

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

Annual Report

Program Reports

2023-2024

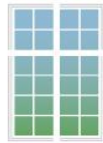


May 19, 2024

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FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Stockbridge, Massachusetts

-

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

In accordance with the By-laws of the Church, we hereby call the Annual
Congregational Meeting for Sunday, May 19 at 11:00am, following
worship. Included will be votes to approve:

1. Recommendations from the Procter Hall Proceeds Working Group.
2. Nominating slate for Officers, and Board and Committee members
3. To act upon any other business that may legally come before the meeting.

Jeremy Ridenour, Clerk

Ron Hanft, Moderator

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
of the United Church of Christ, Stockbridge
4 Main Street,
Stockbridge MA 01262

ORDER OF BUSINESS - ANNUAL MEETING
May 19, 2024
Immediately Following Worship

When you come together, share a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.
1 Corinthians 14:26 (NIV)

- I. Call to Order and Quorum Check
- II. Opening hymn: *We Gather Together*, verse 1
- III. Reading of the Land Acknowledgement Statement
- IV. Approval of Annual Meeting Minutes 2023
- IV. Scheduled Business
 - A. Remembering those we have lost
 - B. Recommendations from the Procter Hall Proceeds Working Group
 - C. Election of Boards and Officers of the Church
- V. Closing hymn: *We Gather Together*, verse 3

Today's hymn, *We Gather Together*, is taken from the hymnal, "Community of Christ Sings"
(Harold Publishing House, 2013)

The First Congregational Church, UCC
Stockbridge, Massachusetts
ANNUAL MEETING Minutes
May 21, 2023

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 11:13 am. Brent led the church with a prayer to begin the meeting.

Approval of Annual Meeting Minutes 2022: The minutes were approved unanimously.

Remembering those we have lost: Charles Wales, Joyce Hovey, Jackie Hawkins, and Jane Hart.

Articles of Organization: Cathy began by speaking about the By-laws Revision Task Force (BLRTF). A motion was put forward to approve the Articles of Organization. The motion was seconded. Jon Geldert asked a question about incorporating the church and how it might benefit the church. John Canning commented on the limitation liability for the officers of the church and commented on the value of having a separate tax ID number. The motion to approve the Articles of Organization was approved unanimously. Next, John put forward a motion: I move that the congregation authorize and approve the incorporation of The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ Stockbridge, Massachusetts, by the taking of the action steps set forth in the document furnished to the congregation at today's meeting, which document shall be attached as an exhibit to the minutes of today's meeting. The motion was approved unanimously.

Approving Revised By-laws: A motion was put forward. The motion was seconded. Cathy opened space for questions. Elizabeth Young thanked the group for their work. No questions were brought forward. The motion to approve the revised by-laws was approved unanimously.

Call for Updates:

Update on the Capital Campaign Implementation – Joe Nicolosi provided a brief history about the Capital Campaign. Joe outlined the projects that have been completed, those currently underway, and those planned in the future (e.g., the organ repair). Joe thanked Bronly Boyd for his leadership on these various projects. The cost to fully fund all Phase One Projects was going to cost \$986,000 and has now been increased to about \$1.2 million dollars. Given this gap between the monies raised by the Capital Campaign and the new estimate for all the projects, a group has been formed to decide which projects should take priority. Joe offered to provide more detail for any interested church member.

Vote on Approving the Nominating Slate – Realizing that she had skipped over this item, Cathy returned to vote on the nominating slate. A motion was put forward to approve the Nominating Slate. A motion was put forward. The motion was seconded. Brent announced that Elizabeth Bellows is going to serve for a three-year term on Christian Education. No other issues were brought forward. The motion was approved unanimously.

Update on the Justice Task Force – Charlotte Rodgers provided an update about the Land Acknowledgment. The ad-hoc Justice Task Force formed about a year ago. The group reports to Mission & Action. Charlotte thanked all those who served and helped the group along the way. Charlotte outlined the aims and upcoming projects for the Justice Task Force. Charlotte suggested people visit the church website to learn more about the Stockbridge Munsee Tribe and to listen to Josh Hall’s lecture about the church and its early history with the tribe.

