

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

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



December 2021

Holly Fair - December 4

Pastor: The Rev. Brent Damrow (on sabbatical)

Interim Minister of Music: Tracy Wilson - music@stockbridgeucc.org

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*

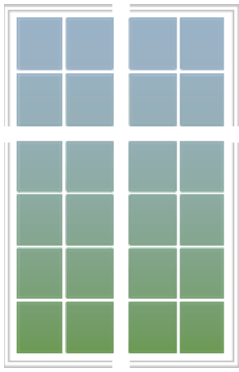
Thursday: Walking Prayer

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

December 2021

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Online worship at stockbridgeucc.org	Guest Preacher for December Rev. JaQuan Beachem		1 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm Council 7:00pm	2 Walking Morning Prayer	3 Service League 10:00am	4 Holly Fair 10:00-1:00 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
5 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> Capital Campaign Dedication CEC 11:30am SFC rehearsal 1:00pm	6	7 <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i>	8 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Christian Ed 5:00pm Music 7:00pm	9 Walking Morning Prayer	10 Service League 10:00am	11 Stockbridge Festival Chorus Concert 5:00pm <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
12 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> CEC 11:30am <i>Sabbatical Sessions</i> 1:30 and 7:00	13 Spiritual Direction 2:00pm	14 Tuesday Club 2:00pm <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i>	15 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm M & A 5:00pm Trustees 5:30pm Deacons 6:30pm	16 Walking Morning Prayer Newsletter Deadline (send to Will)	17 Service League 10:00am	18 Golf Club board meeting <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
19 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online;</i> <i>pageant</i> CEC 11:30am	20	21 <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i>	22 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm	23 Office closed Walking Morning Prayer	24 Office closed	25 Christmas Day <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
26 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Pre-recorded, online</i> <i>only</i>	27 Office closed	28 Office closed <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i>	29 Office closed	30 Office closed	31 Office closed	



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

December 2021 Newsletter

Beloved Community,

A favorite poem, as we approach this magical time of year--a time to honor the dark and the light.

"The Shortest Day" by Susan Cooper

*So the shortest day came and the year died,
And everywhere down the centuries of the snow-
white world*

*Came people singing, dancing,
To drive the dark away.*

*They lighted candles in the winter trees;
They hung their homes with evergreens;
They burned beseeching fires all night long
To keep the year alive.*

*And when the new year's sunshine blazed awake,
They shouted, reveling.*

*Through all the frosty ages you can hear them
Echoing behind us--Listen!!*

*All the long echoes sing the same delight,
This shortest day,*

As promise wakens in the sleeping land:

*They carol, fest, give thanks,
And dearly love their friends,
And hope for peace.*

*And so do we, here, now,
This year and every year.*

Welcome Yule!

So, let us enter the dark of the year fruitfully. It is a sacred time and the essential half of the cycle of life. We can use the darkness as a resource, a place of healing and rebirth, a time of rest and renewal, enabling the growth that comes with the return of the light.



Plants die in order to reseed themselves; leaves die and fall to Earth, replenishing it. Trees stretch their branches toward the light, while their roots are being nourished in the dark Earth. They would not survive without this nourishment. And so, we pause in the midst of all the activity of this time of year to honor the sacred darkness as a time of mystery and wonder, a time to renew our spirit and prepare to receive the Christ light--the divine energy and power from God through Christ that gives life to all. Soon we will burn our Yule logs, gathering inward around our hearth fires, welcoming the light and peace of this blessed season, loving and caring for the Earth and each other.

Prayer from Psalm 139:

"If I say 'Surely the darkness shall cover me and the light around me become night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you."

Peace,

Mary Hoeltzel

**HAPPY DECEMBER
BIRTHDAYS**

December 3 Glenn Gilbert
Nicole Arrell
December 6 Philip Connor
December 8 Khalil Haddir
December 12 Ted Hornick
December 13 Nancy Fitzpatrick
Anne McKinsty
December 21 Brent Damrow
Ron Hanft
December 24 Jenna Knauss
December 25 Debbie Goodwin
December 28 Bruce Wilkens
December 29 John Canning
Joe Nicolosi



A special thank you!

