

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

August 2019 Newsletter

Dear Friends in Christ,

Amazing! Sacrificial! Loving! Transformational! These are words at the center of our faith and our shared life. They are aspirational, beautiful, and meaningful. They also fully apply to the attitude, approach and accomplishments of a group of people who have been tirelessly working on a critical process within our church. The group is the Personnel Committee (Carl Bradford, Hal Brink, Joan Kopperl, Jeremy Ridenour and Chaired by Madonna Meagher)

After being charged by Council six months ago to fulfill the by-laws of our church is supporting our staff and congregation through personnel feedback and evaluation, they have been meeting, often weekly, to revise and develop instruments, to seek input, and to carefully and openly discuss the gathered information. As you receive this newsletter, they have completed writing their reviews and begun meeting with our staff. This is a critically important aspect of ensuring that our staff are getting both the challenge and support they need to bring vitality to our church.

This will be the first chance I have had to formally receive feedback since I arrived nearly seven years ago. Smart Church Management reports that we are not unique – some 40% of church employees **never** receive evaluations. This process not only will provide our staff with information about the way they do their work, the Personnel Committee has also intentionally incorporated questions about the overall health and vitality of the administration, worship, music, service, fellowship, and educational programming of our church. Thanks to their hard work we will be in a much better position and place to continue following the call of God in our life

together and answering our mission to be God's love in the world.

I thank the congregation too for their active input. Hundreds of feedback forms were received and read. Multiple conversations took place where both individuals and groups shared their thoughts and experiences. The Personnel Committee asked for your engagement – and you responded. Shortly our staff will have received feedback, goals will be set, and our Church Council will have received a snapshot of how the congregation sees our church at this moment.

I am grateful and yet also hopeful that this is not an ending but a beginning. We need you to continue to offer feedback – both joy for things well done and suggestions for how we might do things better. We have systems in place to receive feedback and to help our staff. Both Cathy and I have groups who function as confidential sounding boards. They are groups selected by Council and us to be safe places for dialogue and planning. My group consists of Miles Wheat, Margaret Hornick, Diane Piraino, and Ron Hanft. Cathy's is still being formed but, in the meantime, you can contact David Anderegg. You can give me feedback about any staff member. The Trustees (Chair Joe Nicolosi) are a great place to share feedback on Will in his role as Sexton. The Board of Music (Chair Jack Brown) welcomes comments on our Music while the Deacons (Chairs Cathy Clark and Elizabeth Young) are here to listen to your experiences about worship. If something is important, please let us know. Thank you for the way you participate in the life of our church and the deep ways you care about our mission.

In Deep Gratitude and Love,

Brent

OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER

HAPPY AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

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

August 2 Jacob Geldert Damrow

August 6 Susan Moyle Lynch

August 8 Muriel Wermuth

August 9 Ashley Collins

August 13 Barbara Bracknell

Ronnie Cunningham

Mariah Parise

Janet Canning

August 14 Kinney Frelinghuysen

Kim Ruffing

August 17 Helen McCormick

Mary Lou Ryce

August 18

Nora Randolph

Linda Hoddy

August 21

Emily Brown

Joan Nimmo

Linda Russell

Miles Wheat

August 23

Jennifer Germain

August 24

Joe Roy

August 25

Kyle Germain

Natalie Doerr

August 26

Jon Geldert

August 27

David Cooper

August 29

Joshua Hall

Wayne Dix

August 31

Steven Bankert

PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS:

The family of Ann Underwood, Jill Fleming and her daughter Sophia, Alice Ruffing's sister and family, Emily Chernof, Patty Strauch, Jean Damrow, 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, Aleva Henderson; Philip Connor; Colin Cunningham, son of Ronnie Cunningham; Gege Kingston; Barbara Bracknell; Betsey McKearnan; Jen Germain; and Jeanne Fleming.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE CHURCH

REPORTS FROM BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND SERVICE LEAGUE

Board of Christian Education

We did indeed have the perfect day for the All Church Picnic on July 14th. About twenty-nine of us made it to Mohawk Lake to enjoy the hospitality of the Schneyers, who provided not just the idyllic setting, but also their customary glad welcome and all the drinks and paper goods, grill, etc., leaving us to little else to do but enjoy -- each other, the lake, the food, the shade, the sun. Our thanks go out to our hosts!

