



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

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



February 2022

Pastor: The Rev. Brent Damrow

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*

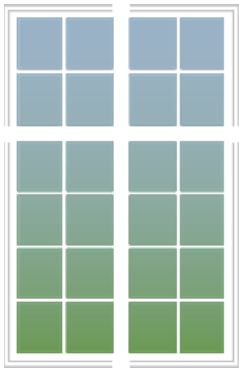
Thursday: Walking Prayer

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

February 2022

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>
Online worship at stockbridgeucc.org		1 Gospel of Luke Study 12:00noon <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> Gospel of Luke Study 7:00pm	2 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Church Council 7pm	3	4 Brent's Sabbath Day	5 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
6 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> Annual Budget Meeting, immediately following worship.	7	8 Gospel of Luke Study 12:00noon <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> Gospel of Luke Study 7:00pm	9 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm Christian Ed 5:00pm Music 7:00pm	10	11 Brent's Sabbath Day Service League 10:00am	12 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
13 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> CEC 11:30am	14 Spiritual Direction 2:00pm	15 Gospel of Luke Study 12:00noon <i>Tuesday Club 1:15pm</i> <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> Gospel of Luke Study 7:00pm	16 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm Trustees 5:00pm Deacons 7:30pm	17	18 Brent's Sabbath Day Service League 10:00am Newsletter Deadline (send to Will)	19 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
20 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i> CEC 11:30am	21	22 Gospel of Luke Study 12:00noon <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> Gospel of Luke Study 7:00pm	23 Morning Prayer 8 am M & A 5:00pm G&F 6:00pm	24	25 Brent's Sabbath Day Service League 10:00am	26 <i>Stockbridge Golf Club meeting 8:30am</i> <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
27 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i>	28	Berkshire Waldorf High School schedule (JE Room)	Monday 12:45-3:30; Tuesday 10:25-11:20 and 1:15 – 3:30;	Wed. 2:15-3:30; Thursday 11:35-12:30 and 2:30-3:30.		



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

February 2022 Newsletter

Dear Friends in Christ,

It is a great joy to be back with you in worship, Bible study, meetings, phone calls, visits, planning, and more. As I ease (or jump) back into the life of this place I am mindful of my gratitude for you and of some core things I learned while away. I was blessed with so many great places to walk – the severe beauty of Big Sur, the rolling openness of Alford, the contrast of mountain and sea in Maine, and the streams flowing through endless acres of national forest in Vermont. I had the chance to experience the heat of Southern California, the slowly relentless change of fall here in the Berkshires, and the fullness of winter storm and wind in the mountains of Vermont. Most of my walks were alone, but many had the gift of family or friends too, and on each of them there was the waving to passing walkers, bikers, or motorists.

Beyond the exercise, the beauty, and the rhythm of those walks emerged a tremendous sense of opening. I am sure that part of the opening emerged from the essence of where I walked – places filled with hill and valley offering new vistas around each corner, places rich with the limitlessness of the ocean or the movement of a stream. I am equally sure, though, that the sense of opening transcended the gift of location.

The lack of agenda in my walks allowed me to be fully present, to linger in moments, and to allow my heart, rather than my watch, to determine which turns to take. The pace facilitated noticing details, smelling my surroundings, and hearing things usually obscured by the background noise of life. The gradual increase in my strength and the decrease in my weight brought a sense of capacity, possibility, and anticipation to my walking. One of my favorite walks involved getting lost with Jake in the woods and scrambling our way out. At walks' ends, my mind and body were tired, joyful,

and peaceful. My outlook was profoundly more hopeful and open.

We have been hemmed in by this pandemic. We have been forced to accept limitations just as we have been enticed to focus on an ever-smaller sense of place and reality of existence. Blessings of things like dinners out, parties at the homes of friends, giving hugs, and gathering in church have been constricted or eliminated. Before leaving on my sabbatical, my life and job had both become narrowly confined. Back, I have struggled to keep walking and when I do the walks are shorter and I am aware of the tasks awaiting me at my desk. My goal though is to keep pursuing that blessing of opening that came through my walks and to help you find ways to opening too. The memory of the joy and gift of Christmas is still fresh. There are hopeful signs that even this current wave of the pandemic may be receding. How will we individually and collectively be prepared to open to the new possibilities already here and that might be just around the corner? How will we carve out the time not to jump into more and more but instead create the space, pace, and place that fosters the contemplation of what is worth jumping into?