Approximately 15 years ago, Jeannene Booher made a very generous contribution to our church to assist in the ongoing costs of our Music Program. These funds were placed into a Program Fund and held in the church's Fidelity account. A portion has been used each year to augment our regular operating budget, specifically to enhance and support our music program with soloists, choir section leaders, and musicians. Each year a portion has been brought into the annual budget as the Program Fund Transfer. If you are someone who looks closely at the financial documents included in our Annual Budget Meeting packet, you would see on our Budget an income line for the Program Fund Transfer—and on our Balance Sheet an asset titled Fidelity Program Fund.

We have worked hard to put Jeannene's contribution to good work, and we hope you agree that the music program in our church is diverse, of high quality, and a blessing to us all. Jeannene was also instrumental in working with the committee for the Memorial Garden, and a portion of this program fund was used to support the Memorial Garden. In December, we will have used the last of the balance of this program fund, and it is a good time to thank Jeannene, once again, for her tremendous support of our church and our music program.

~ Patty Strauch, Treasurer

Board of Growth & Fellowship

We have been blessed with beautiful Fall weather on Sundays in November, which has allowed us to start up our reimagined coffee hour – not yet featuring coffee, so we're calling it fellowship hour. The warm cider donuts and fresh apple cider have been so well received, we'll continue with outdoor fellowship after service as long as the weather allows. We also have new guidelines from the Regathering Committee that allow us to have fellowship hour safely indoors during inclement weather – so more to come on that next month.

Also coming up in December, G&F has a very special holiday treat planned for our congregation. If you are someone who loves, or even likes to bake and also loves to share your baking, we would love some assistance from you. We promise it's a fairly simple task you can do in the comfort of your own kitchen, and we'll provide some supplies. Please contact Holland Eaton at hg_brown@hotmail.com to lend a hand, and your oven, or to get more information.

We welcome your input as we continue to reimagine fellowship after service moving forward. Please reach out to Holland by email or speak to one of us in person at an upcoming service. We'd love to hear from you!

Vicky Cooper, Holland Eaton, Mishel Epstein, Brian Farrell, Bryan Hyatt, Susan Moor,
Becky Smith

Annual Giving Pledges

We are very grateful for the pledges we have received so far. And we know that more are on the way. Your pledge is not a contract, but it is a statement of your giving intentions for 2022 that is vital for planning a budget for the coming year. Your support for the programs, staff, and facilities of our church enable us all to live out our commitments to be the people of God and followers of Christ in our own lives and in the



More news from Ron Hanft

Giving Envelopes. If you would like envelopes for 2022 but forgot to indicate that on your pledge card, you can put a note in the Giving Box in the JE room, send a request in the mail, or email to: rphanft@yahoo.com. Please indicate if you want weekly (52) or monthly (12) envelopes. A few additional envelopes will be included for special occasions. We will be producing our own giving envelopes this year for all those who request them. You do not have to pledge to request giving envelopes.

Year-End Giving. You may make a contribution to the church with any check dated no later than December 31, 2021, if we receive it by January 20. Online contributions must be made no later than December 31. These gifts will be included in your giving statement for all of 2021 which you will receive by Jan. 31, 2022.

A **contribution** has been received from Claire Williams to help provide the Christmas wreath on the front of the church in celebration of Barbara Bracknell and her long career as a Deacon.

world around us.

If you have not yet sent in your pledge, please do so as soon as possible. If you misplaced your card we can easily send you another. Also, they are available at the church on the table in the hall outside Will's office. You can mail in your pledges, drop them on Ron's desk in the office, or in the Financial Secretary's mailbox just inside the classroom door. Questions? Contact Ron

Hanft, Financial Secretary, at rphanft@yahoo.com or 413-232-4179. Many thanks!

