

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

January 2021 Newsletter

Dear Friends in Christ,

Now what? 2020 is now part of our history. There were times that I wondered if the year would ever run its course, and if so, to where. Much of it focused on surviving one day to the next.

I am incredibly blessed to have the chance to be up in Maine on one of my study weeks. There are some important questions I need to wrestle with while here. There is the important opportunity for me to get out of location (physically, mentally, and spiritually) and to allow expansiveness into my own life which was becoming very localized and routinized. There is the chance to find better health and perspective.

Each day is taking a familiar shape and I am feeling the blessing of life creeping in on all sides. Each day I am beginning with three things: writing a card of gratitude, reading a short story from the book Jon gave me for Christmas *All These Wonders*, and spending some time walking and praying. I am taking care of business while also taking care of me. I am enjoying sunrises, exploring new trails, and trying to do some cooking that brings joy. It is one of the reasons that the UCC recommends two of these weeks of dislocation, study, and reshaping. I am grateful that you honor that approach and support me in doing so.

There is something critically important about survival mode. It allows us to endure through those things that are bigger than we are when no clear path is discernable. The Bible is full of such stories – the people wandering in the Wilderness of the way to the Promised Land, the people in exile in Babylon having lost home and Temple too, the people of faith in those hours and days following the crucifixion, and the churches Paul wrote to who were trying to find a new way amid formidable obstacles. Survival allowed them to persevere in hope with a common cause and a common remembrance that no matter what the tidings were that nothing could shape who

they were or to whom they belonged.

Yet, in each case the “now what” question eventually came. The people reached the Jordan and the promised land beyond, the people came home and had to reintegrate with those who never left, the resurrection blew the doors off what was possible, and despite all odds those tiny churches kept finding The Way leading them forward onto a path of new life and connection.

The “now what” question is one primary occupation of my heart, mind, and faith while I am up here in Maine. It is something I am trying hard not to immediately answer, but rather live into, or maybe even more accurately, allow to emerge. In these days of this new year, I hope and pray that each of you find some ability to dislocate long enough that you can engage the “now what” question too. You may not be able to change your physical location, but I strongly encourage you change what you can and break the routines of survival mode to engage in expansive thinking, questioning, and living.

In the first story from Jon’s gift, Tara Clancy, shares her experience as a child with someone who always asked her impossibly huge questions to start conversations. Tara maintains that part of the gift of those expansive questions is that they forever changed the way she thought about herself saying “[they] made us think that maybe there was a little more to us than we knew.” To that I would add that when we do so prayerfully and faithfully, they also reveal that there is a little more to God than we knew too. Together such insights are recipes, invitations, and possibilities for that hint of an answer to the “now what” question to emerge enough to get us moving and following. I pray blessings on your exploration. Please keep me in the loop as to your setting out, your journeying, and any path or destination you find.

Brent

OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER

We will be including prayers in the weekly emails, including those gathered in Sunday worship. If you have a name you would like to add, please contact the church office.

HAPPY JANUARY BIRTHDAYS		January 21	Alexis Kennedy
January 4	Lisa Nelson	January 22	Pat Carlson
January 5	John Morse		Daniel Knauss
January 7	Jane McCormick	January 23	Christine Smith
January 12	Anne Roy	January 26	Willa Pohl
	Mary Jane Dunlop		Kenneth LaBresh
January 13	Jeannene Booher	January 27	Linda Colvin
January 14	Jill Wheat	January 28	Chuck Gillett
	Ned Saviski	January 29	Vivian Wise
January 16	Nancy Wilcox	January 31	Cathy Clark

Wrapping up 2020

We're very grateful for the generosity the congregation has shown during 2020. There are a few folk who have not yet completed their pledge. If you cannot contribute more, that's fine; we're very glad for whatever you can do. But if you would like to complete your pledge, that's still possible.

Any check with a December date that is received by January 15 can be credited to your 2020 giving record. You should then receive your annual 2020 Giving Statement near the end of January. Our mail workers have been challenged this year so give them a little longer to deliver these statements to you. Any comments or questions, contact Ron Hanft, Financial Secretary, at rphanft@yahoo.com or 413-232-4179.

Safety Audit to Be Conducted

We are deeply grateful that Dr. Lisa Nelson will be coming to the church in January to work with staff and leadership on a safety audit of our practices especially around worship. Lisa is a member of our congregation and consults with other organizations in this capacity. Our goal will be to discern how to deliver the most meaningful worship in the safest way. Especially as we head into the depth of winter and its cold, we want to make sure we are providing good air quality and safety while recognizing our responsibility to efficiency and care for creation.

