

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Stockbridge, Massachusetts

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



December 2022

Christmas at the First Congregational Church

December 24th – Christmas Eve

Lessons and Carols,
Candlelight Service
NEW TIME – 5:00 p.m.
(Preludes begin at 4:30 p.m.)

December 25th – Christmas Day

Casual Worship in the J.E. Room
10:00 a.m. (Fellowship time with light
breakfast to begin at 9:30 a.m.)

Pastor: The Rev. Brent Damrow - bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org

Minister of Music: Peter Frost - music@stockbridgeucc.org

Administrator/Sexton: Will Garrison – office@stockbridgeucc.org

Financial Secretary: Marion Pomeroy - finance@stockbridgeucc.org

CE Coordinator for Youth and Children: Julian Vallen - ce@stockbridgeucc.org

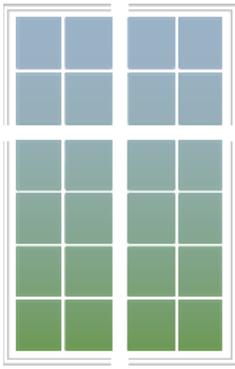
(413) 298-3137 | www.stockbridgeucc.org

Office hours: 9:00-2:00, Monday - Friday

December 2022

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Livestream worship at stockbridgeucc.org				1 Bell Choir 4:00pm <i>Walking Our Talk</i> program 5:00pm Advent Group 6:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	2 Brent's Sabbath Day Service League 10:00am	3 Holly Fair 10am-1pm <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i> <i>Stockbridge Chamber concert 7:00pm</i>
4 Worship 10:00 a.m. SFC rehearsal 1:00pm	5 Advent Book Group – Linda Russell 6:00pm	6 Advent Book Group – Brent Damrow 12:00pm <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	7 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm Council 7:00pm	8 Advent Book Group – Kim Ruffing 6:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	9 Brent's Sabbath Day Service League 10:00am	10 <i>Citizens Climate Cmte Brunch 10:00</i> Stockbridge Festival Chorus concert 3:00pm <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
11 Intergenerational Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i>	12 Advent Book Group – Linda Russell 6:00pm	13 Advent Book Group – Brent Damrow 12:00pm Tuesday Club 1:00 <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	14 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm	15 Advent Book Group – Kim Ruffing 6:00pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	16 Brent's Sabbath Day Newsletter deadline Service League 10:00am	17 Berkshire Lyric concert 3:00pm <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
18 Worship 10:00 a.m. <i>Gathered & online</i>	19 Advent Book Group – Linda Russell 6:00pm	20 Advent Book Group – Brent Damrow 12:00pm <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	21 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm	22 Advent Book Group – Kim Ruffing 6:00pm Office Closed	23 Brent's Sabbath Day Office Closed	24 <i>Christmas Eve</i> <i>Worship 5:00pm,</i> <i>Preludes 4:30pm</i> <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
25 Continental breakfast 9:30; informal worship around piano in JE Room 10:00am	26 Office closed	27 <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i> Office closed	28 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study 1:00pm Office closed	29 Office closed	30 Office closed	31 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

December 2022 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

Happy New Year! By the time you receive this newsletter, a new liturgical year will already be underway. The church year starts, wisely so, with Advent – a return to an amazing story of faith. It is a story replete with stunning imagery. It is a story chocked full of a colorful cast of characters. It is a story with a plotline that invites you in and leaves you clamoring for more. It is the story of a profound truth that changed the world and offers to continue changing our lives. A story of hope, faith, and love. A story of how an impossible possibility came in the most improbable way – the story of a baby born in a manger.

Each year we return to the story. We do in part to greet a familiar friend that provides grounding and hope – to bask in tradition – to bring us back to perhaps the seminal story of our lives. Each year we return to the story. We do in part because we have learned that when we approach with an open heart, there are previously undiscovered miracles waiting to be found – new characters to relate to – new possibilities we somehow have missed each of the years previous. We return to the story because deep down we are the people of the story and that is good.

This year I want to start the year off by inviting you to use this new year by joining in an

exploration of the larger story captured in the Bible. I have found incredible joy and energy in a book written by Rachel Held Evans titled *Inspired*. It is a book all about being people of the story. Her subtitle is “Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again.” I LOVED IT! I want to share it with you – my fellow people of the story.

