

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

Annual Report

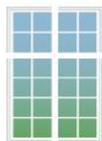
Program Reports for 2021-2022



May 22, 2022

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FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
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Stockbridge, Massachusetts

CALL TO MEETING

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

In accordance with the bylaws of the church, we hereby call the
Annual Meeting of the church for
Sunday, May 22, 2022 immediately following worship.

The business to be transacted is as follows:

- I. Call to Order
- II. Opening Prayer / Remembrance
- III. To act upon scheduled business:
 - A. Election of Boards and Offices of the Church
- IV. To act upon any other business that may legally come before the meeting.

Jeremy Ridenour, Clerk

Catherine Clark, Moderator

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF STOCKBRIDGE
4 MAIN STREET
STOCKBRIDGE, MA 01262**

ORDER OF BUSINESS

ANNUAL MEETING

MAY 22, 2022

Immediately Following Worship

- I. Call to Order**
- II. Quorum Check**
- III. Approval of Annual Meeting Minutes 2021**
- IV. Scheduled Business**
 - A. Remembering those we have lost**
 - B. Election of Boards and Officers of the Church**
- V. Benediction**

**First Congregational Church, UCC
Stockbridge, Massachusetts
ANNUAL MEETING Minutes
May 23, 2021**

This meeting was held via Livestream due to restrictions from the Covid-19 pandemic

Present: Brent Damrow, Cathy Clark (moderator), and others in person and those participating via livestream

Call to Order and Quorum Check: Noting a quorum present, Cathy Clark, Moderator, welcomed us and called the meeting to order at 11:03 am. There was no live reading of the Call for the Meeting. A copy had been previously provided online and by mail (if requested). Comments or questions can be texted to Rev. Damrow. Cathy noted the reports assembled in the Annual Reports and encouraged members to read the various reports.

Ted Randolph and Elizabeth Young read a list of various accomplishments for the past church year (e.g. 200 Christmas gifts offered for the giving tree).

Approval of Annual Meeting Minutes 2020: Minutes were unanimously approved

Scheduled Business

- **Remembering those we have lost:** Nell Ezequelle, Russell Fadding, and Alex Williamson
- **Election of Boards and Officers of the Church:** Cathy noted an addition to the slate of candidates. For the class of 2023, the Board of Trustees is adding Alice Collins. Cathy shared that there are openings on the various boards and encouraged members to offer their suggestions to the nomination committee. A motion was moved to put forward the slate. The slate was moved.

Cathy asked if there was any other business to be brought forward before the meeting. No business was brought forward.

Adjournment: The meeting ended at 11:09 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeremy Ridenour, Clerk

Clerk's Report
May 23, 2021 – May 22, 2022

Baptisms

None

Deaths

Barbara Bracknell September 21, 2021

New Members

Joe Catino April 10, 2022

Liza Catino April 10, 2022

Richard Geiler April 10, 2022

Patricia (Niti) Martin April 10, 2022

Xiaobing Qian April 10, 2022

Transfers Out

Belle Fox Martin March 31, 2022

Summary:

Child Baptisms 0

Adult Baptisms 0

New Members 5

Deaths 1

Transfers Out 1

Membership as of 5/2021 204

Net Added 3

Current Membership 207

Change in status (from Associate to Full Membership)

Tom and Kim Ruffing

MODERATOR'S REPORT

As I continue my journey as church Moderator, I am continually amazed at the depth and breadth of the talents and skills reflected in our community of this thing we call "church." What is even more amazing is the grace and generosity through which these talents and skills are shared. I know. I see it all the time.

I encourage you to read the following board and committee reports that reflect back on the year. But in many respects, these reports just scratch the surface.

Contributions come in many forms and sometimes just showing up is a gift. Dozens in our congregation contributed messages of hope, some with deeply personal stories, for our Lenten Devotionals, organized by Elizabeth Young. Rick Floyd continued to lead a rich and enlightening Wednesday afternoon Bible Study, focused on the scripture for the upcoming Sunday worship service. A group from our church joined with the Jewish Family Services of Western Massachusetts to help settle an Afghani family in Pittsfield. The large urns on our newly set front steps now proclaim an extravagant welcome with bright spring flowers. And more.

We didn't always get it right, especially during Pastor Brent's three-month sabbatical, particularly with all the maneuvering around Covid-19. But to paraphrase Tomas Merton, theologian, poet and other, in one of his best prayers, "We believe that our desire to please you does in fact please you..."

The other thing that amazed and delighted me was the grace and encouragement reflected from members of the congregation to those involved in various church activities. It reminded me of my mother's advice to me: "be generous with your praise and stingy with your criticism." We get the same guidance from Pastor Brent when he urges us to be the kind of people described in Ephesians 4:29. This expression was much in operation this last year, especially during Brent's absence, when a number of us felt as though we were "flying by the seat of our pants."

