

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Stockbridge, Massachusetts

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



February 2025



“Cards of Compassion” - see page 6

Pastor: The Rev. Brent Damrow - bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org

Minister of Music pro tempore: Tracy Wilson - music@stockbridgeucc.org

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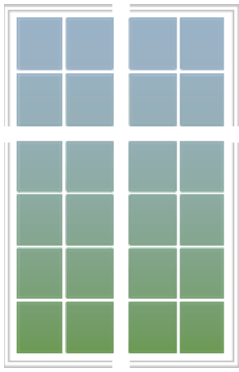
(413) 298-3137 | www.stockbridgeucc.org

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

February 2025

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Yoga Classes are Wednesdays at 9:00am	<i>2nd Nature Arts</i> 3:15 – 5:30pm <i>M & W,</i> <i>and as otherwise noted</i>	Stockbridge Festival Chorus (SFC) rehearses Sundays, 1:00-3:00pm				1 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
2 Sunday Worship 10:00am Annual Budget Meeting 11:00am SFC rehearsal 1 - 3	3 <i>2nd Nature Arts</i> 3:15 – 5:30pm	4 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	5 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Council 7:00pm	6	7 Service League 10:30am	8 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
9 Worship 10:00am SFC rehearsal 1 - 3	10 <i>2nd Nature Arts</i> 3:15 – 5:30pm	11 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	12 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 <i>2nd Nature Arts 12-5:15</i> Social Justice 2:30 Community Meal 5:30	13	14 Service League 10:30am	15 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
16 Worship 10:00am SFC rehearsal 1 - 3	17 President's Day Office Closed <i>2nd Nature Arts</i> 9:00 - 3:15	18 <i>2nd Nature Arts</i> 9:00 - 3:15 <i>Tuesday Club 1-4:45pm</i> Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	19 Morning Prayer 8 am <i>2nd Nature Arts</i> 9:00 - 3:15 Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm	20 <i>2nd Nature Arts</i> 9:00 - 3:15 Newsletter deadline	21 <i>2nd Nature Arts</i> 9:00 - 3:15 Service League 10:30am	22 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
23 Worship 10:00am SFC rehearsal 1 - 3	24 <i>2nd Nature Arts</i> 3:15 – 5:30pm	25 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm</i> <i>AA 8:00pm</i>	26 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 <i>Lenox Garden Club</i> <i>1:00pm</i>	27	28 Service League 10:30am	



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

February 2025 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

Original followers of Jesus weren't known as Christians - they were known as people of the way. Methodists got their name because those who observed them noticed that they had a clear method for how they interacted and how they made choices. Here in Stockbridge, we embrace the goal for our faith to show up not just on Sunday mornings but in the hundreds of our daily decisions (that are influenced shaped and supported by what we do on Sunday morning).

We don't "go to" church, instead we strive to become the church - a gathering; a family of faith; a work in progress. The endeavor of church is expansive, aspirational, relational, and intentional.

In January, the Church Council blessed a new tool to help in our shared endeavor - a Relational Covenant. A small group, empowered by Council, has been working to identify how the idea of being church informs how we relate to one another. We have considered the teachings of Jesus, Biblical texts, and our own church history to create a covenant that both helps us honor/uplift each other and encourages us to engage moments of difficulty or conflict in Christian love.

From my experience in other churches, I have seen how such documents are helpful in challenging times. Equally, I have been impressed how critical they are in moments when it would be easy to yield to tension or distrust and instead such covenants help people find understanding and purpose. I have seen how they encourage people to start talking to other people in difficult moments rather than about other people.

From my experience in this church, I am so grateful for how much people love each other, care for each other, and treat each other kindly. I have

also seen how differences in personality, opinion, communication, or theology have led to pain and disrupted relationship. I have seen how those rifts have led either to distancing between individuals or difficulty within Boards, Committees, or other ministries. I have met with visitors, who, after experiencing a difficult moment with someone in the church, have decided not to come back. Most commonly I have seen how small things, left unaddressed, have become bigger things. I have seen so many of us in our quest to be kind to someone, in our desire not to hurt anyone's feelings, have sometimes been unkind by letting things that should be explored go unexplored.