We have been working hard and creatively to bring the best possible worship to you. In the adjoining article, you will find the invitation to participate in a survey to help us improve and enhance your worship experience. Thank you, Lisa and the Re-Gathering Committee, for your continued work that allows us to be church, **safely!!**

To all members of the First Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ Stockbridge, Massachusetts

In accordance with the Bylaws of the Church, I hereby call the Annual Budget Meeting of the Church for Sunday, Jan. 31 at 11:00 a.m.

The business to be transacted is as follows:

- To act upon the budget for the fiscal year 2021
- To act upon any other business that may legally come before the meeting.

Jeremy Ridenour, Clerk

Note: There will be a budget Q&A via Zoom on Jan. 24 at 11:15 a.m.

Connections

Each week the church sends out one or two emails to over 200 addresses. If you no longer receive emails, please let Will know. He'll make sure you get back on the list. Just call the office, 413/298-3137

If your mailing address is incorrect, please let us know. And if you receive mail at a PO box, please consider letting us know your physical address. You wouldn't want to miss out on bread deliveries!

Board of Deacons

I write two days before Epiphany. I have always loved the Magi—exotic “Wise Men,” “We Three Kings.” So many haunting and beautiful depictions in poetry, song, and painting. They are transitional characters in the Christmas story, marking the end of the birth of Jesus and looking ahead to his life with their emblematic gifts: Gold for the King, Frankincense for the Sacrifice, Myrrh for the Resurrected Savior.

The Wise Men are a clear reminder that Christmas, at the end of our calendar year, is the beginning, not the end, of the challenge Jesus poses each year. The challenge that asks us to consider how we are going to live into the great gift of God among us. The Magi bring symbolic gifts, and even if we cannot offer riches as the Magi do, we can share ourselves with Jesus.

What can I give Jesus this year? How can I live into Jesus’s work, emulate his life? What talents, both material and figurative, can I find in myself and devote to living in covenant with God?

Covenant is a way of being, not a resolution to eat less chocolate or follow a budget. The first week of January 2021, I am thinking about what I can offer of myself—my monetary assets (talents) but also my heart, my brain, and my spirit—to live more fully in accordance with the teachings of Jesus.

In my spiritual life, I need to offer my talents *and* accept God’s will, which sometimes are in alignment and sometimes are decidedly at odds! I get tense, for example, at meetings when I experience views quite different from my own. I can become snarky, and I often lie in bed after a meeting wincing at the way I expressed myself. To live in covenant, I need to use a skill I use a lot in my profession: I need to listen deeply, with my heart open and my defenses down. I do not pounce on my therapy clients, and I think I can learn to sheath my claws and even purr in other stressful situations too. I know from experience that if I allow myself to understand other points of view, meetings are full of growth, joy, and love, not fear and regret.

I also recognize that overextending myself leads to emotional fatigue—and

resentment, which is far from following Jesus! I have been practicing prayer this past year. Many times in the Bible Jesus goes off by himself to pray. To me, his repeated retreat symbolizes his human susceptibility to being overwhelmed. God has infinite capacity for the burden of human suffering. I need to recognize when I am carrying things I cannot control and trust them to God; on those rare occasions then I do that, the lightness that comes fills me with hope and peace.

The Deacons have had a challenging yet rewarding year of growth, ending with the beauty and promise of an unusual Advent and Christmas. In the coming month we move forward in Jesus’s life in worship, and we all can move forward in our spiritual lives as well. I encourage you to think about what talents you can share as you live in covenant with God.

~ Elizabeth Young for the Deacons

Board of Growth and Fellowship

Our big project for December was the holiday bread project. Seven members of Growth and Fellowship each baked 20 loaves of holiday bread and delivered them to 140 homes of church members and friends in the week before Christmas. See picture, below.

This was a lot of work, and the members are to be commended for their energy, focus and devotion. We also had help from non-G and F members who graciously helped with the delivery process. These volunteers were: Deb McMenemy, Anna Smith, Stephanie Bradford, Anne Hutchinson, Margaret Hornick, Tracy Wilson and Patty Strauch. We thank them as well for their generosity with their time.