I can't tell you how many times I have witnessed a "thank you," or "job well done" from members of the congregation to one another. We not only seek to please God, we also seek to please each other. The affirmation that we have done so is always nice.

We give thanks to Pastor Brent for his guidance and leadership. Even when he was on sabbatical, his support and assistance were felt. We also send a full measure of gratitude to our unflappable Administrator, Will Garrison. His quiet competence and ability to do a dozen things all at once helped us stay engaged and connected to one another.

Finally, as he prepares to retire, a big thank-you to Financial Secretary Ron Hanft for his good and faithful service over the last ten years.

In gratitude,

Cathy Clark, Moderator

PASTOR'S REPORT

Dear Beloved in Christ,

Wow – what a year! There has been much challenge and there is much to be grateful for. Amid a divided world and an isolating pandemic, we have listened for the Spirit, discerned important directions, and kept on moving. This has been an exhausting time for many. I also hope that you have found blessing, truth, joy, connection, and love too. Thank you to everyone who has been a part of this endeavor of being church.

This year we have witnessed incredible resilience. We have found ways and moments to live into more fullness of connection. From fellowship that has moved indoors and out to kids' choir that keeps on singing to studies of all ages that have gathered in all manners of ways to giving trees and pop-up pantries to outdoor worship including fire pits on Ash Wednesday to choirs for Palm Sunday and Easter and even to egg hunts in the snow you have responded to these times with life and hope – thank you!

I could write for pages in gratitude for you. I hope that I have thanked you for all you have done. In this report, I will lift two items and trust the rest to conversation:

- My sabbatical was a great blessing and transformative. There is good reason that best practices provide this time of rest, restoration, and distance for clergy and I got to learn first-hand why. I found balance, restored health, learned much, gained even deeper trust and confidence in our lay leadership, and wrestled with life-giving questions about church and relationship. We have many possible paths before us. I look forward to discerning the direction we will take and how we will proceed to ensure faithfully joyfully and sustainably. During my June study week, I will be going back over those blessings in detail, and I look forward to sharing more with you after. I know that so many people pitched in during those Fall months to keep this church vibrant and alive – thank you!
- Our Capital Campaign and the projects that are already underway not only are having an impact but have the potential to be utterly transformative. Relationships have been strengthened not only among the leadership groups, but also as visitation is unfolding around the church and conversations about the gift of this place are happening. This campaign will honor our buildings, will enhance the ministries we can do in and from them, and will ensure that we can embark on bold ministry knowing that our structures are sound and safe.

We continue to persist and grow. We continue to respond to the pandemic not in fear but in possibility. We are getting ever closer to bringing a new Minister of Music on Board and help for Sunday School too. We are alive and following in the way of Christ. Life is good and I am grateful to be sharing this life and this journey with you.

In peace,

Pastor Brent

SABBATICAL COMMITTEE

In mid-2021, a Sabbatical Committee was formed to prepare and plan for Pastor Brent's three-month sabbatical. The first order of business was to make sure that we had a preacher at our Sunday worship services.

At the suggestion of John Canning, Brent lined up a wonderful slate of guest preachers from The Yale Divinity School at Andover Newton, many of whom were seminary students. Sarah Drummond, Dean of the school, started us off, followed by a delightful procession of engaging and interesting preachers: JaQuan Beachem; Ned Allyn Parker; Nedelka Prescod; Greg Mobley; Molli Mitchell; David Figliuzzi; and Jyrekis Collins. We developed a particularly warm bond with JaQuan (who became an ordained minister during his time with us) while he led us through Advent, including what felt like an almost normal Christmas Eve service.

On a picture-perfect autumn day, during an outside service, we bade farewell to Pastor Brent. We exchanged sending blessings from Pastor Brent to the congregation and from the congregation to Pastor Brent. A parting hymn written by David Anderegg—*Go Pilgrim*—sent him on his way.

Before leaving for sabbatical, Pastor Brent asked the congregation to consider a really big question—What is church for? More specifically, what is **our** church for? He would also ponder this question, and we would compare notes on his return. Groups from the congregation gathered over the next three months, both in-person and via zoom, to discuss the question and its ramifications. We were blessed that Rev. Dr. John Nelson, pastor at the Salisbury UCC church in Connecticut, facilitated our discussions.

The groups identified seven main themes which fell into three categories:

- a. Community in formation: host, sanctuary
- b. Locus of: innovation, continuity, service
- c. Assembly for: renewal, reformation

A welcome home service in January, planned by the committee, focused on these themes as well as joy on Pastor Brent's return. Charlotte and Holland planned much of the service, and a number of participants from the groups discussing "What is our church for" shared insights on the seven themes. Michael Deegan volunteered to make a banner depicting the seven themes ("How hard can that be?" he asked). Michael's 3'x12' banner was carried into the sanctuary at just the right moment during the service, and it now hangs in the JE Room. The welcome-back service ended with David Anderegg's beautiful hymn, but with a new title *Pilgrim's Return* and words.

