

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Stockbridge, Massachusetts

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



March 2025

Organ Rededication Concert - page 12

Youth Group - page 11

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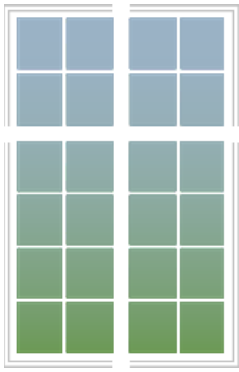
(413) 298-3137 | www.stockbridgeucc.org

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

March 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 M & W, and as noted.	Stockbridge Festival Chorus (SFC) rehearses Sundays, 1:00-3:00pm				1 Organ Rededication concert 2:00pm <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
2 Sunday Worship 10:00am SFC rehearsal 1 – 3 Youth Group 5:00pm	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 5:30pm Ash Wednesday service 7:00pm	6 Lenten Study 6:00pm	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 3:15</i> Community Meal 5:30	13 Lenten Study 6:00pm	14 Service League 10:30am <i>2nd Nature Arts</i> 9:00 – 3:15	15 <i>Stockbridge Golf</i> <i>Club 8:30-11am, JE</i> <i>Room</i> <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
16 Worship 10:00am SFC rehearsal 1 - 3	17 <i>2nd Nature Arts</i> 3:15 – 5:30pm	18 <i>Tuesday Club 1:45pm</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> 3:15 – 5:30pm Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 9:00pm	20 Lenten Study 6:00pm Newsletter deadline	21 Service League 10:30am	22 SFC rehearsal 10-12 <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 Supper Book Club 6:00pm	27 Lenten Study 6:00pm	28 Service League 10:30am	29 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
30 Worship 10:00am SFC rehearsal 1 – 3	31 <i>2nd Nature Arts</i> 3:15 – 5:30pm					



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

March 2025 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

The longer I serve in the ministry, the more I appreciate the routine and ritual of our faith tradition. Amid the inevitable changes both inside our church and in the world beyond, routine and ritual help ground us in ways that can be thoughtful and life-giving. A particular routine and ritual of the church that I find so helpful is our liturgical calendar.

I love how it breaks down our yearly journey into more manageable pieces. I love how each of these seasons are thoughtfully arranged to invite our engagement with core aspects of our faith tradition. I love how those seasons lead up to, enter into, and move forward from the major holy days of our year. I have also learned that there is wisdom not only regarding how these seasons have been set up, but why.

We are approaching one of the longest and most important seasons, Lent. It is a season that leads up to one of the most important days of any year – Easter. Lent is a serious and reflective time. It offers the gift and possibility of exploring our lives, our choices, and our priorities alongside the life, ministry, and generosity of Christ. During Lent, we intentionally give things up or take things on. During Lent, we engage more often in practices like silence and confession. And yet, the wisdom of our forebears in how they imagined the forty days of Lent offers a routine and ritual that is a helpful counterbalance, especially in times like these when so much change can threaten to overwhelm us.

You see, if you count the days between Ash Wednesday and Easter you would come up with

more than 40. That is no mistake, it is an important intentional part of Lent. Sundays are not part of the 40 days of Lent. As Christians, we remember, even as we walk alongside Christ to the cross, that the cross is not the ending. We remember that there is resurrection, that life not death has the final word.

During Lent this year Tracy and I are planning to make sure that Sunday worship does offer the chance for all of the gifts of Lent – both the serious ones and the joyful ones too. We will set aside time for silence and reflection and confession. We will also devote time to remembering the joy, blessings, beauty, grace, salvation, and the possibility of life in the risen Christ.

Part of the Lenten tradition assumes that people engage the thoughtfulness of Lent not just on Sundays but every day. Tracy and I are working on a mechanism to help you do just that. Given my time away we are not quite ready to let you know how it's going to work even though Ash Wednesday is rapidly approaching on March 5. We will have a worship service in our sanctuary at 7:00pm. We hope to send out some electronic information soon (perhaps even before you receive this printed copy).

Routine, ritual, intentionality all matter. They are gifts to us, meant not as one more burden to bear, but as a way of entering into the kind of existence Jesus came to offer – abundant life!

