

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



September 2021

Rally Day - September 12

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

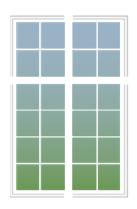
Wednesday: Morning Prayer, 8:00 a.m. Online

Thursday: Walking Prayer

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

$September\ 2021$ The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

Saturday	4 Al-Anon 5:00pm	11 Al-Anon 5:00pm	18 Al-Anon 5:00pm	25 Spiritual Direction meeting 12-5pm Al-Anon 5:00pm	Online worship at stockbridgeucc.org or subscribe to the church's YouTube channel
Friday	3 Pastor Sabbath Day	10 Pastor Sabbath Day Aaron Burr Association meeting 12:00 noon	17 Pastor Sabbath Day	24 Pastor Sabbath Day	Pastor Brent's office hours by appointment, call church office.
Thursday	2 Walking Morning Prayer	9 Walking Morning Prayer	16 Walking Morning Prayer	23 Walking Morning Prayer	30
Wednesday	1 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Council 7:00 p.m.	8 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Christian Ed 5:00 pm Board of Music 7:00 pm	Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Trustees 5:30 pm Deacons 6:30 pm	Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Mission & Action 5:00pm G & F 6:00 pm	29
Tuesday	Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	7 Men's Theological Book Group 6:00pm Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	Re-Gathering Committee 10:30am Men's Theological Book Group 6:00pm Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	21 Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	28 Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm
Monday		6 Service League 10:00am	13 Service League 10:00am	Service League 10:00am Newsletter Deadline (send to Will)	Service League 10:00am Pastor Brent begins his Sabbatical
Sunday		5 Worship 10:00 a.m. Outdoors gathered and online	Rally Sunday Worship 10:00 a.m. Outdoors gathered and online Kids Choir and Sunday School Resumes	19 Worship 10:00 a.m. Outdoors gathered and online (Rally Sunday Rain Date)	26 Blessing & Sending Sunday Worship 10:00 a.m. Indoors gathered and online



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

September 2021 Newsletter

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

September is here! So many things are in transition – some, like summer, drawing to a close even as others, like Sunday School and our community schools, are just opening. At the end of this month, before the next newsletter comes out another transition will happen – you and I will start times of sabbatical. Following worship on September 26 (which I hope you will make an extra effort to be a part of), I will board a train for California to launch my time of sabbatical in the silence of a monastery in Big Sur.

I hope in this letter to share with you both my plans and my hopes for you. Sabbatical is a time for rest, reflection, and rejuvenation for both pastor and congregation. It allows the kind of space (physical, chronological, and emotional) to think – think about what has been, where we are now, what we need, and where we imagine going. It is a time undertaken in the firm knowledge that we will come back together. Done well, the time allows us to come back together sharing openly and honestly that our relationship, our shared ministry, and our future potential might be enlivened and strengthened.

So, what will I be up to? Given the ongoing pandemic and the lessons learned from last year, this year everything is a little more local, a little simpler, a little more grounded. I am beginning in Big Sur because that is where Jon and I were traveling when Deb called almost nine years ago to invite me to come and candidate to be your pastor. There are three themes that are guiding this time: (1) silence and spiritual health, (2) reengaging relationship and activities, and (3) developing sustainable and healthy habits.

There are many ways I hope to experience these things. I have adventures planned to Big Sur, Camden, and the mountains of VT. We are renting a second home in Alford to facilitate the ability to be away, to welcome family and friends, and achieve some separation. I will be spending focused time with close friends and family. I also intend to learn new things like baking bread and will be trying to establish relationships with some local farmers. While I am staying in Parish Ministry here in Stockbridge, I have felt a calling to prison ministry so I will be reading about that. I will be nurturing physical, mental, and spiritual health. I am excited about having a mountain house for Christmas both to spend time with family and indulge all the great holiday traditions.

I hope that you will rest and reflect too. We have a great group of worship leaders coming up from Andover Newton Seminary to expose you the dynamic voices of students, faculty, and staff. There will be a chance for you to explore three key questions (see later in the newsletter) about our shared life. I hope that you too will nurture your physical, mental, and spiritual health.