Finally, the committee is pleased to report that a new Sabbatical Committee won't be formed until Brent's next sabbatical, scheduled for 2027.

Cathy Clark, for the Sabbatical Committee: Michael Deegan, Brent Damrow, Holland Eaton, Charlotte Rodgers

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A second year of Covid times, which meant creativity and flexibility between in person education and going virtual- again. Our kids and families have been so great and patient as we've navigated these unprecedented times.

We gathered for an outdoor Rally Day in September, with lawn games, chalk, painting and fun. We resumed in-person Sunday School- a combined all kids class and curriculum- under the tent and enjoyed the fresh air for a few months until we returned inside to the JE Room as temperatures dropped.

The Youth group resumed their Advent crafting and fundraising day (learning about Kiva), and joyfully the Pageant returned! We decided to suspend in-person Sunday School classes during the Omicron wave, with Jill Wheat again offering her talents in organizing and teaching and musicing us all through several weeks of online Family resources. Elizabeth Young also offered some virtual education related to our upcoming Capital Campaign, exploring the history and structure of our church building.

We resumed in person, indoors Sunday School at Lent. And our Youth Group gathered again to make/decorate Easter eggs for a fundraiser supporting aid to Ukraine, stuff Easter Eggs for our church hunt, and eat pizza! An Intergenerational Service started off the Easter Day festivities, and a delicious breakfast and our beloved Egg Hunt (with a prize table full of books & goodies) capped off a chilly and joyous day.

Special thanks to our teachers: Paul Rix, Elizabeth Evans, Jill Wheat, Cindy Brown, Josh Hall, Ted Randolph, and Elizabeth Young.

This year our **adult programming** found new and creative ways to gather. Here are some of the things that unfolded:

- Ongoing weekly Bible Study led by Rick Floyd.
- Men's book read on *For the Life of the World – Theology that Makes a Difference* (by Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun) in August
- Group Spiritual Direction led by Linda Hoddy from September until now.
- Fall Sermon Discussion Small Groups.
- Advent Devotional Small Groups.
- Gospel of Luke Fourteen-Week Studies.
- A Lent Devotional written by you and coordinated by Elizabeth Young.
- Lent Small Groups on the *Book of Hope* (written by Jane Goodall and Douglas Abrams) and led by Elizabeth Young.

Thank you to all who led these efforts, all who participated, and the resources the church provided to support them.

Elizabeth Evans, for the Board of CE: Barbara Kershner, Paul Rix, Ken Ward, Jill Wheat, Terry Wise, and Elizabeth Young.

BOARD OF DEACONS

The Board of Deacons had another unusual year of service. Here is a brief overview:

We were called to meet the challenges of continued Covid precautions with the re-introduction of indoor church attendance along with ongoing live-streamed services. This required preparing the Sanctuary for safe-distanced worship. Our “Extravagant Welcome” was dampened by the need to screen worshippers as they arrived for proof of vaccination, booster, and masks. It was a difficult time knowing that these precautions prevented some from worshipping in person. It was made easier, however, by the willing and even cheerful cooperation expressed by many. Meanwhile, Deacons continued to welcome remote worshippers who used our text number to check in on Sunday morning. It was an important part of supporting our worship as a community and helped us connect with people from distant geographical areas.

Indoor worship was introduced just as our Pastor went on a long-awaited Sabbatical. Social distancing, in addition to building codes that were instituted as construction began on the front steps, limited the number of people allowed in the Sanctuary to thirty-nine. This small cadre of attendees were invaluable in their assistance as Deacons took on enhanced leadership roles and were called to support the ministries of Guest Worship Leaders from Andover/Newton Yale Divinity School. We were a reduced number Board members who had other responsibilities on Sunday mornings and began to call upon members of the congregation to welcome and read Liturgy. It was a time of “our cup over flows” as everyone we approached was happy and willing to help. It was also a time of last minute changes and not so small crises that were met with unsolicited and generous help.

With guidance from the Re-gathering Committee, we were called to make decisions about worshipping safely through Advent and Lent. Plans for our traditional Christmas Eve service hung on the question “Indoors or Out?” This decision had implications for Deacons who are responsible for decorating the Sanctuary accordingly, as well as the usual duties of serving as Liturgists and Welcomers. Christmas Eve was cautiously celebrated indoors. We also offered and set up an interactive outdoor “Spiral of Light” again so that the beauty of the season could be shared with the larger community.

How glad we were to receive Pastor Brent and his leadership when he returned from Sabbatical. With confidence, we welcomed the Lenten Season. Ash Wednesday marked the beginning of Lent with outdoor meditation stations and the Imposition of Ashes. While working with Brent to introduce new and creative forms of worship, we continued the tradition of Maundy Thursday service; The Stations of the Cross on Good Friday, and the inclusion of an Intergenerational Service prior to Traditional Easter Sunday Service.

