

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

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



January 2025

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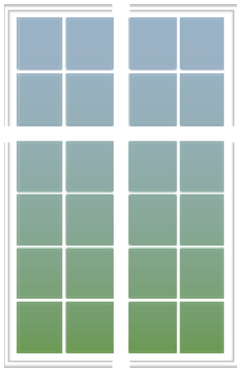
(413) 298-3137 | www.stockbridgeucc.org

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

January 2025

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p><i>Yoga Classes are Wednesdays at 9:00am</i></p> <p>5 Epiphany Sunday Worship 10:00am Memorial Service for Michelle Hawkins Luchi 1:30pm</p>	<p>30 Office closed</p> <p>6</p>	<p>31 Office closed</p> <p>7 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm</i></p>	<p>1 New Year's Day office closed</p> <p>8 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Council 7:00pm Community Meal 5:30</p>	<p>2</p> <p>9</p>	<p>3 Service League 10:30am</p> <p>10 Service League 10:30am</p>	<p>4 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i></p> <p>11 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i></p>
<p>12 Worship 10:00am</p>	<p>13 <i>2nd Nature Arts 3:15 – 5:30pm</i></p>	<p>14 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm</i></p>	<p>15 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm</p>	<p>16</p>	<p>17 Service League 10:30am</p>	<p>18 <i>Stockbridge Golf Club Board 8:30am Al-Anon 5:00pm</i></p>
<p>19 Worship 10:00am 2025 Budget Q&A 11:15am</p>	<p>20 Newsletter deadline</p>	<p>21 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm</i></p>	<p>22 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Supper Book Club 6:00</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>24 Service League 10:30am</p>	<p>25 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i></p>
<p>26 Worship 10:00am All-Church birthday party 11:30am</p>	<p>27</p>	<p>28 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm</i></p>	<p>29 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 <i>Lenox Garden Club 1:00pm</i></p>	<p>30</p>	<p>31 Service League 10:30am</p>	<p><i>2nd Nature Arts 3:15 – 5:30pm Starting 1/13, M-T-W</i></p>



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

January 2025 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

I have a complicated relationship with New Year's resolutions. As a hopeless optimist who believes that the impossible might be possible, I love the idea of resolutions. With more heart, more attention, more commitment there are so many things that we can do to improve our lives and our communities. Already I'm getting excited about the idea of creating resolutions for 2025.

The complicated part is less about the resolutions and more about me. I often pick out those things I have already failed at in many other ways somehow hoping that if I just officially give them a title of a resolution all will change which only sets me up for failure. Even if I am picking new things, too often I choose things I think I should be doing rather than resolutions that bring me joy. As a result, my success rate is not so great.

Research conducted by the Pew Institute in January 2024 reveals that I am not alone. Only about 30% of people bother to make New Year's resolutions. A month in most people are still keeping at least one of their resolutions, although many reveal they failed from day one. Other research is much gloomier, citing as low as a 9% success rate. Since no one wants to fail, less and less people are making them in the first place - why bother seems to be the growing refrain.

I have been thinking in these past few weeks though about what might make it different for people of faith. In conversations about membership, I have been struck by how deeply our church mission, covenant, and purpose are rooted in movement and growth. Each of those documents talks about growing, learning, and becoming. Faith-based resolutions need not be

about successfully accomplishing something but rather moving and growing toward Christ and one another. Resolutions keep us moving.

In thinking about the Christmas story itself, I have been struck by both the ridiculousness of God's amazing plan and about its particularity in starting somewhere. The enterprise was huge and yet it began with a commitment to simply sending love in the form of a child to a stable in Bethlehem through an event that brought joy! We set resolutions to respond to something big and good that help us get started, and started in joy.

This year I encourage you to identify two New Year's Resolutions. The first has to do with your faith life. Don't fall into my trap. Don't pick something that you've never been good at or that you feel guilty about. Instead, contemplate something faith that you've been drawn to. That could be a spiritual act like praying or meditation. It could be a part of church life that you've always been intrigued about but don't quite understand. It could be to explore our tradition or other traditions. If you need help, find me. Second, pick a way to serve – whether the church or the world. Don't do it because you should – do it to open yourself. Christ certainly understood his ministry as one to the poor, the oppressed and the broken. Pick something not to solve but something to enter into. Pick something that will bring you meaning and that you will look forward to.

Blessings on the New Year. May you find purpose that draws you closer to the love of God and neighbor and through it all find joy and abundance.

Brent

HAPPY JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

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

The Giving Tree

To all: Thank you so much for participating in the Christmas Giving Tree this year. Construct in Stockbridge and The Elizabeth Freeman Center in Great Barrington identified many families who would appreciate your 130 gifts, which you beautifully wrapped, to be put under their trees on Christmas morning. You helped brighten the holiday for our South County neighbors. (Ed.'s note: I think it was the adorable gift tags that made you all want to take one!)

Gratefully, The Board of Mission and Action

Minister of Music Search

The Search Committee for the Minister of Music has been meeting since early October. We have received seven resumes as of December and we expect more since this season is a busy one for church musicians. Thank you to everyone who filled out a survey from the Board of Music. We have read them all.

