



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

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



April 2024

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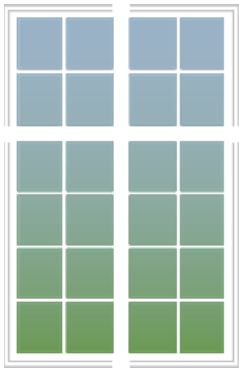
(413) 298-3137 | www.stockbridgeucc.org

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

April 2024

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Stockbridge Fest Chorus rehearses Sundays at 1:00pm through 4/21	1 Easter Monday – office closed Second Nature Arts 3:30	2 Brent's Sabbath Day Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	3 Morning Prayer 8 am Ingrid Richardson service 10:30am Discovering 11:45am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Council 7:00pm	4 Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	5 Service League 10:30	6 Memorial Service 2:00pm Al-Anon 5:00pm
7 Worship 10:00am	8 Second Nature Arts 3:30	9 Brent's Sabbath Day Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	10 Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering the Bible 11:45am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Community Meal 5:30	11 Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	12 Service League 10:30am	13 Music on Main Concert 4:00pm Al-Anon 5:00pm
14 Worship 10:00am	15 Second Nature Arts 3:30	16 Brent's Sabbath Day Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	17 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm	18 Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	19 Service League 10:30am	20 Stockbridge Golf Club 8:30am Al-Anon 5:00pm
21 Worship 10:00am Care for Creation Sunday	22 Second Nature Arts 3:30 Newsletter deadline	23 Brent's Sabbath Day Tuesday Club 1:45pm Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	24 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Discovering the Bible 5:45pm	25 Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	26 Service League 10:30am Stockbridge Fest Chorus dress rehearsal 3:00-6:00	27 Stockbridge Festival Chorus Concert 3:00pm Al-Anon 5:00pm
28 Worship 10:00am	29 Second Nature Arts 3:30	30 Brent's Sabbath Day Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm				Yoga Classes are Wednesdays at 9:00am



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

April 2024 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

As April begins, we are literally left with the question, now what? With Easter still lingering on the air and with resurrection still echoing off our hearts, we are left with that question – now what? First, I say, just linger – just take a deep breath and let in all the new life you can.

Since Christmas Eve, I have been finding my focus returning to the question of whether we are being radical enough, outlandish enough, or bold enough to follow the one born in the stable, the one who lived and taught in the moment, and the one the tomb could not contain. I feel like I have a radical heart – I am ridiculously naïve and hopeful and yet I have also learned I don't come to radicalness in my living very easily. Life and work have taught me the “rules” and how to find success. Such approaches, though, looks pale in the Easter light of Jesus's radical life, outlandish love, and bold path and where they all lead.

There is a part of the Easter Story that gives me hope. In every Gospel, after his resurrection, Jesus returned to those who were trying to follow him. He didn't just do so to show them his victory but instead he did so to linger with them and help them live into the new radical reality of post Easter living.

As I linger in those stories, I remember to turn toward the encouragement and wisdom of contemporary sages. For instance, Rachel

Held Evans points me in a helpful direction remembering her perception that “we are closer to the truth in our vulnerability than in our safe certainties” – so I will strive to be more open and forward looking. Bishop Michael Curry points me in a helpful direction with his call to “stand and kneel at the same time” – so I will strive to take more courageous positions in humility. Tim Sorens points me in another helpful direction when he challenges us all to imagine “what is God up to in our neighborhood?” Returning to Saint Rachel I recall her scandalous truth that what makes the Gospel so utterly radical (the word she uses is offensive) “isn't who it keeps out, but who it lets in” – so I celebrate my own inclusion even as I wonder who doesn't feel included...yet.

What comes next? I don't exactly know, but then again, the disciples didn't either. What I do know is that it will require letting my heart inspire my living and letting Christ's example stretch my imagination and my commitment beyond what is safe or easy. What I do know is that I will need your love, your wisdom, and our collective engagement to even get started. I am not sure that in Easter living we can be too radical, outlandish, or bold. But in these times through Easter Faith, I pray we might be radical, outlandish, and bold enough. I look forward to trying!

Pastor Brent

he/him/his

HAPPY APRIL BIRTHDAYS

April 2	Olga Schwede Hannah Alsdorf
April 7	Bronly Boyd Casey Jones Margo Davis
April 8	Virginia Berry
April 11	Tracy Wilson
April 12	Olivia Doerr
April 13	Don Rodgers
April 15	Marty Noyes
April 18	Jack Brown
April 19	Anna Grace Nimmo
April 22	Keith Raftery
April 23	Seth Ivas
April 26	Chet Douglass
April 27	Ivy Cote
April 28	Beth Cilley
April 30	Samuel Connor



Wednesday Virtual Bible Study

Each Wednesday afternoon several of us meet by ZOOM at 1:00 PM to study the Scripture text that the preacher for the following Sunday has chosen. We would love to have you join us.