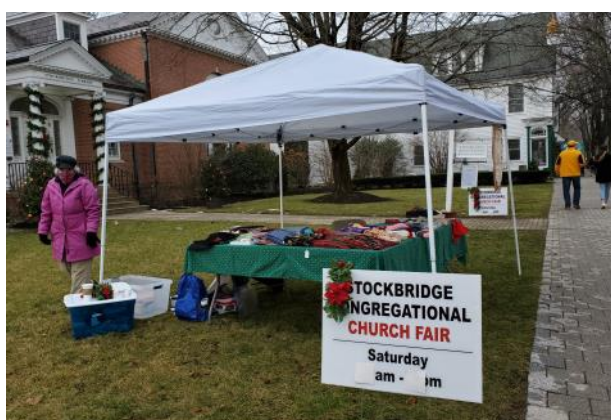
We learned there are a lot of isolated people out there who really appreciated this gesture, sending heartfelt thank-you emails and calls.

~ David Anderegg



Service League

Well, since we couldn't have a real Holly Fair and we weren't tech-savvy enough to have a virtual Holly Fair, we decided to have a Pop-up Holly Fair. The Stockbridge Library was kind enough to host us on its front lawn, where Anne Hutchinson and Nancy Wilcox set up a tent, tables were brought from the JE Room, and an array of goodies was offered to passers-by. In spite of cold toes and menacing clouds, we had fun and actually netted around \$750! We had jams and jellies, cookies, scrubbies, catnip mice, placemats, mittens, and many other items and it felt almost festive. Not exactly what we're used to, but this is a year for innovation, and innovate we did. And we have the pictures to prove it - see below.



Meanwhile, over at the People's Pantry, Anne Hutchinson has been doing some innovating of her own. She arranged for the construction and installation of a new shelter to protect volunteers, shoppers, and food; it even has heat and lights.

Anne also shared photos of her kids, and we all shared stories of our modified Christmas celebrations - a lot of Zooming, a lot of phone calls, and a lot of hope for a New Year that will be a great improvement on the one just past. Meanwhile, stay warm, stay well, and stay grateful for all we have, especially each other.

Margaret Hornick, for the Service League

People's Pantry

I want to thank all of you for supporting the Pantry in so many ways: With donations - lots of donations, including memorial gifts - and time: Many volunteers come from this congregation. The church donation of toilet paper, delivered every Friday, is very, very much appreciated by our clients. Deliveries that I can count on are so important.

In other pantry news, Diane Piraino has just been elected to the Board of Directors, so we have another voice in the organization of the Pantry. Two days before Thanksgiving, our new shelter was installed, and with the addition of lighting and heaters, it is indispensable to our food distribution during the winter months. We continue to serve one hundred shoppers, who are feeding families of one to seven persons each - that is 1200 people receiving a week's worth of food each month!



We have been providing local milk from High Lawn Farms, which has given us a great price, and we offer Cabot cheese and New York eggs. We are starting to purchase locally grown meats from the tri-state area with the help of Berkshire Grown and Tory Hill (an independent school food service provider that develops local meat suppliers). In the new year we hope to support farmers who will plan vegetable crops and raise animals for us. Berkshire Bounty is an indispensable partner, delivering food donations to us.

Thank you so much!

~ Anne
Hutchinson



Erving,
Aviana,
Rio, and
Jayna

Worship Feedback Requested

We continue to understand that worship is at the heart of our *shared* experience. It is that common time where we disentangle ourselves from the demands and expectations of the world and entangle ourselves in our covenant with God and neighbor. It is a time for honesty, beauty, truth, hope, and possibility. We are delighted that attendance for our live-stream worship continues to be robust and engaged. We continue to respond to feedback and to try and make improvements that enhance worship. Some of those things include:

- Better technology including, stronger internet connection, additional cameras, split screen capability, and better microphones.
- The inclusion of lay readers and leaders from their homes.
- Creative music that involves additional instrumentation, vocal duets, and other innovations to evoke.
- The use of “sets” within the church to add visual elements that change.



The Pastor and Deacons ask each member to complete a short survey that will enable us to understand how you are worshipping, what is bringing you joy and meaning, what is challenging, and what opportunities. We are including the questions so that if you need answer them via e-mail or by telephone with the office, you can. We are hoping that you will fill it out on-line so that the answers can be more easily compiled and shared. That link is [HERE](#).

