

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

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



January 2024

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

January 2024

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 New Years Day office closed	2 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	3 Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering the Bible 11:45am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Council 7:00pm	4 Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	5 Service League 10:30 Youth Group Event	6 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
7 Worship 10:00am Epiphany Sunday	8	9 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	10 Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering the Bible 11:45am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Community Meal 5:30 Discovering 5:45pm	11 Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	12 Service League 10:30am	13 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
14 Worship 10:00am Baptism of Christ	15 Martin Luther King, Jr Day office closed	16 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Tuesday Club 1:45pm</i> <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	17 Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering the Bible 11:45am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm	18 Bell choir 4:30pm <i>Rough Sleepers</i> Book discussion 5:45pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	19 Service League 10:30am Newsletter deadline	20 <i>AA event – JE Room,</i> <i>morning</i> <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
21 Worship 10:00am	22 "Wholehearted Faith" hybrid 9:00am	23 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	24 Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering the Bible 11:45am Bible Study Zoom 1:00	25 Bell choir 4:30pm <i>Rough Sleepers</i> Book discussion 5:45pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	26 Service League 10:30am	27 <i>Stockbridge Golf</i> <i>Club 8:30am</i> <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
28 Worship 10:00am Budget Q&A	29	30 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	31 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00			



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

January 2024 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

As you receive this, I hope and pray that Christmas is lingering. The liturgical calendar allots us a precious small amount of time to be in the Christmas season – just twelve days. Compared to the seasons of Advent and Epiphany it is a mere blink of an eye. Maybe we would be wise to do what Mary demonstrated in Bethlehem – simply taking it all in and pondering it in our hearts – that the full measure of truth and beauty may reveal itself in the fullness of time.

The Season of Christmas officially comes to a close on the day of Epiphany. On that day we celebrate the story of the magi – the wise ones – never numbered by the way – never named kings by the way – never given names by the way – at least in the Bible anyway. And yet Epiphany, like Christmas, is not confined to a single day or event but launches a longer season – this time running all the way to Ash Wednesday.

I worry sometimes that the story of Epiphany, let alone the whole season gets lost in a mix of post-Christmas exhaustion and winter blues. And that is simply too bad, because Epiphany is prepared to offer us great gifts, just like those magi offered to the baby Jesus so long ago. There are three things about this story that I hope you notice as we approach that Sunday and hold onto as we travel through the Season.

First is not just that the magi set out, but why they do. The magi have been expecting a savior who would usher in a new just kingdom of God. They had been searching the skies for a sign and that is the only reason they even saw the Star of Bethlehem as it arose let alone set out. So, the first gift of the magi is this – are we expecting a

savior and if so, are we looking for signs?

Second, is not just that they bring precious gifts, but their reaction to the revelation of baby Jesus. These magi have traveled long distances and then end up arriving at a stable where a poor child is lying in a manger – not exactly what we might expect for the one to change everything. Yet, Matthew's Gospel makes it clear they were not disappointed. They were overwhelmed with joy, the Bible says! They gave Jesus every bit of gift they brought. They trusted what God was up to, rather than what they might have chosen to do. So, the second gift is this – when we see signs of God's inbreaking, even if scandalously strange, can we trust and honor what God is doing rather than insisting on our own way?

Finally, I love that the magi left for home by another road, and why. They are warned in a dream not to go back to Herod. They trusted a vision (although if they were wise, I bet they recognized Herod for who he was). They offer us something incredibly poetic, for once we see something that changes everything how can we go back anywhere by the same route?! So the third gift is this – when we encounter God's transformational love can we let that experience lead us by new roads?

We get another try at this amazing story of Epiphany again this year. As Christmas comes to a close, I pray we are wise enough to follow not just the route of the magi, but their ways. I look forward to the journey with you.

In gratitude and hope,

Pastor Brent

HAPPY JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

January 4	Lisa Nelson
January 5	John Morse
January 7	Jane McCormick
January 12	Anne Roy Mary Jane Dunlop
January 13	Jeannene Booher
January 14	Jill Wheat Ned Saviski
January 16	Nancy Wilcox
January 21	Corinne Burke
January 22	Pat Carlson
January 23	Christine Smith
January 26	Will Pohl Kenneth LaBresh
January 27	Linda Colvin
January 28	Chuck Gillett
January 29	Vivian Wise
January 31	Cathy Clark

A Note from the Financial Secretary

The memo line is our friend.

Whether you are making payments by check or through your bank, there is always a place in which to make a notation. Please indicate what your payment is for (e.g., “pledge” or “capital campaign”).

If you are completing a 2023 pledge, please indicate “2023”.

If you are prepaying a 2024 pledge (in 2023), please indicate “2024”.