As the Deacons move forward, we are committed to supporting the ministry of our Pastor, and the spiritual growth and worship experience of our congregation. We are committed to enhancing everyone’s feeling of friendship and community as we welcome “extravagantly,” and join with other committees in shared goals. This year we have joined with Growth and Fellowship in reviving our Meal-Train program.

Finally, the Deacons are grateful for Pastor Brent's return from Sabbatical. We learned a great deal while he was away, and for that we are also grateful. We learned the boundlessness of his creative mind and vision for making worship something real and deep- and what it takes to fill those shoes while he is away. We also discovered that we are part of a Congregation of love and commitment, ready to share burdens and joys, faith, and hope, and ourselves.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Jacobs, for the Board of Deacons: Margo Davis, Michael Deegan, Anna Duhon, Don Eaton, Jill Fleming, Joshua Hall, and Ted Randolph

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The funding for most activities of the church boards includes routine maintenance, operating costs, and salaries. This funding is received during the Stewardship Campaign. This year YOU pledged more than \$225,000! We are thankful for your generosity and the work of Don Rodgers, Cris Raymond, Financial Secretary Ron Hanft, and Treasurer Patty Strauch in leading this project during a time when our pastor was on sabbatical.

Our historic church building's 200th Birthday is in 2024. Respecting its history and the need for restoration and renewal, the congregation voted unanimously to support a Capital Campaign. Joe Nicolosi and Bronly Boyd have taken on full-time jobs managing the projects. They created spreadsheets for the projects to determine priorities, secured estimates, arrange schedules, and oversaw the work. It is estimated that the cost of the work will be \$1.2 million, with \$850,000 being solicited from members and friends and the rest from grants.

Because some of the projects were critical, the trustees opened a \$100,000 line of credit at Berkshire Bank. One stressful project was rebuilding the iconic marble steps that grace the front of the church. Time and use caused them to pull away from the building, which created a hazard and water seepage. Ron Petkus, a talented mason from Stockbridge Stone, was hired to remove the fragile marble blocks and sculpt them to meet present-day building codes. The first reset had to be redone, but now we have a beautiful safe entrance with iron railings hand railings by Stockbridge's Bob Bartle. With a nod to the 21st century, you will see black electric mats being used in the winter to melt the ice and snow that previously required salt and sand.

As per our bylaws, the Trustees' responsibilities include finances, buildings grounds, and some personnel issues. Meeting those responsibilities made 2021-22 a challenging and rewarding year as we carried on with our usual duties and added projects funded by the Capital Campaign.

Securing the permit to work on the steps required the installation of a barrier-free entrance into the building. Not wanting to change the historic appearance of the church, a decision was made

to have the ramp extend from the parking lot into the JE Room. Architect Karen Hunt has developed a design that is both attractive and in keeping with the architectural design of the building. It is hoped that funding will be available to undertake this construction this summer.

A request to Mass Save resulted in a cost-matching grant for the weatherization of the church and part of the manse. However, before Green Collar could begin work, the dirt floor in the basement had to be sealed. Will Garrison, our sexton, with assistance from Joe, spent all his free time to sort the accumulation that filled a 20-yard dumpster. Items returned, are now organized under Will's watchful eye.

Brent's sabbatical was a good time to revamp his office with new flooring, electrical upgrades, fixtures, etc. The manse received a facelift— interior and exterior painting, and the garage was stabilized, including a new garage door with automatic openers and an upgraded electrical service.

The trustees greatly appreciate the expertise of Alice Collins and her work on the grounds. She gave us a deeper appreciation for the trees gracing the front of our building, including a European Birch, a Fernleaf European Birch, and a Yellowwood, which is known as one of the more stunning trees found in eastern North America. However, branches on the ground indicated the need to have the trees evaluated by an arborist, a task undertaken by Jon Geldert. Given the list of recommended work, the trustees held a site visit that led to a cooperative agreement between the church and the Stockbridge tree warden. This resulted in each entity agreeing to pay for critical maintenance to the trees on their respective property. We appreciate a most generous donor who contributed to the church's share of the cost. This spring, if necessary, Race Mountain Tree Service will return to monitor a potential gypsy moth invasion and take corrective action to control any damage.

Other Projects— Shutter project: Don Hayward finished the shutter project. Again, we thank Jon for the work he did on this significant undertaking. Emergency egress lighting was installed by Comalli. The numerous electrical issues in the office wing have been addressed, but more extensive work is part of the Capital Campaign. After research determined that 1280 BTUs of air conditioning would make the JE room comfortable, two sized air-conditioners with Wi-Fi capabilities were installed.

The church continues to serve as a community resource, and we are glad that groups, including the Berkshire Waldorf High School, are returning to our facilities. Anteris, our tech contractors, continued to work on increasing the speed of the "beamed" wireless connection between the church and the manse.