There is a month before I go. There is much to do together and plan. I know this – the time will be good, helpful, restful, and nourishing. It will facilitate our becoming better church to and with each other. I am grateful for your support and company.

Brent

OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER

HAPPY SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

September 1 Nick Pohl

Mary Hart

September 2 Margot Wise

Allison Tracy

September 5 Cindy Brown

Sara Zanin

September 6 Jackie Hawkins

September 7 Les Freeman III

David Schneider

September 10 John Frelinghuysen

Lee Dixon

September 11 Mark Bachman

September 15 Bob Doerr

September 20 Brian Hyatt

September 22 Adrianna Duhon Rix

September 23 Patty Fadding

September 24 Barbara Kershner

September 25 Shirley Blanchard

September 27 Lois Hall

Linda Frelinghuysen

John McKinstry

Mishel Kulibaba-Epstein

September 28 Tracy Schneyer

Helping our Neighbors

The Meal Train

The Deacons have partnered with Mission & Action to restart the Meal Train system. This simple software program will help us to organize meals for people in need.

If you or someone you know has a need for a prepared meal (for example after surgery, illness, or injury), you just need to reach out to Pastor Brent, Will or a member of the Deacons. We will then reach out to you to determine your needs: meal preferences, time meal is needed, number of meals, etc.

When there is a need, we enter the person or family into the Meal Train system and will send out an alert and link on the church's E-News. We will be developing a list of people who are willing to cook, so if you are interested, please let Will know with a phone call, 413/298-3137.

Not on the computer? No problem! Just let Will know, he will contact the team and we will sign you up!

Pop Up Pantry

Bags of shelf stable, easy to prepare foods are available at our Pop-up Pantry, located in the shed at the back of the church. If you know someone in need of this assistance, please let them know. A bag of food can also be delivered to you.



People's Pantry

The church is proud to support the good work of the People's Pantry in Great Barrington. During worship on September 5, Cindy Brown will announce a mini-campaign for financial support for the People's Pantry. Please send your donations to the church, marking "People's Pantry" in the memo line.

And - your gift will be matched 1:1 by the Board of Mission & Action up to \$1,000!

The pantry also needs **volunteers**. Volunteering involves moving produce, meat in coolers, milk and prefilled grocery bags outside onto tables under a tent. For more details please contact Anne Hutchinson at

volunteer.peoplespantry@gmail.com.

~ For the Deacons: Don Eaton; For Mission & Action: Cindy Brown and Charlotte Rodgers

Board of Christian Education

The Board of CE is off to a rollicking start! Here are some highlights:

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Sunday School Teacher Training and Orientation: Tuesday, August 24. If you missed this and would like to learn more, please let Jill Wheat, Paul Rix, or Elizabeth Evans know! We want you to participate!

Rally Day: September 12 (Rain date 09/19). Outdoor service with kids' choir and ritual "Blessing of the Teachers"; children will leave the service after the Time with Children and participate in outdoor activities. After worship, children will play some fun (and COVID-safe) games and have refreshments outside while parents collect info and register their kids for Sunday School.

Sunday School: Children will remain in worship through the Time with Children, and then go to Sunday School. Curriculum this year is "Spark: All Kids," appropriate for older and younger children working together. Classes will follow COVID safety recommendations, including any updates listed on church website. Class typically runs from about 10:15 to the end of the worship.

YOUTH GROUP

A committee is being formed to help foster a church youth group. CE believes that "If you build it, they will come!" We also know that the youth have great ideas about what the group might do! More info as the committee gets underway!