Renewed, I look forward to embracing both the challenge and the joy of leaning into the new reality that has been unfolding and will continue to do so. I invite you to bring your faith, your hope, your love, and your joy to that process. I look forward to walking with you both figuratively on our journey of faith and in this beautiful place we get to call home. I look forward to practicing what is at the heart of Christ – an opening in love to possibility, peace, God and neighbor too.

With gratitude,

Brent

HAPPY FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

February 1	Ann Brink Rick Floyd
February 4	Steve Blanchard
February 10	Claire Williams Senta Brodeur Ellen Lahr
February 12	Les Freeman IV
February 13	Betsy Wheat Paul Rix
February 15	Amy Freeman Logan Higuera
February 17	Thomas Wheat
February 19	Maurice Peterson
February 24	Sophie Randolph John Ruffing
February 26	Jim McMenamy
February 28	Lilly Hassmer

Scholarships

Few things are more satisfying than being able to encourage the educational efforts of the next generation, and on December 19, we were delighted to be able to award scholarships of \$1000 each to our five college students, Fiona Brown, Gabriel Davis-Hollander, Anna Grace Nimmo, Sophie Randolph (represented in the photo by her mother, Diane Piraino) and Ella Smith. All were able to attend except Anna Grace - and we offer our warmest congratulations to them all.

Margaret Hornick, for the Scholarship Committee

Board of Christian Education

The Board of Christian Education welcomes Pastor Brent back! He is celebrating his return by leading two adult Bible Study classes on Luke: The Gospel of Amazement. In addition, he is meeting with the Adult Education sub-committee to discuss adult educational opportunities for Lent, including a Lent Devotional Discussion Group like the Advent one, and another discussion group related to a theme or themes of Lent. The Adult Ed sub-committee also continues to explore opportunities to interact with the Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians.

Sunday School for the children is online at present, with Christian Education planning to reassess COVID safety conditions when we meet in mid-February. Currently the online resources on the Church website include materials from the Spark curriculum, as well as supporting materials for activities at home.

In conjunction with the Capital Campaign, CE will post fun and informative supplemental materials about "Caring for Our Church" online in February, featuring units on "Historic Preservation," "Repainting the Steeple," "How a Church Organ Works—or Occasionally Doesn't!" and "Welcoming and Affirming a Universal Access Ramp." The units will include video, suggested activities, art opportunities, and prayer possibilities.

Kids who participate have the chance to have their art and prayer projects published in upcoming weekly E-News as the Campaign proceeds.



Board of Mission & Action

Mission and Action wants 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 the Pop up Pantry, volunteered at the Peoples Pantry, supported our work with Christian Education and our youth - or otherwise supported Mission – we are grateful!

In December, our congregation provided gifts to several families from the Elizabeth Freeman Center in Great Barrington, Construct Pine Woods housing, Lit Net of the Berkshires and Great Barrington Housing. 135 individual gifts were purchased, wrapped and delivered for the 2021 Giving Tree program!

Thank you to all of the “elves” who worked to make a brighter Christmas for those in need.



The Afghan Resettlement Task Force:

Our sponsored family from Afghanistan arrived at their apartment in Pittsfield in early January. Husain (dad), Fatima (mom), Zahra (9 year old girl), Ali (6 year old boy), and Marwa (2 year old girl) are such a lovely family! The housing team has done a fabulous job of setting up their apartment to make it comfortable and homey. As they have settled in, some additional needs have popped up. Contact Will in the church office for more information.

Volunteer teams are working with Jewish Family Services to help the family with transportation, groceries, education and health needs. For more information on the work being done by the First Congregational Church and the Unitarian Universalist Meeting Church of Southern Berkshire, please visit the Church Life page on the church website, stockbridgeucc.org.

Our Pop-Up Pantry:

We continue to have light traffic for our Pop-Up Pantry behind the church building. A few people have availed themselves of our offerings of shelf-stable food items, and we continue to receive occasional much-appreciated item donations,

supplemented by Mission & Action. For about the pantry, including a shopping list and ways to donate funds, see the Church Life page on our website.

