

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

Annual Meeting

May 18, 2025

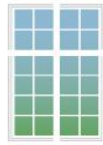


Clerks' Report
Nominations for officers and boards
Program Reports 2024-2025

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— Stockbridge, Massachusetts —

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

In accordance with the By-laws of the Church, we hereby call the Annual
Congregational Meeting for Sunday, May 18 at 11:00am, following
worship. Included will be votes to approve:

1. Nominating slate for Officers, and Board and Committee members
2. To act upon any other business that may legally come before the
meeting.

Charlotte Rodgers, Clerk

Ron Hanft, Moderator

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

ORDER OF BUSINESS - ANNUAL MEETING
May 18, 2025

Immediately Following Worship

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

- I. Call to Order and Quorum Check
- II. Our Sung Invocation:
 "We Gather Together" v. 1
- III. Our Affirmations:
 - Open and Affirming
 - Land Acknowledgement
- IV. Approval of Annual Meeting Minutes 2024
- IV. Scheduled Business
 - A. A Litany for Remembrance for those we have lost.
 - B. Sharing our Relational Covenant
 - C. Report on Membership Status
 - D. Acknowledging with appreciation those who have served, and
 Election of Boards and Officers of the Church
- V. Our Sung Benediction
 "We Gather Together" v.3

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

**The First Congregational Church, UCC
Stockbridge, Massachusetts**

Annual Meeting Minutes, May 19, 2024

Present: Brent Damrow, Ron Hanft (Moderator), and others in person and those participating via livestream. There were over 40 people in the sanctuary and five people participating via livestream.

Call to Order and Quorum Check: Noting a quorum present, Ron Hanft, Moderator, welcomed us and called the meeting to order at 11:11 am.

The congregation then sang *We Gather Together* (verse 1). After the hymn, Ron read the by-law of the Land Acknowledgment and Commitment and the congregation in unison read the Land Acknowledgment Statement.

Approval of Annual Meeting Minutes of May 21 and June 4, 2023: The minutes were approved unanimously.

Remembering those we have lost: Kathleen Oppermann, Ingrid Richardson, Lee Dixon. The Clerk, Jeremy Ridenour, read the names of those we lost and offered a prayer.

Recommendations from the Procter Hall Proceeds Working Group: Ron read the background for the Procter Hall Proceed Working Group (PHPWG) to outline the process and the group that has been meeting over the past year to discuss how to use the proceeds from the sale of Procter Hall. There was a Q&A session on May 12th to discuss questions. Diane Piraino, a member of the PHPWG, began by reading the recommendations of the PHPWG, and then she specified that not all the funds allocated to the social justice funds will be related to the Stockbridge Munsee tribe. Diane noted that the conversations in the PHPWG were often difficult because there was a diversity of opinions within the group. Diane put forward a motion to approve the recommendations of the Procter Hall Proceed Working Group. Next, Patty briefly described the financials of the PHPWG and how the money will come in over the years, with a total of \$250,000 over 15 years and the estimated funds in the years to come. Following the brief financial presentation, Cathy Clark expressed disagreement with the recommendations for how the finances would be set up for each account (much like the church's endowment). Don Rodgers, Chair of the Board of Trustees, expressed concerns about the financial health of the church, noting that there is a budget deficit for this year (~\$18,000) and additional capital items that need to be addressed. At the last Trustees meeting, the Board of Trustees expressed a consensus that the church does not need to make this decision now because we do not know exactly when we will accumulate a substantial amount of money, expecting it to be \$20,000 by 2028. If the motion fails, the Trustees suggest that those decisions be deferred until later. Jon Geldert then expressed enthusiastic support for the recommendations of the PHPWG. Frank Russell shared that raising money for the church has not been easy and raised concerns about the budget deficit. Anne Hutchinson noted that the church's ministries have been supported by the generous endowment. She suggested that we can honor our relationship with the tribe by setting aside this money for social justice issues. Charlotte Rodgers, the leader of the Social Justice Committee, reported that the church has been commissioned to address social justice issues. Within the Land Acknowledgment, there was a promise to honor the ancestors of the tribe and these proceeds are from the property that originally belonged to the Stockbridge Munsee tribe. It is the position of the Social Justice Committee to build an ongoing equitable and inclusive space

for everyone. Rich Geiler then expressed appreciation that it is challenging to balance competing views and said that he believes it is sensible to create these accounts for two important aspects of the church. Bronly Boyd clarified that we do not technically have an endowment but an investment account. There is no restriction on the investment account. These funds could go into the same investment account to be managed. After Bronly, Brent Damrow noted that this is one of the first meetings where serious differences of opinions are being raised and expressed hope that the Holy Spirit animates the vote. Elizabeth Bellows asked if these recommendations can be changed if an emergency comes up in the future. Ron noted that there will be at least six congregational meetings before the funds are available and can take a different direction or adjust earlier to decisions.