A copy of the covenant is on page 8. The Council has blessed a period of living in to this covenant as an experiment before we decide whether to formally adopt it as a congregation. We are developing resources to support the covenant. Simply put, the Covenant encourages us to be our best selves, to handle small situations one-on-one before they become conflicts, and it recognizes that we as human beings sometimes need help to work through situations. This process can help our healthy church become even healthier. It can support this family trying to follow the Way of Christ with hearts, eyes, and arms open. As we share this document, as Boards and Committees begin to use it, and as we invite the entire congregation to consider it, we welcome additional input.

Our church is alive, vital, and good. May we continue to live in to our mission of being God's love, Christ Himself, to the world, to the Berkshires, and just as importantly to each other.

Brent

Music Notes ~ Tracy Wilson

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The music making during February will celebrate Black History Month with beloved hymns and spirituals. Most notably, selections by Harry Burleigh will be featured during the month.

The story of Black History Month begins in 1915, half a century after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States. President Gerald Ford officially recognized Black History Month in 1976, calling upon the public to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.”

Black History Month is a time to honor the contributions and legacy of African Americans across U.S. history and society—from civil rights pioneers such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Jr, and Rosa Parks to leaders in industry, politics, science, culture and more.

STOCKBRIDGE FESTIVAL CHORUS

The Festival Chorus, formed in 1987 by then church music director Penna Rose, continues to present two concerts each year. For our Spring concert, we began rehearsals on Jan 26 for our performance of the Mozart Requiem on Saturday, April 12. It’s not too late – last Sunday to join is February 16. We rehearse every Sunday from 1 to 3 pm. Dues are \$50 to cover the cost of music and some expenses. We do not require an audition – just a love of choral singing!

ORGAN REDEDICATION CONCERT

Isn’t it wonderful to sing hymns and hear the choir accompanied by our newly restored organ! The firm of Czelusniak et Dugal has spent the last four months renovating and rewiring the inside pipe chamber (which houses over 1,600 pipes!), restoring sound to a number of pistons that quit working, improving the air pressure to equalize and balance sound from ranks (groupings) of pipes, upgrading and rewiring the console, and tonal regulation. We are grateful to many church members and outside donors who contributed to our Capital Campaign to cover this \$137,200 project for our 160 year old Johnson organ. This is the biggest restoration since 1981 when Sherm Hall was music director.

HAPPY FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

February 1	Ann Brink Rick Floyd
February 3	Claudia Cooke
February 4	Steve Blanchard Louie Forouhar-Graff
February 7	Drea Pecor
February 10	Claire Williams Senta Brodeur Ellen Lahr
February 12	Les Freeman IV
February 13	Betsy Wheat Paul Rix
February 15	Amy Freeman Logan Higuera
February 17	Thomas Wheat
February 19	Maurice Peterson
February 22	Oscar Brown
February 23	Amos Brown
February 24	Sophie Randolph
February 26	Jim McMenamy
February 28	Lilly Hassmer

To mark this occasion, the Board of Music and Music Department are planning an Organ Rededication Concert on Saturday, March 1 at 2 pm. Three guest organists will demonstrate the beauty of our organ, not to mention their own amazing abilities. Ed Lawrence, from Bennington, Vermont, and Brian Hoffman, Loudonville, New York have both served as concert organists for Stockbridge Festival Chorus and are very excited to perform on the restored instrument. Tim Pyper, a concert organist familiar to Berkshire County, will also perform. Each organist has also selected one of their favorite hymns to accompany our congregation in singing. You will hear the history of this organ from Ron Hanft and Ed Lawrence will take us through the restoration work by C&D. Rich Geiler and John Demler will sing a fun Purcell piece to help in the rededication.

An offering will be collected and a reception held following the concert to meet the artists.

Mission & Action

Construct Fundraising Campaign

February 9 and 16

A “small but mighty” non-profit founded in 1969, Construct serves over six hundred families annually in southern Berkshire County. They have over ninety permanent housing units, a transitional housing program for individuals coming out of homelessness, and the county’s first co-living workforce housing option that shelters local workers in need of temporary housing in a converted, fully furnished inn. In addition to providing these affordable housing options, Construct has established several funds for rental assistance, utility assistance, transportation services for our transitional housing population, and temporary emergency shelter services.

Our support of Construct enables us – in a tangible and active way -- to follow the second commandment of Jesus, to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. On February 9 and 16, please consider making a donation to Construct (in the form of checks made out to ‘Construct’).