[N.B.: While not specifically a CE sponsored event, many helpers this year were from CE.]

At our meeting this month we discussed forming a search committee to oversee the hiring of someone to replace Paige Storti as Nursery Care Provider. We made a preliminary assessment of our Sunday School situation including expected enrollment and available teachers. Finally, we talked about the major items on our calendar this year, including Rally Day, Advent Celebration, Pageant, the Easter Egg Hunt, and, of course, CE Sunday.

Ted Randolph



Personnel Committee

In the July monthly newsletter, I described the workings of all the review templates that the committee is creating and to whom they are being focused: the positions of Pastor, the Minister of Music and the Church Administrator. There has been a big push to get as many feedback forms returned so that everyone who attends our church, member or non-member, can give confidential, honest feedback about how we are doing as a church, and how the church employees are helping us sustain a vibrant, growing church.

I'll admit, I've pushed and nudged all of you to fill out the surveys. I'm pleased to report that over 60 questionnaires were returned for the Minister of Music position, nearly 80 have been returned for the Pastor review, and at least 30 were returned for the Church Administrator position. That smaller number is a good response since the Church Administrator is in his first year plus many of us are still getting to know him and all the tasks he does in the office.

The more feedback forms that are returned, the stronger the data we have to clearly marvel in our strengths as a church and the more "atta'-girl/atta'-boy" kudos for jobs well done. They also help to identify the areas where we can grow as a church, to reflect about our roles as congregants, and to identify what each of us can do to make our community of faith stronger.

I want to take a moment to give a HUGE shout out to the hard working members of this Personnel Committee: Jeremy Ridenour, Carl Bradford, Joan Kopperl, Hal Brink and of course our indefatigable Pastor Brent. We were meeting every two weeks during the months of February-May but as more surveys were returned and we had more data to sort through, we now meet almost every week. It's hard work, but amazing work. How often do any of us get to serve on a committee that can have lasting effects?

We needed each and every one of you to "lift up your voice" and tell us what you think. A majority of you have. And if you would still like to, we're all ears—email us, snail mail us, phone us, or put a note in the lock box in the JE Room. Please be part of this important work.

And finally, as a sales pitch, there is a spot open for another member to join our team shortly after these

three employee reviews are finalized. There is more work to do and it's not boring, it's uplifting. As the Life cereal ad on TV once stated, "Try it you'll like it."

The personnel committee is comprised of a member of most of the boards of the church and 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, Music Minister, Church Administrator, Financial Secretary, and Nursery Attendant. This committee is sort of a HR department, and all information is confidential. Our job is also to make recommendations to the Church Council, not to make any decisions about an employee of the church.

The committee:

- **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

Respectfully submitted,
Madonna Meagher, Chair Personnel Committee





Service League

I promise, this is the last reminder you will get about the upcoming Summer Fair. It's Saturday, August 10, 10:00 - 2:00 in the JE Room. Bring your family, your friends, and come to shop for produce, baked goods, crafts, and more. You'll have fun and you'll be contributing to good works at home and in the wider world!

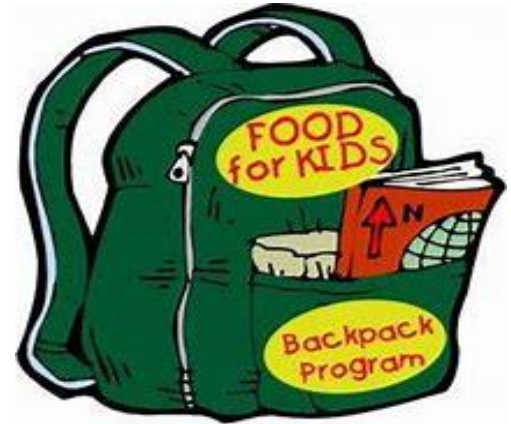
Thank you, as always, for your support!

Margaret Hornick

Muddy Brook School Backpack Project

Some families in the Berkshire Hills School District, who usually depend on school meals, face food insecurity in the summer. With our partners, Fairview Hospital and the Jewish Women's Federation, we will provide nutritious food July 11 to August 22.

Contributions still welcome: Triscuits, yogurt sticks, Cheerios-type cereal (no Honey Nuts or Apple Jacks), corn flakes, Life cereal and cheese sticks (We take apart the packages so bulk packaging is fine). Watch those sales! Please leave contributions in the kitchen.