In gratitude and hope,

Brent

Music Notes

~ Tracy Wilson, Minister of Music, Pro Tem

We will continue the schedule of the Adult Choir singing the first and third Sundays of the month, with the Bells ringing on the second Sunday, and the Kids Choir singing on the fourth Sunday. The first Sunday in March is Transfiguration Sunday, so the choir will sing the wonderful Thomas Tallis O nata lux de lumine, "O light, born of light, Jesus, redeemer of the world."

With the season of Lent upon us, I went through our music library and selected some beautiful anthems for the choir. I also think the hymns in our various hymnals for the Lenten season are some of the most powerful selections of the church year. During Lent, the choir will also sing some chorales from the St. Matthew Passion by J.S. Bach.

Please look ahead to April and mark your calendars for Saturday, April 12, 3:00 PM for the **Stockbridge Festival Chorus Spring Concert of the Mozart Requiem**. This Requiem mass was shrouded in mystery, from its commission to its near completion in 1791. Mozart died December 5th having worked on the mass the last few weeks of his life. The completion is actually attributed to one of his students, Francois Xavier Sussmayer, who had been working on the Requiem with Mozart at the time of his death. Scholars regularly debate this fact but the general consensus is that Sussmayer's instruction by Mozart provided his teacher's inspiration and authenticity. The text of the Requiem uses the traditional Mass for the Dead. An piece composed by David Stone will begin the concert. David was the son of Festival Chorus members Susan and Fran Stone, who passed away a year ago. The piece, entitled *In The Darkest Hour*, was composed in 2015 for his brother and sister in law who lost their first child, Simon. It is a contemporary version of a piece that could be composed for a Requiem mass.

The Stockbridge Festival Chorus, which numbers 60 for this performance, will be accompanied by Ed Lawrence on organ, trombones Carolyn Dufraine, David Wampler and Shaun Bazylewicz, and Deane Prouty on timpani. Our rehearsal pianist is Aaron Likness.

HAPPY MARCH BIRTHDAYS

March 2	Andrew Hall
March 8	Joy Douglass Jim Erwin
March 11	Stephanie Bradford Don Paine Maria Carr
March 13	Bruce Mandel
March 14	Steve Alsdorf
March 19	Ted Randolph Doug Williams
March 21	Angela Vuagniaux
March 23	Julie McCarthy
March 24	Charlotte Rodgers
March 26	Thomas Randolph
March 28	Donna Jacobs
March 30	David Wampler
March 31	Noah Hassmer Mary Jo Erickson Connor

Vocal soloists for the Mozart Requiem include Samantha Talora, soprano Mary Verdi, alto; Rich Geiler, tenor and John Demler, bass.



Whence Cometh the Sounds of These New Winds? ~ Ron Hanft

Our pipe organ began its life with us in 1865 as Opus 183 of the William A. Johnson company of Westfield MA. Prior to 1865 the church used a melodeon, a small reed organ. In a renovation of the sanctuary in 1855-56, a new melodeon was purchased that coincided with preparation of an organ and choir loft at the rear of the balcony above the narthex.

The change to a pipe organ in the chancel area in 1865 was a significant enlargement of the sound and the role of this instrument in worship and in the music life of the congregation. But it didn't end there. With minor changes along the way, the most significant changes and enlargements were made in 1955 and 1980-82. Since then, some subtle but important features began to fail. Now, with the current refurbishment of our organ, its full capacity has been restored.

Mission & Action

The Cathedral of the Beloved ~ April 5 & 6
The Cathedral of the Beloved is an ecumenical ministry that holds a worship service and offers a free meal each Sunday afternoon in Pittsfield. We will be providing and serving the meal on Sunday April 6 indoors at the First United Methodist Church at 55 Fenn. This ministry serves the marginalized, isolated, and homeless, seeking to meet people where they are on the street and to share God's love by being part of the community. The meals serve about 100 people each week.

We need volunteers to sign up to help cook together in the church kitchen on the Saturday before, and/or set up and serve the meal on Sunday. Look for a sign-up sheet beginning March 16 to volunteer to shop, prepare the meal on April 5 and /or serve on April 6.

As Jesus said in Matthew, chapter 25: "I was hungry and you gave me food. Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."



You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world.

God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand.

Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand – shine! Matthew 5:14-15

On March 30 we will join with UCC churches across the country to give to One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS). OGHS is one of four special

mission offerings of the United Church of Christ. This Lenten Offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ within Wider Church Ministries. The news reminds us daily of the broken places in our world that need tending. Look for information and special offering envelopes in your bulletin on March 30.