Kiva Program:

Kiva is a loan program that our church has participated in for several years. Mission & Action set funds aside to use for lending. The tag line for Kiva is “Make a Loan, Change a Life.” The Kiva program is international, spanning 77 countries with over 1.9 million lenders. These are small loans, typically going to underdeveloped countries, helping individuals purchase chickens, livestock, build sanitary facilities or purchase supplies for small craft businesses. The return rate on these loans is over 96%. This year we partnered with the Christian Education Board to involve our youth in making decisions on which projects to select

for loans. Thank you to Patty Strauch for her presentation to the youth group to acquaint them with Kiva, and thank you to Ted Randolph and Jill Wheat for facilitating the youth group’s decisions on loan recipients. Kiva is a great example of how a small amount of money can go a long way to help! See page 9 for photo.

As a group we continue to discuss how the work of our church can impact the congregation and our community. Over the last year we funded support to United Church of Christ missions (including UCC Disaster Relief, Our Church’s Wider Mission, One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, and the Christmas Fund), Church World Service, Afghan refugee support, hurricane relief, KIVA, Hands in Outreach, Construct, Gould Farm, Lit Net, Pop up Pantry, Peoples Pantry. In December, donations were sent to UCC disaster relief in immediate response to the tornado outbreak. We are learning more about what is needed by those impacted by the tornadoes, and will let you know what we learn.

~ Carl Bradford, Cindy Brown, Sarah Conly, Martha Floyd, Nick Pohl, Charlotte Rodgers and Bruce Wilkens

Nativity Pageant

“Hey kids, let’s put on a show!” These words (ala Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney) inspired Christian Education chair Jill Wheat to lead the Sunday school in following the Star (and creating a few in the process...), culminating in a stellar Nativity Pageant during the December 19 worship service, complete with elegant costumes and sets. Mastermind Jill corralled the kids to sing, play bells, and act out the story of our Lord Jesus’ birth, from Mary and Joseph’s trek to Bethlehem’s stable, to the angels’ annunciation to the shepherds and their boisterous and wayward sheep, who made their way to the manger to tell Mary of the angels’ good tidings of the Savior’s birth, and ending with Mary treasuring their words and pondering them in her heart. What a beautiful telling of how God came to be among us. In fact, what Jill actually said to the children was, “It’s your turn to tell the story.” And what a joyful telling it was.

Many hands made all this possible. Here’s the cast and crew:

Mary: Ruth Wheat

Joseph: Khalil Haddir

Angel Gabriel: Andrew Hall

Heavenly Host: Kaitlyn Houghtling, Mia Freeman,
William Barrett, Terry Wise

Shepherds: Conor Hall, Julian Houghtling

Sheep: Harley Houghtling, Betsy Wheat, Tommy
Wheat

Director, Script Writer, Music Director: Jill Wheat

Costumer: Sarah Conly

Set Designers, Carpenters: Ted Randolph, Michael Deegan

Musicians: Tracy Wilson, Barbara Kershner, Nellie Rustick, John Demler

Worship Leader: The Rev. JaQuan Beachem

And many thanks to the families and other church members who worked together toward sharing the love found in this service.

Thank you all for sharing the reason for the season, the story of the arrival of Emmanuel, God-with-us!



Board of Deacons

Blessings in this mid-winter season of darkness yielding to light. The beginning of February celebrates this moment in many traditions, including the traditional Gaelic festival of Imbolc, marking the halfway point between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox, and the Christian feast day of Candlemas, marking the ritual purification of Mary and presentation of Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem 40 days after Jesus' birth.



In this reflective moment, the Deacons look back with deep gratitude on the many volunteers and worshipers who helped bring so much light into the Christmas season. As Donna Jacobs, our Deacon Chair, remarked in a recent meeting, people just kept saying “yes” when asked to help. We wish to especially thank and honor Cindy Brown for the monumental job she did in co-leading the Christmas Eve service and sharing her knowledge and experience in decorating the church. Cindy prepared a beautiful “Christmas Eve Thank You” that can be found in the [“News” section](#) of the website as a tribute to all who helped bring the Christmas Eve service to life.

One of the goals that the Deacons hold this year is to reflect on the new liturgical and

worship experiences that this liminal pandemic moment has inspired, and to consider what we as a church might want to keep, change, or continue to explore creatively. The Advent Spiral, building off of last year’s Advent Labyrinth, and imagined into being by Deacons Ted Randolph, Don Eaton, and Michael Deegan, is an example of such a new “tradition.” When I talked to Terry Wise about her experience of it, she said “I loved the Spiral” and described the joy of being able to hop out of your car, walk it, and be back in your car 5 minutes later having entered a wholly different space for that time.

