

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

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



**December 2024**

Copies of *The Mess in the Messiah*, the United Church of Christ's 2024 Advent-Christmastide Devotional, are now available. Please call the church office.

Pastor: The Rev. Brent Damrow - [bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org)

Minister of Music pro tempore: Tracy Wilson - [music@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:music@stockbridgeucc.org)

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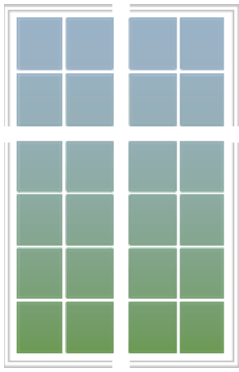
(413) 298-3137 | [www.stockbridgeucc.org](http://www.stockbridgeucc.org)

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

# December 2024

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>
1 Worship 10:00am Advent Party 11am SFC rehearsal 1:00pm	2	3 <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	4 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Council 7:00pm	5	6 Service League 10:30am	7 Holly Fair 10am-1pm <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i> Chamber Commerce Concert
8 Worship 10:00am SFC rehearsal 1:00pm	9 Advent Study 5:00- 6:00pm	10 <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	11 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Community Meal 5:30	12	13 Service League 10:30am SFC dress rehearsal 4:00pm	14 <i>Stockbridge Golf Club Board 8:30am</i> SFC concert 3:00pm <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
15 Worship 10:00am Christmas Skit choir rehearsal 11:30am	16 Newsletter deadline Advent Study 5:00- 6:00pm	17 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Tuesday Club 1:45pm</i> <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	18 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm	19	20 <i>Second Nature 9:00am-3:30pm</i> Service League 10:30am	21 <i>Berkshire Lyric Concert 3:00pm</i> <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
22 Worship 10:00am	23 Advent Study 5:00- 6:00pm	24 Christmas Eve service 5:00pm <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	25 Christmas Day Office closed	26 Office closed	27 Office closed	28 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
29 Worship 10:00am Jo Ann Levitt program 5:30pm	30 Office closed	31 Office closed <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>			<i>2nd Nature Arts: M-T-W 3:15- 5:30pm</i> <b>Classroom. Last day: Dec 11</b>	<b>Yoga Classes are Wednesdays at 9:00am</b>



# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

## December 2024 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

Happy New Year! Yes, I know, this is the December newsletter and yet I say Happy New Year!. The church calendar wisely begins each year not according to human logic or design, but God's. Each year we begin the new church year by remembering the new beginning God offers to us through Christ.

It is ironic that Advent, long connected to waiting, simplicity, and quietness has turned into the most stressful time of any year. Each year our "to-do" lists seem to get longer – decorations, cards, presents, parties, and everything else we feel are necessary to make this, as the song goes, "the most wonderful time of the year." And yet, this year, as stress levels are already high, I think we all know that something needs to change. And as usual, the best place to start with that change might be with us and our own hearts and minds.

Fortunately, our Advent texts this year are well suited for that task. They come from the prophets. Prophets speak the truth. Prophets cut through the noise. Prophets call us to a better way and to our better selves. Prophets also accompany us on the journey, reminding us of ancient truths that still apply today. I am so grateful that this year, the text for the 1st Sunday in Advent comes from Jeremiah. I love that the text over and over again reminds us what God is doing. I love how not once does it mention what we need to do. I hope that we can use it as a jumping off place to stop at least long enough to see what God is up to in these moments that we might simply climb aboard.

As I think about that first advent and what God was doing I think about the gift of that child I think about the new life and hope that are present when a child is born. I think about the joy and purpose that is found in caring before the vulnerable. I think about how virtually everything in this story was unexpected: from Mary's conception, to the place of birth, to the first invited to the celebration, to the small moments that Mary chose to ponder Nothing in that first advent was traditional all of it, for each of those involved, new things inviting each of them to respond.

This season our mailboxes and inboxes swell. As you consider how to respond, I invite you to remember Jeremiah and before committing to anything stop and see what God is doing. I invite you not to let the obligation of tradition or the compulsion for perfection to get in the way of the new beginnings I know God is still whispering. Advent is such a beautiful mixture of beauty and purpose, of preparation and movement, of receiving great gifts and offering them too, and of witnessing while love springing forth while bearing witness to that love in our own actions. This year in the middle of everything that is happening, I invite you to keep it simple, to slow down, to see where God's love is heading, and then to simply climb aboard.