Update on the Waldorf Task Force – Brent announced an update about Procter Hall and Berkshire Waldorf High School’s intention to renovate it for a new location. Brent thanked the various people who have been working on this project for the last 18 years. Brent provided some history about the project. The conveyance price has been negotiated to be \$250,000. He described some of the additional projects that the school has offered, including lighting and parking. Brent provided some more information about contingencies in case the Waldorf Task Force pulls out of the project. A formal question and answer session will be held on May 31st. Council approved a special congregational meeting to be held on June 4th too discuss the project. The second issue is how to use the funds for the conveyance price. Brent noted it has been suggested the monies be used for more significant maintenance projects that require regular updates. David Anderegg asked about the maximum draw as a policy and thought it was a “guideline.” Brent clarified that the official piece of paper is an endowment policy. Diane Piraino noted that is the land of the Stockbridge Munsee people and a burial ground for them. The tribe had asked that there be a deed restriction on the policy to prevent digging as it might disrupt potential graves. The other issue is that the possibility about a potential reparation might be offered to the tribe, which has been discussed by the Justice Task Force. Diane suggested the funds be used for education and reparation. Brent noted that Berkshire Walford High School is interested in working on a land acknowledgment, and the high school is not planning on digging. The discussion then ended.

On behalf of Council, David offered to Cathy a gift for her terms of service. Prior to ending the meeting, Cathy is bequeathing to Ron her copy of Robert’s Rules of Order. Brent ended the meeting with a benediction at 12:00 p.m.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 12:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeremy Ridenour, Clerk

The First Congregational Church, UCC
Stockbridge, Massachusetts
Special Congregational Meeting Minutes
June 4, 2023

Present: Ron Hanft began the special congregational meeting at 11:22 a.m. and announced the agenda for the meeting. Ron declared a quorum for the meeting based on attendance in the church. Rev. Linda Hoddy then led the congregation in prayer.

Ron announced that the meeting will consider recommendations from the Procter Hall Task Force, an effort that has spanned 15 years. The Procter Hall Task Force includes the following members: Bronly Boyd, Margaret Hornick, Buck Smith, Brent Damrow, and Cathy Clark.

Margaret Hornick read the first motion: “To authorize the finalization of legal documents effecting the sale of Procter Hall to The Berkshire Waldorf High School with the land configuration identified in Exhibit One and with the conditions outlined in Exhibit Two for a conveyance price of \$250,000 and to authorize the Procter Hall Task Force to make minor alterations to such documents as legally or otherwise required.” The motion was seconded. Ron invited a discussion, but no points were brought forward. The vote was unanimous in support.

Brent Damrow read the second motion: “Upon the completion of a binding legal agreement between The Church and The Berkshire Waldorf High School to convey the property and upon the signing of said agreement, to authorize The Church to notify the Town of Stockbridge of the cancellation of the existing lease related to Procter Hall. The agreements with BWHS are to go into effect simultaneously when the current lease with The Town is legally understood to be cancelled.” The motion was seconded. Ron invited a discussion, but no points were brought forward. The vote was unanimous in support.

Buck Smith read the third motion: “To instruct the Church Council to design and appoint a Working Group to determine how any proceeds from the Conveyance are to be used. The Group is to be appointed not later than the September meeting of the Council and should be constituted to represent the breadth of the Congregation and key stakeholders (including but not limited to the Board of Trustees and the Justice Task Force). The Working Group is to update the Church Council on its progress and report back to the May 2024 Congregational Meeting with any preliminary or final recommendations. Final recommendations are to be approved by a vote of the Congregation.” The motion was seconded. Ron invited a discussion. Jill Wheat brought forward a question about whether a representative from each Committee would be on the Working Group to make sure the Task Force has representatives from various aspects of the church. Ron clarified that the members of the Working Group are not exclusively limited to Trustees and Justice Task Force. The motion was seconded. Ron invited a discussion, but no points were brought forward. The vote was unanimous in support.

Prior to offering a benediction, Brent expressed gratitude for all those who have contributed to Procter Hall. Brent offered a benediction at 11:34 a.m. The meeting was adjourned at 11:34 a.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jeremy Ridenour, Clerk

Clerk's Report
May 21, 2023 – May 19, 2024

Baptisms

LeeAnn Fleming October 29, 2023

Deaths

Kathleen L. Oppermann February 1, 2024

Ingrid Richardson April 3, 2024*

Lee Dixon May 19, 2023

New Members

Tim Bosworth June 4, 2023

Beth Cilley June 4, 2023

Gary Cilley June 4, 2023

Marty Noyes June 4, 2023

Transfers Out

None

Summary:

Child Baptisms 0

Adult Baptisms 1

New Members 4

Deaths 2

Transfers Out 0

Membership as of 5/2023 207

Net Added 2

Current Membership 209

*Although not a member of the church, Ingrid Richardson was a beloved member of the wider church community and considered this place her home.