Retirements: The diligence of the Endowment Committee, chaired by Frank Russell, plays a critical role in maintaining the spending power of our endowment in perpetuity. We appreciate its members dedication and want to specifically thank Paul Kopperl who is retiring after serving several years on the committee. The church Financial Secretary, Ron Hanft, also is retiring. We feel fortunate that Ron will continue his financial expertise as a member of our board.

Goodbye and Welcome: We thank Mary Hoeltzel and Kara Smith for their dedication and work during their time on our board. We are pleased Mary has joined another board, and Kara is

available for volunteer opportunities. We are fortunate to have Ron Hanft and Cris Raymond with us.

Thank you: Thank you to the Stockbridge Golf Club for being a partner in grounds maintenance, and to Ted Randolph for being an extra set of hands when needed. We also appreciate the tireless dedication of Will Garrison, who says “yes” to every challenge we throw at him and then delivers with a smile and Patty Strauch, who, as treasurer, provides financial support to the church and the capital campaign, also our gratitude goes to moderator Cathy Clark.

Our Pastor Brent Damrow provides leadership and inspiration. On a personal note, several years ago, Brent asked us to imagine what life could be for us as a family of faith. This year I found out that I appreciate all my church family and the love and support you have given to me as I slowly recover from a severe injury; you are indeed a church family. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Rasmussen, for the Board of Trustees: Bronly Boyd, Alice Collins, Ron Hanft, Joe Nicolosi, Cris Raymond, Don Rodgers, Becky Smith, Kara Smith, and Patty Strauch.

BOARD OF MISSION AND ACTION

Mission and Action began this year in the second phase of the global pandemic but filled with the hope and promise that we would be able to gather once again. We engaged in thoughtful discussion about establishing a plan for distributing funds. Of note, we voted to join in the United Church of Christ’s (UCC) “5 for 5” Giving. In the past, Mission and Action would donate a lump sum to the UCC mission giving, skipping the steps of letting the congregation know about each individual gift. Starting in 2022, we will engage the congregation in the “5 for 5 Giving” to UCC. The five are: Church World Mission, One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need and the Christmas Fund (Retired Minister’s Fund). Other giving through UCC Disaster Ministries included a donation to the Covid crisis in India and storm relief in the United States.

Donations were made to Church World Service and two other organizations providing assistance to the people in Afghanistan – with a focus on women and children unable to leave the country. We learned that Jewish Family Services of Western Massachusetts would be involved in the resettlement of Afghan refugee families – with some families expected to relocate to the Pittsfield area. Mission and Action funding was set aside for this project. We were fortunate to be able to partner with the Unitarian Universalist Meeting of Housatonic to form a HOSTS volunteer group. The Hussaini family arrived in Pittsfield on New Year’s Day! Volunteers from our congregation assisted with moving them into their new apartment and providing home furnishings, food, clothing and other basic needs. These efforts continue as the family of 5 learn

English, establish schools, doctors and other necessities. The family is warmly thankful for their new home and neighbors!

Mission and Action was involved in discussions with the Christian Education Board to strengthen our church commitment to our youth. We discussed a possible mission/outreach trip with youth and members who participated in youth fellowship. The KIVA project was revived with a special presentation to our youth – explaining the KIVA loan program and letting them select loan participants. Additional funding was allocated to the KIVA project this year.

Our local giving to nonprofit organizations was broad – including gifts to Construct, Literacy Network, Gould Farm, Hands in Outreach (local organization serving girls in Nepal), Muddy Brook School Backpack project, Berkshire County Diaper Project, Salvation Army and the Peoples Pantry. A challenge match raised over \$4,000 for the Peoples Pantry in November, 2021! The annual Giving Tree project provided 141 individual gifts to local families in need.

We continue to operate the Pop up Pantry in the shed at the rear of the church.

Generous donations of shelf stable food items and volunteer time continue to support this outreach to provide free food – 24/7 with no questions asked!

A new initiative, the Justice Task Force (JTF), kicks off in May, 2022. The JTF is a subcommittee of Mission and Action. This group will take a broad look at social justice issues, reporting to both the Mission and Action Board and the Church Council over the course of one year. Look for more information and your chance to get involved with this important work!

As always, we thank you for your generous support and donations to Mission and Action.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlotte Rodgers, for the Board of Mission and Action: Carl Bradford, Cindy Brown, Sarah Conly, Martha Floyd, Nick Pohl and Bruce Wilkens

BOARD OF GROWTH AND FELLOWSHIP

The purpose of the Board of Growth and Fellowship is to welcome friends and strangers alike into our worship space and our community. We are charged with making people feel connected, and we understand that charge as carrying out Jesus's commandment that we love one another.

In 2021 we were again faced with scaled-down fellowship activity, though from October-December we were able to restart a pared-down fellowship hour after services, beginning with hot cider and donuts outside and ending with advent-themed cookies and punch in December. We look forward to the return of previous annual celebrations, such as the All-Church Birthday Party as conditions allow.

