



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
— Stockbridge, Massachusetts —

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



**February 2021**

Pastor: The Rev. Brent Damrow – [bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org)

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

Administrator: Will Garrison – [office@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:office@stockbridgeucc.org)

Financial Secretary: Ron Hanft – [rphanft@yahoo.com](mailto:rphanft@yahoo.com)

(413) 298-3137 | [www.stockbridgeucc.org](http://www.stockbridgeucc.org)

[www.facebook.com/stockbridgeucc](https://www.facebook.com/stockbridgeucc)

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

Wednesday: Bible Study, 1:00 p.m.

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

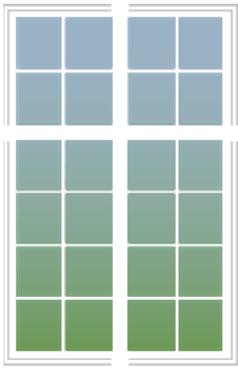
Thursday: Walking Morning Prayer

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

# February 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.	1	2 Pastor Sabbath Day	3 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Deacons 6:00 pm Church Council 7:00 p.m.	4 Walking Morning Prayer	5	6 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
7 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>online</i>	8	9 Pastor Sabbath Day	10 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Christian Ed 5:00 pm Mission & Action 5:30 pm	11 Walking Morning Prayer	12	13 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
14 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>online</i> Transfiguration Sunday (Sandor returns for his monthly worship service)	15	16 Pastor Sabbath Day	17 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Ash Wednesday Worship 5:30 – 7:00 pm outdoors	18 Walking Morning Prayer	19	20 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
21 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>online</i> Lent begins	22	23 Pastor Sabbath Day	24 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Trustees 5:30 pm G & F 7:30 pm	25 Walking Morning Prayer	26	27 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
28 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>online</i>			Online worship is at <a href="http://stockbridgeucc.org">stockbridgeucc.org</a>	Please check the church website for updates.		



# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

## February 2021 Newsletter

Dear Friends in Christ,

On January 20, I did what many people around the world did – I watched the inauguration of the Vice President and President of the United States. It helped that Jake, encouraged by his teacher and school, really wanted to watch it too. I have watched inaugurations and attended one of them (when I was an undergrad at the nearby University of Richmond). I have watched whether my preferred candidate was the one being sworn in, or not. I have left such things in many different ways.

I was profoundly struck by the proceedings. It helped that I was watching with my son who had so many questions about why it all mattered and what they were trying to do. I also know that this particular event was so different; different because of the pandemic, different because of the events at the same location just two weeks before, different because of the division in our nation right now.

As is typical with such events the spotlight shown most brightly on those assuming office. I was deeply touched by Justice Sotomayor administering the Oath of Office to Vice President Harris. I was relieved and inspired by the heart-felt words of President Biden. My heart, though, was so wholly opened by so many of the remaining cast who played a role. There were those like Lady Gaga and Jennifer Lopez who commanded attention before even offering their gifts – a splash of flair amid a very formal occasion. Even more though, there were those like the National Youth Poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman who gave stunning word to the moment, or Firefighter Andrea Hall who spoke in both word and sign for the Pledge of Allegiance, or Amy Klobuchar who always pointed away from herself and even beyond those on the stage to those who had gone before and on whose shoulders all of us stand. Then there was the hero, Eugene Goodman, who led rioters away from leaders in the Capitol now in the role of escorting the Vice

President Elect and the unknown man who stepped forward to clean the podium each time.

The event was so perfectly choreographed and organized to point toward the dawning of a new time in our nation with its possibilities without ignoring very real challenges. Beyond that, there was a brilliance in the cast...who it is that will bring about such new beginnings. The truth that it won't just be the leaders under the spotlight who help us become who/what we might be, but rather all those others through their words and actions who will both show us who we can be and walk with us into that future.

It is very closely aligned with the messages of both Epiphany and Lent. With the spotlight in both of those seasons squarely on Jesus, we must not miss how the spotlight pointed toward a new beginning that was dawning then and the one that is dawning in our faith journey now too. Beyond that, though, we dare not miss the brilliance of the surrounding cast and the ones Jesus would encounter – ones whose names we have come to know and some we never are formally introduced to. The formal disciples and those who leave transformed and dedicate themselves to transforming. Can we dare imagine that we are that very cast in these times.