MODERATOR'S REPORT

Dear Friends,

What does a Moderator do? A bit of everything, but nothing by oneself. In fact, most of the time I am responding to the activity, questions, decisions, and thoughtful discussions that arise from all of you. This is generated out of our Congregational meetings, Boards, and the Council; but which engages our whole community of faith, often interacting with the larger community of which we are a part. For now, I can describe only some samples of this 'wildlife' here in the Berkshire Hills.

When I signed the paperwork finalizing the sale of Procter Hall it was the culmination of 15 years of research, negotiations, congregational and committee meetings. When I remembered how so many others had labored for this sale, my pen shook a bit when I signed off on the final deal.

Then a new challenge emerged. How shall we use the proceeds of \$250,000? The congregation called for a working group to develop a recommendation. The Council recruited another set of set of folks who deliberated for nine months to bring their recommendation to you today.

Acquiring and managing the resources to support all we do and aspire to do are daunting tasks. Key to that process is the work that our Treasurer, Budget Committee, Council and Trustees do in bringing an annual budget to the congregation. But the final decisions are yours, and one of the best ways to help the church is to just show up and participate in our Congregational meetings. Thank you for that!

Meanwhile, the Trustees and others continue the implementation of our Capital Campaign projects, with needs and budgets constantly fluctuating. I spent many hours, with the help of Tracy Wilson and Peter Frost, negotiating a final contract for extensive repairs to our organ which just began. This year, projects continue, at the Manse and soon with the Steeple, while other projects are emerging. A group to plan next year's refurbishment of the JE Room and kitchen was recruited and is now at work.

All the while, we maintain and build relationships, among ourselves and with others, such as the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Community. In January, the congregation established a new By-Law for 'Land Acknowledgement and Commitments' as we grow in our awareness of the history of the land we occupy.

Regarding other dimensions of our history, this is the 250th year for this building as our church home. An excellent new book about our life in this building will be published soon. How shall we celebrate this milestone? Brent has some ideas but he needs input and help from more of us. Stay tuned.

While all this appears as just "activity" it actually expresses our discernment of what we value most and what living our faith is actually all about. That's why we begin and end most of our meetings with prayer. So, for all of you, and for all that you allow me to be a part of, Thanks be to God!

Ron Hanft, Moderator

PASTOR'S REPORT

Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

Romans 12:2 (CEB)

Dear Church Family,

Here we are - another year under our belt and another adventure about to begin. I am deeply grateful for each of you and the ways you gather and are becoming church. I hope that you read the reports in this document. They reveal the vitality of this place and lift up those who have shared their ideas, hearts, gifts, minds, and hands.

The above passage from Romans is one of my favorites. It has much to say to us in these times, and this world. I love how it both share important truths about these days while encouraging us to remember that new days are coming. I love that it challenges us not to be conformed to the “pattern(s) of this world” while offering us not just something to strive for but a compass to direct us – discerning God’s will.

It is natural to resist patterns that are so threatening and so replete in the daily news - patterns of fear, separation or discord; the patterns of drawing lines or erecting barriers; the patterns of self-seeking schemes to benefit the powerful at the expense of the powerless. This passage offers us inspiration to engage. This annual report reveals so many ways that we have and to the ways we have found identity and purpose following in the way of the resurrected Christ.

This passage also, though, challenges us to look inward at patterns we too have created. Church is a unique undertaking – one that brings our lives into dialogue both with long-held beliefs and traditions and with the expansive nature of faith. Sometimes those patterns have evolved from moments of joy or common chosen experience. Other times they have come in response to external pressures and challenges.

The pandemic was long and hard. It created new patterns in our individual lives and our collective life as church. Some of those patterns offer new and vibrant possibilities, others linger even if they get in the way or no longer serve any discernible purpose, and still for others it is too early to tell what they mean or how they shape our shared life. The pandemic’s patterns are still with us. We need, as we are called to do with all patterns, lovingly consider them to discern whether they are life giving or not - whether they are good, and pleasing and mature.

I am so grateful for the humble courage and the generous love that this church continues to demonstrate in the way it worships, programs, studies, prays, and lives. I look forward to the journey ahead and to undertake it with you!