1. How often do you attend streamed worship?
2. When you do, how often is it “live” (at 10:00 on Sunday Mornings)?
3. How often do you check-in and/or send in prayer requests? Why or why not?
4. What do you find particularly meaningful/helpful/joyful about worship? (describe)
5. What challenges do you encounter while connecting to livestream worship (technical issues)?
6. What other challenges do you experience during livestream worship?
7. What suggestions do you have to help make worship better?
8. Any other general comments or questions.
9. Would you like a Deacon or the Pastor to call to talk further?

Thank you in advance for your help! We are deeply grateful for you and the way you are engaging our church, our faith, and our community. Please share with others you know who may attend our services.

Technology Assistance Available

Live-streamed worship? Zoom Meetings? Virtual Coffee Hours? All of it can seem challenging or intimidating. We don't want any barriers between you and connection to this church. If technology is a burden for you, there are a couple of people who would be happy to work with you. So next time you can't connect to worship, just reach out to:

David Anderegg danderegg@gmail.com or 413-281-9694

Patty Strauch patricia_strauch@hotmail.com or 413-269-6119

You can also contact call Will in the office (office@stockbridgeucc.org or 413-298-3137) during regular office hours (M-F 9:00 – 1:00).



Community Advent Wreath

Thanks to the contributions of many volunteers and local businesses, the trees - with tokens of hope, peace, joy, and love - brought light to the season. The lighted labyrinth provided a place for quiet contemplation.

Photos by Cindy Brown and Susan Lynch

Electrical Work: Comalli Group
Lights: Ward's Nursery
Trees and greenery: Windy Hill Farm

Library Lobby Gallery Art Show

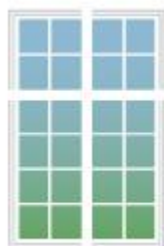
The Stockbridge Library, Museum & Archives is pleased to announce the return of art shows to our Lobby Gallery. Patrons and guests are invited in to view the featured artists work anytime during open library hours.

This month the Stockbridge Library Lobby Gallery will feature *Exploring Abstraction*, paintings by artist Terry Wise from December 14, 2020 through January 30, 2021. The paintings are primarily oil on paper and were executed as an exercise while taking an online course from Hudson Valley abstract painter Jenny Nelson during the past summer of pandemic isolation. Check the library website stockbridgelibrary.org for hours.

Berkshire Waldorf High School

The pandemic has prompted new partnerships. Last semester, the sanctuary and the Jonathan Edwards Room served as classrooms for the Berkshire Waldorf High School. This allowed students to be safely distanced here and at their main building on Pine Street, Stockbridge.

It was a joy to have dozens of young people in the building and on the lawn, continuing their studies. Towards the end of the semester, just before Thanksgiving, it did get a bit chilly inside with the windows open and the fans running. But the students and teachers just bundled up and kept going! It was a safe and enjoyable way to contribute to the community. And the high school made a handsome donation to the church.



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Stockbridge, Massachusetts

Pastor: The Rev. Brent Damrow – bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org

Minister of Music: Dr. Sándor Szabó - (on leave)

Administrator: Will Garrison – office@stockbridgeucc.org

Financial Secretary: Ron Hanft – rphanft@yahoo.com

(413) 298-3137 | www.stockbridgeucc.org

www.facebook.com/stockbridgeucc

Sunday Worship: 10:00 a.m. *Online*

Wednesday Morning Prayer: 8:00 a.m. *Online*

Thursday Morning Prayer: 8:00 a.m. *Gathered*

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

January 2021

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
Pastor Brent's office hours by appointment, call church office.	Please check the church website for updates.	Online worship is at stockbridgeucc.org			1	2 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
3 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>online</i>	4 Pastor Sabbath Day	5	6 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Church Council 7:00 p.m.	7 Morning Prayer	8	9 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
10 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>online</i>	11 Pastor Sabbath Day	12	13 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Christian Ed 5:00 pm Mission & Action 5:30 pm	14 Morning Prayer	15	16 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
17 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>online</i>	18 Pastor Sabbath Day	19	20 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Trustees 5:30 pm Deacons 6:30 pm G & F 7:30 pm.	21 Morning Prayer	22	23 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
24 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>online</i> Budget Meeting Q&A via Zoom 11:15 a.m.	25 Pastor Sabbath Day	26	27 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm	28 Morning Prayer	29	30 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
31 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>online</i> Annual Budget Meeting Livestream 11:00 a.m.						