May you know peace, hope, joy, and love. And may the source of each and all those things abide with you. I look forward to the journey with you,

***Brent***

## HAPPY DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

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

## Time, Talents, and Tithes

A friendly reminder that 2024—and the end of the church’s fiscal year—are coming to a close. Thank you to all who have supported the church with time, talent, and tithes (pledges) this year. For those who are able, please make every effort to complete your 2024 stewardship pledges by the end of the year. The church is counting on all of us.

Emails were sent out in early October with your pledge status. Over the course of 12 months/52 weeks, it is easy to lose track of where we are in our pledge-giving for the year. If you fall into that category, you are not alone! If you are unsure about your remaining balance, please email your inquiry to [finance@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:finance@stockbridgeucc.org) or leave a message with the church office.

I am happy to help!

Marion Pomeroy, Financial Secretary

## Growth & Fellowship

Each Sunday after worship the Board of Growth & Fellowship oversees a lively Fellowship Hour. It’s a time when Sunday School is over, families come together, and many of our community stay a while

to enjoy lite fare and good company. If you haven’t made that detour into the Jonathan Edwards Room after worship yet, be sure to do so soon. Tables and chairs are set for those who want to take a seat and gather around with friends, old and new.

If the idea of striking up conversation feels challenging, you might find that heading toward the kitchen and offering to lend a hand is a way to ease in and truly feel at home at church.

November was a special month for Grow & Fellowship. (What month isn’t?) New members were greeted and there was a reception at Kimball Farms with some of our long term members. We are working toward finding regular transportation from Kimball Farms to Sunday Worship and other events. So far, we are grateful that individuals are offering to bring people to and back to Kimball Farms from church.

We are looking forward to holding the annual Advent Potluck. By the time you read this you may have already heard the details and are planning to attend on December 1.

The Board of Growth & Fellowship is a small group that depends on volunteers to help out hosting coffee hour and other events. Other church boards — Trustees, Deacons, Christian Education — have signed up on Breeze to take a Sunday during the year. You might take a moment to look over the invitation that Will Garrison sends out every so often and find a date to sign up.

You’ve probably often heard that we have great fun, but may not be so sure that setting things up for coffee hour is your cup of tea. But the chance to cultivate a real sense of camaraderie is priceless.

We’re looking forward to growing our fellowship with you. ~ Donna Jacobs, Bob Doerr, Ted Randolph, Tom Ruffing



## Advent - Lunch and Crafts!

**Special Announcement for Families:** Get Ready for the Advent Lunch and Craft-Making Fair on December 1. This event is co-sponsored by Growth & Fellowship and the Youth Event Planners. We are inviting all youth, children of all ages, and grown-ups too. Lunch will be served (potluck) about 11:30 am. Once the dishes are cleared away, we will cover the tables in craft



projects. You can make one craft or you can make all the projects. You can do something on your own, or pair up with another person. Whatever you choose, it will be wonderful intergenerational fun. Note: this event will serve as the Youth Group event for the month of December.

## From the Music Department

As if the Advent season doesn't give us each enough things to be excited about, topping my list is the completion of the organ restoration and the return of using the King of Instruments to celebrate the music of the season. We are planning an organ rededication concert sometime in March which will give the church organists among us the opportunity to "exercise" the instrument, making sure all systems are go, tuning has settled in, etc.

The adult choir will be in the loft on December 1 singing one of my favorite Advent anthems, E'en So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come with music by Paul Manz, with text adapted by his wife, Ruth, from Revelation 22. The writing of this piece came at a time of great stress for the family when their three-year old son, John, developed a rare type of

double pneumonia. This required the parents to give 24 hour attention as John's condition became critical. During this time, Paul composed a motif and Ruth wrote a text based on the last chapter of Revelation as a way of expressing their hope and grief. John recovered and later became a pastor in the Lutheran Church. The dedication above the title says "To John". This piece was a favorite of one of our former, now deceased, music directors, Roger Claiborne. I am pairing this anthem with a hymn for the choir entitled Advents, with words by Rev. Richard Floyd and music by David Anderegg. This hymn is dedicated to the memory of Roger Claiborne.

The choir will be in the loft again on December 15 to celebrate the CE Christmas Skit, and, of course, we are planning some beautiful music for our Christmas Eve service. We hope to be joined by harpist Teresa Mango. And, the bells will be ringing in the season on occasion and the kids' choir involved in the skit.

Please mark your calendars for Saturday, December 14, 3:00 PM for the annual Christmas concert of Stockbridge Festival Chorus. The main selections are two glorious pieces by Ralph Vaughan Williams: Fantasia on Christmas Carols for baritone soloist (John Demler) and chorus, and Magnificat for contralto soloist (Vira Slywotzky) and women's chorus. We will also be singing anthems by David Anderegg, Philip Stopford and Bob Chilcott.