Questions? Want to volunteer an hour on Thursdays at 12:30 at Monument Valley Middle School? Call Anne Hutchinson (413) 854-7798.

Church Vegetable Garden

Summer is upon us and the vegetable garden is thriving under the care of Sarah Boyd, Anna Smith, Liz Murray, Lenore Sundberg and Stephanie Bradford. Thanks to Bronly Boyd the church has new lightweight hoses along with a box for storage. The vegetable garden and Memorial Garden can now easily be watered as needed – and need it they did during the recent hot spell! We've been harvesting lettuce and radishes. Cucumbers and yellow squash are just coming into their own. Beans and tomatoes will follow in August. We've been donating to CHP (Community Health Program) in Great Barrington which serves many families in South County. If members of our church community would like to share in what's available, please get in touch with Will Garrison in the church office. He will be able to make arrangements for pick up. If you haven't seen the garden, stop by and take a look. It's lush with vegetables, herbs, marigolds and nasturtiums!

“God Almighty first planted a garden. And indeed, it is the purest of human pleasures.”

Francis Bacon
Essays 'Of
Gardens'(1625)



Board of Deacons

The Board of Deacons often discusses choices. For example, this summer we have an option for children to leave the service before the sermon to do a craft and return during the offering, or to stay in the sanctuary. Sounds simple, right?

But choices bring complications. They require decisions: who will lead the craft session? Who will leave the sanctuary and who will stay any particular Sunday—a potential negotiation on the part of parents and children!

Decisions highlight different needs: for example, the church's need to expand the cohort of adults working with the children; a child's need to practice separating from a parent, or sitting quietly through a sermon, or relating to other kids; a person's need to listen to a sermon or cultivate a child's interest in sermon or craft—many, many implications of seemingly simple decisions, with different benefits.

For some people, an active child in the sanctuary during the sermon might be a distraction; for others, a child in the sanctuary might signify the early cultivation of religious interests. The implications of the decisions bring different perspectives into play, and while there may be tension between distraction and learning to focus, the presence of both can in fact be enriching.

Yes, choices are usually enriching, even while they complicate situations and challenge us. Choices help us grow—as individuals and as a church. When there is choice, we learn about other people's perspectives: perhaps a discussion over Sunday dinner about learning to be still and know God, or an account of how to make a "God's Eye" out of yarn and sticks.

Choices also tend to increase participation. I may yet lead a craft for the children (those God's Eyes I loved as a child, perhaps?), and thereby become involved in Sunday school. I also notice that the number of families with children at our church far exceeds the number of families with children at other churches I have attended, perhaps because our options for children are varied, inclusive, and stimulating.

Increased participation leads to connection, and connection leads to intimacy: as a church we come

closer when we all attend to the needs of each other. Today after church, when I went over to say hi to Tommy Wheat, he got out of his chair and put his arms around my leg. Needless to say, my eyes filled with tears of joy.

Increased connection and intimacy lead to a strong sense of community, which allows us to experience the body of Christ: the warmth of fellowship, the hope of security, and the inspiration to relate to the world with love.

Choices require energy: planning, implementation, assessment, and more planning in the form of adjustment. Choices are ongoing, creative situations. As we experience choices in our spiritual life, from the small (which craft?) to the large (how to respond with love to the global changes that strike our hearts?), let's keep our eyes on the potential for growth and community, as we choose to participate and connect with each other.

Elizabeth Young for the Board of Deacons

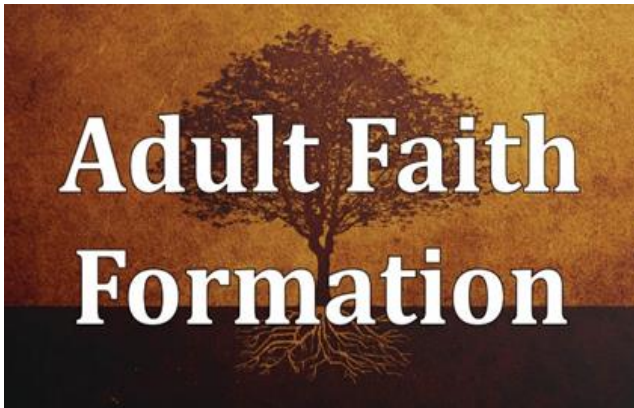
Summer Kids Choir Concert

August 11 at 2:00 p.m.

