful, with minimal distraction and maximum focus on receiving and understanding God’s love.

I am exploring opportunities to care for our brothers and sisters. I’ve enjoyed every opportunity, thanks to supportive instruction, collaboration, and assistance. Hosting the coffee hour is daunting until I learn about written directions in the kitchen, and friendly members of Growth and Fellowship show me how to use the coffee makers and sterilize the dishes. (Both easy-peasy with a bit of friendly supervision the first time!)

Choir is a great way to meet people and lift one’s voice. Cathy Schane-Lydon’s direction is friendly and low key: “Let’s run through that again,” Cathy says at rehearsal when there’s a horribly wrong note from a soprano (*me, again*) in what should be a nicely tuneful chord. And when I apologize for having to miss practice, Cathy says: “This is a guilt-free choir, Elizabeth! No worries!”



Mission and Action’s and Service League’s opportunities provide easy, organized, regular ways to participate in our local community: donations to the food pantry, a summer program for hungry kids, and/or Church World Service, for example. The Holly Fair at Christmas provided pleasing gifts for my family, and this summer I will relinquish some knick-knacks to Grandma’s Attic and enjoy making chutney and jam for the food booth at the upcoming summer sale too.

A friend is enthusiastic about her experiences teaching Sunday School. “We have fun craft supplies,” she said, “and the kids are great!” I, who have no children of my own, find myself

thinking, “Hmm. I can read stories aloud. I can do crafts. These kids in our church are awfully nice, fun, smart and friendly—” Yikes! I am getting perilously close to *volunteering* to teach a Sunday School class! I quickly shut my brain down. (I’m secretly scared of children.) Someone inside whispers, *Maybe it’s time to get over that fear?*

Opportunities abound here. I am a person who wants to connect with my sisters and brothers, and practice sharing God’s love. Perhaps you are too? If I, or any of the other Deacons, can help you try something here at church, please let us know. We are God’s children together.

Elizabeth Young on behalf of the Board of Deacons (Cathy Clark, Margo Davis, Joshua Hall, Donna Jacobs, Casey Jones, Jim McMenemy, and Jeremy Ridenour)

Photo: CE Sunday, June 2



Summer Activities for Children during Worship – HELP NEEDED

Based on some preliminary feedback from the Lenten Experiment, we know that people enjoyed having children engaged in worship and yet it was also difficult for parents (especially during times like the sermon). This Summer, we have designed worship to engage our kids at the beginning and end of worship in many ways. While all kids would be welcome to stay and listen to the reading and sermon, we want to provide a casual opportunity outside of worship for kids to engage during those fifteen to twenty minutes.

We are developing a series of stand-alone arts and crafts exercises related to our faith life that kids can do for those fifteen to twenty minutes. We will have premade packets in the classroom ready to be put into action. What we need are some VOLUNTEERS to lead these activities. You need not be a Sunday School teacher (although those are welcome too) – you need not be an expert crafter – we just want someone who wants to spend some fun time with our great kids for ONE SUNDAY.

It would probably be helpful to stop by the church in advance and look at the crafts so you know which one you want to do and how it works, but on Sunday all you need to do is spend a few minutes setting up the room with the provided supplies and then leave worship with the kids before the reading and come back after the sermon. Sign-up sheets are in the JE Room. If you have questions, feel free to contact the church office.

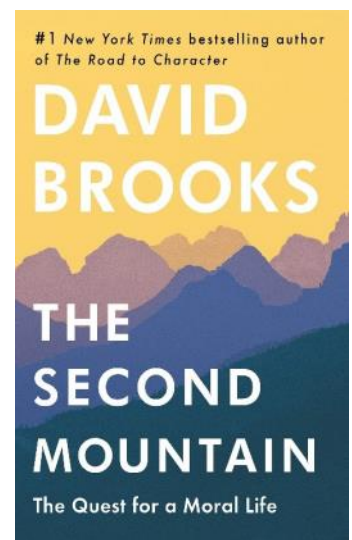
We plan to have crafts ready to go starting on July 7th and running through the Labor Day Weekend (nine Sundays). With just nine volunteers giving a half hour of time, we can make Summer Worship great for our kids and their parents too. We hope you might consider helping!

EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS

Summer Book Read Update

More than 25 people have signed up to participate in our summer read. In addition, people from St. Paul's Church and from Christ Trinity Church (Sheffield) have likewise expressed interest in reading and talking. We are going to be using the Small Group model introduced through the Vision Implementation Group to bring people together. This model places the emphasis as much on relationship building as it does on learning. We hope that the small groups will include people from each church as a way of broadening the conversation and making new friendships.

On July 7th, we will release a list of different groups you can join. Each one will have eight or so folks in it. They might meet twice or four times. They might meet at a church, a home, or somewhere else. Each group will have a "convener" who will be provided with a study guide to the book to help make things easier for you. The point, though, is that you enjoy, you meet each other, and you learn – it's summer after all!



Art News

Flowers in the Jonathan Edwards Room

There is an art “Flower Show” in the JE Room through August, featuring works by Jeannene Booher, Cindy Brown, John McKinstry, Olga Schwede, and Terry Wise. Anyone wishing to purchase an art piece, please contact the artist – the purchase price contains a 20% contribution to the church. Questions? Contact Olga Schwede, (413) 644-9846.

Wild Flowers, painted in Provence, France.
Jeannene Booher

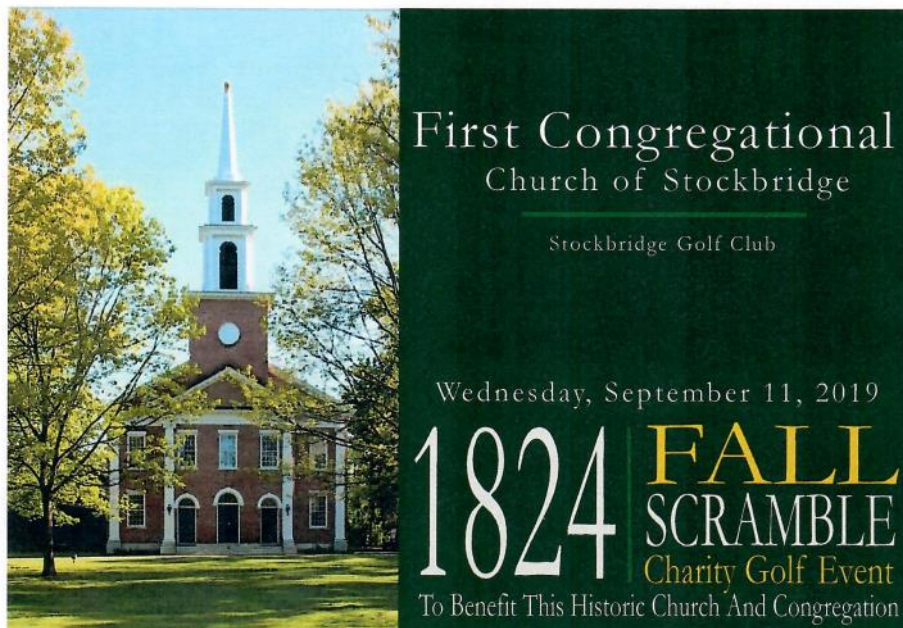


Take part in our Council Fundraiser – the Golf Scramble!!

This year we will take to the links on September 11 to raise money for the care of our historic buildings and vibrant programs. In last month’s newsletter, we sent you the flyer and sign-up forms. This month we ask for your assistance. Here are some ways you can help:

- Help field a team! If you play golf, get a foursome together. If not, talk to those you know who do and encourage them. (If you need another sign-up sheet, call the office, we have more on hand.)
- Share the sponsorship opportunities with businesses or organizations you know.
- Sign-up in the JE Room to volunteer. We will need all kinds of help both on the day of the event and leading up to it. Let us know if you can help, and we will pair you with something you would like to do.

Deep thanks to our committee (Jim and Deb McMenamy, Nick Pohl, Jorja Marsden, and Pastor Brent), to the Service League who will be providing the side dishes for the lunch, Will for his logistical support, and all others who will get involved to make this happen.