You can never have enough music in your life, and it a pleasure to be surrounded by such talented musicians to celebrate this blessed season.

~ Tracy Wilson, Minister of Music pro tem



## From the Service League

With just three weeks to go before the Holly Fair, we're going full speed ahead with preparations. This means unpacking and pricing the treasures donated to Grandma's Attic, making phone calls and sending emails to request helpers, bakers, and workers, sending out publicity, and much more. On Wednesday, December 4, starting at 9:00 AM, we'll have a greenery work bee, making and decorating centerpieces. Feel free to join in and express your creativity! On Thursday, December 5, we'll start setting up the JE Room and classrooms to display all the goodies - helpers are always gratefully welcomed.

Sunday School students will staff the children's gift room, so we'll be extra happy to receive donations - books, puzzles, toys - to that. I'm often asked when we accept donations. The answer is always, year round. If we don't get to sorting and pricing donations for one Fair, they'll appear at the next one. And we always, always, appreciate your support and your generosity. ~ Margaret Hornick



**HOLLY  
FAIR**

▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼

**Sat., Dec. 7**  
**10am-1pm**

▲ ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲

baked goods | crafts & gifts  
holiday greens | Santa  
Grandma's Attic  
tea room

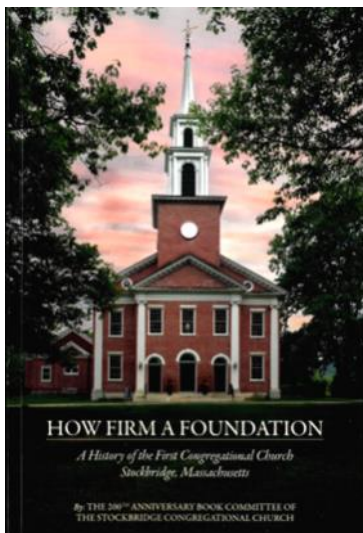
**Stockbridge**  
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
4 Main Street, Stockbridge, MA

## How Firm a Foundation

The history book team is pleased to announce that *How Firm a Foundation: A History of the First Congregational Church, Stockbridge, Massachusetts on the Occasion of the 200th Anniversary of the Brick*

*Church* is on sale. Beat the Christmas rush! Available in the church office and during Fellowship Hour Sunday.

Hard cover \$30;  
soft cover \$22 -  
cash/check/  
Venmo.



## Board of Mission & Action

The church has supported the following the past couple of months:

- \$140 Riverbrook Employment Partnership
- \$88.24- For community member in need (Discretionary Fund)
- \$645 – Community Organizing training (Social Justice)
- \$300 for Berkshire Coalition for Suicide Prevention (local needs)
- \$500 Our Church's Wider Mission (national needs)
- \$1000 to UCC Disaster Relief Fund for Hurricanes Helene and Milton (national needs)
- \$211.28 - Pop-Up Pantry supplies (Local Needs)
- \$180.85 – Cathedral of the Beloved (Local Needs)

## The United Church of Christ Christmas Fund Special Offering

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

Thanks to your generosity, last year the Christmas Fund provided over \$1.9 million in pension and health benefits, emergency grants, and thank-you checks to retired church servants and their families. Every gift came from people like you. This year, please give what you can to continue supporting those who’ve devoted their lives to serving others.

Look for Special Offering envelopes in your bulletin on December 15. As well, the lion’s share of the offering taken at the Christmas Eve service will go to the Christmas Fund. You may also send checks directly to the church office: PO Box 825, Stockbridge, MA, 01262. Note “Christmas Fund” on the memo line. Or contribute through Venmo: FCC Stockbridge, enter Christmas Fund on the ‘What’s This For’ line.



## Special Worship Service on December 15



The Third Sunday in Advent is “Joy” Sunday. Historically it has been a way to take a break from the traditionally penitential season of Advent to remember that Christ’s coming is joy-filled. This year we can use an extra dose of joy, so we have packed the service filled to the brim and overflowing with joy.

First, the Christmas Pageant written and brought to life by our children under the wonderful guidance of Elizabeth Bellows will be presented. Throughout the fall they have provided small glimpses and hints of the wonderful surprises that await.

Second, we will celebrate those who have been long time members of this church. We are so blessed to have people who have called this place home for decades. We will celebrate all who have been members of this church for 25 years or more including some who have been members for more than 80 years. Finally, we will welcome new members into our church family who bring their gifts to share and who give new birth to our congregation.