In gratitude and hope,

Pastor Brent

He/him/his

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

During the summer, we met with our Sunday School Coordinator (for 2022-2023) to hear his observations and thoughts about running a Sunday School program. For older children, we migrated to a Storytelling model staffed by volunteers from the wider church. There are generally several elements each week – singing (led by Elisabeth Bellows and/or Liza Catino), praying, reading the Bible stories and then doing activities that reinforce the story. The CE Board meets to select the stories following the Narrative Lectionary, then we brainstorm craft, drama or learning activities which reinforce the message. We feel that using this team-based approach yields more creative and varied activities. We are extremely grateful for our storytelling leaders and assistants – Jo Ann Levitt, Ted Randolph, Jill Wheat, Cindy Brown, Cathy Clark, Jon Geldert, Elizabeth Young, Diane Piraino, Miles Wheat, Vicky Cooper, Elisabeth Bellows, Terry Wise and Kim Ruffing. For next year, we will need to increase the number of volunteers so the program will continue to be engaging and impactful for the growing number of children and families in our congregation.

The youth group has been active this year as well, their activities have included hiking, navigating a corn maze, making crafts at the after-church potluck and Advent craft party. In the winter they saw the Winterlights display at Naumkeag and enjoyed a bowling outing. The Youth Group planning team was Terry Wise, Elisabeth Bellows, Diane Piraino and Ted Randolph – thank you for your tireless efforts to coordinate, plan and shepherd the various events.

Our nursery care providers for the year were Samantha Goudey, Malina Jackson and Emily Goudey. Emily has been the primary nursery care provider since the Fall. We're delighted that families are assured about having nursery care each Sunday.

There were also special events, Rally Day in September and an egg hunt on Easter. For Rally Day, the children and youth enjoyed a treasure hunt, the ever-popular watermelon seed-spitting contest, arts and crafts, bubbles and other games. Growth and Fellowship provided a wonderful lunch and everyone enjoyed the kickoff to the program year. The Easter Egg Hunt was well-attended (twenty children) and the participants enjoyed the egg hunt, the nut-free candies hidden in the eggs and the choice of Bible-themed prizes to take home.

In Adult Education, we held two year-long studies. Thank you to Pastor Brent for leading a year-long Bible study and thank you to Linda Russell and Kim Ruffing for leading discussions of "Wholehearted Faith" by Rachel Held Evans. Each of these studies led to thoughtful, intentional discussions about the Bible and Christian faith in contemporary life. We thank Vicky Cooper and Kim Ruffing for leading discussions about the eye-opening book "Rough Sleepers" by Tracy Kidder. Lastly, a small team led three different sessions contemplating end-of-life issues using Henry Nouwen's book "Our Greatest Gift", the team members were Pastor Brent, Elisabeth Bellows and Kim Ruffing. Also, a huge thank you to Rick Floyd for continuing his weekly Bible study. The adult education programs have been offered in various ways – in-person, on Zoom,

weekly and monthly – as we try to make the programs accessible and engaging. The convening of groups continues to be a vital part of growing our collective faith and our connection to one another. Thank you to all who led or participated in these small group studies.

As a Board, we are striving to engage the children, youth and adults of the church with interesting and creative programs.

Respectively submitted by the CE Board –

Kim Ruffing (Chair), Terry Wise, Vicky Cooper, and Elisabeth Bellows.

BOARD OF DEACONS

The Deacons have had a productive, joy-filled and very busy year living into the rhythms of worship and the spiritual practices of our church.

As our worship services continue to be hybrid we continue to look for ways to involve the congregation in new ways of connecting, especially through prayer. Those attending from home call in their prayers and we now have prayer cards in the pews which are collected with the offering, read aloud and offered up together as a congregation.

We continue to give careful thought to the language we use in worship and whether or not that language reflects the extravagant welcome we strive to provide and the open and affirming commitment that the church has made. We have been considering gender neutral and gender inclusive language in our services as we move closer to the spirit of these commitments.

Advent and Lent were both reflective and meaningful in their respective ways and the deacons enjoyed contributing to those experiences. Both seasons culminated in joyful celebrations that filled the church. Many thanks to everyone who helped make these experiences happen.

The one fly in the ointment is the fact that we are unable to realize some of our ideas due to the lack of deacon power. On many Sundays we are short staffed and have to enlist ad hoc deacons from the congregation. We appreciate all those who step up to help out, especially Jo Ann Levitt with communion.

As we move into this next year the deacons are looking forward to working on finding new ways to connect, language that welcomes everyone into worship, and effective ways to bring our voices and vision into worship.

Respectfully,

The Board of Deacons:

Michael Deegan, David Anderegg, Sarah Conly, Andrea Pecor, Ken Ward, Miles Wheat

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Trustees, through the Stewardship subcommittee, conducted the campaign to fund the operating budget. Pledges totaled \$238,000 with the expectation for additional new member pledges throughout the year. Individuals on the stewardship subcommittee included Frank Russell, chair; Joe Catino, Don Rodgers, Treasurer Patty Strauch, and Pastor Brent. Financial Secretary Marion Pomeroy provided invaluable support for the team.