ADULT EDUCATION

Sermon Small Groups: This fall while our pastor is on sabbatical, the church will have leadership from different people affiliated with Andover Newton Seminary: many different perspectives and messages! In response to such variety, CE would like to organize several small groups that would discuss the meaning of something from the week's service. Groups will determine their own meeting time and format, with possibilities such as a dinner group, a walking group, a Zoom group, a singles group—whatever! The goals are twofold: to learn more about God, our community, and ourselves, and to build and strengthen our personal ties within the church family. There will be some structure to the weekly discussion, but each group

will evolve in its own way based on its members. More information will be forthcoming in weekly e-news and in church announcements. We encourage you to sign up to participate in a group!

Spiritual Direction: Linda Hoddy will be offering a class focused on the question, "What is God calling me to at this point in my life?" In a small group, members of the class will meet monthly to explore their individual callings and to establish and deepen a practice of prayer. The class will run Fall 2021-June 2022 and will begin with an opening half-day retreat at the church. More information is forthcoming in weekly e-news and church announcements. We encourage you to consider this opportunity to deepen your spiritual life with an expert spiritual director!

Letter-Writing Pen Pal Campaign: Terry Wise is investigating opportunities for members of the church, including youth and/or intergenerational group, to establish and develop connections with the Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians now living primarily in Wisconsin. If you would like to be part of this effort to re-establish friendship with descendants of our earliest members and residents of Stockbridge, please contact Terry at 413-329-2645 or wises@bcn.net. You can learn more about the Mohican Nation on their website: mohican.com.

Board of Growth & Fellowship

We are looking forward to seeing you all on Rally Day, when you'll get a chance to meet us all as greeters for the service.

After the service on Rally Day, we'll be taking photos outdoors, weather permitting, for anyone who has not yet submitted a photo to Will for the church directory. It will be quick and easy, we promise!

We will provide a very light refreshment after the service on Rally Day as well. There won't be coffee, so we can't call it coffee hour, but we do hope you will linger after the service in fellowship with other members and guests. As we work on reimagining what coffee hour looks like in our ever-changing reality, we welcome your ideas on what you'd like it to be.

~ Vicky Cooper, Holland Eaton, Mishel Epstein, Brian Ferrell, Bryan Hyatt, Susan Moor

The Service League

We did it - a Summer Fair like no other! In spite of limitations imposed by the pandemic, we were able to pull it off. Under the tent, flowers bloomed (thanks to Claire Williams, Jeannene Booher, Mary Hoeltzel, and David Anderegg); vegetables flourished (thank you, Chad McCormick and Mark Fadding), baked goods beckoned (Josh Hall, Jill Wheat, Deb McMenamy, and Cathy Clark contributed) and crafts and jams and jellies by our own members flew off the tables. The usual cast of Service League ladies was ably assisted by Christine Rasmussen, Anna Smith, Diane Fogarty, Terry Wise, and Barb Kershner.

Meanwhile, inside in the JE Room, Grandma's Attic morphed into Grandma's socially distanced parade of card tables laden with the many quirky and charming contributions that members of the congregation have brought in over the past few months. We send out a hearty THANK YOU to all who contributed - and beg forgiveness of any helpers or donors whose names may have been inadvertently been left off the list of shout-outs. We can't let the credits roll without a special mention for Will Garrison, whose patience in the midst of chaos is legendary, for providing a lot of heavy lifting, literally and figuratively, as we prepared for our big day. And did I mention that we netted \$2148? That's a record - and it will all be sent out into the world to benefit our mission projects. Thank you all for your support! ~ Margaret Hornick, for the Service League





Board of Deacons

Hopefully by now, the faces of our Deacons are becoming more familiar through the hazy (as in hot and humid) and crazy days of indoor, outdoor, and livestream worship. Michael Deegan, Anna Duhon, Don Eaton, Joshua Hall, Donna Jacobs, and Ted Randolph, helped by Deacon alumni Elizabeth Young, Cathy Clark, Jim McMenemy, and Hal Brink, have been doing our best to support Pastor Brent, Barbara Kershner, and our Congregation in worship.