I think that Bible junkies will love not only her insights, but those drawn from folks who have become close friends of hers (people like Nadia Bolz Webber, Walter Brueggemann, and Peter Ens to name just a few). I think that those who are not sure of what to do with the Bible will love her honest struggle with the same issue. I think those who don’t know the stories of the Bible will love it because she will introduce you to them in ways that will stir your imagination and invite you to find meaning.

In my ten years here, I am not sure I have ever felt as positively or as strongly about the potential of any single book for the life of our congregation. Her take both on the stories of the Bible and why it matters has the potential to inspire and, I believe, even transform our shared life. How we engage this book is still being developed but, in the meantime, I hope you read it! We have copies in the church office and the audiobook is read beautifully by the author.

As we prepare to return to the amazing story of love come down on Christmas, may we remember that we are people of the story and let Rachel Held Evans bring new depth to that reality.

In gratitude and with hope,

Pastor Brent





Art News

Many thanks go out to Pastor Brent for sharing photos and narratives of his recent sabbatical. Please come see the exhibit in the JE Room, and enjoy the journey. It will be on display for the next couple of weeks.
 ~ Olga Schwede

HAPPY DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- December 3 Glenn Gilbert
Nicole Arrell
- December 4 Liza Catino
- December 8 Khalil Haddir
- December 12 Ted Hornick
- December 13 Nancy Fitzpatrick
Anne McKinstry
- December 17 Niti Martin
- December 21 Brent Damrow
Ron Hanft
- December 23 Cris Raymond
- December 24 Jenna Knauss
- December 25 Debbie Goodwin
- December 27 William Barrett
- December 28 Bruce Wilkens
- December 29 John Canning
Joe Nicolosi
- December 31 Hal Brink

Music

Calling all Singers!..... who do not already sing in the choir. On Thursday, December the 1st from 7:30-8:30pm, rehearsals for Christmas Eve will begin. This will give us four Thursday rehearsals before singing multiple anthems on Christmas Eve. Our Christmas Eve service will begin at 5pm with the choir warming up and rehearsing at 4:15.

If you do not have choral experience, please contact me before December 1 so that we can meet and determine which voice part best suits you. We will also work some on one of the pieces to be performed to make sure you can rise to the challenge.

Please contact me if you will be joining us. It is important that we know prior to the service how many will be in the choir. This will help us determine how many seats and robes we will need, as well as how many copies of music.

For those who cannot make all four Thursday rehearsals, I will also hold rehearsals on Sunday the 11th, and on Sunday the 18th. These rehearsals will begin 15 minutes after the close of worship and will last no longer than one hour. I will ask everyone singing to make their best effort to attend the last rehearsal on December 22.

My email is: music@stockbridgeucc.org.

I look forward to hearing from you.

~ Peter



Financial Notes

Thank you to all who have submitted pledges for 2023! This timely submission is tremendously helpful for budgeting purposes and is greatly appreciated. We realize that there are new pledges that are still coming in. Feel free to mail them, drop them in the church office or offering plate, or email them. Thank you for your thoughtful and prayerful pledging.

2022 Pledges/ Year-end Giving: This is the time of year to complete your 2022 pledge and/or make other year-end gifts. I am happy to provide pledge status updates on an individual basis at any time. Pledge status letters will also be mailed out in early December to all pledgers except those who have completed their pledge for the year.

If you wish to have annual pledge or other contributions recorded on your 2022 Giving Statement, you may send year-end checks dated no later than Dec. 31. We need to receive year-end checks no later than Jan. 15.

Pledge Envelope Reminder: Due to fewer folks requesting giving envelopes, we will not be distributing the usual boxes of envelopes for 2023. This will help our printing budget, too! However, we are glad to provide “home-made” or recycled giving envelopes upon request. If so, please let me know if you need 12 for monthly giving, or 52 for weekly giving. Of course, you may use any envelopes of your own.

**The only time an envelope is necessary is when you give cash and wish to have that included in your giving record.

A simple tracking sheet will also be available to record your contributions throughout the year. You may wish to use this in lieu of envelopes for keeping track of your giving.

Marion Pomeroy,
finance@stockbridgeucc.org

Fundraisers Bring Joy and Meaning

During November, separated by one week, two fundraisers brought the community together to support our church. Both of them relied on things we cherish here – story, song, and connection.

The first, our traditional Lake Mahkeenac Radio Hour, complete with Pie Contest, was a raucous affair. Thank you to David Anderegg for his writing, organization, and performance. Thank you to Holland Eaton for her leadership and skill in running the pie contest. Thank you to all who volunteered, promoted, and attended. The event has brought in more than \$5,000 after expenses and funds continue to arrive.

