

*The First Congregational Church, UCC
PO Box 825
Stockbridge MA 01262*



July 2020

Pastor: The Rev. Brent Damrow – bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org
Minister of Music: Dr. Sándor Szabó - music@stockbridgeucc.org
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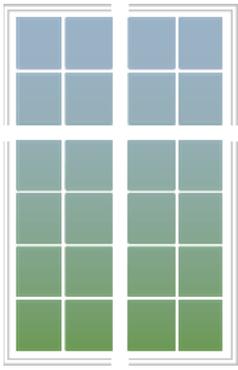
www.facebook.com/stockbridgeucc

Online Sunday Worship: 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday Morning Prayer: 8:00 a.m.

Office hours: 9:00-1:00, Monday - Friday

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Online worship is at stockbridgeucc.org	Calendar is subject to change. Please check the church website for updates.		1 Morning Prayer 8 am Church Council 7:00 p.m.	2	3 Bible Study 2:00 p.m.	4
5 Online Worship 10:00 a.m.	6	7	8 Morning Prayer 8 am Mission & Action 7:00 p.m.	9	10 Bible Study 2:00 p.m.	11
12 Online Worship 10:00 a.m.	13 Pastor Brent's open hour 1:00 p.m. Christian Education 5:30 p.m.	14	15 Morning Prayer 8 am Pastor Brent's open hour 1:00 p.m. All-Boards meeting 7:00 p.m.	16	17 Pastor Brent's open hour 1:00 p.m. Bible Study 2:00 p.m.	18
19 Online Worship 10:00 a.m.	20 Pastor Brent's open hour 1:00 p.m.	21	22 Morning Prayer 8 am Pastor Brent's open hour 1:00 p.m.	23	24 Pastor Brent's open hour 1:00 p.m. Bible Study 2:00 p.m.	25
26 Online Worship 10:00 a.m.	27 Pastor Brent's open hour 1:00 p.m.	28	29 Pastor Brent's open hour 1:00 p.m.	30	31 Pastor Brent's open hour 1:00 p.m.	Morning prayers, open hours, and meetings are online, via Zoom.



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

July 2020 Newsletter

Dear Friends in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in these days and all days.

I thank you for your willingness to allow me some time to separate in order that I might reconnect with my family, my faith, and my own sense of self and calling. I apologize that the many thank you cards, phone conversations, and physically distanced walks I planned to accomplish before I left with so many of you did not come to fruition. I trust that upon my return we will reconnect in familiar, new, and powerful ways.

There are a couple of seeds that I want to plant to that end. I apologize that they will not feel new. Instead they both rest on the foundation that both pandemics we are facing not only will be with us for the foreseeable future, but that they also will affect how we are church together locally and universally.

It is hard to face the truth that while we have been doing amazing work here in MA around reducing transmission, the broader, national picture shows trends that are alarming and growing. We are committed to finding ways to restore greater connection both as it relates to the possibility of face-to-face gatherings and through such mechanisms as small groups. What I would ask you to contemplate is what do you find yourself looking for or yearning for these days. The re-gathering committee is sending out a survey – take it! Also, contact the church office or my e-mail to share your ideas and your needs. My hope is that we find ways, especially during these summer months, to take

advantage of the chance to safely connect outside.

Primarily this is about how we feed you and/or help you engage with your faith, each other and the world. Doing so will give us the strength and endurance to withstand any uptick in the virus that is likely to return in the fall.

It is equally clear that right now the time is so ripe for exploring racism including how we are called to be and act as agents of change in our own hearts, our community, and the world. Later in this newsletter is an invitation to engage the topic by looking first at ourselves, followed by more closely studying the history and scope of the issue we must engage. I hope that you might respond by joining me in those activities in July. Beyond that though, my heart tells me there is so much to engage with. I hope that you will explore the topic too. I hope you will bring organizations back to the



attention of the church with whom we might share our time, treasure and talent. I hope that you will find great yard signs to post and then let us know how to get some to share. I pray that we dive deep into this central issue of our times that demands all of our courage and humility.

I am so looking forward to this time of centering and recovery. I am looking forward to enough quiet time that I can pray, read, and reflect. I hope that you might find some time to do some of the same that when I return I can listen to your stories, dreams, and ideas while sharing some of my own too!