What happens during this hour? First, we greet each other and check in on how our week is going. We share joys and concerns.

This may take fifteen or twenty minutes. Then, we share a prayer and somebody volunteers to read the Scripture passage. We take a quiet minute to think about it. What struck you? What did you find interesting or curious? What questions do you have about the text? Then, someone else reads it, usually from a different English translation.

Then we talk about it. That's pretty much it. We enjoy each other and our conversations are lively and fun. We often learn new insights into the Bible. It is great preparation for Sunday worship. Often toward the end we guess where the preacher will go with the text or texts. We're often wrong.

You may be an expert on the Bible or maybe you never opened it before, but you will be welcomed and valued in this group.

There is no cost, and no sign up. Just go to the [church website](#) and hit the ZOOM link you see there. We'd love to have you join us.

Blessings, Pastor Rick Floyd

Personnel Committee

The Personnel Committee is conducting annual staff reviews. Unlike last year, we are not going to conduct church-wide surveys for all professional staff positions (Pastor, Minister of Music, Financial Secretary, Church Administrator & Sexton).

However, if you would like to share your perspective with the Personnel Committee about the performance of the staff members, please email me at jeremy.ridenour@gmail.com.

Jeremy Ridenour,
Personnel Committee



Happy Birthday to Us...

Have you had, or will you have, a birthday this year, or any other year? Then you need to join your friends at the All Church Birthday Party and potluck luncheon on Sunday, MAY 5th, immediately following the service.

There will be songs, costumes, and, of course, a parade of cakes. You can sign up through Will in the church office, on Breeze, or on the signup sheet in the JE room. This is a Pot Luck, so please bring a lunch item to share. Those with last names starting with A-G are asked to bring a main dish, H-P a side dish, and Q-Z a salad.

Would you be willing to bake a cake? We need bakers. Contact Diane Piriano, at pirainodiane@hotmail.com or 413-822-7559.

Watch for details each week in the ENewsletter on Thursdays, or announcements in church!



A Beautiful Comedy of Errors

Many of us know that our own Maurice "Pops" Peterson is a regular columnist in a new classy magazine, "The B", a publication of *The Berkshire Eagle*. The current issue has a special section on Weddings & Celebrations. In it, Pops shares the complicated, stressful, but thoroughly joyful story of his marriage in 2010 to his husband Mark. The article is titled "A Beautiful Comedy of Errors", referring to a glitch in the wedding; but this loving relationship is no mistake. Grab a copy of this issue of "The B" and get to know Pops and Mark a little better.



Voice of the Sanctuary

Here is an excerpt from the upcoming history of the current church building, *How Firm a Foundation: An Architectural History of the Stockbridge Congregational Church 1824-2024*

Prior to the installation in 1865 of the Johnson tracker organ Opus 183 by the William A. Johnson firm of Westfield, Massachusetts, the church used a melodeon, a small reed organ to accompany hymns. When the sanctuary was renovated in 1855-56 to create the interior we now worship in, a new melodeon was purchased that coincided with creation of an organ loft at the rear of the balcony above the narthex.

For a mechanical "tracker" organ, the wind needed to sound the pipes was produced manually with one or two persons pumping large bellows. In 1869, Gordon Prindle was paid \$25 for "blowing the organ," which referred to working the hand bellows.

In 1904, the burden of hand pumping the bellows was replaced by a "water-motor." Power was provided by water pressure delivered through the municipal water system that was shared with the manse. Every time a toilet flushed, the water pressure for the organ dropped, leading to some sour notes and knowing smiles. This was all replaced in 1955 with an electro-pneumatic key and stop action system, upgraded twice since. The organ needs upgrades about every twenty-five years and it is due again so that it can continue to bring smiles to players and listeners alike.

Note: the organ is scheduled for repairs starting mid-April, part of the Capital Campaign.

News from Mission & Action

CONSTRUCT WARM UP THE WINTER OFFERING REPORT

On February 18 and 25, our congregation took up a collection for Construct's Warm Up the Winter emergency fuel fund campaign. A donation table at coffee hour was staffed by Tristan Osgood and Cindy Brown. This annual fundraising campaign is dear to Tristan's heart, and he campaigns for it year round in various venues, raising thousands of dollars each year. From our congregation this year, Tristan received \$1,019 for Construct. With an additional \$500 donated by Mission & Action, our church's total came to **\$1,519**. Many thanks to our congregation, and kudos to Tristan for his persevering commitment to Construct.