How have you experienced the Advent Spiral or any of the other new worship experiences that have arisen during the pandemic? What “traditions” would you like to see continue or evolve? We welcome feedback as we continue to reflect.

Finally, looking ahead to spring and Easter, for Ash Wednesday on March 2nd the Deacons are leaning toward another opportunity for a different kind of worship experience, building on last year’s luminary-lit pilgrimage and bonfire. We hope you will continue to join us in these different forms of worship and share your reflections and experiences of them with the Deacons.

Anna Duhon, for the Deacons



Capital Campaign

• • • SAVE • THE • DATE • • •

WHEN: Sunday, April 10, 2022

WHAT: Capital Campaign Kickoff Celebration

WHERE: (TBD-stay tuned!)

WHY: Refresh, Rehydrate, Rejoice!

At the January 16th meeting of the Campaign Executive Committee, Jack Brown made an exciting announcement. As Chair of the Kickoff Event task group, he was charged with finding a place to hold this important gathering. Well, he did! Unfortunately- or very fortunately - at our meeting on January 23, the CEC voted to move the date of the Kickoff to April 10 in hopes of finding a venue better suited for the expected size of the event, and, frankly, in hopes of more agreeable weather. The new date coincides with another celebration, Palm Sunday, so prepare yourselves for a nimiety of joy.

Now you may be thinking to yourself, “Wait, a Kickoff Event?? Hasn’t the Capital Campaign already started? I’ve been hearing about it since September at least. Then we had the Congregational Meeting. I know there’s a committee that meets almost every Sunday (missing a few other kickoffs?), and I’ve even heard rumors that some people have already made their campaign pledge.” Gentle Reader, all I can say to your excellent questions and observations is that there are many moving parts. Campaigns move in mysterious ways, and all will be revealed in the fullness of time. So please, save the date.

While you wait, here’s Quiz No. 1 to bide the time:

- 1) FCC was established in what year? 1492, 1776, 1734, 1824
- 2) The second minister of our church was: Sergeant Edwards, Stephen East, Jonathan Edwards, David Dudley Field?
- 3) The newly set front steps are made of: soapstone, marble, granite, concrete?
- 4) Our 1865 organ is a Johnson, Nixon, Estey, Yamaha, Harley?
- 5) What American composer, while strolling along the Housatonic with his wife Harmony, was inspired by music from our church to compose “The Housatonic at Stockbridge”? Currier Ives, Charles Twichell, Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, Leonard Bernstein?
- 6) Mixed sports-related metaphors bother you: (a) a little, (b) a lot, (c) not at all, (d) only when they are football and/or baseball metaphors.





Patty Strauch explaining Kiva to Youth Group.

The Service League

We were all enjoying our January R & R so much that we decided - or Omicron decided for us - that it might be a good idea to extend it into February. So as of now, no news to report, and these days, no news is good news. We'll reconvene on February 11th - at least, that's the plan for now. Stay tuned!

Margaret Hornick, for the Service League

Family News

Sophie Randolph, daughter of Ted Randolph and Diane Piraino, is engaged to be married to Patrick B Ray. Sophie and Patrick live in Houston, Texas, but will be married here in the Berkshires this June.



Riverbrook Spiritual Group

One of the outreach ministries of our church is the Riverbrook Spiritual Group, which began in 2016. It's currently led by Jeremy Ridenour and Cindy Brown. Our beloved Wendy Nicolosi was also a leader for many years. The Riverbrook Residence in Stockbridge is a home for exceptional women with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The group meets every two weeks to study the Bible, pray, and have fellowship together.

Before the pandemic we met in Riverbrook's conference room, and for the past two years we have been meeting on Zoom. Beth, Charlotte and Don Rodgers very generously purchased "The Jesus Storybook Bible" for each participant, and we've been studying the Hebrew Scriptures starting with Genesis, and then going through the life of Jesus and the beginning of the church in the New Testament. After exuberant greetings and thoughtful prayers for loved ones, Cindy reads a biblical story followed by Jeremy's expert commentary and teaching, and then we watch a video of the story and have an enthusiastic sing-along of a related hymn. This is a time of delightful fellowship, and these wonderful women provide a ministry of love to one another and to Jeremy and Cindy.

photo of Beth Rodgers by Cindy Brown.