We are getting ourselves ready to step up during Brent's long awaited Sabbatical to provide the joyful welcome that we've grown accustomed to with him at the helm. Among our goals as a Diaconate are to join with the Congregation in welcoming several new Guest Worship Leaders. Our Pastor reminds us that new voices will bring a freshness and breadth of perspective to our growth as a spiritual community. We know that he is right, of course, but we also know how much we are missing him already. We have been fortunate that he has brought boundless energy, intellect, and soul that has grown our faith community. As Deacons, we have been guided in our duties as he has made transitions in the way we worship together seem just about seamless. We've come through challenging times. Are we a little nervous about being on our own? Yes indeed. But we have a loving church to support us in our roles, and we are looking forward to the special times ahead.

~ Donna Jacobs



In this section of the newsletter, we share the books we are reading and what we are finding in them. This month in Gary Schieneman sent in some suggestions for you. What are you reading? Let us know.

The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz by Eric Larson (The Devil in the White City)

This book chronicles Winston Churchill's first year as Prime Minister of Great Britain (1941). If you thought you knew everything about Churchill, think again. The *New York Times* very accurately says it "delivers an intimate chronicle of Winston Churchill and London during the Blitz — an inspiring portrait of courage and leadership in a time of unprecedented crisis." It is a long book — 608 pages — but both my wife and I, and everyone else we know who has read it, say it is really hard to put down.

And if that doesn't sell it to you, it was named one of the best books of the year by the *New York Times Book Review*, *Time*, NPR, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the New York Public Library, the *Globe and Mail*, and *Kirkus Reviews*, among others!

The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good? by Michael J. Sandel

In this short book (227 pages) Sandel, a world-renowned philosopher and Harvard professor, explores the inequality in our society driven in large part, he believes, by a misguided notion of merit that has reduced social mobility and resulted in anger and frustration on the part of those unable to succeed. Sandel debunks the idea that the winners and losers in our society deserve what they get. He explores the hubris that a meritocracy generates among the winners and the harsh fate imposed on the losers. Luck, family background, and easier access to top colleges and universities play a major role in "success," and success has nothing to do with being self-made.

So why do the successful owe anything to the less advantaged? Because "for all our striving we are not self-made and self-sufficient; finding ourselves in a society that prizes our talents is our good fortune, not our due." Sandel believes that understanding and believing that would contribute to a there-but-for-the-grace-of-God-or-the-accident-of-birth-or-the-mystery-of-fate-go-I attitude. "Such humility is the beginning of the way back from the harsh ethic of success that drives us apart." And that would mightily contribute to the common good.

From Pastor Brent

As I shared in my sermon recently, I have been loving a compelling reflective work by Jedidiah Jenkins entitled <u>Like Streams to the</u> <u>Ocean</u>. This book explores core topics to life including ego, family, home, friends, faith and more. Sometimes I find myself hearing my own story through his words, at other times I find myself intrigued by his unique perspective, but at all times I have found value, hope and possibility through his writing. Another book I have enjoyed is <u>The Grateful Heart</u> by Brother David Steindl-Rast. The book is a compilation of some of his talks about prayer offering the idea that prayer should never be forced or a compulsion but rather a way of opening to the blessings that are always all around us. It is a short and joyful invitation to thinking about something so familiar in a new way.

Still Life: Flowers,
Fruits & Foods in Repose
Terry Wise is showing her
paintings in a group exhibit
at Spencertown Academy
until Sept 19. Their gallery
hours are Saturday and
Sunday, 1 - 5 pm. For
more information, go to
spencertownacademy.org.

Group Spiritual Direction this Fall

Do you wonder to what God is calling you at this point in your life? Would you like to deepen your prayer life? Would you like to dwell more often and more consciously in the presence of God? If your answer to these questions is yes, we invite you to consider participating in Group Spiritual Direction at our church this fall.

Spiritual Direction, or, more accurately, Spiritual
Companioning, is an ancient practice of meeting with a trained spiritual guide to explore your relationship to God, and God's call to you. The guide is your companion in the exploration. The director is God. Spiritual direction can be undertaken on an individual or group basis. Usually, such sessions occur monthly, or more frequently, if desired.