Bronly reminded the congregation that, in addition to the \$5,000 in estimated expenses related just to the recent sale, there had been approximately \$30,000 in prior expenses to establish that the church does, in fact, own Procter Hall and the land it is on. These expenses, which came from the Operating Fund should also be reimbursed before proceeds are allocated to the two purposes in the recommendation; and that would delay money available for those purposes by another year or more.

Bronly then put forward an amendment to the motion to accept the recommendation: that the two suggested investment accounts be consolidated in the existing investment account (called the endowment) and that we maintain a bookkeeping system that maintains the stipulated funds to be distributed in the exact same manner as indicated in the recommendation. Some members asked for clarification to make sure that the recommended use of funds remains the exact same. The amendment passed unanimously. Patty Strauch raised if the problem is the 50/50 distribution of funds between these two accounts or if it has to do with the budget deficit. Terry suggested that we should trust the recommendations put forward by the PHPWG. A member of the congregation moved to end discussion and vote on the Motion as amended. The Motion to end discussion was passed unanimously. Then, the vote on the Motion to accept the recommendation as amended was voted on and passed but it was not unanimous, with around 5 members who voted against the motion.

Election of Boards and Officers of the Church: David Anderegg, member of the Connections Committee, noted that Patty Strauch is being re-nominated for a two-year term as Treasurer, but this must be brought forward by the Board of Trustees. Don Rodgers, Chair of Trustees, nominated Patty for another two-year term as Treasurer. Gary Cilley has agreed to be in the Deacons class of 2027. Mary Hoeltzel has agreed to serve another year on the Board of Music for the class of 2025. A motion was put forward to approve the slate of the election of boards and officers of the church as amended. The motion was approved unanimously. At end of the vote, Brent then thanked those who have served the church in various roles, including Jeremy Ridenour as Clerk whose term is ending, various Chairs who are finishing their service (Michael Deegan, Charlotte Rodgers, Martha Floyd and Cindy Brown, and Tom Ruffing), and all those who are going off various Boards. Brent offered a prayer of blessing for all those who serve.

Before the end of the meeting, Carl Bradford noted that it is getting increasingly difficult to fill the board positions and if anyone would like to participate on a board, then it would be helpful. The church ended the meeting by singing the last verse of *We Gather Together*.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 12:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jeremy Ridenour, Clerk

Clerk's Report

May 19, 2024 – May 18, 2025

Baptisms

Elsie Shippee Spaulding	January 19, 2025
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Deaths

John Allen Miner	September 7, 2024
Jean Stackhouse	February 1, 2025
Margory "Gege" Kingston	February 23, 2025
Hannah Peabody	April 24, 2025

New Members

Adam Brown	October 20, 2024
Joanne Conroy	October 20, 2024
Hannah Fries	October 20, 2024
Lisa Johnson	October 20, 2024
Randy Johnson	October 20, 2024
Kirsten Fredsall	December 15, 2024
Asa Peabody	December 15, 2024
Hannah Peabody	December 15, 2024
Phena Peabody	December 15, 2024
Emilie White	December 15, 2024

Transferred, by request, by individual to move from Member to Friend:

Tigger Bruenn
Michael & Sara Zanin

Transferred from active member status to inactive member status, May 2025*

Ivy Cote	Don Paine
Teresa Gentile	Karen Lindstrom
Jennifer Germain	Joan Nimmo
Glenn Gilbert	Nellie Rustick
Debbie Goodwin	Christine Smith
Alexis Kennedy	Judith Stafford
Kris Kennedy	Kim TenBroeck
Dan Knauss	Tom TenBroeck
Jenna Knauss	Margaret Williamson
Ellen Lahr	

*see page 10

Summary:

New Members	10
Deaths	4
Transferred to Friend	3
Transferred to inactive status	19
Net change	-16

Active Membership as of 5/2024 209

Current Active Membership 193

Child Baptisms	1
Adult Baptisms	0



Inactive Membership

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Stockbridge, MA

By-Laws, from Section V. Membership:

D. Termination of Membership

1. For Inactivity:

(a) If, for a period of one year, a Member does not communicate with, participate in, or contribute to the Church, Council shall make appropriate inquiries and, if possible, renew this Member's interest in the Church.