The church is hosting a brief summer Ecumenical Kids Choir for children in kindergarten through grade 8. Free will donations toward a local charity will be collected at the concert, held in the sanctuary. 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.
Info: songsailormusic@yahoo.com.



EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS



This Fall

Commit to Learning!

(No experience necessary.)

Wondering what to do this Fall when the kids go back to school, the leaves begin to tumble, and the days start to shorten? Why not consider one of our adult formation classes? Multiple studies confirm that Bible Studies and other learning opportunities are some of the best ways to deepen your faith and connect with other people from our church. Classes here at First Congregational Church welcome people who know a little or a lot, as well as people who have participated in dozens of studies, and those for whom this will be the first one.

There are two opportunities this fall for adults. Please contact Pastor Brent if you have any questions.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW: GOD WITH US

A fourteen week study beginning the week of September 9 and wrapping up mid December

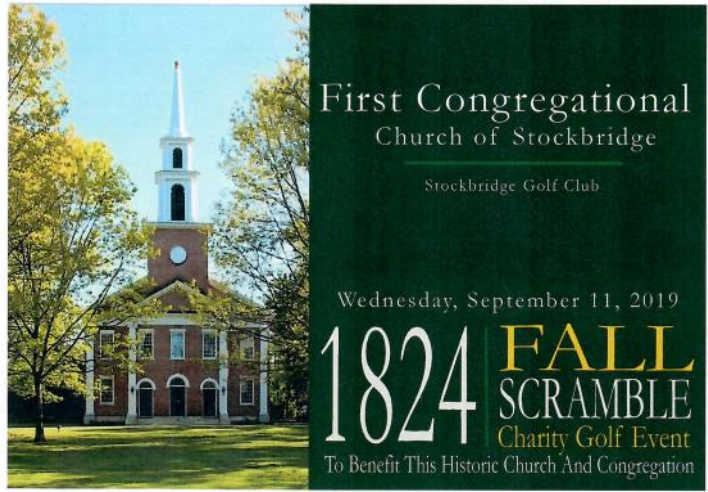
We chose this particular study because, in Advent, the lectionary will switch over to providing Sunday readings primarily from Matthew. This will give us the chance to learn more about the Gospel and to prepare for the coming year. This study, led by Pastor Brent, should work for people of all abilities and backgrounds, so feel free to sign up! A description from the publisher:

*With all we have to unite us, we still find ways to create division. It is an age-old question: do we focus on what sets us apart, or what holds us together? According to Matthew, it is Emmanuel, God with us. The First Evangelist and the new Christian community saw themselves first as part of Judaism, not separate from it. A distinguishing feature of the Gospel according to Matthew is its use of the Greek term *ekklesia*, which means an assembly of ones who are called out. It conveys nothing of the static conception of the word "church" held by many today. According to Matthew, the Church is an earthly manifestation of the kingdom of God, and it is comprised of Jesus' followers who have been called out to live righteously in the world and to serve in the manner of the Christ with deep humility and unfathomable forgiveness. In Jesus, there is a new community at work for the blessing of the world. What is it that binds us together? Jesus—God With Us.*

ANIMATE FAITH

An eight week study beginning the week of September 23 and ending the week of November 11

We chose this study because of the many people in the church who love coming to worship, being part of this community, and have expressed a desire to learn more about some of the basic concepts of Christianity. This study, featuring short clips from some of the leading contemporary voices, explores central topics like God, Religion, Jesus, Salvation, Cross, Bible and Church. Led by Pastor Brent, it is designed to be open to all questions.



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

We take to the links on September 11 to raise money for the care of our historic buildings and vibrant programs. 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. See form, below.
- 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.