Here at First Congregational Church, we will offer this exploration in two groups, each



consisting of six people. We will begin with a retreat on Saturday, September 25, from 1-5 p.m. Then, each group of six will meet monthly for 2.5 hours to discuss how their prayer life is going, what they are hearing in God's call and what issues they might be struggling with in ascertaining that call.

Participants need to be able and willing to:

- share deeply about their relationship to God;
- practice contemplative prayer on a regular basis, hopefully daily;
- attend the retreat and a monthly meeting October June;
- hold confidential things that are shared in the groups.

Meetings will be at the church, unless rising COVID cases force us to hold meetings on Zoom. We will strive to find a time that works best for the participants of the group.

The groups will be led by Rev. Linda Hoddy, an ordained minister who has been a member of our congregation since 2013. She earned a certificate from the Spiritual Guidance Program in the Christian Contemplative Tradition from the Shalem Institute in Washington D.C. in 2012. She holds a Master of Divinity degree from Harvard Divinity School (1992), and served as a parish minister in the Unitarian Universalist tradition for 25 years.

Participants may join a group by completing the registration form, available from the church office, or on the church website, www.stockbridgeucc.org.

Participation will be limited to 12 people – two groups of six. It is open to all members and friends of FCC. There is no charge for participation.

Questions? Please address them to LindaJHoddy@gmail.com, or phone 518 527 1238.

Sabbatical Invitation – Let's Talk!

Beginning in October, Pastor Brent Damrow will take a sabbatical leave from the church. Due to the pandemic, this sabbatical has been delayed since April of 2020. Brent is approaching the end of his ninth year at Stockbridge. It has been more than a decade since the church has experienced a sabbatical. It is a time full of possibility both for Pastor Brent and the church.

The church is alive. We are coming out of the pandemic with both hope and with some challenges. As we attempt to shape our new future, we collectively

are grateful for the life of this place and the gift it is to many. We also have some concerns about the ongoing sustainability of the church on both the Pastor and lay leaders as we have big hearts, big imagination, and desire for significant programs.

We hope that our time apart can be a time of mutual rest, rejuvenation, and re-imagination of who we are as a church in this generation and moment in our present location.

We invite you to set aside time in the months of October, November, and December to participate in three conversations. Each one will consider one question that helps us both imagine who we are trying to be as church and how we get there in ways that are sustainable for both our lay leadership and our pastor. The draft of those questions is:

What is church for? Or maybe another way, why do we engage in this thing called church?

How does that purpose show up, inform, relate to, or impact the relationships with each other within the church?

How does that purpose show up, inform, relate to, or impact the relationships we hold with the broader community?



We plan to hold those conversations through both face-to-face gatherings and through zoom during the second weeks of each month. We are currently working to bring in someone to help facilitate those conversations. We will provide a one- or two-page framing document for each conversation to give us something to think about and to make sure we are on the same page. We are hoping that everyone feels the ability to come to these conversations without them being too much of a heavy lift. Pastor Brent will be setting aside time while he is away to engage each of these questions too.

We hope that people will come to all three but come to the ones you can or are most interested in. We will be developing a sign-up system to make sure the groups are small enough to enable good conversation. This is very important both to Pastor Brent and for the church. It is our chance to step back and to share, to listen, and collectively commit to how we become a stronger, more faithful, more alive, and more sustainable (or less over-taxed) church. Feel free to contact any member of the Sabbatical Committee to learn more.

Thanks,

Cathy Clark, Michael Deegan, Holland Eaton, Charlotte Rodgers, Pastor Brent



Family News

Our daughter Nora was married to Eli Mills on July 31 in Leicester, North Carolina. The joyous event was attended by some 120 family members and friends. Nora and Eli met in 2016 when both were working at Outward Bound (Table Rock, NC). They now live in Asheville where Nora teaches Spanish and rock climbing at the French Broad River Academy. Eli is a guide with the Blue Ridge Hiking Company. ~ Ted Randolph and Diane Piraino

Refurbishment of Front Entrance Steps

Over many years, probably decades, the front steps for the main entrance to the Sanctuary have settled into the ground, sloping back to the front wall. This has allowed rain water and melting snow to infiltrate the foundation area and to pool on the steps. In the winter the water freezes causing a safety issue, there has been damage to the wall behind the steps, and the structure of the steps no longer meets current building codes.