Sabbatical Committee Update

The third and final Sabbatical Session is scheduled for **Sunday, December 12**, both in-person at the church 1:30-3:00, and that evening 7:00-8:30 via Zoom.

Our first session in October explored the concept of "what is church for?" or why do we engage in this thing called church? In November, we discussed how that purpose shows up, informs, relates to, or impacts the relationships we hold with each other within the church.

For our December discussion, we will investigate how that purpose shows up, informs, relates to, or impacts the relationships we hold with the broader community.

Our discussions have been lively and engaging, and beautifully and thoughtfully facilitated by Rev John Nelson.

To register, please visit stockbridgeucc.org or call the office. A two-page framing document for each conversation will be available to give everyone something to think about before coming to the session, to make the discussion as easy and open as possible.

You needn't have attended either of the two previous sessions to fully enjoy and participate in this last one. There's plenty of room in both time slots. Hope you can join us!

Cathy Clark, for the Sabbatical Committee (Michael Deegan, Holland Eaton, Charlotte Rodgers)

Board of Deacons

When the word “Church” is initially thought of, most people immediately see a picture of a building in their mind’s eye. For us it is probably our beautiful historic Congregational Church of Stockbridge here at 4 Main St.

The visible and universal church, however, refers to all believers everywhere, but more locally and intimately the church is you - members, non-members, clergy, lay clergy, and volunteers of all kinds. We all are part of this wonderful connection to our community and Almighty God. So, on behalf of the board of deacons I would like to thank everyone for making the first half of Brent’s sabbatical precious and special. We have

been confronted with a few unplanned events that were taken in stride, so many thanks to all. This is a prime example of how living into our choice to “be the church” allows us to honor God.

I cannot help but to start to feel the excitement in my belly whenever the Advent season comes around. This year is no different. Although we will be heading straight into Christmas without our beloved pastor, I know that everyone will pull together and make this a warm and special celebration of the birth of our Saviour.

Peace.

Don Eaton, for the Board of Deacons

The Service League

Since we last reported, a lovely memorial service for Barbara Bracknell was held, led by Rev. Barbara Kershner, with a reception in the JE Room hosted by the Service League. There were some charming tributes to this long-time member whose crocheted scrubbies and knitted mittens, caps, and sweaters were a staple of Holly Fair inventory.

And now, we're just a couple of weeks away from this year's HOLLY FAIR - Dec 4, 10:00 - 1:00, in case you missed it, and the Service League members are busy with last-minute pricing, planning, organizing, and delegating to be ready for you. Don't be surprised if you get a call from Nancy Wilcox asking for a contribution to the baked goods table - always popular with hungry shoppers. And we've had some lovely donations to Grandma's Attic. Did everyone spend their spare pandemic hours cleaning and decluttering? I know I did - some of the time, at least. We'll soon go into production at the Grange to create a limited edition of holiday wreaths, under our organizer-in-chief Hope Ponsart (Claire Williams' daughter).

Speaking of cleaning out closets, someone unearthed this bit of ephemera in one of ours. Hmm. Is this what they mean by "inflation"? Even if chicken supper prices have gone up in sixty years, HOLLY FAIR prices have barely budged. It's the perfect opportunity for bargain-hunting do-gooders who like to see all their purchases fund charitable works. We hope to see you there!

~ Margaret Hornick, for the Service League



The CEC is Up and Running

The CEC, or Campaign Executive Committee is charged with implementing the church's \$850,000 Capital Campaign, unanimously approved at a special congregational meeting on September 26th. Our consultant, Jennifer Williams, joins Cathy Clark and Bronly Boyd in guiding some two dozen committee members – representing fourteen different sub-tasks -- along the three-year path to a (successful!) conclusion of the fundraising efforts. Speaking as a neophyte to such campaigns, and Co-Chair of Publicity, right now it all seems quite daunting. But many of us are far from being newbies, and I know we're in good hands. Also, this is the first time I've ever been on a committee that has a Co-Chair of Prayer, and that feels good.