Flower Power

The Board of Deacons is undertaking a new take on an old process: flowers for the Communion table. Since the passing of our dear Jackie Hawkins, flowers on the communion table have been occasional and unpredictable. In an effort to organize this process (our favorite thing...) we are initiating a simple process whereby members of the congregation can sign up to provide flowers for Sunday worship.

Here's how it will work:

You can sign up to provide flowers using the online registration form, [here](#) and in the weekly email. When people's gardens are in bloom, using the signup tool will prevent having overabundance.

You can note in the bulletin if the flowers are given in memory of a loved one. The name must be provided to Will by Thursday at noon before the Sunday service in order for him to put it in the bulletin.

Flowers can be from your garden or ordered from a florist for delivery to the church. Delivery must be scheduled for Friday morning delivery to the church office: earlier deliveries might mean tired flowers by Sunday morning; later deliveries will have delivery people marching all over on Saturday looking for where to leave them.

Flower arrangements should be ample enough to be visible but not so ample that they obscure the minister's face.

If you have any questions, ask a Deacon!



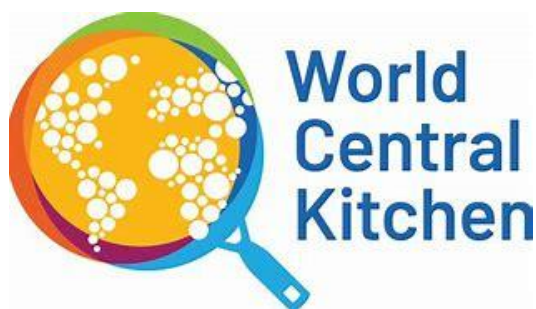
From the Service League

At our last meeting, we did our favorite thing - we went shopping! Not for eggs or sneakers, but for worthy causes that we like to support. Since you are an indispensable part of the fund-raising that gives us this money to spread around, we thought you'd like to know what we did with it.

We divide our giving into three categories - for the Church, for local needs, and for national and international needs. In that first category, we donated \$2000 to the scholarship fund, \$1000 each for 2024 and 2025, and \$300 for the JE Room. Local needs that we supported include the backpack program, which provides food for public school students to take home on weekends when free school meals aren't available. We sent \$500 each to it, to Construct, the Elizabeth Freeman Center, and the South County Food Pantry.

In the category of national and international organizations, we sent \$1000 each to Doctors Without Borders, Americares, and World Central Kitchen, which all provide emergency food and medicine to areas where wars or natural disasters have struck.

The needs are great and we're grateful to be able to do some small part to alleviate suffering. Thank you for your help and support! ~ Margaret Hornick



A Birthday Bash to Remember

Nearly seventy people turned out for the All-Church Birthday Party on January 26. This year's theme was musical families: Brass, Woodwind, Strings, Percussion, and Keyboard. Attendees self-identified with a family and seated themselves at the appropriate table. Some loose guidelines were given for choosing one's family, and I hear that some even took online quizzes to figure it out!

Diane Piraino was our emcee. The parade of cakes was astounding with flavors of chocolate, fruit, peppermint, and Guinness Stout(!)

Jack Brown was our concert master and led us through the Musical Activity du jour. The theme tune was Old Hundredth, to which each table

wrote words in praise of their musical family.

After each table sang for the others, Jack then led us in a five part round. It sounded... terrifying and

ridiculous. Maybe we should all keep our day jobs, but we sure did have fun.



Special thanks from Growth and Fellowship go out to our chief source of inspiration and Emcee, Diane, and to Jack Brown for deftly leading the vocal activity. Cake bakers, thank you! And to so many others helped us set up, take down, and wash and wash those dishes after: we couldn't have done it without you.

~ Board of Growth & Fellowship

Jean Stackhouse (1935-2025)

Jean Stackhouse and her late husband, the theologian Dr. Max Stackhouse, were first introduced to the Berkshires when Max was a graduate student at Harvard. They had been invited to stay with one of his professors in Monterey, where that professor was active at Gould Farm. They soon began coming for concerts, and, like many Bostonians and New Yorkers, started thinking of the Berkshires as a home for their retirements. Jean, a pianist who taught at the New England Conservatory, had many connections with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and its summer home at Tanglewood. The house they found in West Stockbridge eventually became their full time home, and when Max and Jean looked for a church to join, they were drawn to Stockbridge; Max particularly wanted to be part of Jonathan Edwards' church, with its deep connection to the history of New England Protestantism.