We have also talked to members of the congregation and asked them this question: What are you looking for in a Minister of Music? Their answers have been very helpful.

If you have any questions about the process or you want to give us your opinion, please contact any one of us on the Committee.

Yours in Song, Liza Catino, Cindy Brown, Brian Farrell, Jon Geldert, Deb McMenemy, Gary Schieneman, Pastor Brent Damrow (ex-officio).



Finance Notes: We appreciate your financial support through donations and pledges! As always, it's important that we know what your check or contribution is for. Please make a memo notation on your checks, envelopes, Post-its, or attached gum wrappers. Alternately, you may send a note to finance@stockbridgeucc.org in advance of your contribution. Examples: *2025 pledge, donation* [i.e., not a pledge], *Capital Campaign, Pop-up Pantry*, etc. There has been great progress in making these notations—thank you! A reminder: please make and date your remaining 2024 contributions by December 31, 2024, to be included on your tax receipt for 2024 giving.

Advent and All-Church Birthday

December 1 was not only the first day of a new month, but also the first day of a New (Church) Year. We began Advent with a potluck lunch during the Fellowship Hour, and segued into a time making Advent crafts once the dishes were cleared. As the day also fell on Thanksgiving weekend, we organizers were concerned that attendance might be sparse.



Our concern turned to joy as the signup sheet swelled to forty or so, with fifty actually attending. A smaller number of adults and kids stayed around for crafts, but their enthusiasm filled the room as they created things out of paper, ribbon, and hot glue.

This event was a joint effort of Christian Ed and Growth & Fellowship. We are thankful for those who volunteered ahead, or on the spot, to help set up, clean up, and smooth things out along the way. Many saints make light(er) work!

~ Ted Randolph for G&F and CE

“Follow That Star!” a pageant created by the children and youth and directed by Elisabeth Bellows, delighted on Dec 15. It featured the first ever McBibles with camel drive-thru.

Kimball Farms: As an outcome of our recent reception with church friends at Kimball Farms, we are coordinating transportation every Sunday morning at 9:30 for anyone there who needs a ride to church from Kimball Farms. Donna Jacobs is coordinating. If you are willing to be a “back up driver” on an occasional Sunday, let Donna know.

SAVE THE DATE: All Church Birthday Party, January 26, 2025. Details to TBD soon, but know that we will let you eat cake! And lunch. And maybe play a game or sing a song.

From the Music Department

Every week in January we are blessed with wonderful music making by so many talented musicians! Aren't we fortunate to be surrounded by their beautiful sounds in such a challenging time. The adult choir continues its schedule of singing the first and third Sundays, January 5 (The Three Kings by Peter Cornelius) and January 19 (How Lovely are the Messengers by Mendelssohn). The bells return on January 12, and the kids choir rehearses from 9:15 to 9:45 prior to the service to prepare for singing at the January 26 service (Draw the Circle Wide). On Sunday, January 19 we will be welcomed in and out of worship by Laura (flute) and Doug Wilkins (piano), members of our church family. Sunday, January 26 we look forward to hearing from Doug Williams. I welcome sharing in this music making.

~ Tracy Wilson, Minister of Music pro tem



From the Service League

I'll admit to sometimes being at a loss for words when Will sends that friendly reminder that Newsletter articles are due. But not this time - I have two words for you: THANK YOU! The Holly Fair was a great success, with a steady stream of cheerful shoppers, and it felt like it was over almost before it started. We netted \$5049.05 as of the last tally, and some late sales are still trickling in. Now we have the satisfying task of allocating that to our favorite mission projects.

But I'm straying off the subject, which is THANK YOU - to those who helped with set up and clean up, those who made greenery arrangements, those who knitted and baked, who staffed tables and wrapped purchases. Without attempting to categorize, here's what I hope is a complete list, in no particular order: Thank you to Jo Ann Leavitt, Diane Piraino, Diane Fogarty, Shirley Miller and her daughter-in-law Jill, Mary Boyce, Mary Hoeltzel, Anna Smith, Patty and Cindy Strauch,

Cindy Brown, Ted Randolph, Gene Kalish, Terry Wise, Jay Wise, Gary Cilley, Susan Moor, Sarah Boyd, Janet Canning, Stephanie Bradford, Olga Schwede, Shirley Blanchard, Sandy Wilmot, Noah and Lily Hassmer, Meadow, Casey, and Willow Krawczyk, Erving Henderson and Scarlett Richter, Charlotte Rogers, Martha Floyd, Tom Ruffing, and John Canning, and of course, Brent Damrow and Will Garrison. Since many of the wonderful baked goods come from anonymous donors, as do many of the treasures in Grandma's Attic, I won't try to name you - just know that your gifts are very much appreciated.

I'm amazed to see what a long list it is - actually almost four times the number of members of the Service League, which tells you all you need to know about how much we depend on you to make these fairs happen. We called, you answered! Thank you, thank you thank you! We could not do it without you. ~ Margaret Hornick

The Supper Book Club

I have always been drawn to good conversations about interesting books while enjoying a savory meal. I am delighted to invite you to be a part of just such an endeavor in the new year.