At this writing we have had three meetings, going over the job descriptions of each subcommittee, the calendar for the next twenty-two weeks, and housekeeping items, as well as brainstorming to determine a theme and logo. The Publicity subcommittee looks forward to keeping you apprised of our progress via this newsletter and elsewhere. One of our initial discussions was about how we will need extra help from time to time for specific tasks. If one of us comes knocking for a little assistance, please consider our "ask." Thanks!

~ Ted Randolph

Campaign Co-Chairs: Cathy Clark/Bronly Boyd

Campaign Consultant: Jennifer Williams

Subcommittee task groups

Advance Gifts: Carl Bradford/Susan Moyle Lynch

Family Gifts: Patty Strauch/John Canning

Administrative: Don Rodgers/Stephanie Bradford

Brochure: Michael Lynch/Charlotte Rodgers

Publicity: Cris Raymond/Ted Randolph

Kickoff : Jack Brown/

Recording /Acknowledgement:

Janet Canning/Ron Hanft

Prayer: Linda Russell/

Building: Joe Nicolosi/Christine Rasmussen

Planned Giving: Frank Russell/

Grants: Shirley Blanchard/Carl Bradford



Sermon Discussions

Two small groups facilitated by Jeremy Ridenour, Kim Ruffing and Linda Russell have been meeting weekly via Zoom to discuss the previous Sunday's sermons by preachers from Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School. We listened to a variety of sermons and we have read the sermon transcripts faithfully transcribed by Cindy Brown. Our discussions, which wrap up after the November 21 service, have been lively and meaningful for everyone.

Please visit the church website stockbridgeucc.org to listen to and read each week's sermon.



Pastor David Figliuzzi, November 14



Heifer
International 2021
\$220

1 Group of Honeybees \$30

4 Flocks of Chicks \$80

1 Hope Basket of Rabbits, Chickens, Training \$50

3 Flocks of Ducks \$60



Sunday School on Halloween featured four lovely children and one teacher dressed in full costume (and the other adult in a groovy mask). The kids decorated boxes they had constructed under Ted Randolph's direction and collected \$220 for Heifer International from the generous congregation! The children used the money they raised to purchase chickens, ducks, rabbits, and honeybees for families in need.

Mission & Action Helping Our Neighbors – The Afghan Humanitarian Project

Members of Mission & Action have been closely following the Afghan Humanitarian Project – sponsored by Jewish Family Services (JFS) of Western Massachusetts. It is expected that as many as 60 refugee families will be resettled in the Berkshires as early as December and January 2022. JFS is working to form HOSTs (Host Organization Support Teams) that will welcome and support newly arrived Afghan evacuees. HOSTs groups include general support as well as a core group of volunteers that will work closely with JFS staff. HOSTs organizations will work very closely with their family, providing compassionate support, for an estimated 6-8 months, helping with housing, community connections, health care, employment and education. Training is provided and support is provided by JFS.

Mission & Action has formed a Task Force to explore the possibility of sponsoring a family, either as a single HOSTS team, or joining together with other small congregations. The need for help is great, and this involves a significant commitment of time and funding.

If you are interested in joining the Task Force, or learning more about how you can help, please contact Martha Floyd at 413-445-5704 or mtalisfloyd@gmail.com



Look for information on The **Giving Tree** and please select families to shop for!! Details are in the weekly emails, or call/email Will at the office 413-298-3137, office@stockbridgeucc.org

And please be sure to check out the January news from Mission & Action, where you will learn more about how your pledges have supported a variety of special projects that include local, national and international support.

Wishing you the hope, peace and love of the season,

Charlotte Rodgers, Carl Bradford, Cindy Brown,
Sarah Conly, Martha Floyd, Nick Pohl, Bruce
Wilkins

People's Pantry

We may not be feeding 5,000, but we are helping to feed at least 200, week after week. We can bless, and break, and multiply, and share those loaves, and come to know Christ more fully in the breaking of the bread.