The network of friends and colleagues that this gifted couple developed over the years, from Boston to Princeton, seemed to converge in Stockbridge. Max's career in theology, and Jean's in music, led eventually to the founding of the Berkshire Institute for Theology and the Arts. Relationships with member-musicians Chet and Joy Douglass, Don and Peggy Shriver of Union Theological Seminary, Jill Horner and YoYo Ma, Stuart Feder of Juilliard, who was a psychiatrist and scholar of the works of

composer Charles Ives, James and Betty Forbes of Riverside Church, and Berkshire Bach founder Simon Wainrib, among others, all became the seeds of BITA weekends. In the Berkshires Max and Jean continued their relationship with Max's former student from Andover-Newton Seminary, Rick Floyd, and his wife Martha, who shared their interest in BITA's development. Choir member Mary Hoeltzel, Jean's roommate at DePauw University, and her late husband Rudy, had been married by Max. These musically and intellectually stimulating programs were rooted in the synergy of their complementary passions and flourished until Max began to suffer from Parkinson's Disease in 2006.

Max died in 2016; at his service, YoYo Ma played a Bach cello suite. In 2020, the Covid pandemic prompted Jean to move to Boston to live with her daughter Sara's family. When she visits today, she sees a church that is "a lot livelier, there's a lot going on - study groups, reading groups - there are a lot of things happening." But Jean, and those who remember the vibrant programs that she and Max inspired and implemented, still recall that unique era fondly.

Excerpted from *How Firm a Foundation: A History of the First Congregational Church, Stockbridge, Massachusetts on the Occasion of the 200th Anniversary of the Brick Church.* (2024).

Minister of Music Search

Thank you to everyone who worked so hard last month to welcome our candidate of choice. We are sorry the candidate was not there, but we had a lovely community supper and a delightful hymn sing-a-long.

Unfortunately, at the last minute, our candidate had a change in life circumstance that prevented him from moving forward as our candidate and thus has withdrawn his name from consideration.

The good news is that our search process continues and we will be interviewing two talented church musicians in the coming weeks.

Stay tuned! ~ Liza Catino, Chair, Search Committee

Growth & Fellowship

G & F hosted a “Grab-n-Go” (non) Fellowship Hour on February 2nd, the day of our Annual Budget Meeting. With food and drink arranged near the doors into the Sanctuary, the idea was to cleverly coax folks right back into the pews for the meeting, food and drink in hand. It turned into more of a “Gab-n-Stay,” but we did eventually get a quorum for a successful meeting.

We also hosted a Community Dinner in Brent’s absence, at his request. As you may know, this supper turned into a reception and listening event for our recommended Minister of Music candidate, to be followed by a sample choir rehearsal. Sadly, the candidate could not make it. We (now 30-35 in number) cheered ourselves with a mini hymn sing, led by Liz Catino, and accompanied by Ron Hanft. And by trying to eat Caesar Salad for 80.

Birthday Card Art and Photography: It is time to print a new batch of birthday cards, with new cover art. We will soon be asking the congregation to submit art or photographs, from which we hope to find a suitable new cover. This is just a heads-up! Details on how to submit your work will be forthcoming just as soon as we know what we’re talking about.

On March 2, we will continue the practice of an **Active Prayer of Thanksgiving** as an act of gratitude after receiving communion. We encourage you to bring non-perishable food items and toiletries and/or money for food (cash or check), for our own Pop-Up Pantry.

If you wish to contribute by check, please make your check payable to The First Congregational Church, memo line: Pop-Up Pantry. To contribute via Venmo, FCC Stockbridge, note Pop-Up Pantry on the ‘What’s this for?’ line.

Many thanks for your loving generosity!



HAPPY *birthday* TO YOU

Drivers needed for Kimball Farms (Lenox) members and friends to attend Sunday worship. Right now, rides are mostly being provided by Donna Jacobs. If you have some availability to help her out occasionally, she’d love to hear from you at donnajacobsmw@aol.com





New Newsletter Feature

We invite you to contribute to a new, and hopefully ongoing, part of our newsletter - a section of gratitudes. We know that the practice of sharing gratitude is life giving and joy creating. We also know that the sharing of gratitudes lifts up wonderful parts of our shared life that many may not be aware of.