Active Prayer of Thanksgiving

Sunday, February 2 to support the People’s Pantry, Great Barrington

Each month we respond to Christ’s offering of spiritual food at communion by giving generously to our neighbors’ need for physical nourishment, a beautiful and tangible gesture of support for those who are facing food insecurity in our local community. On February 2, we encourage you to bring non-perishable food items/toiletries and/or money for food (cash or check) for the People’s Pantry in Great Barrington. (To contribute by check, make payable to First Congregational Church, memo line: People’s Pantry.)

Suggested food/toiletry items: canned/dried beans, peanut or other nut butters, breakfast cereals/rolled oats, canned fruit/vegetables/soups/tuna/salmon/chicken, brown rice/quinoa/other grains, white or whole grain pasta, pasta sauce, white or whole grain flour, cornmeal, condiments, cooking oil, coffee, tea, shampoo, soap, toothpaste, paper towels.

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.”

Mission and Action Expenditures January 2025

The church has supported the following in January: UCC Disaster Ministries for California Wildfires \$500 (National Needs); ServSafe Training to support our Service to the Cathedral of the Beloved \$330 (Local Needs)

Lenten Study: Understanding the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Rick Floyd and Jeremy Ridenour are offering a six-week course during Lent that will provide an overview of the doctrine of the atonement. Atonement theories provide a narrative to understand how the death and resurrection of Jesus saves us from sin, death, and evil.

Richard L. Floyd
**WHEN I SURVEY THE
WONDROUS CROSS**
REFLECTIONS ON THE
ATONEMENT



Foreword by Gabriel Fackre
A CONFESSING CHRIST BOOK

Throughout church history, there has never been a single, orthodox account of this doctrine, which has led to various metaphors, motifs, and narratives to explain how Jesus’s death and resurrection redeems. The group will review the history of the doctrine and will read portions of Rick’s book [When I Survey the Wondrous Cross: Reflections on the Atonement](#).

The group will meet for six consecutive Thursdays throughout the season of Lent: March 6, 13, 20, 27 and April 3 and 10. The meetings will take place from 6:00-7:00 pm at the church. Please let Jeremy Ridenour know if you would like to participate, so that he can order you a copy of Rick’s book.

From the Service League

Now that the Holly Fair is in the rear-view mirror, the proceeds are tallied, and the remaining boxes packed away, we've had time to reflect on how it went and start to plan for the future. At our most recent meeting, in January, we talked about the history of the Service League and how it's changed over the years. There was a time when Women's Auxiliaries and Altar Guilds were nearly universal features of church structure, and the First Congregational Church of Stockbridge's version, called the Women's Service League, was typical. Its function - though the methods have evolved - has remained quite stable for over seventy-five years. Those functions include fund raisers, helping care for the physical needs of the church, providing receptions at religious events, and otherwise supplementing the formal structure of the organization by filling in the blanks where boards and committees leave off.

What has changed over the years is the availability of women to be members of the group on a regular basis. Seventy-five years ago, few women worked outside the home; today, very few don't. What that means for the remaining small group is that as each year goes by, we are more and more reliant on the larger congregation to help us with our activities, especially the fund-raising Spring Fair (formerly the Summer Fair) and the Holly Fair. It's also why we dropped the "Women" from our name - to emphasize that any and all are welcome to participate.

And why am I taking you on this trip down memory lane? To emphasize that when we say how much we appreciate your support, and "We couldn't do it without you", we really, really mean it! Thank you, once again, for making it possible to put on another successful fair. ~ Margaret Hornick



February Tidbits

The electrical system at the church will get some long needed upgrades in February. We may need to close the building for a day or specific times. The church office will provide updates.

Brent will be on a study and spiritual renewal retreat for the first two weeks of February. If there is an emergency and you need to reach him, please call Will Garrison during office hours or Jon Geldert at other times. They will relay the information to Brent so that he can be in touch.

Cards of Compassion

In Sunday school on January 19, the kids explored the story of Jesus's healings. In that story, Jesus is moved with compassion - that is to say, he is moved by the person's situation and is truly with that person.

Like we usually do in Sunday school, we invited the children to respond to that story in a tangible way. The class created colorful and creative greeting cards (see cover) including some get well cards, some cards of blessing, and some cards of appreciation. The cards are decorated with everything from band aids to doilies to pom poms. They are designed to help the church show compassion to each other. These cards are available in the church office if you would like to send or bring one to someone in need.

(Don't forget, we are always in need of leaders and helpers to work with our children as they learn more about our faith on Sunday mornings. Contact Kim Ruffing, Elisabeth Bellows, Vicky Cooper, Jeremy Ridenour, or Rich Geiler with questions.)