The primary focus for the Trustees over the past year has been to manage the projects funded by the Capital Campaign. The status of projects is detailed below. A total of \$756K has been pledged by the congregation and friends of the congregation along with \$200K pledged through grants. The initial list of projects was estimated to cost more than \$1.2 million so additional monies will be needed to accomplish all the items. Also, it should be noted that as projects are planned and executed, we are considering ways to make our church more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Capital Campaign Projects

Work began on these projects in 2022 and the following is a list of completed projects and those planned for 2024 and 2025.

2022 completed

- Reset Sanctuary front steps & new railings
- Hallway & office renovations
- Egress Lighting per Town Code & Electrical repairs
- Exterior painting classroom windows & facias
- Weatherization & insulation church & manse basements
- Accessibility ramp design, stonework & automatic door opener.
- Garage: Structural repairs, new roof, new electrical service & automatic door
- Manse: New roof, Re-build 3 chimneys some kitchen upgrades

Total 2022 expenditures: \$423,229.

2023 completed

- Sanctuary: Pew encapsulation & painting, mahogany pew rail refurbishment, prime & painting windowsills, baseboard Trim, repair & Paint balcony upper molding, (\$44,000 added 2023).
- JE Roof rehab: North & east slopes, deep valley between JE and main church & downspout, Flat shelves, chicken run & other roof areas, re-flash door overhang (\$49,000)
- Organ repair: Initiate contract, place deposit & schedule work

Total 2023 expenditures: \$93,000.

The cost to fully fund all “Phase 1” projects was originally estimated to be \$986,000. Since that original estimate, we have:

- 1.) Experienced significant cost increases on materials & labor of approximately \$40,000 and
- 2.) Have needed to add two unanticipated projects: Sanctuary pew encapsulation and electrical mains upgrades totaling \$94,000.

This has increased the cost to fully fund all the Priority 1 projects to \$1,120,000. Currently, we anticipate the 3-year total for Capital Campaign pledges to be \$756,000 plus we have received \$200,000 in grants for a total of \$956,000 available for all projects. The gap between the revised total for all projects and the available 3-year Campaign total is approximately \$200,000. We will need to secure additional funding to complete all the projects.

2024 under contract

- Organ repair: \$139,200
- Steeple repair and painting; repointing front brick façade: \$69,100
- Manse: remodel first floor half-bath to include a shower: \$21,000
- Replace front walkway and landing area: \$9,056 (completed)
- JE Room / kitchen planning and design: \$15,000

2024 planned

- Narthex wall repairs and painting (est. \$11,000)

2025 planned

- Je Room / Kitchen renovation (est. \$185,000)
- Additional projects – planning in progress

There are many to thank for this successful year. Olga Schwede organized a spring art show, “Being Grateful.” Our talented corps of artists provided works to sell, with the proceeds benefiting the Capital Campaign. In October, Ronnie Cunningham returned to the stage to present “A Childhood in Words and Song: Part 2.” Proceeds were contributed to the Capital Campaign’s organ restoration project. Thank you to both for putting their talents to work, providing additional treasure for the campaign.

Thanks to Marion Pomeroy for assisting with the Stewardship Campaign and diligently recording and reporting the pledges. Thanks to Will Garrison, Administrator, who keeps our church office running smoothly and handles sexton duties as well. A key contributor is Patty Strauch, Treasurer, who carefully manages our annual budget as well as expenditures from the Capital Campaign. Thanks to Frank Russell, Chair of the Endowment Committee who manages the spending power of the endowment in perpetuity. A special thank you to Pastor Brent for providing leadership and guidance to the Board; his inspiration is greatly appreciated.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Rodgers, chair; Tim Bosworth, Bronly Boyd, Joe Catino, Brian Hyatt, Joe Nicolosi, Christine Rasmussen, and Patty Strauch.

BOARD OF MISSION AND ACTION

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me. Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” ~ Matthew 25:35-36, 40

Our goals for this year included reviewing local community, national and international needs to create priorities for our outreach, to keep the congregation informed of our activities and involve the congregation when appropriate, support the Justice Task Force’s efforts, and continue our focus on housing and food insecurity- based on our survey of congregation priorities of our work in February 2022.