Come and see. Come and experience joy.

## Youth Group News

At our November youth group meeting, we talked about what it would have been like to be a kid in Asheville during Hurricane Helene. We loaded the last of the clothing from the drive into Diane's car and made thank you cards for first responders. After an enchilada dinner, we made sundaes and topped off the evening with some games.



## Celebrating Our Traditions

### Advent and Christmas

Mark your calendars to be part of this joyful season at the church. More detailed information about many of these things can be found throughout this newsletter.

- Sunday December 1st: We launch advent with a dedication of the pulpit, organ, and Pew Bibles. You are encouraged to stay after worship for the Advent Potluck and Craft Party.
- Saturday December 7th: Come by the church to participate in the annual holly fair sponsored by the Service League.
- Saturday, December 14th: Our Stockbridge Festival Chorus holds their concert at 3:00 PM.
- Sunday December 15th: Joy Sunday is jam packed with the Christmas pageant, celebration of longtime members, and welcoming of new members.
- Tuesday December 24th: Our Christmas Eve service begins at 5:00 p.m. and tells the story through lessons and carols.
- Wednesday December 25th: Merry Christmas! The Church office and building will be closed between the 25th and January 2nd. Twelve step programs will still be held.

## Poinsettias

We invite you to help us transform the sanctuary on Christmas Eve. You may donate one or more poinsettias to the church in honor or memory of someone who is in your heart this Christmas. You can then choose either to take your plant home or allow us to bring it to someone who could use some joy.

To order, find the link in an upcoming email, fill out a paper form, or just call Will in the church office. The gifts will be listed in the Christmas Eve bulletin.

**Paper forms may be found in the JE Room.**

Deadline for listing is December 16.

Please indicate how you want the in honor of / in memory of to read, and your name(s) as you want to be listed in the bulletin.

Example: *In loving memory of John and Jane Doe, from Sam Smith*

Cost: \$20/each      Mailing address: Flowers at FCC, PO Box 825, Stockbridge MA 01262





## Advent Kicks Off with Dedication(s)

The first Sunday in Advent is always special. When you walk into the sanctuary and see the advent wreath with its colorful candles at the front of the church something changes. To be surrounded with greenery and candles brings feelings of both calm tradition and hopeful anticipation. The communion table is draped in beautiful purple, the music resonates from years gone by, the message of the prophets comes to life anew - the first Sunday in Advent is always special.

This year along with the traditional launching of the season and the dedication of our lives, we also are thrilled to dedicate some things that are at the heart of our worship services. We will dedicate new Pew Bibles, the story that guides our journey. We will dedicate the newly restored pulpit, the place from which the word is shared and preached, and the story of our lives is shared. We will also dedicate the newly restored organ, the instrument that helps to convey the beautiful message of our faith and lifts our voices in song.



*Tom Kuklinski of Shelburne Falls restored the pulpit.*

To do any one of these things would make for a full Sunday and for a hope filled venture. To do all of them together will be a profound blessing. We have the chance to worship in our sanctuary is the result of those who have come before us and on whose shoulders we stand. We have undertaken these steps to not just care for these things in our time, but to make sure that the generations who follow will likewise have a chance to worship in a place of safety filled with beauty and truth.

The organ has been restored through funds raised as part of our capital campaign. The pulpit was restored thanks to a gift from the Henderson family in honor of Bob and Aleva Henderson. The Bibles have been purchased thanks to the Deacons and the members of the congregation who have donated a Bible in honor or memory of someone. (If you would like to dedicate a Bible, there is still the opportunity to do so. Please contact Elizabeth Young.)

The first Sunday in Advent is always special.



*The organ was renovated by Mssrs. Czelusniak et Dugal, Inc. of Northampton.*



## Fall Book Groups Wrap Up



This fall, the board of Christian education sponsored two book groups. One group of twelve participants, led by Jeremy Ridenour, explored the theology of Jurgen Moltmann using Stephen Morrison's work *Jurgen Moltmann in Plain English*. The other with eight participants, led by Pastor Brent, explored the Book of

Genesis using Maryland Robinson's work *Reading Genesis*. Both groups included folks from within our congregation and folks beyond our congregation. Both groups met over the course of five sessions and sought to bring the insights of each work into conversation with our current times and lives.

The Moltmann group explored his theology to think about how we think about God, including complicated theological questions such as how the Father, Son, and Spirit were present on the cross. In addition to theology, they also grappled with important ethical issues such as gun violence, the death penalty, and abortion.