Moderator's Report - the 2025 Annual Budget

"...the measure you give will be the measure you get..." Mark, 4:24.

Dear Friends,

At our February Congregational Meeting each year we take, in a particular (or perhaps peculiar) way, a measure of our faith and commitment to the church. We call it a "Budget." It measures, in a quantitative way, what we are giving and what we are getting.

The format of a budget generally puts our resources or revenues first. We look primarily to what we have pledged in financial terms to support our life together as a community of faith. We also count every additional way that resources may be added for our use in the year ahead. Then, we look at the needs we have, for facilities, leadership, and activities of many kinds. We gather for worship, weddings and memorials, concerts, and in small groups for Wednesday morning meditation and continuous Bible & book study groups. We are enriched through social relationships at each coffee hour, monthly suppers, service groups, and even at boards and committee meetings. We also engage and provide for the larger community; through a pop-up pantry, a Tuesday Club, a yoga class, twelve-step programs, after-school children's activities, and more.

A common approach is to look first at what we anticipate in revenue and then decide what we

think we can do. However, in recent years we have begun to look first at what we need -- to maintain and grow the kind of "church alive" that we want to be, and how we can become alive in greater measure. Not surprisingly, we sometimes find ourselves with needs that exceed our immediate foreseeable revenues. Some call it a "deficit budget", others call it an "aspirational budget". In any case, to adapt a poetic phrase, our "reach is beyond our grasp". Now surprisingly, over the last few years we have reached and found that we could, in fact, grasp the resources that we need. A year ago, the 2023 budget that began with a \$4,400 deficit actually ended with an \$823 surplus. This year, another surprise. We are finding that our 2024 budget that began with a \$17,700 deficit (increased by action from the floor of the Congregational Meeting) is ending up, for a variety of reasons, with a surplus of \$4,128. To me this is rather astounding.

This year, for 2025, we are looking at a budget gap, although significantly lower than last year, of \$7,746. Is this our "deficit", or is it our "2025 Challenge"? I commend this budget to you as our challenge for 2025; to reach beyond our immediate grasp; to be the best, ever-growing flock of followers of Christ that we can be.

Then, next year, let us again be as they were in Mark 7:37: "They were astounded beyond measure".

~ Ron Hanft, Moderator

Minister of Music Search

The Search Committee has in-person interviews with two qualified candidates. We continue to receive applications and the process will remain open until we find the right person.

We are blessed that Tracy Wilson, pro-tem, has graciously agreed to extend her contract through Easter. 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).

Relational Covenant

As followers of Jesus Christ and as part of the First Congregational Church, we seek to build a beloved community within the church by treating one another with compassion, mercy, and love. We recognize that we will sometimes fall short, hurt one another, and find ourselves in disagreement or conflict. We commit to carrying out the mission of our church that is rooted in the love of God and to creating a safe and welcoming environment for all. We aspire to respect one another in the following ways:

Remember: We will remember the marks of faithful living - approaching one another in genuine love, outdoing one another in showing honor, and practicing humility. (*Romans 12*) We will remember when we speak to only say what is useful and necessary for building up so that our words come as grace to others. (*Ephesians 4:28*)

Experience: We will speak from our own experience even as we make room for the experiences of others. (*1 Corinthians 3:16*)

Support: When someone else has accepted responsibility for completing a task, we will support the process and them in their work. When we discern the movement of the Holy Spirit and make a decision, we will support that outcome. (*1 Corinthians 1:10*)

Pray: We will proceed with the premise that we are all doing the best we can for our community, we will exercise patience in the midst of conflict, and we will bathe all things in prayer. (*1 Thessalonians 5:17*)

Empathize: When we encounter disagreement or difference, we will seek out one another and speak face-to face with openness and empathy. (*Ephesians 4:15*)

Communicate: We will invite and accept the invitation of another to come to a table of reconciliation and will engage an intermediary if necessary in order to communicate in ways that offer healing and forgiveness. (*Matthew 18:16*)

Truth telling: We will strive to be instruments of peace, listening with open, curious, and non-judgmental minds, tempering our anger in love, seeking truth where there is misunderstanding, and trying as hard to understand as to be understood. (*The Prayer of St. Francis*)

The church is committed to supporting you in this process. Should you need or want assistance, please contact Will Garrison in the Church Office and he will connect you.