The second, a new venture, envisioned and brought to life by Ronnie Cunningham, *A Childhood in Words and Song*, held the audience in rapt attention and she took the audience back to World War II England. Thank you to Ronnie Cunningham (who all agreed is a consummate raconteur) for writing and performing her own life story inviting the audience to join in. Thank you to all who supported and attended. The event, whose purpose was to support the organ restoration, has raised more than \$1,200 after expenses and funds continue to arrive.

The Sunday School class on November 20 created lots of salt dough ornaments.
Photo by Cindy Brown.



Board of Deacons

Recently the Deacons have been considering how our church can continue to live into the welcome advertised in our Open and Affirming commitment statement. While we have made meaningful progress in making our church a safe and welcoming place for all, the Deacons have recently been considering our transgender and gender non-conforming siblings. Can we continue to push our language and our practices so that all people, no matter what their gender identity, may feel at home here? This idea, to start a larger conversation in our church community around gender inclusive language, was the subject of a proposal recently made by the Deacons to Council.

Council was very supportive of the proposal, leaving the Deacons to consider how to move the task forward. We feel it is an initiative that ranges beyond the scope of our own Board, and should have wide representation, and so are open to ideas from you. In the meantime, we will continue to look for ways to make the language we use in our services welcoming to all.

On a seasonal note, Advent is here—a time traditionally marked by waiting and expectation, reflection and penitence, and the color purple. As Advent progresses, you will see additional decorations appear as we prepare both God's house and our hearts for the arrival of Jesus. Let Ted Randolph know if you would like to be part of the decorating efforts.

Advent Engagement

Daily Devotionals

The Board of Christian Education is happy to continue our tradition of offering the popular "Still Speaking Writer's Group" Daily Devotionals this year. Copies



are on the way and will be available on Sunday mornings or by calling the church office to reserve one. They are our gift to you and we hope they bring quiet and meaning to your Advent this year. We have ordered fifty and ask that families share one if possible.

From the Service League

It probably goes without saying, but we'll say it anyway - right now we're all about the Holly Fair, which, in case you missed it, is coming right up, on Saturday, December 3, from 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM. If you haven't had a chance to attend a Holly Fair before, you're in for treat - actually many treats, including yummy baked goods, unique hand-made crafts and ornaments, Grandma's Attic, Santa Claus, and more. And of course, all our proceeds go to our mission projects. Many thanks to those who've volunteered to help on the day of the sale - we can still use more hands if you're available. And your baked goods are always welcome!

If you've ordered a pie, it will be ready for pickup in the Church kitchen on Wednesday, November 23, from 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM. If you've ordered a wreath, it will be available at the Stockbridge Grange on Friday, December 2nd, from 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM. And if you haven't ordered a wreath, it's not too late!

We're happy to report that our own Patty Fadding is out of the hospital and recovering at home. Please keep her in your prayers.



Board of Trustees - Workdays!

On October 29 (outdoors) and November 12 (indoors), the Board of Trustees organized hard-working crews to prepare the church and grounds for winter and to tackle some big cleaning tasks. Thanks to Don Rodgers for leading the crews, which included Elisabeth Bellows, Cindy Brown, Charlotte Rodgers, Carl & Stephanie Bradford, Marion Pomeroy, Shirley Blanchard, Tom Ruffing, Terry Wise, Don Eaton, Frank & Linda Russell, Cathy Clark, Sarah Conly, Michael Deegan, and Cris Raymond. Thank you all!



It takes a crew! Everyone worked together and buffed and shined and cleaned - we are ready for Advent!



Mission & Action

The Christmas Giving Tree

As we move into the season of Advent, we invite you to share in the tradition of the Christmas Giving Tree, which offers a wish list of gifts you can purchase that will help make a brighter holiday for some of our South County neighbors. Mission & Action has contacted Construct, the Elizabeth Freeman Center, Literacy Network, and the Berkshire Housing Authority to receive Christmas wish lists from some of their clients.

This year, the Giving Tree will be in the church's Jonathan Edwards Room, beginning on Sunday, November 13. You can choose one or more gift tags from the tree, sign off on the spread sheet located next to the tree, and then return your gift(s) under the tree, wrapped and with tag attached, at any time with deadline on Sunday morning, December 18. (Pack a gift receipt with your gift, where appropriate.) We recommend a price range of \$25-\$40 for each gift.