Summer Kids Choir

The church is hosting a brief summer Ecumenical Kids Choir for children in kindergarten through grade 8, free of charge. Rehearsal dates are Sunday, July 28 and August 4 from 2:00pm-3:00pm. The concert will be held at 2:00pm on Sunday, August 11, with dress rehearsal beginning at 1:15pm that same day. Free will donations toward a local charity will be collected at the concert. Both spirited and soulful music will be mostly unison with maybe one or two rounds and/or two-part pieces. Directed by Jill Wheat and accompanied by Dr. Gene Kalish. Please email Jill the names and ages of your interested family members. For more info: songsailormusic@yahoo.com.

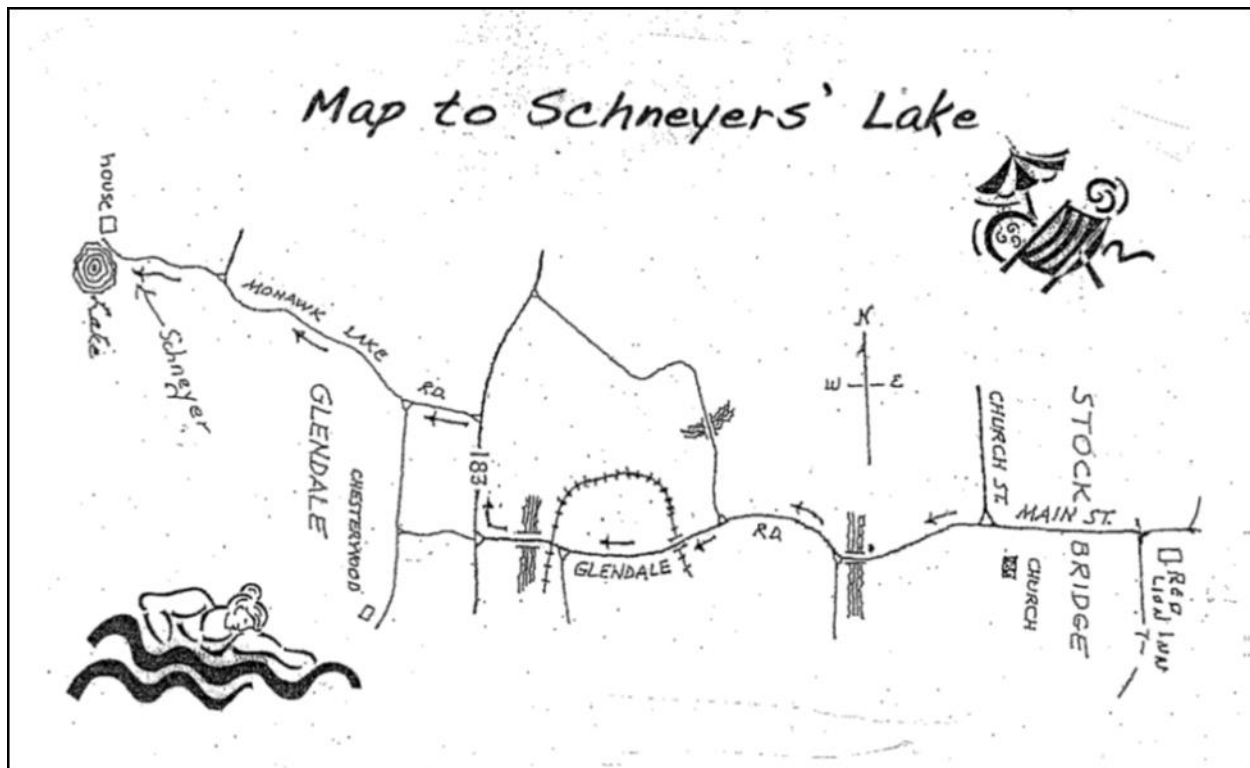


All Church Picnic: Sunday, July 14th at 12:00 noon (rain date: July 21)

YOU are invited to the All Church Picnic at the Schneyers' gazebo and lawn overlooking picturesque Mohawk Lake in Glendale (map below). This is a relaxed time of picnicking, fellowship, swimming, and boating for all members of our congregation – your friends and family are welcome too. We're asking everyone to bring their own meat or main dish – a grill will be available. Please also bring a dish to share: salad, side dish, dessert, or munchies. Drinks, condiments, burger and hot dog buns, paper products, and ice will be provided.