In October, Cindy Brown made this eloquent plea on behalf of Mission & Action for renewed support of the People's Pantry. Mission & Action pledged to match up to \$1,000 from its budget. That match was met more than four times over, adding up to over \$5,000 for the work of the Pantry. Thank you!



Open to shoppers Mondays 4:00-5:30 PM and Thursdays, 10:00 AM - 12:30PM, the Pantry is open to all residents of South Berkshire County. There are no income guidelines and shoppers are welcome to visit once a week all year. Due to Coronavirus the Pantry has replaced its usual self-selection model of shopping with pre-packed bags of staples. Produce, meat, baked goods, and dairy products are selected by shoppers from outdoor tables.

The People's Pantry is primarily run by volunteers from the community. These volunteers and many organizations and other individuals support the Pantry with food collections and financial donations.

More at thepeoplespantrygb.org

The Board of Christian Education has numerous activities scheduled in the coming weeks. If you are interested in participating in any of them, please sign up by contacting Will Garrison at the Church Office. Telephone: (413) 298-3137, Email: office@stockbridgeucc.org.

The Sermon Discussion Groups have had lively sessions about the stimulating material in the sermons we have been fortunate to have from faculty and students at Andover Newton Divinity School. In addition, the Spiritual Direction small group is thriving in its monthly meetings to discuss spiritual practices and growth under the Rev. Linda Hoddy's leadership.

UPCOMING EVENTS: During Advent, the children will participate in a simple Christmas pageant, as well as continuing to have lessons from the Spark Curriculum we currently use. The Board of Christian Ed decided to purchase the next set of lessons from Spark, as it includes engaging content, significant and useful teaching and learning materials, and attractive handouts for children to use at home.

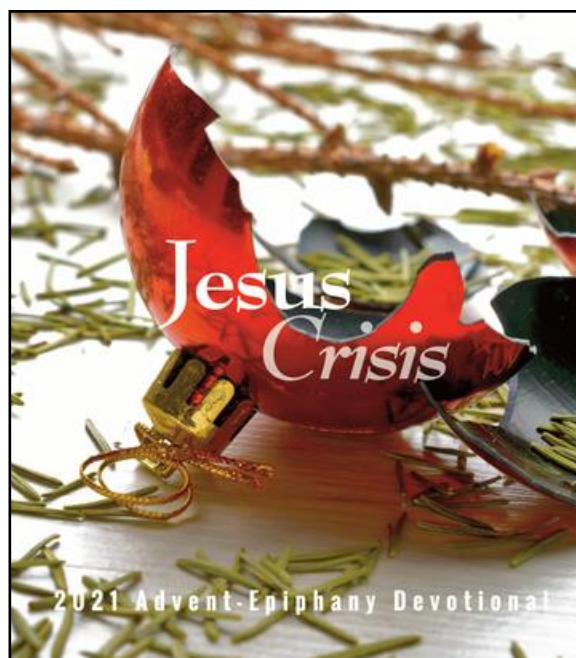
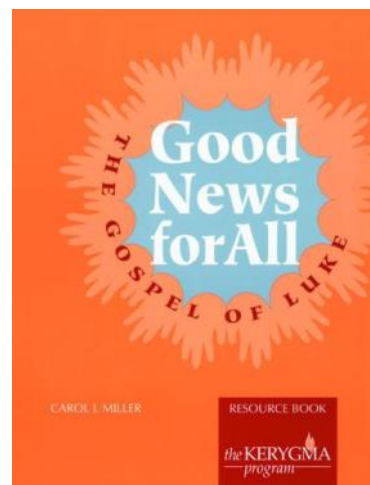


The Youth Group's next event is an Advent Festival on November 28 after church. There will be pizza, as well as opportunities to make an Advent Wreath, print cards with potatoes, decorate votive candle holders, and play holiday themed charades! Along with all of this, youth will learn how they can share hope with families through Kiva's small funding grants on this first Sunday of the Advent season! Please sign up!