To receive end of year tax acknowledgement for 2023 contributions, 2023 pledges need to be dated by December 31. (We will, of course, gratefully accept completion of 2023 pledges even after the new year.)

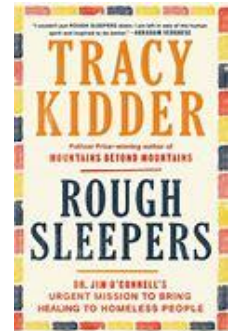
Please direct any questions to me at finance@stockbridgeucc.org

Many thanks ~ Marion Pomeroy

Winter Book Discussion

Rough Sleepers by Tracy Kidder

In *Rough Sleepers*, Tracy Kidder tells the story of Dr. Jim O’Connell, a gifted man who invented a community of care for Boston’s unhoused population, including those who sleep on the streets—the “rough sleepers.” This book is a modern-day example of someone who lives a life of compassion and gentleness.



The Christian Education Committee is partnering with Mission and Action and we invite you to join us as we read this book this winter. Vicky Cooper and Kim Ruffing will lead two discussion groups, one in person and one online.

- Thursday sessions, Jan 18, Jan 25, Feb 1, Feb 8, 5:45-6:45pm – in person
- Tuesday, February 6, 5:00-7:00pm – online

To sign up please contact the church office, if you have questions please reach out to Kim Ruffing or Vicky Cooper.

Readers are encouraged to acquire a copy on their own. Please reach out to the church office if you need assistance, we’d be glad to get a copy.



Advent Craft Workshop!

A Word about Multicultural BRIDGE

(Berkshire Resources for Integration of Diverse Groups Through Education)

Many of you have heard about the large influx of refugees into Massachusetts since August. On August 8th, Maura Harley declared a state of emergency in a bid for federal help. On Aug. 31, Gov. Healey authorized more than 200 National Guard members to assist the more than 2,500 families living in hotels, a step meant to address a shortage of social service agencies to help incoming migrants. The state reached a cap of 7,500 set by the governor on October 8th.

On November 1st, 84 migrants came to Berkshire County, 33 in Great Barrington and the remainder in Pittsfield.

From the *Berkshire Eagle*, November 9:

“They need absolutely everything,” said Gwendolyn VanSant, Founder and CEO of Multicultural Bridge, whose staff and volunteers are helping them in a variety of ways.”

Mission & Action is donating to Multicultural BRIDGE to support the staff and volunteers working hard to gather the many needed supplies.

Founded in 2007, BRIDGE (dba Multicultural BRIDGE) is a grassroots organization dedicated to advancing equity and justice by promoting cultural competence, positive psychology, and mutual understanding and acceptance. The organization acts as a catalyst for change through collaboration, education, training, dialogue, fellowship and advocacy. We are a minority and women run non-profit certified by the Office of Supplier Diversity of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. (SDP) Our certified competencies are training, education, language access, and multicultural awareness.

BRIDGE connects vulnerable community members with key resources and networks, while also providing education to both local institutions and the community at large. Click here to learn more about their programs and community services.

BRIDGE is a small-but-mighty diverse team of trained educators, facilitators, and advocates. We



have an engaged Board of Directors and Advisory Council, and a robust group of volunteers and activists in our midst. Our main offices are in Lee, MA, but we have worked with schools, businesses, organizations, town governments and more throughout the county, state and across the country.

In 2015, BRIDGE was recognized as a Berkshire Trendsetter for non-profit impact by OneBerkshire, and has also been cited by researchers as a best community-based practice in preventing hate crimes. Our advocacy efforts have led to the adoption of local policies and practices in towns and businesses to support equity and justice.

Wednesday Community Dinner

Eating together nourishes our bodies and our souls. All are welcome to a dinner on **January 10** at the church, led by Jo Ann Levitt. The food will be ready at 5:30 p.m. and served until 7:30 or so. People may arrive whenever is best for them and stay as long as they like. The food will be simple, nut-free, and include a vegetarian and gluten-free option.

No one is obligated to bring anything. Those who wish to contribute, help cook, or bring a dish can.

In gratitude, Pastor Brent

From the Service League

What an amazing Holly Fair! Yummy baked goods (Thank You, baker/donors!), a booth overflowing with greens (Thank You, artistic elves!), a Grandma's Attic stuffed with treasures (Thank You, attic cleaner-donors!) and a general hum of festivity throughout the morning and early afternoon. We netted \$4350 for all the effort, which will of course flow right back out to the church, the community, and the world to support many worthy projects.