*(b) Should Council not succeed, such Member may be **transferred to the inactive list** and notified in writing by the Clerk.*

(c) Subsequently, such Member may be restored to active Membership at the discretion of Council.

The bylaws do not define the implications of “inactive.” The following notes were compiled in May, 2025 by Charlotte Rodgers, Clerk; Will Garrison, Administrator; and Brent Damrow, Pastor. It was shared with Ron Hanft, Moderator. This is our interpretation of both what inactive membership is and how it will affect communication and other elements of church life.

- Christ calls us to love our neighbor and even our enemy too. We will continue to hold those on the inactive membership list in love. Should they call upon us to actively care for them in times of sickness grief or other challenge we will respond in loving kindness and offer the support of our community and pastor. We will, however, release them from some of the ways that we actively hold our church family (for example we will not list them on the birthday list in the newsletter, send them a birthday card, or list them in the church directory).
- Those on the inactive list will not be eligible to vote on matters brought before the congregation or serve on boards within the church. Any other rights or responsibilities that require membership but also not be afforded.
- Regarding formal communication:
 - Inactive members will receive one more weekly e-mail and one more monthly newsletter. Each of those correspondences will be accompanied by a note that this will be their final communication unless they notify us that they would like to continue receiving them.
 - Inactive members will be removed from the stewardship list and all other mailing lists that are used for the conducting of official church business.
- An inactive member may be restored to active status as per the by-laws.

As this is the first time we have fully implemented this process, we anticipate that we may need to make some adjustments to what is written here and or provide further clarification as issues arise. We do not see this as a formal policy but rather as our interpretation of the bylaws and our strategy for implementation. Any feedback or input is appreciated.

OFFICERS, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES OF THE CHURCH

(as of 5/12/2025)

May 18, 2025 Annual Meeting

All Officers of the Church and members of Boards elected at the Annual Meeting shall assume their duties at the close of the Annual Meeting. Bylaws: Article 4 D 4. (d)

CHAIR OF CHURCH COUNCIL/MODERATOR

Terry Wise
Two-year term ending 2027

CLERK

Charlotte Rodgers
Two-year term ending 2026

TREASURER

Patty Strauch
Two-year term ending 2026

HISTORIAN

Joshua Hall

LIBRARIAN

AT-LARGE MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

Liza Catino, Frank Russell

BOARD OF DEACONS

CLASS OF 2026

David Anderegg
Drea Pecor

CLASS OF 2027

Elizabeth Young
Gary Cilley
Helen McCormick

CLASS OF 2028

Jo Ann Levitt

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

CLASS OF 2026

Elisabeth Bellows

CLASS OF 2027

Jeremy Ridenour
Rich Geiler

CLASS OF 2028

Rick Floyd

BOARD OF MISSION & ACTION

CLASS OF 2026

Alice Collins
Beth Cilley

CLASS OF 2027

Anna Smith

CLASS OF 2028

Susan Moor
Sarah Boyd
Lisa Johnson

BOARD OF GROWTH AND FELLOWSHIP

CLASS OF 2026

Ted Randolph
Joanne Conroy

CLASS OF 2027

Bob Doerr
Tom Ruffing

CLASS OF 2028

Vicky Cooper

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

CLASS OF 2026

Joe Catino
Tim Bosworth
Brian Hyatt
Bronly Boyd
Don Rodgers
Patty Strauch (Treasurer)

CLASS OF 2027

Cathy Clark
Margaret Hornick

CLASS OF 2028

BOARD OF MUSIC

CLASS OF 2026

Janet Canning
Mary Hoeltzel

CLASS OF 2027

Brian Farrell

CLASS OF 2028

Liza Catino
Jon Geldert

PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Margaret Hornick, Anne Roy, Paul Rix

MINISTER OF MUSIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Gary Schieneman, Rick Floyd, (Minister of Music appoints two additional members)

CONNECTIONS COMMITTEE

David Anderegg, Charlotte Rodgers, Cindy Brown

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

The By-laws call for representatives appointed by boards: Trustees (tba), Music (tba), CE (tba), and Deacons (tba).