We stand poised for new beginnings not just as a nation but as a people of faith. We are the folks, the disciples, called through our words and actions to both show others who we can collectively be and walk with them even as Christ still walks with us into our future. Do not let go of the emotion and hope of these days, may they inspire us to continue becoming the masterpiece in progress (individually and collectively) Desmond Tutu knows us to be. May they help each of us to be one of the people on the stage of this moment that contributes and that someone else may even noticed and be inspired by too.

With peace and love,

*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 FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

February 1	Ann Brink Rick Floyd	February 15	Amy Freeman Logan Higuera
February 4	Steve Blanchard	February 17	Thomas Wheat
February 10	Claire Williams Senta Brodeur Ellen Lahr	February 23	Kathleen Opperman
February 12	Les Freeman IV	February 24	Sophie Randolph John Ruffing
February 13	Betsy Wheat Paul Rix	February 26	Jim McMenamy Patty Fox
		February 28	Lilly Hassmer

## Giving On-Line

Many of you are giving on-line via our website. That's great (of course, checks are always great too)! However, we are missing important information for a few gifts. It will help us assure that your gift goes to the intended place if you are sure to use the drop-down menu to indicate the nature of your gift where you see "Click Arrow to Select Fund." If the intended destination for your gift is not listed there, please write it in "Comments". Many thanks. Questions? Contact Will (office@stockbridgeucc.org) or Ron (rphanft@yahoo.com).

## Giving Envelopes for 2021

We're very grateful for all the pledges made by members and friends in our church community. All those who pledge or request envelopes may receive them. Some have envelope numbers from previous years; others do not use envelopes. During this past year, with only mail and online giving, some additional folk have stopped using these envelopes.

Here's the current distribution plan:

Some have already picked up their envelopes at the church. We are mailing out boxes to those who live some distance away from the church (Becket, Otis & NY State) and to our members at Kimball Farms. For those boxes remaining, they will continue to be available for pick-up at the church during office hours. If you would like a box of envelopes delivered or mailed to you please notify Ron Hanft and he will gladly make sure you receive it. Contact Ron at 413-232-4179 or rphanft@yahoo.com.

## Artists' Work Needed for a Church Fundraiser

Calling all artists to participate in an Art Show in May 2021 – in person or virtual, to be determined.

Art may be of various media, including paintings, graphic designs, photography, collage, mixed media, sculpture, or woodwork. Each piece must be 12" x 12" and will be priced at \$100.00 per piece. Artists may contribute one or two pieces, of which one will be sold as a fundraiser and another for personal sale.

The art pieces may be submitted during the week of April 26-30, 2021, with final directions to follow.

Art Show coordinators are Madonna Meagher and Olga Schwede.

Church artists and artist friends are invited to participate. Questions? Please call Olga at 413-644-9846.

*"Joyfully Creating Joy!"*

## COVID-19 Testing

The Board of Mission and Action has compiled important resources about testing and information specifically for us in Berkshire County. That information can be found on our website, stockbridgeucc.org. On the top of the homepage, look for the link for COVID-19 pandemic updates. This will be updated periodically.

## Board of Deacons

The Deacons are glad to be back at the drawing board, helping Pastor Brent plan new ways to mark Ash Wednesday and the Lenten season, and we are even thinking about Palm Sunday and Easter! How time blurs when we are under COVID restrictions....

Ash Wednesday services at our church have been deeply personal and meaningful through the years. If you have not participated in one, I encourage you to come this year. It is a ritual of confession and of faith in our ability to change our hurtful and harmful ways with the love of God to guide us. The service encourages us to examine our lives: often a difficult task, but one that is ultimately liberating. Don't we all want to lay our burdens down? On Ash Wednesday, we do just that, and we are blessed.

A pilgrimage is full of self-examination, courage to make change, and opportunity to start a new way of being. It is a human process, a part of many spiritual and religious practices. We will have an opportunity to make a spiritual pilgrimage on Ash Wednesday, and to devote ourselves during Lent to following Jesus as he moves purposefully toward the Cross.

There will be different opportunities to enter the Lenten process: an actual journey; a meditative practice; candles, music, prayer, liturgy, and reflections that will take us beyond our restricted lives—riddled by anxiety about disease and vaccine, citizen and immigrant, white and black, rich and poor—to the place where we can all be what we truly are: children of God.