It was heartening to see, minutes before the doors opened at 10:00 AM, that even as our core circle of Service League members has grown perceptibly smaller, the group gathered for our sending prayer has grown larger. There are so many people

to thank, I'll ask your indulgence if I overlook someone - but please let me know so I can fix that oversight. In no particularly order, thanks to Gene "Santa Claus" Kalish, Diane and Ted Randolph, Jay and Terry Wise, Christine Rasmussen, Patty "PayPal" Strauch, Charlotte and Don Rodgers, Shirley Miller, Mary Jane Dunlop Liz Murray, Elizabeth Bellows, Anna Smith, the Wilmot Family, Cindy Brown, Scarlett Richter and Erving Henderson, Stephanie Bradford, Martha Floyd, Vicky Cooper, Donna Jacobs, Janet Canning, Jo Ann Leavitt, Brent Damrow and Barb Kershner for a prayer and devotional (the latter from our absent Claire Williams) and to the ever-patient, flexible, and forbearing Will Garrison!

In case you missed it, (and even if you didn't) check out the photos below - a small sampling of the great pictures taken by faithful documentarian Cindy Brown.

Thank you to everyone who helped, who donated, who shopped. We could not do it without you!

Margaret Hornick, for the Service League



Be a Storyteller! An Important Invitation from the Board of Christian Education

The Magi visit Baby Jesus...Jesus' Baptism...Jesus Begins his Ministry...Jesus Tells Parables

Those are the stories we plan to tell our children in January. We need your help!

We are blessed with a growing number of kids in church. We are blessed with the chance to share the story of our faith and to create in them a love of God and neighbor. This year the Board of Christian Education has worked hard to create a way of both sharing the stories of our faith **AND** helping our kids get to know many people in our church family.

We need your help, and it is simply to tell stories and do an activity related to that story.

Each week our kids encounter one story. As storyteller, the Board of C.E. would equip you with resources to tell the story and bring it to life. Each week from 3-10 kids might be present for the story time. Each week the time begins with some music leaving you with approximately 20-25 minutes for the story. Storytellers are provided with:

- A couple of options for telling the story.
- At least two concrete options for engaging that story through craft, acting, activities that you can pick from (or you can choose your own way).
- Notes from Pastor Brent about the story and some common questions that may come up.
- A second adult in the room to help you with the children and with the activity.

Storytelling ends approximately when the sermon ends giving storytellers the chance to come back to worship. You don't need to be an expert in the Bible or faith to do this, all that is required is a willingness to tell a story, engage our kids, and see how joy and learning springs forth.

If you think you might be interested, please contact Kim Ruffing, Terry Wise, Vicky Cooper, or Elisabeth Bellows with any questions or Will Garrison to sign up. If you want to see how it all works, sign-up to be the second adult in the room first and go from there.



January Texts and Themes

January 7 – Epiphany Sunday

Text: Mathew 2:1-12

This is the story of the Magi who set out after searching the skies to find the Christ Child. When they arrive, they fall down in joy and present amazing gifts. They return by a different road.

January 14 – Baptism of Christ Sunday

Text: Mark 1:1-13

This is the story of the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan River.

January 21 – The Beginning of Ministry

Text: Mark 1:14-45

This is the story of the calling of the disciples, teaching, and then healing.

January 28 – Parables in Mark

Text: Mark 4:1-34

The story of multiple parables and the reason for them. It includes the parable of the sower, the parable of the lamp under the bushel, the growing seed, and the mustard seed.

Mission & Action News

The Christmas Giving Tree



Thank you to our congregation for participating in the Christmas Giving Tree! We purchased 137 Christmas gifts for 12 families (42 people – 26 children and 16 adults), through 4 organizations – Construct (Pine Woods in Stockbridge), the Elizabeth Freeman Center (Gt. Barrington), Literacy Network (Lee), and the Berkshire Housing Authority (Flag Rock in Gt. Barrington).

Many thanks to everyone who shopped for individual gifts, and also to everyone who donated money to the Giving Tree Fund, including the West Stockbridge Wisdom Lodge of Masons (through Joshua Hall). With the extra money, we were able to purchase Big Y gift cards for each family. Thank you also to the Stockbridge Library for donating Christmas books as extra gifts for the children.

You made a brighter holiday for some of our South County neighbors. The Mission & Action Board thanks you for remembering those in our community that needed an extra hand this year. May the Hope, Peace, Joy and Love of Christmas be in your heart and actions all through the new year!

MISSION & ACTION RECENT EXPENDITURES

- \$754 to BRIDGE for recent immigrants' needs (Local Needs).
- \$268 to People's Pantry, Gt. Barrington (Restricted Fund).
- \$600 for Big Y gift cards (for pastor's Discretionary Fund).
- \$685 for Giving Tree gifts (Restricted Fund).



Flowers and sticks for Advent.
Advent Craft Workshop (bottom)