For adults during Advent, CE is offering this year's UCC Advent Devotional, "Jesus Crisis," by the UCC Stillspeaking Writers' Group. Advent begins November 28. If you pre-ordered, we have

a copy set aside for you; if you would like a copy, please look for them on the table outside the church office or in the JE Room. The Devotional has a lively, brief reading for each day, suitable to share with family and friends in meaningful conversation through the season. Or join a structured discussion group led by Elizabeth Young on Thursday afternoons (December 1, 8, 15, and 22) from 2:00-3:00 in person at church. Please sign up, or simply drop in to discuss the week's readings!

Looking ahead to the new year and Pastor Brent's return, the Board of CE has ordered books for an in-depth Bible Study course on the Book of Luke. Using the Kerygma text, *Good News for All*, Pastor Brent, will lead one small group, featuring his usual scholarly and spiritual depth, and Elizabeth Young will lead another small group, featuring her expertise as a professor of literature. The classes will start in early January and run for 14 weeks, ending (appropriately!) at Easter. Please sign up!



Regathering Committee

This ad-hoc committee meets every two weeks to review the covid protocols necessary to balance safety and the need to gather together. On November 17, we published an updated set of protocols:

Protocols for use of the building

Regathering is a transition, and we continue to work to find safe ways to be together in worship and in fellowship. We strive to keep protocols consistent, simple to understand, and based on the latest medical advice. We will face this together armed with hope, love, faith, intellect, and understanding.

Our Regathering Committee takes the lead in setting protocols for building use, using data and directives provided by several sources, including the CDC, the Tri-Town Health Department, and the Southern New England UCC. As conditions are constantly changing, these protocols may be amended at any time.

Cold weather season: We will be worshipping indoors, observing social distancing. With permission, small groups can use the JE Room and classroom. Contact the church office, 413-298-3137, with any questions.

Masking Requirement: Following the directive published by the Tri-Town Health Department (as amended 10/27/2021), masks – covering nose and mouth – are required inside the church buildings regardless of vaccination status. This requirement applies to all functions held at the church. We will have masks on hand if people need them.

Exceptions: staff when working alone in their offices, for worship leaders when they are speaking during worship, children under the age of two, and as described below in “Food and Drink.”

Food and Drink: Following the examples of restaurants and school cafeterias, we allow the consumption of food and drink; the following guidelines to be followed.

1. Everyone remains masked as much of the time as possible; unvaccinated adults must remain masked at all times.
2. Persons eating/drinking must be seated, in small groups, before removing masks. Each person is to be seated as socially distanced as feasible.
3. Any function or event at which food/drink is served is subject to review by the Regathering Committee.

Vaccinations: We recommend that anyone who enters the church to be vaccinated (excepting those with medical conditions that prevents this, and children under 12). Anyone needing help to get vaccinated is welcome to call the church office.

Thank you for using masks and getting vaccinated. This enables us to meet in person.

Music News

There will be a lot of amazing music this holiday season! The **Bell Choir** and the **Kids Choir** will be sharing their talents during worship services during Advent and Christmas. Interim Minister of Music Tracy Wilson and guest soloists will provide even more music during **services**.

The Stockbridge Festival Chorus will perform in concert on December 11, starting at 5:00pm. In the sanctuary. Keep an eye on emails for updates!

The **Church on the Hill** (UCC) in Lenox is sponsoring a service of lessons and carols on Sunday December 19th at 5 pm. The carols and anthems were all written by our own David Anderegg, with additional lyrics by Rick Floyd and Anne McKinstry.



**HOLLY
FAIR**

**Saturday, Dec. 4
10am—1pm**

baked goods | crafts & gifts
holiday greens | Santa
Grandma's attic

Stockbridge
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
4 Main Street, Stockbridge, MA



Race Mountain Tree Service
preparing to prune our trees,
November 18.



Pastoral Care

Rev. Barbara Kershner will be serving as Pastoral Care person during Pastor Brent's sabbatical.

If you need to contact Rev. Kershner, please call/text (570) 449-8581

Since cell phone coverage is spotty where Rev. Kershner lives, please try texting first.

Merry Christmas!



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