The Robinson group put the Biblical text of Genesis side by side with her remarkable insights. Robinson wove the stories of Genesis together to show how themes resonated in each story building to an understanding of a loving and gracious God who meets the fullness of the human condition in restraint to further the goodness of the human project initiated in creation. As the group encountered the real gifts and shortfalls of the people in Genesis they imagined how we still struggle with those questions – like the repercussions of telling an “unlivable” truth versus the implications of trying to hide it. Many of the participants were drawn to the radical gift of grace – as one participant Michael Munroe wrote, “Most importantly I learned of our original “free will” from the Garden of Eden, and its impact in Genesis, and in the decisions we now make. Yet God's grace forgives us in our humanity and imperfections.” Another participant, Janet Canning echoed those thoughts writing, “Reading

Marilynne Robinson's "Genesis" with a group was mind opening. SO much to love about her insights, but one of my take-aways was that God acts with restraint, forgiveness and Grace.”

Look for more CE offerings coming soon including the Advent Book Group led by Jeremy and focusing on the work *God is in the Manger – Reflections on Advent and Christmas* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

## Radio Show/Pie Contest Delights

The church welcomed the community in for a delightful installment of the Lake Mackinac Radio Hour and Pie contest. A huge thank you to all who volunteered or participated in the evening. On the Saturday before elections, the crowd delighted to creative and hilarious skits, gorgeous music, and delicious baked treats. The show raised funds for the Annual Operating Budget. You can still see the show online and donations are still welcomed.

At the risk of leaving someone out, we want to extend extra thanks to those who took on significant leadership roles. Thank you to David Anderegg who wrote, starred in, and directed the show as well as recruited all the acts. Thank you to Holland Eaton and her crew (including Charlotte Rodgers) who brought the Pie Tasting and Contest to life. Thank you to Patty Strauch who managed the doors and ticket sales. All of it came together to be a gift both to the church and to the community.



\$20, with children and students 18 and under free

BERKSHIRE  
*Lyric*  
presents

# THE VERY BEST TIME OF THE YEAR

A CONCERT OF TRADITIONAL CAROLS & POPULAR CHRISTMAS MUSIC

The Berkshire Lyric Chorus  
Melodious Accord  
The Lyric Children's Chorus  
featuring baritone John Demler

Jack Brown, Director  
Joe Rose, Accompanist

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21, 3:00 PM**

Stockbridge Congregational Church  
4 Main Street Stockbridge, Mass.

**TICKETS SOLD AT THE DOOR OR IN ADVANCE  
THROUGH [BERKSHIRELYRIC.ORG](http://BERKSHIRELYRIC.ORG).**

This special holiday concert for people of all ages is underwritten by The Red Lion Inn.

In addition to "The Very Best Time of the Year" at The First Congregational Church, UCC Stockbridge, **Berkshire Lyric presents:**

### **Love's Pure Light**

- Dec. 13, Friday at 7:30, St. Mark's Church on West Street in Pittsfield.
- Dec. 15, Sunday at 3:00, Saint James Place Great Barrington

Traditional and contemporary a cappella carols by Warlock, Pärt, Bruckner, Brahms and others.

The 80 voice Berkshire Lyric Chorus, fresh from their Bruckner triumph at Seiji Ozawa Hall Tanglewood, will take advantage of the marvelous acoustics of this large gothic style church. Then repeat the program in a more intimate setting in downtown Great Barrington two days later. Joined by the Lyric Children's Chorus, our young women's ensemble Melodious Accord and by soloists Lily Lothrop, Rich Geiler and John Demler.

More info and tickets at [BerkshireLyric.org](http://BerkshireLyric.org)

# Stockbridge Festival Chorus in Concert

Saturday, December 14, 3:00 pm 2024

Forty-five voice choir  
**Tracy Wilson**, director  
Bob Logan, piano  
Annabelle Hoffman, cello  
Cathy Mohn, flute  
Vira Slywotzky, contralto  
John Demler, baritone



**Fantasia on Christmas Carols** by Vaughan Williams  
for chorus, baritone and cello

**Magnificat** by Vaughan Williams  
for women's chorus, contralto and flute

**The Advent Rose** by Dale Jergenson

**Anthems** by David Anderegg, Philip Stopford  
and Bob Chilcott.

**First Congregational Church of Stockbridge**  
**4 Main Street**

Recommended donation \$20, \$10 for members of local community choirs,  
free for people 18 and younger. The sanctuary is fully accessible.

For more information, call **413-298-3137**