Warm Up the Winter Call to Action for Emergency Assistance is one of Construct's most critical and impactful annual fundraisers, with proceeds supporting those in need of emergency assistance for fuel, utility, rental payments, and emergency accommodation. It provides 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 on Construct can be found at <https://constructberkshires.org/>

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING OFFERING & CHURCH WORLD SERVICE HYGIENE KITS

On March 10, our congregation took up a collection for the One Great Hour of Sharing annual offering. This ecumenical offering began over 70 years ago, and is still going strong. The idea was that once a year, churches all over the country would take this offering on the same Sunday in the same hour of worship – one great hour. The purpose of the offering is to share what we have, in order to assist people all over the world who are in need – funding disaster relief, refugee assistance, and development ministries.

Our offering total came to **\$1,230**.

One of the groups that works together with One Great Hour of Sharing is Church World Service. And one of their missions is to provide hygiene kits to disaster victims. Hygiene kits offer some help when supplies like toothbrushes and soap are hard to come by. At coffee hour on March 10, we had the chance to participate in a fun hands-on mission project, putting 50 hygiene kits together (washcloth, hand towel, comb, band-aids, toothbrush, soap, nail clipper). The kits were then sent to Church World Service, who will send them all over the world, wherever they're needed.



THE PEARL ~ HOME FOR THE HOMELESS IN PITTSFIELD, PROVIDED BY SERVICENET

The Board of Mission & Action donated \$500 to ServiceNet for The Pearl homeless shelter in Pittsfield. This was motivated by our congregation's recent study of the book "Rough Sleepers," which describes a homeless program in Boston.

ServiceNet is a non-profit mental health and human service agency based in Greenfield, MA. They provide essential services to people living with homelessness, mental illness, developmental delay or disability, brain injury, substance use issues, and other challenges. Each year they serve more than 8,000 individuals throughout Western Massachusetts. Because everybody needs help sometimes.

continued

Amy Timmins, Vice President of Community Relations, shares, “The shelter recently opened in its new space at the Methodist Church in Pittsfield. Since its door is on Pearl Street, the shelter is being called The Pearl—which seems fitting as the beautiful result borne of response to an irritant/grain of sand. There are currently 40 people there, plus a few in overflow when the weather is harsh. The people living there are really coming together as a community.”

Another exciting plan being developed by ServiceNet is an expansion of ServiceNet’s first farm in Hatfield that has provided meaningful agricultural work, fair wages, and personal and professional growth to hundreds of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Early this year, ServiceNet purchased the property in the former Jodi’s Seasonal, the 16-acre flower farm on Crane Avenue in Pittsfield. It includes greenhouses, a few buildings, and a great deal of land. Prospect Meadow Farm Berkshires is a therapeutic vocational farm.

All farmhands and trainees are paid at least minimum wage and have growth opportunities such as senior farmhands, peer mentors, and then job coaches. “Our ultimate goal is to provide meaningful paid employment to people with developmental disabilities,” Robinson said.

For more information, visit servicenet.org

THANK YOU FROM PITTSFIELD HOMELESS SHELTER

Dear Mission & Action,

Our sincere thanks to you for your generous donation of \$500 to ServiceNet’s Berkshire County shelters for single adults and families.

(This will go to the homeless shelter in the Methodist Church on Fenn St. in Pittsfield.)

Our shelters play an important role in our community providing a safe and warm place to stay, and a hot meal. Over the years, thousands of folks have come through our doors with the hope of ending the cycle of homelessness. We offer them the assistance and encouragement needed to get through this difficult time in their lives. ServiceNet helps provide employment and counseling services. These supports restore hope and dignity for people who have lost everything.

ServiceNet maintains contact after folks have moved out of the shelter to ensure that they continue to do well and make progress on their

dreams of living independently. Thank you for sharing in our mission of guiding folks safely home.