Board of Growth & Fellowship

To celebrate the holidays, Growth & Fellowship organized its second annual bread extravaganza. A team of bakers baked and wrapped 135 loaves of delicious bread; drivers delivered them to homes of members and friends to a wide area: west to Troy, NY, east to Sandisfield, MA; south to Canaan, CT; and north to Dalton, MA. Thanks to all who helped!

~ Holland Eaton

Photo by Cindy Brown

To keep gatherings at church as safe as possible, the Regathering Committee identified high-quality (and stylish!) KN95 masks, in both adult and children's sizes. The church has purchased these masks, to be made available at in-person gatherings.



Gospel of Luke Study Launches

Sponsored by the Board of Christian Education, two sections of the Luke Study have recently launched. Both happen on Tuesdays and are led by Pastor Brent. The lunchtime section includes Cathy Clark, Sarah Conly, Vicky Cooper, Meryle Epstein, Marilyn Strauch, Patty Strauch, and Terry Wise. The evening section includes Ray Bergmann, Cary Quigley, Jeremy Ridenour, Charlotte Rodgers, Don Rodgers, and Miles Wheat.

So far we have made it from the visit of angels to both Elizabeth and Mary through the births of their sons John and Jesus. The curriculum has focused our attention on considering what God is up to and observing to how Luke sees these events linked to and flowing out of the Covenants of Hebrew Scripture. One innovative element of the study is the assignment each week for one person to pick out and share a hymn text that builds on something we learned that week. We will continue making our way through the Gospel from beginning to end. The chapters dealing with Holy Week and Easter will be explored even as those events unfold on the liturgical calendar. We will keep you in the loop as we go forward and invite you to contact any of the participants to learn more about their experience.

***We take welcome seriously here.** We do so because we understand that Jesus welcomed extravagantly and calls us to do the same. We do so because we understand that in this world, people need a place where they can come and be in safety, sanctuary, and community. To be fully welcoming requires more than uttering the statement; it means that those who come through the door both feel safe and are safe.*

The Regathering Committee has unanimously agreed to a new approach that honors the call of Christ to look out for the most vulnerable, that is mindful of current medical understandings, and that recognizes local conditions. We are taking these steps to allow the physical campus of the church to remain open; mindful of the

importance of gathering and the importance of protecting all who come through the doors.

Please read the protocols, below. We continue to evaluate and revise our approach as the pandemic continues to change.

We welcome feedback and hope that it is offered in the same loving spirit that we undertook the responsibility for making decisions on behalf of our church family. We will meet again on February 8.

In peace and gratitude,
the Regathering Committee

Hal Brink, Cathy Clark, Ronnie Cunningham,
Pastor Brent, Michael Deegan, Elizabeth Evans,
Will Garrison, and Anne Hutchinson.

Updated Covid protocols for use of the church building (Jan. 12, 2022)

Anyone coming to the church for worship, meetings, or other church activities are now required to be fully vaccinated.

Definition of “fully vaccinated” (assuming Moderna or Pfizer):

Adults ages 18 and over – three doses (this means having a booster shot)

Young persons ages 5-17 – at least two doses.

Consistent with CDC guidelines, children ages 2-5 are welcome if masked. Under age two, there are no masking requirements.

Proof of vaccination must be shown before entering. For convenience, the church office will maintain a spreadsheet listing fully vaccinated persons, so you do not have to show a card each time you visit. You may email a scan or photograph of your card, or bring in person, to Will at the office (after seeing it and adding your name to the list, he will delete emails). On Sundays, simply show your card to the Deacon at the door.

Food and drink will not be consumed in the building, except by staff in their offices.

We continue to require that all persons in the church, except for children under the age of two, remain masked at all times. Masks must cover both mouth and nose. We continue to encourage social distancing.

Please be aware of the schedule of the Berkshire Waldorf High School. They will be using the JE Room on these days/times: Monday 12:45–3:30; Tuesday 10:25-11:20 and 1:15-3:30; Wednesday 2:15-3:30; Thursday 11:35-12:30 and 2:30-3:30.

Finally, while not part of the official policy, we ask for everyone’s help in making the church a safe place for everyone. If you see someone who needs help following these policies, please (lovingly) say something to them. Or please let the office know. Thank you!



These photos are from Pastor Brent's sabbatical walks. Left to right, top: dusty paths and panoramic views in Big Sur; middle: early morning mist in Big Sur and in Alford, MA. Bottom: mountain streams and snowy vistas in Vermont.

Right: "What is Church For?" We welcome Pastor Brent back from his sabbatical, January 9.