We invite you each month to send in a short blurb for someone or something in our church life for which you are grateful. The deadline for each month is the 20th day of the preceding month.



March 5

**Worship service, in the sanctuary,
at 7:00pm.**

Be sure to get your copy of *How Firm a Foundation: A History of the First Congregational Church, Stockbridge, Massachusetts on the Occasion of the 200th Anniversary of the Brick Church*. Available in the church office and during Fellowship Hour Sunday. Hard cover \$30, softcover \$22 - cash/check/Venmo.

Building Updates ~ Will Garrison

Two projects of note:

Anyone who walked through the narthex the past few weeks would have noticed two sets of scaffolding reaching way up to the stairwell ceilings. Valley Restoration (the same company that repaired the steeple and repainted the pews) needed the scaffolding to repair plaster and paint the walls and ceiling. This project was prompted by safety concerns regarding the plaster ceiling over the east stairwell. After 200 years the plaster was at risk of falling. Valley Restoration repaired it by going into the attic and consolidating the plaster from above. The Board of Trustees decided to take the opportunity to have the

entire space fixed up, and it looks great. Photographs don't do it justice, so please go and look the next time you are in the building. As a bonus, Rui (the amazing plasterer), repainted the double sets of doors between the sanctuary and the JE Room. Decades of wear and tear and chipped paint have been erased.

Led by Trustee Tim Bosworth, the long process of upgrading the electrical service continues. Lately, Comalli Electric has been here to replace electrical panels. The power was turned off in the office wing for a day, so it was nice and quiet! In the office hallway you will notice that the panel is now accessed from the hall instead of the closet in the restroom. This was required by building code.

A Note of Gratitude

As I was getting ready for my time away, I had an important conversation with our Conference Minister, the Rev. Darrell Goodwin. He has a great gift for asking meaningful questions and conveying through the sound of his voice that he actually cares about your answer. And so I took a chance of actually being honest with him. I shared with him how wonderfully things are going here. I shared that objectively the vitality of this church is profound. We are achieving growth in our lay leadership and the wonderful things they are accomplishing. We are experiencing growth in membership and attendance. We are experiencing depth in our learning, serving, and worshipping. We are finding new ways to be beautiful in our music and in our fellowship. As good as no better than perhaps they have been in a very long time and I believe they truly are. I then paused, I took a breath, and I decided I also needed to share the rest of the story. There is a line from the Lord of the rings that I have always found profound. Bilbo Baggins shares with candles that he felt a little thin, he felt like butter spread over too much bread. I shared with him that also was how I was feeling. He replied in a life-giving way. He took a breath and told me he was grateful for my service to Stockbridge and to the larger church. He told me that I was alone that this perhaps is the single biggest issue he and his executive team are working on the truth that So many of the clergy in the southern New England conference are either at the edge of burning out or already burnt out. He said to me, "Brent, you can't serve from an empty cup. Go take this time and fill your cup."

My time in Maine was a blessing and a gift. As always, it did not go exactly as I had planned. As always, especially in these times, there were some things that added challenge. Nonetheless, it was a time of filling my cup through things like time with family and friends, long extended walks in places I had not previously explored, time for prayer and reflection, good food, good books, and far less responsibility. I did have the chance to fill my cup. It may not be completely full, and I did discover places where my cup tends to leak now and then, not my cup it is more full than it was.

Part of my ability to do all of this was the knowledge that the church would be in good hands while I was away. Thank you to everyone who kept the church not just going but thriving. Thank you to the staff and to the volunteers. Thank you to the Boards, the worship leaders, the music makers and everyone who pitched in.

If you, too, are feeling a little thin - like butter spread over too much bread, know that you are not alone. Come and talk to me and I will try to listen as fully as I was listened to and respond with the same kind of grace and generosity I experienced through Darrell. These are full times and will be for some time - there are joys to be celebrated and challenges to enter into. We need to pour out our cups in service and compassion AND we need to make sure we refill them too.

Thanks again, Brent



Tristan Osgood and Anna Smith collected money to support **Construct, Inc.**'s "Warm Up the Winter Emergency Assistance" fundraiser. These funds help provides a safety net for those who need it most. It is especially crucial this year with the bitter cold weather and the jump in the cost of heating fuel.



Steve and Noah Hassmer provided some star power at the February 23 service.