Peace, *Brent*

OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER

HAPPY JULY BIRTHDAYS	July 6	Conor Hall	July 17	Margaret Hornick	
July 1	Gary Schieneman	July 7	Christine Rasmussen	Teresa Gentile	
July 2	Vicky Cooper	July 8	Mia Freeman	Eric Germain	
July 4	Carl Bradford	July 9	Tom Ruffing	July 20	Gwendolyn Evans
	Frank Russell	July 11	Jill Fleming	July 21	Aiden Germain
July 5	Maddie Alsdorf	July 14	Jay Wise	July 24	Steve Hassmer
		July 16	Patricia Strauch	July 25	Hazel Slocombe

PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS:

The family of Nell Ezequelle, Shirley Moyle, Doris Schulz, Pat Nowak, Russ Fadding, Cindy Ogulnick, Sibylle Baier, Diane Vogt, Gary and Corinne Burke, Mary Jane Dunlop, Stan Osak, Jr., Philip Connor, Ronnie Cunningham's son Colin, Gege Kingston, Barbara Bracknell, Meryle Epstein, Lindsay Hermanski, Jeannie Smith, Natalie Newberg, Betsey McKearnan, Alice McKinstry Hawes, and Jeanne Fleming.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE CHURCH

Rev. Barbara Kershner, a member of our congregation, is providing **pastoral care** for folks who are in need until Brent returns on July 13. She is best reached by her cell phone which is 570-449-8581. Texting is the most reliable means. Her e-mail address is revbarb670@gmail.com.

Rev. Quinn Caldwell is in the midst of four sermons tackling the theme of *Emerge*. Be sure to hear and see Quinn's sermons on July 5 and 12; the first two are available via the church's website.

Board of Music

We enjoyed an exciting foretaste of musical treasures to come, when our new Minister of Music Sandor Szabo led worship on June 7. He will be joining us on a regular basis starting Sunday July 19. As the designated singer that day, I can tell you how mightily impressed I was by his musicianship, creativity and good humor. We are blessed to have him join us and should enjoy some meaningful musical moments together.

Music has remained an integral part of worship, even though it has been scaled back without the impact of live sound and a choir during the pandemic. The committee is working closely with the Re-Gathering Committee to envision just how music will be once we can worship together in the same space. Unfortunately choral and solo singing seem to be particularly risky spreaders of any virus, so safety precautions may mean that it will be a while until the return of the choir.

The Music Committee welcomes a few new members, and we now consist of Jack Brown (chair), Joan Kopperl, Ronnie Cunningham, Gary Schieneman and Bob Doerr. If you have any ideas or comments about our music going forward, please connect directly with me or other committee members.

Looking forward to seeing (and hearing you) back at church in the future.

Jack Brown

Church Family News

Ian and I celebrated our 6th wedding anniversary in May and our birthdays in June (13th and 20th). Gwendolyn turns two on July 20th! She runs and talks and laughs all day! We've been keeping busy at Gould Farm (Ian and I both work there) where we like to visit the cows and newborn pigs.

We've planted a small vegetable garden in our backyard and a memorial birch tree in our front yard to commemorate five years (July 1st) since the loss of our unborn baby, and I really enjoyed participating in the Sabbath small group and reading Wendell Berry's poetry.

~ Elizabeth Evans

Board of Christian Education

The Christian Education committee has been attempting to keep the church family of all aged learners spiritually connected. Thank you to Ted Randolph and Sarah Conly who have finished their CE committee experience for now and welcome to Barbara Kershner, Cris Raymond, Anne Hutchinson & Paul Rix.

Pastor Brent has been leading Adult Study groups via Zoom, providing meaningful connections. In the future a small group will gather to assist Pastor Brent to plan new adult education experiences. Contact Will at the church office for more information about upcoming study groups.

Jill Wheat has been organizing simple activities and lessons for families to access from the Live Stream page on our church website in the hopes of providing some means for families to stay in touch and continue aspects of Sunday School enrichment at home with their children. Big thank yous to these busy people who have contributed brief readings of stories on video, simple crafts to do at home, coloring pages and children's song activities: Diane Piraino, Joshua Hall, Paul Rix, Cindy Brown, Elizabeth Evans, Miles Wheat and the small Wheats. Thank you to Jon Geldert and Will Garrison for posting these resources on the Live Stream page and to Pastor Brent who has been providing detailed ideas to use as themes so that resource materials can be prepared ahead of time.

We would love to have some more contributors for this ministry. The more and varied faces in pictures and videos for the children of our church, the better the interest and connection. Jill can email the sign up sheet to those with interest. The sheet shows theme ideas for upcoming Sundays, dates, areas to fill and examples all listed on it. Please reach out to Jill at songsailormusic@yahoo.com.