~ Erin Forbush, Director of Shelter & Housing Services, ServiceNet

MISSION & ACTION RECENT EXPENDITURES

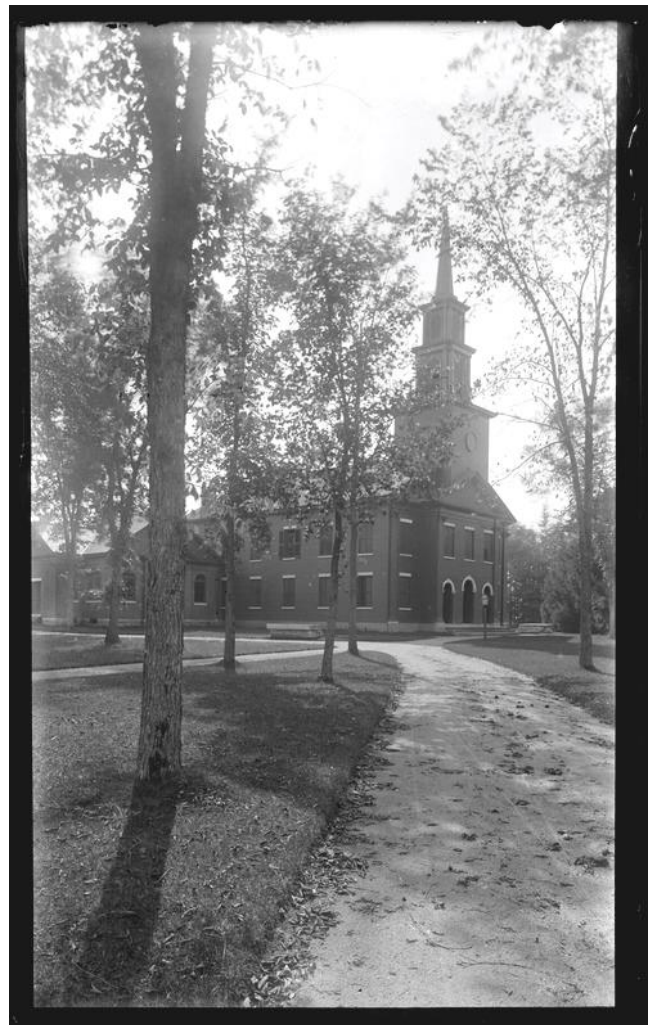
- \$200 to People’s Pantry, Great Barrington (restricted fund)

- \$500 to School Backpack Food Program (restricted fund)



This beautiful picture of the front of the church, circa 1900, is courtesy of [Digital Commonwealth](#), a statewide consortium of libraries, museums, archives, and historical societies from across Massachusetts.

Note the two carriage blocks on either side of the entrance to the church. ~ Joshua Hall



April Texts and Themes

April 7 – Judas Sunday

On this Sunday we will be looking at Judas in the light of Easter – is there forgiveness for him? Is there Resurrection? The early Christian tradition increasingly vilified Judas – what do we do with him?

For the kids, any story about forgiveness and grace would be good – a couple that come to mind include: Matthew 18:21-22 (forgiving 70 X 7 times) or Luke 17:4 where Jesus tells someone to forgive someone who has wronged you seven times in one day! Both the 490 and the 7 are simply symbols for fullness – don't keep track – keep forgiving.

April 14 – Witness Sunday – Guest Preacher

Text: Acts 1:1-14

In the opening of Acts, there is a quick summary followed by the final instructions of Jesus to the disciples, including to wait for the Spirit and then once comes to be his witness to the “ends of the earth.”

April 21– Care for Creation Sunday

Text: Genesis 1:26-32 (Inclusive Bible, Robert Alter), Psalm 19:1-4

While the texts might change, the Genesis text contains a word in Hebrew (radah) which is not the traditional word for “rule” rather it connotes as one Hebrew scholar notes, “to actively partner with God in taking the world forward.” We will look at our role to partner with God for the good of all creation.

April 28 – Church Sunday

Text: Acts 17:1-4, 1 Thess. 1:1-10

This will be the first time we get to the concrete early Church. In Thessalonians, Paul ministers to a church he comes to love. The text expresses gratitude for how the church is living and becoming known for hospitality, love, and faithfulness.

CATHEDRAL OF THE BELOVED

Cathedral of the Beloved is an ecumenical ministry that holds a worship service and offers a free meal Sunday afternoons in Pittsfield. This ministry serves the marginalized, isolated, and homeless, seeking to meet people where they are on the street, and to share God's love by being part of the community. The meals serve about 100 people each week. Churches volunteer to cook and serve a meal. We have participated in the past, and are gearing up to do it again.

We will partner with the West Stockbridge Village

Congregational Church to serve a meal indoors, at the Methodist Church, Fenn Street, Pittsfield on **Sunday, April 28**, and we will cook together in our church kitchen on **Saturday, April 27**.

We need **volunteers** to sign up to help cook together in the church kitchen on the Saturday before, and/or set up and serve the meal on Sunday. **Please check out the sign-up sheet on the JE Room bulletin board.**

As Jesus said in Matthew, chapter 25: “I was hungry and you gave me food. Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”