This is a great day to come to church dressed for a picnic. Just don't forget to pack your bathing suit, towel, sand toys, hat, sunscreen, bug repellent, and a chair or blanket. Floaties for small children are fine, but please don't bring any large rafts or boats. There are boats available at the lake. The Schneyers have a house next to the lake where we can change clothes or use the restroom.

Please note that parents are responsible for their own children's safety. Mohawk Lake is a private lake and our hosts kindly request no fishing, no outside boats, and no dogs. Carpooling is encouraged as parking is somewhat limited. If it rains (which it won't!), we are currently planning a rain date for the following Sunday. Any questions, ask Ted, Diane, Nell, or Patty Fadding.





Pictures (from top to bottom)
The last day of choir, June 16.
CE Sunday, complete with a radio
play, June 9.

NEW MEMBERS



Brian Farrell

My first career was in acting, unless you count two very long months teaching music in a rough and tumble high school in New Jersey. Not a good fit! I subsequently covered a lot of ground in show business, from appearing on Broadway opposite Julie Harris to getting married on “The Love Boat.” I can only hope that wasn’t legal. I haven’t seen the bride since.

Not long after that I made the wise decision to segue into residential real estate, first in Los Angeles/Beverly Hills, then Cape Cod, then New York City, and now the beautiful and peaceful Berkshires. All the while I’ve sung in one chorus or another, from Northfield Mount Hermon School to Berkshire Lyric, which is how I found my new church home. Many thanks, Jack!



Don and Charlotte Rodgers

Don and Charlotte recently moved from the Boston area to Lee, MA. Charlotte is originally from Columbus, Ohio, and met Don when he came to Ohio State for graduate school. They are both huge Ohio State Buckeye football fans! They love entertaining friends and family, gardening, travel, hiking, and birding - and living closer to daughter Beth.



Beth Rodgers

Beth has lived in Stockbridge, at Riverbrook Residence, for almost eight years! She graduated from Cotting School in Lexington, MA. Beth enjoys a variety of employment and volunteer opportunities, including working in the First Congregational Church kitchen, making coasters at Riverbrook on Main, and helping to deliver Meals on Wheels to local residents. Her newest adventure is horseback riding at Blue Rider Stables.



Corinne Burke

I'm married to a wonderful man, Gary Burke. We're both retired. Since Gary had a stroke, I take care of him; we work together.

I like to listen to Elvis Presley music and collect Elvis items. We like to go for walks for exercise. My husband and I are going to celebrate our 12-year anniversary on July 7. We have three beautiful children, Jason, Christopher, and Crystal.



Kara, Eric, Ella, Parker, and Gianna Smith

Kara and Eric, life-long residents of the Berkshires, live in Richmond, MA and are proud parents of Ella, Parker and Gianna. Eric grew up in Richmond; Kara is from Lenox. They both work at a local non-profit human service agency where Eric is the Food Services Director and Kara is the Director of Fiscal and Administrative Services.

Kara recently joined the Board of Trustees and has also volunteered to be a Sunday School classroom helper. Ella will be a junior at Lenox Memorial High School; Parker will be in the 7th grade and Gianna will start Kindergarten at Richmond Consolidated School.

They enjoy spending time with their families, going to the beach, having backyard barbecues and cheering on the Boston sports teams. They are an active family who participates in volleyball, baseball, running, skiing, tennis, basketball, hiking, and gymnastics.



Ken Ward

Becket, MA.

Biography to come.



Susan Moor

Before moving to Stockbridge in 2017, I took a circuitous route through NY, OH, CT, VA, MA and VT. I live very happily with my husband Terry and our dog, Homer – this is our final home.

Retired now, my work experience was varied and interesting: working for an airline, an insurance company, child protective services, a law school library, the travel industry and for the Alzheimer's Association, specializing in working with individuals and families affected by dementia.

Together, Terry and I have four children and 11 grandchildren who visit us from time to time in the Berkshires. We all love the hiking trails and cultural events and they all enjoy skiing and in warm weather walking along the river looking for snakes and salamanders. Terry and I are still working on our house and garden and both are a labor of love. We enjoy traveling visiting different countries in Europe in the winter, enjoying the Berkshires during the spring and summer. How lucky we are that we have found the warmth, vitality and beauty of this area!

Welcoming new members, June 16.



