



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

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



May 2024

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

May 2024

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Yoga Classes are Wednesdays at 9:00am			1 Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering 11:45am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Council 7:00pm	2 Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	3 Service League 10:30	4 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i> Stockbridge Library Concert 7:00pm
5 Worship 10:00am All-Church Birthday Potluck Lunch	6 <i>Second Nature Arts</i> 3:30	7 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Second Nature Arts 3:30</i> <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	8 Morning Prayer 8 am Discovering the Bible 11:45am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Community Meal 5:30 Bible Study 5:30pm	9 Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	11 Service League 10:30am	11 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
12 Worship 10:00am	13 <i>Second Nature Arts</i> 3:30	14 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Second Nature Arts</i> 3:30 <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	15 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm	16 Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	17 Service League 10:30am	18 <i>Berkshire Lyric</i> <i>Young Singers</i> Concert 3:00pm <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
19 Pentecost Worship 10:00am "Strengthen the Church" offering. Annual Meeting	20 <i>Second Nature Arts</i> 3:30 Newsletter deadline	21 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Second Nature Arts 3:30</i> <i>Tuesday Club 1:45pm</i> <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	22 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Discovering the Bible 5:45pm Bible Study 5:30pm	23 Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	24 Service League 10:30am	25 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
26 Worship 10:00am	27 <i>Memorial Day – office</i> <i>closed</i>	28 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Second Nature Arts 3:30</i> <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	29 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00	30 Bell choir 4:30pm Choir rehearsal 7:00pm	31 Service League 10:30am	



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

May 2024 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

We are a diverse church – both locally and in covenant with other UCC churches – diversity abounds. We welcome and cherish people who come to be the body of Christ for very different reasons and who understand that body of Christ and the larger issue of faith equally differently. One of our great hallmarks is our desire to strive for deep understanding and connection even as we recognize that we need to hold any such endeavors or discoveries from them loosely as love and faith are unfolding enterprises.

In our tradition, believing matters deeply. One of the gifts we bring to organized religion is our approach to belief. In the UCC we more often talk about “how” we believe rather than “what” we believe. We do so because of the unfolding nature of that belief which is not arriving at an answer but rather a giving of our full life force to a way and not just any way, but the way of Christ. We emphasize the “how” of believing to keep us moving, exploring, praying, surrendering, discovering, learning, and, of course, following.

Yet we do not ignore the “what” of belief. We have a beautiful statement of faith as a denomination – it never fails to move me when I read it. It is available on our website, stockbridgeucc.org/learning-formation/ We don't shy away from the task of making tangible how we understand God and how we understand our calling to live. We identify as “non-credal” not to discourage such endeavors but rather to remember our diversity and to acknowledge that no statement or creed should ever be a “test of faith” rather they are ever-evolving “testimonies of faith.”

Statements of faith also give us something to hold onto together and remind us of the life-long and

very real challenge of not letting faith remain some amorphous thing floating in the skies about but something that shapes both how we live and why.

In my recent Care for Creation sermon, I shared my [work-in-progress Statement of Faith](#) (also on the website). It was a joy to craft and shape and it was a privilege to be able to share it with you.

The joy came not only from the words that found their way onto paper, but from the contemplation of the Scripture, theology, and experiences that helped those words make it onto the paper and most importantly The Word that is behind, underneath, and around it all. That draft can be found on our website – I would love to hear your thoughts. Even more, though, I encourage you to take a crack at writing your own. It need not look or feel like mine, but I hope that you might likewise let your words spring forth from deeper places in your own faith journey, from Scripture that matters to you, and from other places that have shaped you. Finally, I hope that you will share them with me (thank you to those who already have). I look forward to identifying a way to share them with each other that we might learn from each other and be in fullness of relationship.

If this feels daunting, know that I am here. If it feels challenging – good – it should for it is important and meaningful. If it feels intriguing – wonderful – run with it. In any case, find peace in the truth that it is not a final answer but always a work in progress. Believing matters; spending the time to reflect on what and how and why we believe can be life-giving. I look forward to your wisdom, your truth, your understanding, and your willingness to share.

In gratitude and hope, Pastor Brent (he/him/his)

HAPPY MAY BIRTHDAYS

May 9	Donald Eaton
May 10	Sarah Conly
May 12	Erving Henderson
May 18	Marissa Peyron
May 19	Marie Raftery
May 20	Terry Wise
	Jeremy Ridenour
May 22	Gene Kalish
	Diane Fogarty
May 24	David McCarthy
May 26	Suzanne Dower
May 27	Cary Quigley
	Marc Fadding
May 30	Ed Ivas

Spring Awakening

The April 13th Music on Main "Spring Awakening" concert was glorious. All 56 of us in attendance were on our feet cheering and clapping at the end. The two talented young NYC singers, Emily Kate Gentile and Bernard Holcomb, were all over the musical map--from Clara Schumann to Verdi and Bizet with Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, and H. Leslie Adams thrown in. Also, the award-winning poetry of Connie Wanek was wonderfully set to music by and read by our own Minister of Music, Peter Frost. His wife, Hui-Mei Lin (Fimi) is an amazing pianist and did beautiful collaborative work with the singers, both of whom she had lined up. Their voices and chemistry were a delight.