As of this writing we are a few weeks into the return of the aroma of coffee filling the JE room, and a simplification of coffee hour with a focus on fellowship, not food. While G&F will continue to host larger celebrations on special occasions, the expectation for our weekly fellowship hour is that it be simple – just coffee and a plate or two of cookies, with G&F keeping a supply of cookies on hand so the host doesn't need to contribute anything but time. Setup and cleanup can be done in 15-20 minute windows before service and after fellowship hour. We are eagerly awaiting the return of hosts and look to members and friends alike to come forward and volunteer.

In addition to the return of fellowship hour in 2021, G&F continued to support the beautification of the Narthex project, which included the purchase of plants and planters for the church entrance, new additions to children's activity bags and the 2nd annual Christmas Bread Project.

Similar to last year, for the holiday bread project members of G&F, as well as two volunteers from the congregation, baked holiday breads for 135 local-ish members and friends of the church. Breads were baked, wrapped, and bagged in materials provided by G&F and delivered the week before Christmas. Home delivery was carried out by G&F as well as 6 volunteers from the congregation, with deliveries spanning west to Troy, NY, east to Sandisfield, MA; south to Canaan, CT; and north to Dalton, MA. This was a logistically challenging project, though we benefitted from experience and made positive modifications. Feedback was again positive, with the connections made delighting recipients and deliverers in kind. With the exception of the hardware provided by G&F, the bakers and deliverers donated their time and materials for this project; they are to be thanked for their generosity in this regard.

We also included custom-printed Christmas cards in the bags with the breads, and mailed the cards to distant friends and members. This year we featured artwork by one of the children at church, which provided an element of delight and surprise to a repeat event.

We have continued to write birthday cards and to help Rev. Damrow as needed in occasional outreach to church family members.

This year, we wish to thank retiring Board members Susan Moor, Vicky Cooper and Mishel Kulibaba Epstein for their years of service.

Respectfully submitted,

Holland Eaton, for the Board of Growth and Fellowship: Vicky Cooper, Mishel Kulibaba Epstein, Brian Farrell, Brian Hyatt, Susan Moor, and Becky Smith

BOARD OF MUSIC

The Board of Music is charged with overseeing the church music program, most importantly the provision of music for Sunday worship and special services throughout the year. We work with Rev. Damrow to attempt to bring consistent quality, variety and wide congregational participation to our music life.

The year 2021-2022 has continued to be a challenge for our music program because of pandemic restrictions on singing. Choral singing, the centerpiece of our music program, has had to be severely restricted, and this has affected every aspect of the worship experience. An additional challenge was the formal resignation (after several months of leave of absence) of our Minister of Music, Sandor Szabo, in September 2021. Sandor's resignation necessitated our continued use of substitute musicians until we hire a new Minister of Music, which we anticipate will happen in May or June of this year. The lack of a Minister of Music also required members of the Board of Music to step in for organizational and scheduling tasks.

Over the past year, we have had a roster of keyboard players from within the congregation who have stepped up to make music happen every week: we are indebted to Ron Hanft, Barbara Kershner, David Anderegg, and Tracy Wilson for their efforts. Tracy sat on the organ bench during all of Brent's sabbatical last fall and for Palm Sunday and Easter, and her efforts in coordinating music with all the guest pastors was a heroic effort for which we should all be most grateful.

In the absence of a choir, we have had regular vocal soloists who have sung anthems and led in-person and remote congregational hymn singing: Nellie Rustick, Jack Brown and John Demler have all served with artistry and devotion all year. We have also been blessed with regular performances by the Bell Choir under the direction of Mary Jo Connor Erickson; they continue to provide heavenly music with great skill and humility. Jill Wheat has stepped in with the children's choir when pandemic restrictions have allowed, and we have delighted in seeing what our kids can do under her baton.

We look forward to a renewed music program when the new Minister of Music comes on board: we thank search committee members Tom Ruffing and Joan Kopperl (co-chairs); Terry Wise, Josh Hall, Brent Damrow and Barbara Kershner for their careful work and we expect to celebrate their successful efforts soon! The reappearance of a real choir for Palm Sunday and Easter this year was a joyous prelude of big things to come. Thanks be to God!

Respectfully submitted,

David Anderegg, for the Board of Music: Gary Schieneman, Deb McMenemy, Ronnie Cunningham, Bob Doerr, Mary Hoeltzel, and Tom Ruffing

RE-GATHERING COMMITTEE

The global COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect how the church gathered – in worship, in meetings, and the daily work of the offices. The Regathering Committee kept abreast of the latest scientific news, recommendations/requirements of the CDC and the local board of health, and maintained open communication with church members and friends.

As we noted in the meeting of May 24, 2021,

To be welcoming we need to both be inclusive and to honor our congregants' concerns for their own and their neighbors' health. We cannot assure that everyone will always be completely safe, and individuals must assess their own levels of comfort. ...