LOCAL OUTREACH

Housing Insecurity:

- We hosted an Affordable Housing Panel to address housing issues after worship on June 25th. Carolyn Valli, CEO of Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity gave a moving Mission Moment during worship. Panel participants included Carolyn Valli, Eileen Pelletier, CEO, and Jennifer Meehan, Director of Community Engagement, Berkshire Housing Services, Inc., Kate Coulehan, Construct, and Matthew Russett, Legislative Assistant to Congressman Richard Neal.
- Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity: We continued to sponsor monthly work days for the house in Great Barrington until it was completed in July. We look forward to working with them again as the 30 units in Housatonic come to fruition.
- We gave financial support to Construct, “Warm Up the Winter”, Berkshire Housing Services, Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity, and ServiceNet (administers homeless shelter in Pittsfield).

Food Insecurity:

- People’s Pantry: We financially supported the People’s Pantry in Great Barrington and weekly delivered goods donated by our congregation.
- Pop Up Pantry: We continued to supply and stock twice a week our own congregation’s Pop Up Pantry to provide emergency nonperishable food goods 24 hours.
- Meal Train: In coordination with the deacons, we used the Meal Train to offer meals made by individuals to congregants requesting help with meals during periods of illness or other need.
- Cathedral of the Beloved in Pittsfield: This ministry provides community to the homeless and vulnerable throughout the week. On Sundays, different churches take turns preparing and offering a meal after their worship service on the lawn at St Joseph’s Church in Pittsfield. After hearing Jenny Gregg preach last April, our church provided 3 meals to Cathedral of the Beloved during the year, July 23rd and September 24th, 2023 and April 25th, 2024. We partnered with members of the Congregational Church of West Stockbridge for the meal in April.

- Active Prayer of Thanksgiving: After a hiatus during the pandemic, we are resuming this practice of bringing non-perishable food items and/or monetary donations to be given to local food pantries. This is an act of gratitude after receiving communion.
- School Food Box Program: Financially supported this effort to provide boxes of food to families of local school children during the summer.

OTHER LOCAL OUTREACH

- Christmas in August donations for Veterans: The congregation donated undershirts and toiletries to Pittsfield Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic/Soldier On and the Northampton Veterans Affairs Hospital in Leeds.
- Christmas Giving Tree: Our congregation gave gifts through four agencies: Construct (Pine Woods in Stockbridge), Literacy Network, Elizabeth Freeman Center and Berkshire Housing Authority. We were able to provide 137 gifts to 12 families, 26 children and 16 adults.
- Riverbrook: Our longstanding relationship with the women at Riverbrook continued. At the Budget Committee's recommendation, the funding for the work the women do has been moved into the M&A budget for 2024. Funds will be moved out of Office Supplies and Sexton Support to cover the \$1,900.00 line item. It has been renamed Riverbrook Employment Partnership to reflect the weekly work the women do at the church. It is hoped this transition might lead to increased interaction and activities with the women at Riverbrook. It also aligns the budget with other Boards, namely the nursery workers under Christian Ed. Supervision and coordination of the program will continue by Will.
- Charlotte Rodgers shared the mission, history and personal experience of daughter Beth residing at Riverbrook with our Board in February.
- We provided financial support to Multicultural BRIDGE (in support of recent immigrant relocation in Berkshire County), Berkshire Coalition for Suicide Prevention, and Appalachian Trail Ministry,

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH

- We provided disaster and crisis relief primarily through the UCC to Turkey & Syria, Ethiopia, Ukraine, Greece (fire/flood), Morocco (earthquake) and Libya (flood), Hawaii, Mississippi (tornado). A donation was also made to World Central Kitchen.
- CWS Hygiene Kits: In March we again provided the congregation the opportunity to prepare 50 hygiene kits to be distributed by Church World Service wherever in the world they are needed.
- We supported the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

UCC Mission Offerings:

Over the past few years we have been intentional about highlighting the 5 UCC offerings that have come out of our budget (with the exception of the Christmas Fund), totaling \$2,000.00. Beginning in 2024 we are bringing these offerings to the congregation to increase our awareness and to encourage our broader participation with other UCC churches nationally. We spoke during Moment for Mission in worship, and sponsored informational tables during coffee hour, to let people know the purpose of each of these. The offerings include Neighbor's in Need

(October), The Christmas Fund (Christmas Eve), One Great Hour of Sharing (Lent), Strengthen the Church (Pentecost), and Our Church's Wider Mission.

Pastor's Discretionary Fund:

Pastor Brent used a portion of the M&A budget to support local people in need.