Ash Wednesday is February 17 this year; Palm Sunday and the start of Holy Week is March 28, and Easter Sunday is April 4. Join us in looking forward to the journey together, and as we move toward the Cross, where we will be united in hope and love.

~ Elizabeth Young for The Board of Deacons (Hal Brink, Anna Duhon, Don Eaton, Joshua Hall, Donna Jacobs, Jim McMenemy and Ted Randolph)

## Board of Christian Education

We hope you all got a chance to look at our family resources for Advent through Epiphany. Jill Wheat and Cindy Brown did a beautiful job putting together story lessons for the kids, along with music and art links. For Lent through Easter, we will similarly try a story-telling approach. We will have lessons covering the life of Jesus from his baptism through the Resurrection, including teachings and miracles. It should be exciting: doves descending, Satan in the wilderness, blind men seeing, dead men rising....

Our lessons are geared towards kids, but all our welcome. I frequently hear new members saying they wish they had more Bible literacy. Well, check out these lessons. Or check them out if you want to hear what the kids are learning. Or best yet, contact Jill if you want to teach a lesson. We will provide the reading and the supplemental resources. We all miss seeing our church family in person and this is one way to get your smiling face in front of the kids.

Check out our music resources, too. In December, Jill posted a great collection of videos of church members making Christmas music. For February, Black History month, we will have some African American sacred music. We are all looking forward to a time when Christian Education can happen face to face and hand in hand.

~ Diane Piraino

## Board of Mission & Action

As we welcome the possibilities of a new year, we want to take a minute to thank you all. Thank you for supporting the outreach work that we do – whether you made a donation, worked with Open Table, volunteered to drive, worked at the Peoples Pantry, or otherwise supported Mission – we are grateful!

As a group we continue to discuss how the work of our church can impact the congregation and our community. As the Covid-19 pandemic continues, unemployment and financial burden are real stressors as people struggle to pay for housing costs, transportation and food.

We are planning to open a “Pop Up” Pantry at the church within the next few weeks. This self-serve pantry will provide access to **basic non-perishable food** – 24 hours a day. The system will allow people in need to pick up the food while maintaining confidentiality and dignity – no questions asked. This Pop Up is not intended to be a substitute for a fully operating food pantry, but will serve to bridge the gap. We will have information available to guide people to other sources of assistance.

Mission and Action has budgeted start-up funding for this project. We will be reaching out to you in the next few weeks, with specific requests for food donations and opportunities for you to volunteer.

We're excited to pilot a “Pop Up” in Stockbridge, please join us! Look for details soon, or reach out to Brent, Will or any of us on the Board of M & A!

~ Charlotte Rodgers, Patty Strauch, Patty Fadding, Sarah Conly, Sara Zanin, Bruce Wilkens & Nick Pohl



This year, Lent takes a new shape. Faithful to the ancient story and relevant to our times and needs, we will encounter Lent through the lens of *pilgrimage*.

Pilgrimage is a liminal space of encounter. It is an intentional decision to let go and set out. It is a place of reflection and expansion. It is transformative.

### ***Ash Wednesday – February 17***

This outdoor, in-motion service is the stepping-off point for our journey. The service will follow a path around the church in stages including intentional sections of letting go, confessing, expanding, nourishing, marking, and setting out. Framed by Psalms, symbolism, and story participants will set out on their own and at the same time surrounded and supported by Deacons, Pastor Brent, and their church family.

You may arrive anytime between 5:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. The path will be level and walkable. While some portions will head into the grass, a route is available that remains on pavement. It should take about 20-30 minutes to complete. Dress warmly. We may move the date of the service to another day should weather compel. It will be all outside and allow for distance. Masks are required and will be available.

### ***Lenten Worship***

Each week we will use the pilgrimage mindset to hear contemporary and time worn stories of encounter. We will remember the ancient promises of God, ask questions of ourselves, and leave with the invitation to continue our pilgrimage throughout the week. Lent is a time for reflection and learning. We will remember both our beloved-ness as well as our need for grace. We will send you home each week with an invitation for sacred practice and questions for contemplation.

**INVITATION:** We are looking for people to share stories of unexpected and life-giving encounters during lent. These 4–5-minute stories would be recorded and used in worship. Please contact Pastor Brent if you have a story you would like to share.