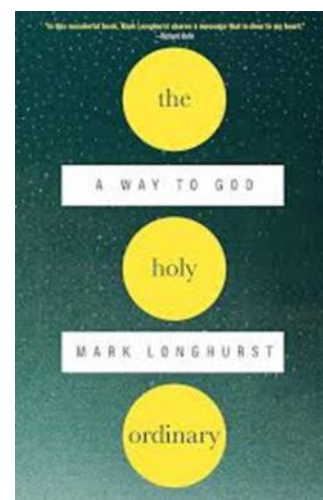
A cherished friend and colleague Mark Longhurst published a delightful new book called *The Holy Ordinary – A Way to God*. Mark is the former pastor up in Williamstown and now works as part of Richard Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation. Mark's writing style is that wonderful combination of being deeply insightful and thoroughly approachable. In his Preface, Mark describes this book as a way to have a deeper relationship with God in practical and simple ways that are grounded deeply and that allow us to also go about living our lives. I have always known Mark to be fun loving, deeply faithful, and super smart. I have no doubt that his book will bring all three together in ways that will bring insight and possibility to our lives too.

The plan is simple: we will gather three times to read his 156-page book gathered around a simple supper table. Participants would be expected to try to attend all three of the sessions in person. I am hoping for the meals to be simple and potluck.

The dates for the gatherings will be:

- Wednesday Jan 22 - 6:00pm - JE Room
- Wednesday March 26 - 6:00pm - JE Room
- Wednesday April 30 - 6:00 PM - JE Room

Please contact me directly to find out more information about this initiative or to indicate your interest. I will place an order so that we can get the books locally. I look forward to sharing together around a table. Brent



Clothing delivery to Asheville

384 pounds. That's how much clothing we collected for Ted and me to take to Asheville in mid-November. The Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry graciously accepted our donation. ABCCM is supported by 300+ churches of all denominations and 6000 volunteers through a variety of missions. You can read about them here: www.abccm.org

Seven weeks post storm, Asheville was far from recovered. There was still flood debris in the trees and along the banks of all the rivers and creeks. On higher ground, there was evidence of tree damage and piles of brush and sawn logs on curbs waiting for pickup. There was still no potable water in the city limits.

Aside from a huge tree down in the backyard, Nora and Eli's new home was spared. Ted spent the week laying new floors with them while I scrubbed down the kitchen and started filling cabinets. It was great to see that the kids were okay and be able to help them settle in.

Thanks for all who contributed to the clothing drive and asked about our family.

~ Diane Piraino



New Members

On December 15 we welcomed five new members. Pictured, left to right: Hannah, Phena, and Asa Peabody; Emilie White, Kirsten Fredsall. We also celebrated long-time members - more on that amazing event in the February newsletter!

Christmas Week at 4 Main St.

In the week between Christmas and New Years the church traditionally observes an extended Sabbath. It is a time when we cancel meetings and keep the heat low. A few things about this year you should know:

Tracy and Brent are excited about worship on the 29th (see below).

Our 12 step groups will continue to meet.

On other days, the building will be closed, locked and, we hope, quiet. There will be the potential for a couple of deeper cleaning projects to take place over the break with the buildings not in active use.

The church offices will open back up again on January 2.

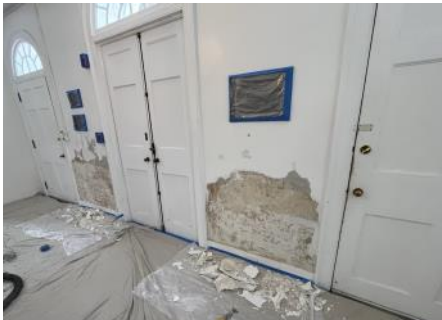
Christmas Week Special Worship

While the liturgical Christmas season is short, crammed between the much longer seasons of advent and epiphany, the Christmas readings and music are such treasures.

This year come on the 29th and enjoy a service filled with hope, peace, love, and joy. The service will include plenty of Christmas carols that we love to sing, a blessing of gifts the story of Jesus being left behind at the temple, and the chance to come back together and share our own stories too.

We invite you to bring one gift you received this year that we might bless it as part of worship.

We are also planning a festive and simple breakfast before worship. If you have a favorite coffee cake, muffin, or other breakfast recipe, you are welcome to make it and bring it with you. Brent and Jake will be coordinating the food for the day so let Brent know what you plan to bring. If you are not able to come to worship but want to share some goodies, they can always be dropped off early. After worship we will simply enjoy the leftovers from breakfast for fellowship hour. This is not meant to be fancy or stressful, but rather to evoke those wonderful mornings during a holiday week when we get to sit, linger, and talk over a hot beverage and a yummy pastry.



Repairs and Upgrades It has been a busy week. Rui from Valley Restoration repaired the water-damaged plaster in the Narthex, then repainted the north wall and insides of the doors. Above: electricians from Comalli are installing the new 400-amp feed at the back corner of the building.