In order to correct this problem, the Trustees have proposed a solution that they believe will not only eliminate this issue, but improve the function of the steps - - all while bringing them into compliance with building codes.

The process includes removing all of the front steps and the material under the steps. Water barrier material will be installed on the foundation and the base material will be replaced with material offering better structural support. The top step will be raised to provide a landing area just outside the doorway, tilted just slightly

(away from the front wall) to allow the water to drain away from the building. Essentially the transition from inside to outside will be level. The remaining steps will be arranged so the step down distance will be consistent and will meet building codes. New hand rails will also be installed as the current railings do not meet code.

Construction is scheduled to begin shortly - - with a completion date in early September!

In order to secure a building permit for the Front Step project, we were required by the town of Stockbridge to provide detailed plans for a barrier -free entrance ramp that meets current building codes. To comply with this, the Trustees engaged an architect, Karen Hunt, to design the ramp. The proposed design now places the ramp at the entrance way to the Jonathan Edwards Room.

The Trustees will be sharing plans and drawings for the proposed design of this new ramp in the next few weeks so everyone can see this muchneeded addition for barrier-free access to our church.

Personnel Committee

The Personnel Committee of the church is charged with reviewing the paid staff which includes, Pastor, Music Minister, Church Administrator/Sexton, Financial Secretary, and Nursery attendant. Please fill out the form on the next two pages - we deeply value your feedback about the work of Rev. Brent Damrow, especially during the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The more feedback forms that are returned, the stronger the data we have to clearly marvel in our strengths as a church, recognize the good work of our staff, and also the areas where we can grow as a church, to reflect about our roles as congregants, what each of us can do to make our community of faith stronger. Please do not hesitate to contact any member of the Personnel Committee (Joan Kopperl, Carl Bradford, Jeremy Ridenour, Hal Brink, or Madonna Meagher) with any questions.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UCC, STOCKBRIDGE MA 01262 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW CONGREGATIONAL FEEDBACK

POSITION: PASTOR

NAME: REV. BRENT DAMROW DATE: SEPTEMBER 10, 2021

CHURCH MEMBERS: Please comment on how the church transitioned to the COVID-19 pandemic. This could include streaming, worship both outdoors and indoors, personal adaptations that have affected your participation, relationship to our church community, faith, or other aspects of connection.

COVID-19 has necessitated dramatic changes in the format of worship and Brent's exercise of his roles and responsibilities. Please comment on the following:

Faith Leader and Faith Formation:

How Brent supports the faith development of the congregation and ways for others to learn and grow.

Worship:

Please comment on Brent's worship leadership, with particular attention to the adjustments to COVID-19 protocols.

Pastoral Care:

11

Please comment on Brent's pastoral care and how he has adapted pastoral care during the pandemic.

Connection to the World:

Please comment on mission and ministry during the pandemic.

Administrative Leadership and Direction:

Please comment on overall direction, work with staff, boards, lay leadership, etc

Adaptability to COVID-19 challenges

pandemic.	
As you think about the church right now, what are o	ur greatest strengths, blessings or opportunities?
What are our weaknesses, challenges or liabilities?	
As you think about Pastor Brent and his role within cellent opportunity for reflection) consider the follow. What things do you commend or give thanks for?	the church as he prepares for his sabbatical, (which is an exwing questions:
What are his growing edges, challenges, or areas he	should devote attention?
Is there anything else you would like Brent or the Pe	ersonnel Committee to know?
Name:(All feedback will remain confidential but having a	

Please comment on how Brent adapted and continues to adapt to the challenges raised by the COVID-19

You may return this document to the Church by mailing/bringing it to the church in a sealed envelope addressed to the Personnel Committee by SEPTEMBER 10, 2021