If you are unable to shop, you can also donate to the Giving Tree by sending a check, payable to First Congregational Church, noting "Giving Tree" in the memo line. Mission & Action elves will be

shopping for any gifts not selected.

If you have any questions, contact Cindy Brown (phone: 413-298-5365, email: cindytoddbrown@gmail.com, text: 413-446-2623).

The Mission & Action board thanks you for remembering those in our community that need an extra hand this year. We wish you the Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and Spirit of the Season!

Instructions for the Christmas Giving Tree

1. Choose one or more gift tags from the tree. Each tag has a code (eg.- A1, C3, etc.)
2. Sign the tags off on the gift list spread sheet.
 - Find the tag's code on spread sheet (eg.- A1, C3).
 - Fill in all white spaces for that tag:
Date tag taken (eg.- 11/13), Your name, Your phone #, your email
3. Purchase gift(s). Get a gift receipt if possible.
4. Wrap gift(s), including gift receipt. Attach tag to package.
5. Put gift(s) under the JE Room tree, deadline Sunday morning, December 18.
6. Mission & Action Board will deliver gifts on Monday, December 19.



Thank you from Construct

Dear Board of Mission and Action,

Thank you for your donation to Construct. This gift will have an impact on many lives. With your support, Construct can provide vital assistance to those experiencing housing insecurity in the southern Berkshires, while creating hope and stability. It is a difficult time for many of our neighbors, and your contribution truly makes a difference.

With gratitude,

Leigh Davis, Development Director

Hands in Outreach

We donated \$100.00 to this organization based in Sheffield. It will provide uniform and books for one girl. It's mission: "with cultural sensitivity and compassion, HIO provides access to education and a supportive social network that empowers marginalized girls and women in Nepal to lift themselves from deep-rooted poverty." For more information go to handsinoutreach.org



Christmas Fund for Veteran's of the Cross and the Emergency Fund: Overwhelmed with JOY!

Our Christmas Eve offering will go the Christmas Fund. The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need.

"Warm Up the Winter" Construct Fundraiser

Warm Up the Winter Call to Action for Emergency Assistance is one of Construct's most critical annual fundraisers, with proceeds supporting those in need of emergency assistance for fuel, utility, rental payments, and emergency accommodation.

Warm Up the Winter has always provided a winter safety net for those who need it most.

Based in Great Barrington, Construct has been the leading nonprofit provider of affordable housing and supportive services to south Berkshire county residents in need for over 50 years. With a small, highly skilled staff and committed volunteers, Construct leverages time, talent, money, and long-standing community relationships to support its mission. More information at constructinc.org.

Thank you from
The People's Pantry

*Dear Friends at First
Congregational Church of
Stockbridge,*

*Thank you very much for
your generous donation to
The People's Pantry. We
truly appreciate your
continuing support. The
Pantry is seeing more people
needing help and we are only
able to be of help because of
your and the community's
support.*

*Your commitment to the
Pantry provides great
inspiration to those of us
doing the work, and shows
great leadership to the entire
Southern Berkshire
community.*

Beth Moser, President

Berkshire Lyric Presents...

On Saturday December 17, **Berkshire Lyric** presents *Home on Christmas Day*, taking place at 3:00 at the church. The concert of traditional and contemporary carols will also include a number of well known standards from the American holiday songbook. There will be many opportunities to sing along with the massed 100 singers. Santa (portrayed by John Demler) will also make an appearance at this old-fashioned holiday event geared for families of all ages. The Lyric Children's Chorus will be back, making its first public performance since before the pandemic.

As part of their 60th Anniversary Season, Berkshire Lyric is also presenting **two other distinct Christmas concerts this December**, each with a slightly different feel, with music designed for the particular setting. *Angels We Have Heard on High*, takes place on Friday evening December 9 at 7:30 at St. Mark's Church on West Street in Pittsfield. Traditional and contemporary a cappella

carols by Anton Bruckner, Kenneth Leighton, Alice Parker, John Rutter, Anson Olds, and Bob Chilcott will take advantage of the splendid acoustics of this large Gothic church. They will be joined by Lyric's young women's ensemble **Melodious Accord** and by soloists Lily Lothrop, Madeleine Redpath, Rich Geiler and John Demler. The other concert, *There Was a Star*, is set for Sunday December 11. The choral program will have a broader mix of Christmas music with Joes Rose at the piano and take place at 3:00 at Saint James Place on Main Street in Great Barrington. This popular concert at this festive venue has been sold out for the last few years, so purchase tickets early.