Justice Task Force, now Social Justice Committee

The Justice Task Force completed its mandate to develop a land acknowledgement that recognizes and respects the Indigenous Peoples (the Stockbridge-Munsee band of Mohicans) as the original stewards of the land we worship on. The group worked diligently on the effort over two years and the Land Acknowledgement was presented to the congregation February 4, 2024, and approved unanimously. The Land Acknowledgement is now a part of our by laws. Our administrator will create a secure file containing documents that pertain to the work.

A great deal of time was spent educating ourselves and the congregation and we thank Josh Hall for sharing his historical expertise with us. Thanks also goes to Charlotte Rodgers, chair, John Canning, Martha Floyd, Michael Lynch, Diane Piraino, and Terry Wise.

This subcommittee of Mission and Action is now the ongoing Social Justice Committee. They will continue the work of social action in support of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community as well as exploring other areas of social justice.

Restricted Funds:

We thank the congregation for all you do to support our outreach. We particularly want to acknowledge the special generous donations that individuals have made for specific projects ("Restricted Funds"). These are funds donated in addition to our operating budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Floyd and Cindy Brown, Co-Chairs, Mission and Action

Carl Bradford, Beth Cilley, Alice Collins, Ronnie Cunningham, Nick Pohl, Marion Pomeroy, Tracy Wilson

BOARD OF GROWTH AND FELLOWSHIP

The Board of Growth and Fellowship is charged with warmly welcoming members, friends and visitors into our church community, following the commandment of Jesus to love one another.

Our board is also charged with recruiting volunteers from the congregation to assist with outdoor greeting and hosting the time of fellowship. It continues to be a struggle to find a stream of volunteers for these tasks, however, we are most grateful to our other boards and groups that have stepped up to volunteer their time and talents this year. The coffee and fellowship hour has been fully embraced as a time of gathering and connection. Delicious coffee is served, along with a variety of cookies, cakes, breads, fruits, cheese & crackers, and a gluten free option. Tables have been added to the JE room each week so that people can sit and linger.

An important part of the Growth and Fellowship work has been to strengthen and continue the tradition of sending a hand written birthday card to each of our members and friends. The cards are signed during coffee hour and has become a popular activity with people writing personal notes! A new card has been produced for 2024.

Throughout the year we have been developing a plan to bring back member, friend and visitor nametags. At the request of Pastor Brent, Growth and Fellowship will be taking over the responsibility of name tags – from creating a new design, to storage and weekly distribution. At the time of this writing, we anticipate that the new name tags will be available in the next couple of weeks (mid to late May, 2024).

During the year we hosted several special celebrations. This included our second “Rally Day” party on the first day of Sunday school in September. Growth and Fellowship collaborated with the Christian Education Board to create a fabulous outdoor celebration for all that included a treasure hunt, a watermelon spitting contest and a picnic lunch.

For Thanksgiving, Growth and Fellowship contributed a turkey, and a lovely volunteer (Donna Jacobs) to cook, providing an intimate dinner that followed the ecumenical Thanksgiving Service. We decided to end the home delivery of holiday breads this year as it began as a Covid response project and now that we’ve regathered, the decision was made to discontinue this project for now. We served King Cakes for fun on Palm Sunday, and held a special coffee and fellowship hour on Easter Sunday – with goodies to nibble while the kids did the traditional Easter egg hunt at 11:00.

This May marked the return of the All Church Birthday party with the Parade of Cakes, and a Pot Luck luncheon! Around 50 people filled tables in the JE room and enjoyed lunch while they planned a seasonal themed song. The party planning was led by Diane Piraino and Ted Randolph – a great time was had by all!

As we end the 2023-2024 Board year, we note that our board has had only four members. We thank everyone who has volunteered to help us out – greeting, hosting coffee hour or volunteering for a larger event – we could not do it without you! In the next year, we will continue to work with Pastor Brent and Will on the Hospitality initiative – looking at how we

can recruit volunteers through Breeze on the church website, identifying new ways to reach out to visitors and new members and continuing to partner with other Boards on projects and special occasions. If you would like to join us we would love to talk with you.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlotte Rodgers, Chair, Board of Growth and Fellowship

Brian Farrell, Donna Jacobs, and Ted Randolph

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 the Minister and the Minister of Music to attempt to bring consistent quality, variety and wide congregational participation to our music life.