## ***Mindfulness Meditation***

### ***Your Invitation to spiritual practice during the Lenten Season***

*Offered by Jo Ann Levitt*

Jo Ann is delighted to offer a free five-week Zoom course in Mindfulness Meditation that begins on Thursday February 25<sup>th</sup> and ends Thursday March 25<sup>th</sup>—just one week before Maundy Thursday arrives and Holy Week is under way.

This is an opportunity for you to learn the ins and outs of Mindfulness practice, as experienced through different meditation techniques, including the use of breath-work, toning and loving-kindness meditation—all of which have the power to bring peace, grounding, and good will into our lives.

The course will be conducted from 7:00 PM to 8:00 PM each Thursday and you can sign up with Will through the church office. In addition to our online class, you will also be receiving a variety of adjunct materials that you can print out and use as reference material.

For those who may not know Jo Ann, she is a certified yoga and meditation teacher and has taught meditation for more than 30 years both at Kripalu Center and Canyon Ranch in the Berkshires. She has also been part of multiple experiments with neuro-scientists at Harvard University and Mass General Hospital, testing the efficacy of meditation practices. She is happy to share those results with you during our classroom experience and is looking forward to both “mindful” and “heart-felt” practice with you!



## **Piraino-Randolph Family Updates**

Photos:

- Sophie at the Grand Canyon during her winter break.
- Diane was part of a team injecting roughly six hundred First Responders, medical providers, and residents of Austen Riggs and Gould Farm on January 15. She also received her first dose of the Moderna vaccine. They'll all do it again four weeks later.
- Ted teaches Scottish dancing on Zoom once and sometimes twice a week, and has been reading a book on Norwegian Wood.

Other news:

Nora has a date (as well as a fiancé) for her wedding. We're all hoping the world (and greater Asheville, NC) will be safe enough for a “normal” celebration by July 31st. Tom gave up his Brighton apartment and is now living in our garage apartment. Our housemate for the last 15 months, Lisa, has moved on to Westfield, Vermont to be a goat farmer at the Lazy Lady Farm.

## New Program – *Book Shares!*



Paul Rix is currently on a mission to call everyone in the church. He is checking in to see how folks are doing. He is asking how people are engaging the church and the church family. He is listening for any new ideas that you might have.

On a few recent calls people have brought up a similar idea: sharing the great books we have been reading with each other!

Paul thought it was a great idea – he shared it with the staff and we are trying to make it happen.

We are going to use the J.E. Room to be a place where people can come, browse, pick-out a book, and take it home. You will

be welcome during office hours to come in and see. We are also going to post the list of books and corresponding recommendations on our website so that if you can't make it to the church, you can still take advantage or ask us to set one aside for you.

### Here is what we need from you:

- Identify a book or books that you enjoyed or through which you found meaning.
- Write up one paragraph that would help others to understand why you are recommending it and to help them decide whether they might want to read it too.
- If you are willing to share the physical copy of the book with others, bring it to the church with the note. Otherwise, send an email to Will ([office@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:office@stockbridgeucc.org)) with the information.

### Here is what we will do:

- The books will be arranged on the shelves over the Max Stackhouse Library for you to peruse and to check out.
- We can arrange for copies of the book if needed.
- We will keep the list updated on the website and offer curb-side pick-up or delivery, if needed.
- We will add the names of those who have read the book so that people will know who they can talk with about what they read.

### Here is what we hope:

- That through this program people will share the joy of what they have read.
- That through conversation people will have a chance to talk with friends old and new.
- That through it all we will draw closer to one another, God, and the world.

We will launch as soon as books and reviews arrive. If you have any questions or suggestions on how to make this better – just give us a call at the office! Happy reading.

FROM THE SERVICE LEAGUE: It's always been our custom to take the month of January off from meetings and work bees after the exertions of the Holly Fair. But this is the year when customs of all sorts have been upended - can't say we've worked so hard that we need a rest, but, when so few options are available for getting together with each other, friends, and family (Outdoors? Too cold! Indoors? Too risky!) we decided to take our cue from the animal kingdom and HIBERNATE! It's great, we highly recommend it. Not sure exactly when we'll come out except to say that if we get a call from Charlie Baker, we will all definitely emerge long enough to roll up our sleeves and get our jobs. Meanwhile, the advice from the cave is, please stay warm, stay well, and stay hopeful.



Margaret Hornick, for the Service League