Tickets for Dec. 9 and Dec. 17 are \$20 and will be sold at the door, with children and students 18 and under admitted for free. Tickets for Dec. 11 at Saint James Place are \$25 for all, with no discount for children due to the more limited seating capacity. Advance purchases can be made through the Berkshire Lyric website or member singers. For further information, visit www.berkshirelyric.org



Family News

Our daughter Catherine and Steven were married November 13th at the Hotel Thayer at West Point. We are so happy to welcome Steven into our family!
Susan & Michael Lynch



Diane and I were able to connect with Steve Hassmer, Lily, and Noah in Wilmington, NC, on our recent trip south. Unfortunately, Casey was away at a conference. Everyone is doing well, and wish to be remembered to their friends at First Church.

Ted Randolph and Diane Piraino

On This Day, Rejoice!

STOCKBRIDGE FESTIVAL CHORUS

in concert to celebrate
the Christmas Season and its 35th anniversary

Saturday, December 10, 2022 3pm

First Congregational Church of Stockbridge, 4 Main Street

Forty Voice Chorus conducted by **Tracy Wilson**

Bob Logan, piano **Ed Lawrence**, organ

Music by Willcocks, Stopford, Mathias and Howells

Tickets at the door \$20/adults, \$10 members of local choirs, free 18 or younger
413-298-3137 for more information

Advent Prayer Tree

Prayer is a central part of worship and of our shared life. Prayer is a way we share, we become vulnerable, we allow others (God and neighbor) into our lives, and we wait in hopeful expectation for a response.

The Deacons have been spending a substantial amount of time talking about prayer and imagining how we can help the congregation to abide in prayerful experiences in new and deeper ways.

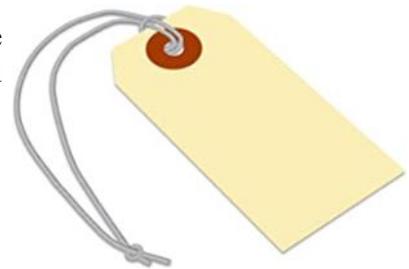
During Advent, tags will be available both on Sundays at worship and during the week from the office. People are invited to write a prayer request on the tag to be hung on the prayer tree in the sanctuary.

On Sundays, tags can either be placed by an individual on the tree or put in the offering plates. We will collect those placed in the offering and read the prayers exactly as written on the card as part of the sharing of joys and concerns before

placing them on the tree. *(Since the tree will be on display for the public, be mindful of any personally identifying details that others might not wish to be shared.)* We ask that those who leave requests with the Church Office indicate whether you would like them read out loud on the following Sunday or simply placed on the tree.

We hope that this enables all to share their prayers and for the larger congregation to be aware of them and pray for them.

We hope that this brings a physicality and tangibility to our prayer life. We hope that this brings meaning and depth to our shared journey. As always if you have input or questions, please contact a Deacon or Pastor Brent.



Christmas at the First Congregational Church, Stockbridge



December 24th – Christmas Eve
NEW TIME – 5:00 p.m.
(Preludes begin at 4:30 p.m.)
Lessons and Carols - Candlelight
Service

Through story and song, we bring the beauty of Christmas to life. We hope the earlier time will be welcoming to children. We are designing the service to be meaningful for all ages. Hear familiar passages, sing cherished melodies, and bear witness as light and life spread.

For unto us a child is born. Come and see.

December 25th – Christmas Day
10:00 a.m. (Fellowship time with light breakfast to begin at 9:30 a.m.)
Casual Worship in the J.E. Room

Gathered around the piano, dressed in comfy clothes (or even pajamas) we will remember the gift of Christmas in a casual and joy-filled service. Bring a present to be blessed, come ready to sing, and let's celebrate Christmas morning together as a family.

The Christmas Giving Tree



During this season of Advent, we invite you to share in the tradition of the Christmas Giving Tree, which offers a wish list of gifts you can purchase that will help make a brighter holiday for some of our South County neighbors. Mission & Action has contacted Construct, the Elizabeth Freeman Center, Literacy Network, and the Berkshire Housing Authority to receive Christmas wish lists from some of their clients.

The Giving Tree is in the church's Jonathan Edwards Room. Please choose one or more gift tags from the tree, sign off on the spread sheet located next to the tree, and then return your gift(s) under the tree, wrapped and with tag attached, by Sunday, December 18. More instructions are available by the tree.

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