We are so blessed to have Peter along with Fimi at the helm of our church's music program.

~Mary Hoeltzel, Music Board

Welcome Back!

I first met Steve Hassmer after he came to sing in our choir and we introduced ourselves while hanging up choir robes in the back hallway. He informed me that his wife, Casey Jones, is a dentist. I made sure my dentist husband, Jay, got to meet Casey. The rest is a long and complicated history. Jay hired Casey as his associate in 2013 and enlarged his office to accommodate two dentists.

A lot has happened since then: a pandemic, Casey and family relocating to North Carolina, Jay's heart surgery, new associates to keep things going. As of early April, not only is Casey back, but she now owns and operates the dental practice Jay has nurtured since 1981. He will continue to be a dentist in Casey's practice, which goes by the name of **Inspired Dental Wellness** at the same location in Lee. I hope we will be able to welcome the Hassmer-Jones family, including Noah and Lilly, back to our congregation!

~ Terry Wise

A Church Alive with Music

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*

When **Penna Rose**, former choir director, was asked about her time with us, she said:

In 1989, the BBC wanted to set its program Songs of Praise in America to celebrate Thanksgiving. The Stockbridge church was invited to be the setting for this event. I asked my friend Harry Huff, an enormously talented organist from New York City, to accompany the singing. One of our younger members, 8-year-old Peter Wise, sang All Things Bright and Beautiful and the congregation heartily sang many hymns associated with Thanksgiving. That service is one of the enduring memories of my musical life.

She especially remembers *Oh Joanah*, the story of Jonah and the whale. "Because our Jonah was Maggie McMenemy, we changed the spelling to Joanah and she was a hit! We also had some biker girls as the Nineveh thugs." [The BBC's "Songs of Praise" series has run since October, 1961.]





All Church Birthday Party!

Having a birthday this year? Come celebrate with a potluck lunch and party on **Sunday, May 5!** This year's theme is The Four Seasons. Bring a dish to share, sit with your seasonal siblings, sing seasonal songs, eat cake...And speaking of cake, are you willing to bake one? Email Diane at pirainodiane@hotmail.com, or give a call to the church office.

Annual Meeting

After worship on Sunday, May 19. We will read the Land Acknowledgement, review the Annual Meeting Minutes of May, 2023; remember those we have lost; consider recommendations from the Procter Hall Working Group, and elect officers and members of the boards.

Land Acknowledgement

As followers of Christ, we are called, in the words spoken by Isaiah, to "maintain justice and do what is right." Accordingly, we offer this land acknowledgment using the language approved by the Stockbridge-Munsee Community:

It is with gratitude and humility that we acknowledge that we are learning, speaking, gathering, and worshiping on the ancestral

homelands of the Mohican people, who are the indigenous peoples of this land. Despite tremendous hardship in being forced from here, today their community resides in Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all.

Wednesday Community Dinner

Eating together nourishes our bodies and our souls. All are welcome to a dinner on **May 8** at the church. The food will be ready at 5:30 p.m. and served until 7:00 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

Have you been visiting this church for a while and thinking about calling it home?



Please contact Pastor Brent to talk about how to make this step in your faith journey. We try to offer this twice a year, so if now is not the right time, another opportunity will come soon.

Pastor Brent can be reached at bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org or 413-298-3137 x11

From the Service League

It seems like everyone in the Service League is traveling this month. Anne Hutchinson, with Gene Kalish, Erving Henderson, and Scarlett Richter in tow, is currently in Costa Rica where they're all volunteering at a nature preserve. Jane McCormack just returned from Barbados, and Nancy Wilcox, Patty Fadding, and Helen McCormack all went on a day trip to the CIA (the one in Hyde Park, AKA the Culinary Institute of America) where they had an amazing lunch and an informal tour of the school, which was once a Jesuit Monastery. And Donna Jacobs traveled with a friend to Saranac Lake to watch the solar eclipse in its totality (see photo). But lest you think we're all play and no work, I'll mention that we're preparing every week for the Summer Fair and the Holly Fair. Do you have any stray canning jars you'd like to get rid of (4 and 8 oz sizes) or donations for Grandma's Attic? We'll happily take them.