We understand that there are different levels of comfort. Livestream will still be an option. Our outdoor protocol is extremely conservative in hopes that all local congregants will feel comfortable with it. Our indoor protocol is stricter than CDC guidelines. All protocols are evolving, and the committee will continue meeting to consider appropriate changes.

Once the weather warmed, we held some services outdoors, as that was the safest environment. During the spring, when vaccines were becoming widely available, we loosened some of the protocols. We dropped the requirement for pre-registering for outdoor services. At the outdoor services, masking was optional once folks were in their places. Indoors still required registration and masking while moving about the building. As part of the increasing distinction between vaccinated and unvaccinated persons, those who were vaccinated could choose to remove masks when in their (distanced) seats. Others had to remain masked. We did not require proof of vaccination. Children's choir and activities remained outside, in large part because of lack of vaccines for young children.

Over the summer, with the Delta variant emerging, we tightened up the masking requirement. Masking was required of everyone inside the building, regardless of vaccination status. An exception was made for staff when working alone in their office. We started acquiring and installing HEPA air purifiers in meeting rooms and offices. We opened windows as much as possible.

Pastor Brent noted in August: *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.*

In November the protocols were tweaked again, based on directives published by the Tri-Town Health Department. Because of onset of cold weather and (temporary) ebbing of the pandemic, worship was moved indoors, observing social distancing. With permission, small groups were allowed to use the JE Room and classroom.

Following the examples of restaurants and school cafeterias, we allowed the consumption of food and drink following guidelines for restaurants published by the Health Department. We recommended that anyone who entered the church to be vaccinated (excepting those with medical conditions that prevents this, and children under 12). Anyone needing help to get vaccinated was welcome to call the church office.

Then came the Omicron variant. In reaction to the greatly increased cases in the county and beyond, the committee updated the protocols on January 12:

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. 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.

These protocols were in place until March, when case numbers, hospitalizations, and infection rates in Berkshire County dropped significantly.

Face masks were now optional (though always welcomed), and distancing was no longer required in the sanctuary. An area was set aside for anyone wishing to be distanced and to wear a mask. Food and drink could be served at church events, inside the building. By late March, the requirement to show proof of vaccination was dropped. Sunday School classes and Nursery were again held inside.

As of May, these protocols are still in effect, though the Regathering Committee is now more strongly encouraging all to wear masks while gathered.

As described in the current protocols, posted, as always, on the website:

We understand that we have each experienced this pandemic in different ways, that we each have differing levels of risk, and that we have found different ways of understanding the best paths for ourselves and our families. We hope that we will continue to honor one another as we enter this new phase in our shared life.

If you have any questions, feedback, or suggestions for the Committee, please contact any of us listed below. We thank you for your support, kindness and understanding as we undertake this important work.

The Regathering Committee: Hal Brink, Cathy Clark, Ronnie Cunningham, Pastor Brent Damrow, Michael Deegan, Elizabeth Evans, Will Garrison, and Anne Hutchinson. And thanks to Don Rodgers for joining the conversation in April.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

A Capital Campaign has been in-the-works for quite some time. The Trustees, under the leadership of Joe Nicolosi, have been developing a projects list that details the repairs needed to our facilities, and includes a newly designed universal access ramp, and significant restoration of our organ.

In late 2020, a Capital Campaign Steering Committee was formed to lay the groundwork for a future capital campaign. The committee reached out to all boards, committees, and others who use the church as a gathering place and asked what its “needs and dreams” were.

Meanwhile, Joe and others continued to hone the Projects List to include new and refined projects, and update estimates. All this was in preparation for a feasibility study later in 2021, conducted by our consultant, Jennifer Williams, to determine a reasonable capital campaign goal, and to see what specific projects most resonated with the congregation.

In October of 2021, at a special congregational meeting, a capital campaign, with a goal of \$850,000, was unanimously approved by the congregation. In addition to reaching out to members, friends and neighbors to achieve our \$850,000 goal, we hope to obtain grants to fund a number of projects that will move us toward achieving our greater goal of over \$1.2 million

A Campaign Executive Committee, representing a rather impressive array of skills and talents, was soon formed. Many on the committee did not know each other, and few really knew what we were getting ourselves in for. The two dozen of us started meeting most Sundays after church to brainstorm, plan for upcoming actions, and update each other on the progress of our various projects. Task Groups included everything from designing and printing campaign materials, to planning our kickoff event, to lining up campaign visitors who would personally contact our church members.

Elizabeth Young, our Member-at-Large Task Group Leader, sent the message of the capital campaign out to our younger members through three delightful videos and related kid activities for three major projects—the universal access ramp, renovation of our organ, and painting of the steeple. Linda Russell, leader of the Prayer Task Group, provided us with beautiful and uplifting weekly devotionals that kept us inspired, and reminded us what the capital campaign is really all about.

We are all looking forward to the successful completion of the capital campaign at the end of the three-year pledge period.