This was the first “normal” year post pandemic with the first full year for our new Minister of Music, Peter Frost. The choir continues to provide spiritually moving hymns from the loft on an every-other-week basis, which allows for adequate rehearsal time and a more successful choral sound. The choir section leaders are now a full quartet, with Amy Shake, John Demler, Caroline Mielke and Rich Geiler, contributing their beautiful voices and solid leadership to make a joyful noise on Sundays. Under Peter’s direction, Christmas Eve and Holy Week observances continue to be wonderful celebrations. We once again thank Tracy Wilson for filling in when Peter is away. We also extend a big hand to Hui Mei-Lin (also known as Fimi, Peter’s life partner) for her contributions at the piano and organ.

The Bell Choir under the direction of Mary Jo Connor Erickson has continued their monthly performances this year, and we thank them for their great skill and assiduous practice. Early in 2024, Jill Wheat reassumed her volunteer post as director of the children’s choir. We once again thank Jill for her patience, spirit and loving devotion to our children. The Music Board and Minister of Music are in process of re-imagining a children’s choir program that will be sustainable in the future.

Finally, our concert series, Music on Main, relaunched spring 2023, held successful concerts in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024. The plan remains to raise money and contribute concert net proceeds to the Music on Main fund so that we can hire top-notch musicians ahead of time and not have to worry about variable proceeds from each concert. In the future, proceeds from these concerts can then go to support other church programs and mission projects in the community. Music on Main helps welcome non-members into our space and helps community members see us as a happening place. Many thanks to Fimi for generously donating her services and to Fimi and Peter for reaching out to their network to arrange for such high caliber talent to amaze us at each concert.

Respectfully submitted, Tom Ruffing, for the Board of Music: Deb McMenemy, Bob Doerr, Mary Hoeltzel, and Tom Ruffing

SERVICE LEAGUE

We continue to meet on a weekly basis to prepare for our two annual fundraisers, the Summer Fair and the Holly Fair. In the second half of 2023, the funds raised from our two fairs, with existing balances, were dispersed as follows:

Income from Fairs:

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| Summer Fair | \$1446.00 |
| Holly Fair | 4628.76 |

Donations:

- To The First Congregational Church of Stockbridge, \$4000 toward fulfillment of our pledge to the Capital Campaign;
- To World Central Kitchen and Americares, providing food and medical care to persons displaced by war in Ukraine and Gaza, \$1000.00 each;
- To the South Community Food Pantry, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Construct, and the Backpack Project, \$500 each.
- In addition to the above donations, we collect contributions of women's products for The People's Pantry at each of our monthly business meetings.

We would like to express our gratitude to the members of the congregation for their generous support of our fundraising activities, through donations and labor, participation, and moral support. We could not give to our missions without the support you give to us. Thank you!

Margaret Hornick, for the Service League

STOCKBRIDGE FESTIVAL CHORUS

The Festival Chorus of Stockbridge was founded in 1987 by First Congregational Church's then Music Director Penna Rose to enhance the church's choral offerings. Tracy Wilson took over the Festival Chorus in 1992 when hired as the church's Music Director after Penna. The concert tradition continues, celebrating the Festival Chorus (now Stockbridge Festival Chorus) 35th anniversary in 2022.

We continue our regular schedule of performing two concerts per year, one celebrating the Christmas season and its second one in the Lent-Easter season, both conducted by Tracy Wilson, with rehearsal pianist Bob Logan and concert organist Ed Lawrence. Both concerts were well attended by church members, local community and friends and family of choristers.

The program for December 9, 2023 consisted of carols by John Rutter, Philip Stopford and Peter Warlock, with the centerpiece being Benjamin Britten's A Ceremony of Carols, accompanied by Teresa Mango on harp.

The Spring Concert on Saturday, April 27 honored the life of local composer and arranger Alice Parker, who passed away December 24, 2023. The choir sang several anthems arranged by Ms. Parker and the centerpiece was the cantata A Melodious Accord: A Concert of Praise, accompanied by the Berkshire Brass Quartet and Teresa Mango on harp. A solo vocal quartet consisting of Maya Rose, soprano; Mary Verdi, alto; Rich Geiler, tenor; and John Demler, bass, supplemented the 45 voice chorus. This concert was dedicated to the lives of Alice Parker, Lee Dixon and Ingrid Richardson.

This past year the Festival Chorus lost two beloved souls: long time rehearsal accompanist and coach Lee Dixon, and longtime president and soprano Ingrid Richardson. The chorus sang their hearts out for the two Celebrations of Life: Lee Dixon in July 2023, drawing many alums of the Festival Chorus and Penna Rose, Festival Chorus founder; and Ingrid Richardson on April 3, 2024.

Submitted by Tracy Wilson