Golfer Signup

Captain _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

_____ # of Golfers @ \$125 each: \$ _____

Optional donation: \$ _____

Total Enclosed: \$ _____

Team

Name _____

Contact _____

Name _____

Contact _____

Name _____

Contact _____

Please make checks payable to:

First Congregational Church
P.O. Box 825
Stockbridge MA 01262

Register by Email
office@stockbridgeucc.org

We Want Your News for the Newsletter

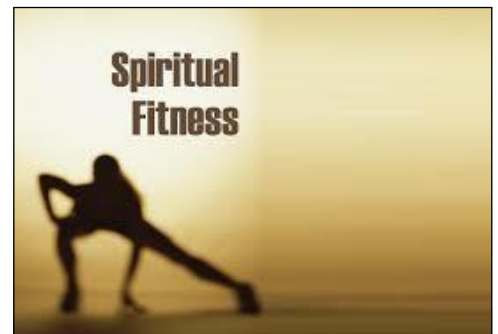
The goal of this Newsletter is to share with you things that matter. At the UCC conference I attended at the First Congregational Church in Madison, WI, I noticed that in their newsletter was a page devoted to information about the lives of the congregation, shared by the members. The news included everything from awards received, to art exhibitions, to a congregant sharing an update on his medical condition. It was a simple thing, but it struck me as to how valuable it is. We invite you to begin sharing information for the newsletter.

The deadline each month is the 20th. If you are sharing news about or for someone else, please make sure they are okay with it. One or two sentences would be perfect. Questions? Please give me or Will a call.

Thanks, Brent

Spiritual Training Update

In the June Newsletter, Pastor Brent invited folks to bring something about their faith they wanted to work on. So far, three people have come forward – each wanting to explore something a little bit different. Generally, the first meeting has been used to set the parameters for the work while the remaining three sessions used to do the work. One has requested the chance to look at how the way Jesus worked might inform their own occupation, another to explore issues of privilege and justice, while the third is trying to identify ways to incorporate more intentional faith practices in a busy life.



If you are interested in exploring something, please reach out to Pastor Brent.

Sexton Update

At the beginning of July, Will Garrison expanded his role at the church to include the recently created position of Sexton. This position not only handles cleaning and general maintenance, but also bigger projects and set-up for programs and events.

Many people have already noticed the impact. With new equipment the carpets are much cleaner. With loving attention, the rooms of the church are cleaned and prepared for the next group to come in. In hiring Will, the church asked him to also prioritize those things that help welcome newcomer to the church and present the church to the community in the best possible light. Next time you come to church, notice the door to the JE Room which he has sanded, caulked, primed and painted. It looks great. We also ask you help to keep it looking great. Please avoid attaching anything to the exterior of the door. If you must, ONLY use blue painter's tape, available in the office.

Summer Book Read

The discussion groups are off and talking! Meetings are taking place at this church, at the Library, and in people's homes. For those in the groups, mark your calendars for our final gathering that brings all groups together and decides if we want to collectively respond to David Brooks' suggestions for engagement. It will be held Sunday August 25th here at the church at 11:45 am. (note the new time so people can make it to Tanglewood).



Rev. Lisanne Finston, the Executive Director of Gould Farm in Monterey, was the worship leader July 7.

On June 30, the church held its annual Strawberry Social.



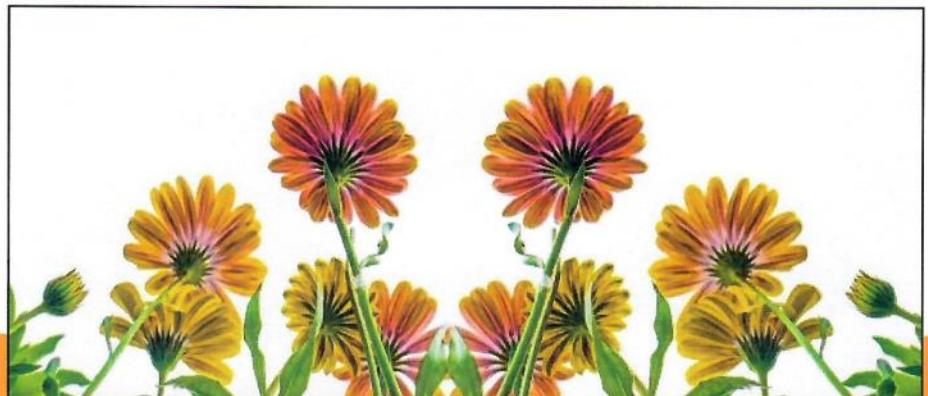


Summer Fair

Sat., Aug. 10, 2019
10 am – 2 pm

Crafts • Baked Goods
Fresh Produce • Cut Flowers
Herbs • Perennials • Lunch

*Mini-
Grandma's
Attic*



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
4 Main St., Stockbridge, MA