Cathy Clark, co-chair for the Campaign Executive Committee: Bronly Boyd (co-chair), Rev Brent Damrow, Shirley Blanchard, Carl and Stephanie Bradford, Jack Brown, Janet and John Canning, Ron Hanft, Michael and Susan Moyle Lynch, Joe Nicolosi, Ted Randolph, Christine Rasmussen, Cris Raymond, Charlotte and Don Rodgers, Tom Ruffing, Frank and Linda Russell, Patty Strauch, and Elizabeth Young

PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY

Our in-person knitting sessions came to an abrupt halt with the pandemic. We knit on our own and find it a comfort during these stressful times. I, for one, have been working on a new prayer shawl at home, but I miss our congenial times together to work and talk.

We do have a few shawls completed, so if you know of anyone who should receive one as a celebration or a solace, please let me know.

~ Terry Wise

SERVICE LEAGUE

As we have emerged in stages from the pandemic, we have gradually been able to resume our weekly gatherings. In spite of restrictions, we were able to hold two successful pop-up fairs during the last year, on June 12 and August 14, in front of the Stockbridge Library. On December 4, we held our annual Holly Fair after a year's hiatus, and even with necessary modifications to conform to safety protocols, it was also very successful. Because of these activities, we were able to continue our mission support, with donations to World Central Kitchen and Americares, in support of Ukrainian refugees, to the Elizabeth Freeman Center, Construct, the Christian Center, and the Backpack Program locally, and to the Church's Scholarship Fund.

We were saddened to lose our long-time member Barbara Bracknell on September 21.

Margaret Hornick, for the Service League

LEADERS – IN GRATITUDE

The following are folks who are finishing up or have already finished their service. We are deeply grateful for their service and invite you to share your gratitude as well.

Deacons

Margo Davis, Jill Fleming, Donna Jacobs, Joshua Hall

Christian Education

Elizabeth Evans, Barbara Kershner, Ken Ward, Jill Wheat

Mission and Action

Charlotte Rodgers, Sarah Conly

Growth and Fellowship

Vicky Cooper, Mishel Kulibaba, Susan Moor

Trustees

Kara Smith, Becky Smith

Music

Gary Schieneman, Ronnie Cunningham

**NOMINATING SLATE
OFFICERS, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES OF THE CHURCH
May 22, 2022**

This list includes confirmed nominations as of May 18, 2022. The Connections Committee will share any additional nominations up to and at the vote.

Bold indicates those to be voted on by the congregation.

CHAIR OF CHURCH COUNCIL/MODERATOR	Cathy Clark For an additional one-year term ending 2023
CLERK	Jeremy Ridenour For a second two-year term ending 2024
TREASURER	Patty Strauch Nominated by the Board of Trustees for a new two-year term ending 2024
HISTORIAN	Joshua Hall
LIBRARIAN	Terry Wise

BOARD OF DEACONS

<u>CLASS OF 2023</u> Anna Duhon Ted Randolph Don Eaton	<u>CLASS OF 2024</u> Michael Deegan	<u>CLASS OF 2025</u> Sarah Conly Miles Wheat Ken Ward
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BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

<u>CLASS OF 2023</u> Paul Rix	<u>CLASS OF 2024</u> Terry Wise Elizabeth Young	<u>CLASS OF 2025</u> Kim Ruffing Vicky Cooper
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BOARD OF MISSION & ACTION

<u>CLASS OF 2023</u> Nick Pohl Bruce Wilkens Marion Pomeroy	<u>CLASS OF 2024</u> Cindy Brown Carl Bradford Martha Floyd	<u>CLASS OF 2025</u> Ronnie Cunningham Cary Quigley Tracy Wilson
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BOARD OF GROWTH AND FELLOWSHIP

CLASS OF 2023

Holland Brown
Brian Hyatt
Charlotte Rodgers

CLASS OF 2024

Brian Farrell
Becky Smith

CLASS OF 2025

Ken LaBresh

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

CLASS OF 2023

Ron Hanft
Joe Nicolosi
Alice Collins

CLASS OF 2024

Cris Raymond

CLASS OF 2025

Bronly Boyd (2nd term)
Christine Rasmussen (2nd)
Don Rodgers (2nd)

BOARD OF MUSIC

CLASS OF 2023

Robert Doerr

CLASS OF 2024

David Anderegg
Deb McMenamy
Mary Hoeltzel
Tom Ruffing

CLASS OF 2025

Linda Hoddy

PASTORAL RELATIONS

Margaret Hornick, Miles Wheat, Anne Roy, Paul Rix

CONNECTIONS

David Anderegg

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

The By-laws call for representatives appointed by boards: Trustees (Don Rodgers), Music (tba), CE (tba), and Deacons (tba). Two at-large members: **Jeremy Ridenour** and **Carl Bradford**.

COMMITTEE OF DELEGATES

SNE CONFERENCE

Class of 2023:
Margaret Hornick
David Anderegg

BERKSHIRE ASSOCIATION

Class of 2023:
Margaret Hornick
David Anderegg