We hope that our church families with youngsters are somehow staying in touch. I, as a parent of three very busy children, know that communicating with the rest of the world can be tricky let alone trying to sit down and watch the Live Stream services! The committee might be reaching out to families via an email or phone call in the future to see how we can better support your family, and maybe just to say hello because we miss you.

Submitted by Jill Wheat
for the Christian Education Committee

The Service League

We couldn't stay away! So, this month our group has been meeting - masked and socially distanced, of course - Mondays on the lawn for lunch. We bring our chairs and our brown bags and get caught up on family news. Sadly, not all the news is good - we have lost a beloved member, Nell Ezequelle, who died June 10, after a long illness. We will miss her greatly.

We also decided, reluctantly, after much debate, that it would be wise to cancel both the Summer Fair (August) and the Holly Fair (December). We are exploring the possibility of taking orders for some of our perennial favorite items and will keep you posted on new developments.

Meanwhile, life goes on, if in new and unfamiliar ways. But some things don't change - the Berkshires are still beautiful, the wildlife more abundant than ever (Jackie saw a bear and a Baltimore oriole - the winged kind - at her birdfeeder), we still need rain, and we all still love to get together and enjoy each other's company.

On June 15, nine of us gathered outside the church, on lawn near the kitchen, at noon for our third socially distant get-together since Covid-19 began on March 11, 2020.

There were nine of us from Service League—all wearing our masks—Jackie, Anne F, Patty, Nancy, Anne H, Helen, Jane, Margaret and Ann B. Again, we brought our lawn chairs and lunches and sat around in a circle enjoying everyone's company. Will joined us for a while.

I (Ann) have some news about Nell from Trae, her grandson. Yesterday, June 17, I saw him at the Big Y in Great Barrington. It was his first day back at work since Nell died. When I talked to him, he was having a hard time getting back into the work routine and feeling quite emotional. I really wanted to hug him but couldn't because of Covid-19.

Trae said the day Nell died, he and his uncle had visited her plus his father had talked to her on the phone. He felt that Nell was feeling at peace that day and he felt good about his visit with her. He wanted me to tell all of you that Nell loved all of us. Please call Trae if you can, he would love to hear from you.

See you soon,
Margaret Hornick and Ann Brink for the Service League

Small Groups: Race and Racism

This summer, we will be exploring the ideas of race and racism. I propose that we do so in small groups of eight where people are reading different texts and sharing insights. I propose that we do so in layers – starting with looking at our own “whiteness” and formulating an approach to race and how it has played out in the church.

I propose then that we follow-up with the next step of learning taking a look at significant works on the reality of racism right now and how we are called to respond with our hearts, minds, and hands. The model is based on our recent successful Sabbath groups. While I don't plan the first group as a pre-requisite to the second group, I think it would be highly helpful for folks to begin by looking more closely at ourselves and at whiteness.

Please sign up for these groups through the church office. When you do, pick a book from the list and go ahead and start reading. We will have those books available through the office or you can get them on your own. We will set groups and begin conversations when Brent returns in mid July. Round One books and descriptions:

White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo (paper version out-of-stock, recommend eBook)

In this "vital, necessary, and beautiful book" (Michael Eric Dyson), antiracist educator DiAngelo deftly illuminates the phenomenon of white fragility and "allows us to understand racism as a practice not restricted to 'bad people' (Claudia Rankine). Referring to the defensive moves that white people make when challenged racially, white fragility is characterized by emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and by behaviors like argumentation and silence. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium and prevent any meaningful cross-racial dialogue. In this exploration, DiAngelo examines how white fragility develops, how it protects racial inequality, and what we can do to engage constructively. (From Cokesbury)

Playing Into the Dark by Toni Morrison

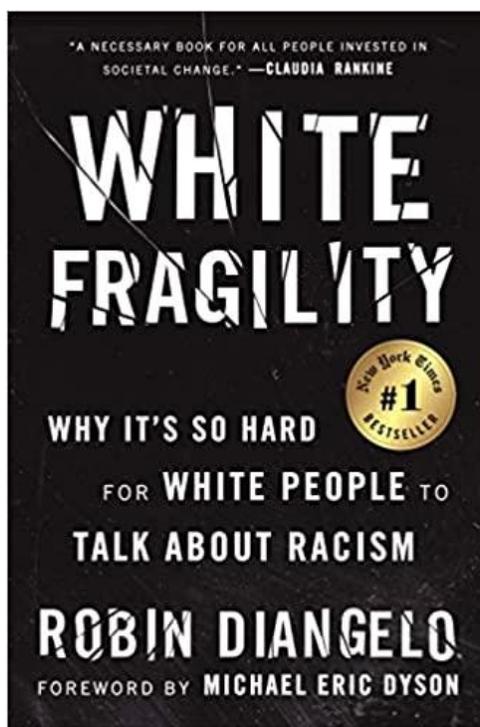
Toni Morrison's brilliant discussions of the "Africanist" presence in the fiction of Poe, Melville, Cather, and Hemingway leads to a dramatic reappraisal of the essential characteristics of our literary tradition. She shows how much the themes of freedom and individualism, manhood and innocence, depended on the existence of a black population that was manifestly unfree--and that came to serve white authors as embodiments of their own fears and desires. (From Goodreads)