Margaret Hornick, for the Service League



STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH: SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL OFFERING

On **May 19**, (Pentecost Sunday) we will join with UCC churches across the country to give to the Strengthen the Church special offering. The Strengthen the Church offering supports the expansion of ministry and growth of UCC local congregations. Your support of this offering will help the UCC fulfill its commitment to creating a just world for all by investing in new ministries and practices that meet the emerging needs of local communities. The Strengthen the Church offering reflects the shared commitment of people across the United Church of Christ to cooperatively build up the UCC by equally sharing the gifts given by members and friends through their local congregations. The funds raised support leadership development, new churches, youth ministry, and innovation in existing congregations. As God calls our congregations to be the church in new ways, your generosity will plant new churches, awaken new ideas in existing churches and

develop the spiritual life of our youth and young adults. By your generosity to this offering, you build up the Body of Christ.

For the past several years, the 5-for-5 UCC special offerings (except the Christmas Fund/Veterans of the Cross) have come from our Mission & Action budget. Beginning this year, Mission & Action, with Council approval, will return to engaging the congregation in joining churches across the country to give to UCC Special Offerings. Bulletin inserts will be provided to learn more, and look for specially marked offering envelopes for your gifts. Please make your check payable to First Congregational Church. On the memo line on your check, please note 'Strengthen the Church.' If you are contributing through Venmo, (FCC Stockbridge), note 'Strengthen the Church' on the 'What's this for?' line.

We hope you will give prayerfully and generously.

Active Prayer of Thanksgiving

On **May 5**, our church will revive the practice of an Active Prayer of Thanksgiving. In the past, this has been a regular practice of our congregation each month as an act of gratitude



after receiving communion.

We encourage you to bring non-perishable food items and/or money for food, to be given to a local food pantry. This month, our donations will go to the People's Pantry in Great Barrington, which our church has supported for many

years with contributions and volunteers. Their needs continue to grow exponentially.

We will join a procession to the front of the sanctuary (that's the active part!) to bring our donations (that's the thankful response part!).

If you wish to contribute by check, please make your check payable to First Congregational Church, memo line: People's Pantry.

We look forward to responding to Christ's offering of spiritual food at communion by giving generously to our neighbors' need for physical nourishment. As you do this for the members of God's family who have food insecurity, Jesus tells us "that was me – you did it for me."

Pop-Up Pantry News

Our church's Pop-Up Pantry continues to enjoy robust usage. We offer basic non-perishable food, available 24/7 to anyone in need. We have now moved freezable items from the inside hallway back to the outdoor shed behind the

Sunday school wing. We continue to encourage donations of food (which can be left in the marked blue bin in the back hallway) and also monetary donations (checks payable to First Congregational Church, memo line: Pop-Up Pantry).

Mission & Action - Recent Expenditures

- \$500 to People's Pantry, Great Barrington (Local Needs operating budget line)
- \$130 to People's Pantry (Restricted fund)
- \$500 to World Central Kitchen (National/International Needs operating budget line)
- \$500 to UCC Disaster Relief Fund for Sudan (National/International Needs operating budget line)

Capital Campaign update

To finish the front steps project, Williams Paving arrived with a lot of equipment on April 26 to remove the existing sidewalk and replace with a narrower one closer to the memorial garden and front of the building. The new sidewalk is open for use - please stay off the re-seeded areas. Next up (literally): the steeple will be repainted starting July 1. We'll keep you posted.



Jeff Bendremer (in safety vest), the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, was on hand in case any cultural artifacts were found. Jeff did not find any during this project.

May Texts and Themes

May 5 – Love Sunday

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Our Text takes us to the wonderful description of love. Paul is writing to a church in a cosmopolitan city and reminding them that all of the wonderful gifts they bring are nothing unless they are undertaken in love.

May 12 – Life and Death Sunday

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-26, 51-57

The text considers the idea of death and resurrection. The passage contrasts how sin came into the world through one man (Adam) and how resurrection came into the world through another man (Jesus). There are some rich passages here that we use in funerals today including “where O death is your sting?”

May 19 – Pentecost Sunday (Annual Meeting)

Text: Acts 2:1-4; 1 Corinthians 12:1-13

The Narrative Lectionary pairs the coming of the Spirit with the wonderful passage on the gifts of the spirit and the making of one body. We will start with the story of Pentecost for the opening and then use the Corinthians passage for the sermon text.

May 26 – Trinity Sunday

Text: John 3:1-17

This passage features a Pharisee, Nicodemus, who comes to Jesus in the middle of the night to ask important questions that end of with answers of mystery. The Trinity is so often portrayed in logical constructs and yet is a mystery of relationship. We will explore mystery through very real human confusion.



United Church of Christ, Pittsfield, and the Berkshire Association of
the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ

invite you to

A Service of Word and Rite of Installation

of

The Reverend Michael Denton

as Minister of United Church of Christ, Pittsfield

*the newly reunited congregations of First Church of Christ, Congregational, and
South Congregational Church*

Sunday, May 5, 2024

3 pm

Reception follows in the parlor

United Church of Christ, Pittsfield
110 South Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

For more information, visit
uccpittsfield.org/visit
or call 413-442-7357