The **Kids Choir** added their voices - with a couple of guest stars - during the service on February 23. Kids Choir rehearsals are the second and fourth Sundays of the month, led by Liza Catino.



Youth Group

It is the first Sunday of the month and so you know what that means - Youth Group!

This month, on March 2, we are inviting both parents and youth to attend. Following a yummy dinner in the JE Room we will break into two groups. The youth will stay with Pastor Brent while the parents will head off to talk to Elisabeth and Jeremy. Both groups will be talking about some exciting new opportunities for our youth including Membership (what that means and what it doesn't) and a new Mentoring program we hope to launch. Appropriately during that conversation we are going to serve M&M's (from our favorite Nut Free Chocolate Company).

Afterwards, we will come back together for a fun group activity, some dessert, and a new great game (Six Second Scribbles)!

We will meet at our regular time of 5:00 and we'll wrap up by 7:00.

If you have any questions just give the Church Office a call. ~ Brent & Elisabeth



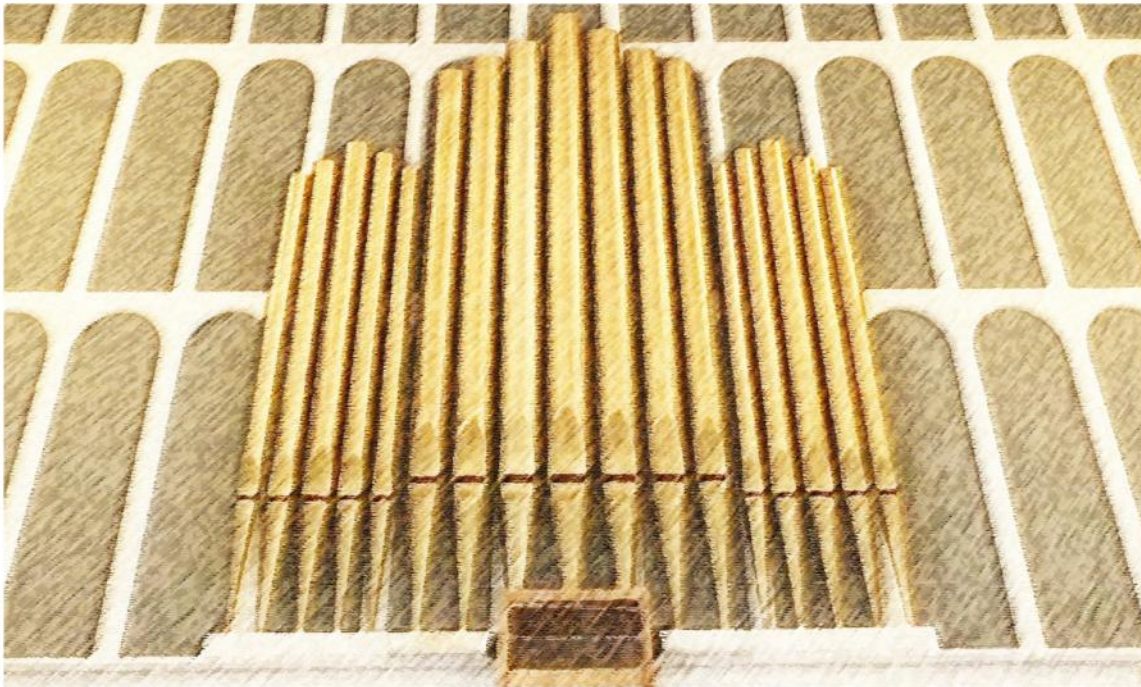
Also available on Livestream - go to
www.stockbridgeucc.org

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC OF STOCKBRIDGE
4 MAIN STREET, STOCKBRIDGE, MA 01262

ORGAN REDEDICATION CONCERT

SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 2:00 PM

TO CELEBRATE THE RENOVATIONS OF ITS HISTORIC 1865
JOHNSON ORGAN, OPUS 183



FEATURING CONCERT ORGANISTS:

TIM PYPER, EDWIN LAWRENCE & BRIAN HOFFMAN

Works of J S Bach, Mendelssohn, Buck & compositions by our guest organists

NICK REID, SPECIAL GUEST

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

FREE WILL OFFERING. RECEPTION TO FOLLOW THE CONCERT



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH Stockbridge, Massachusetts

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL: 413-298-3137