America's Original Sin by Jim Wallis

In America's Original Sin, Wallis offers a prophetic and deeply personal call to action in overcoming the racism so ingrained in American society. He speaks candidly to Christians--particularly white Christians--urging them to cross a new bridge toward racial justice and healing. (From Amazon)

Dear Church by Lenny Duncan (paper version out-of-stock, recommend eBook)

Part manifesto, part confession, and all love letter, Dear Church offers a bold new vision for the future of Duncan's denomination and the broader mainline Christian community of faith. Dear Church rejects the narrative of church decline and calls everyone--leaders and laity alike--to the front lines of the church's renewal through racial equality and justice. (From Amazon)



In the Second Round, my preliminary thoughts (open to your ideas and suggestions too) are that we tackle works like:

- *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander
- *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* by Rev. Dr. James Cone
- *God of the Oppressed* by Rev. Dr. James Cone
- *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman
- *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- *How to be an Anti-Racist* by Ibram Kendi

Our Response to Covid-19

We wish to make you aware of the formation of the **Re-Gathering Committee**. This group will be looking towards a time when we will, again, be able to safely meet face to face. We are not the "Reopening Committee" as the church never closed. We continue to worship remotely, experience Christian Education, and remain active in the work of Christ in the community. But we do miss worshipping together in the sanctuary and making, together as a family, a joyful noise. This has been a time of isolation for many of us and it has been made more difficult by the inability to attend physical church.

As a congregation, we value inclusivity. We are trying to address how we can practice this in the time of a pandemic, keeping in mind not only the safety of our congregants, but also that of the wider community. We will be leaning into guidance from the UCC as well as the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, but ultimately must, with your help, decide what works best for us. We will keep you updated. Meanwhile, feel free to reach out to any of us with your thoughts.

In the peace of Christ,

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Diane Piraino, Board of Christian Education

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Jo Ann Levitt, Connections Committee

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Dear Friends,

The Re-Gathering Committee, in addition to information from the Mass. Department of Public Health, is using two excellent sets of guidelines, *Recommendations for In-Person Worship* and *Phasing Forward to In-Person Gatherings*, from the Southern New England Conference, UCC. These can be found online. If you would like a paper copy, please contact Will at the Church office. I encourage you all to read these guidelines in their entirety. They are short, thorough, and well thought out. Below is a short excerpt that serves as a philosophic summary:

First, there is no way to ensure the overall safety of our communities until there is a trusted vaccine.

Second, in person worship in sanctuaries is one of the types of gatherings that is most likely to spread the infection. In an enclosed room over a length of time the airborne viral particles can reach every corner.

Six-foot or twelve-foot physical distancing will not prevent this. Speaking, praying, and singing aloud propels the virus even further than just breathing. Using masks limits but does not prevent the transmission of the disease. We know that people can be carriers of the virus without any symptoms.

Third, we don't know everything about this disease and its impact on all ages. New information is coming out daily. This makes it hard to predict trends, safety measures, and phases.

Fourth, our congregations are comprised of the populations most vulnerable to Covid-19.

Fifth, an outbreak in our churches impacts our communities and the capacity of our health care system.

We are exploring the possibility of outdoor services on August 9 and 16. But before we regather outside, there are many logistical and philosophic problems to address. We have put together a brief survey to learn about your interest in regathering, what your concerns are, and what would make the experience most meaningful for you. **Please take a few minutes to complete this survey, if you haven't already done so online.** We are all the church and need to be involved in this decision-making process.

Wishing you all peace and good health, Diane Piraino



The Service League modeling masks and social distancing. Below: Patty Strauch's niece Emma celebrating her graduation from the University of Rochester. Left: Ted Randolph and Diane Piraino held a birthday party for Anne Hutchinson - outdoors and distanced. Pictured: Gene, Anne, Erving; Emily Kalish, Alan, baby Liam.



A bear (almost) crashing the Father's Day celebration at the Randolph/Piraino backyard.



July 2020