Two at-large members: Martha Floyd and tba.

COMMITTEE OF DELEGATES

SNE CONFERENCE

Margaret Hornick
John Canning

BERKSHIRE ASSOCIATION

Margaret Hornick
John Canning

We will vote on people whose names are **bolded**; **highlight** means extending one year

MODERATOR'S REPORT

Dear Friends,

At first I thought it was just me...the past two years seemed like a blur and I was having difficulty sorting it out for this "Moderator's Report" and overview. Then, as I skimmed the minutes of seven Congregational meetings and 26 Council meetings, not counting the planning sessions with individuals and small groups, I realized...it's all your fault!

Because, you see, we are all rooted in a living faith. We worship, sing, pray and study together. We nourish each other in coffee hours and church dinners. We carry out a mission to those in the wider world. If we were not a community of faith that cares deeply about the values and commitments of a Christ-like life; if we did not work diligently to carry out assignments while also responding to new emerging opportunities; if we did not take time for shared discernment, especially when we differ, and if we did not carefully manage our resources while seeking to live out more fully what God is calling us to be and do; then, life around this church would be so much simpler and easier to describe.

However -- We are working intensively to implement a complex three-year Capital Campaign, with all the planning, timetables, unexpected projects and costs to be managed. We affirmed, with serious humility, an acknowledgement of the history of the land which we occupy and those who preceded us here; then struggled with the implications for how we carry on our activities in this place. We finally concluded nearly two decades of deliberations on how to handle the Old Town Hall that our own history left us to deal with -- only to be challenged again with how to allocate the future proceeds from the sale of that property. We were surprised by the need to repaint pews and encapsulate lead paint in the sanctuary, leading as well to new pew Bibles. Meanwhile, in acknowledging the 200 years in our current sanctuary, a small team produced a remarkable book reviewing this history. We reflected on the ways we engage each other, from applause in worship to exploring a new Relational Covenant for all our interactions.

All this while continuing to look forward. We responded to the need to find and call a new Minister of Music. We are developing ways to engage our youth more meaningfully in a life of faith. Having established the Social Justice Committee that worked to develop our Land Acknowledgement, we will soon be embarking on new ways of engaging the congregation in justice ministries. Stay tuned. This page is short and I'm sure I've left things out.

Now, of course, all of this is not because of "your fault," it is because of your faith. I, as only one of our flock of faithful sheep, our herd of cats, our exultation of larks...I have felt so very fortunate, sometimes frustrated, but always and forever deeply grateful for all of you.

Thanks be to God.

Ron

PASTOR'S REPORT

Dear Church Family,

Grace and peace be unto you. There are many images that strive to capture the dynamics of being church. The one that is currently resonating with me is that of the ship. Not just any ship, but maybe even the old ship of Zion. In my mind I see an old wooden ocean sailing vessel with two or even three sets of sails.



What strikes me about that image in these times is that such ships are strong and yet not impervious; sailing them requires skill, knowledge, and engineering but artfulness too; they can last centuries and rely on regular care; they can cover great distances and yet can drift off course due to external forces, and finally they carry a large group of people and rely on those same people to stay afloat and to chart a course.

I start with gratitude. Thank you for being a part of this endeavor. Thank you, leaders - those who have trimmed our sails and adjusted our rudder. Thank you, volunteers - those who have attended to the things that need attention - those who have swabbed the deck and put out some food. Thank you too to all of you who have and continue to simply board the ship - show up and cheer people on or sometimes just hold on for dear life. To make this ship go requires all of us.

We have been sailing in choppy if not at least uncharted waters for many years now. The turbulence of the world is here for the foreseeable future. That can feel overwhelming, but it can also be a relief - we know these waters, we know these conditions, and so now the question that lies before us is what do we do, or maybe more to the point what are we called to do?

What I have encountered in my life with you this year raises a few good questions including:

- In tough times, how do we care for ourselves? How do we recognize that God is already here, that grace abounds, that being church does call us to love and care for the world and also equally to come together as a family in mutual love and mutual care.
- What is our vision for these times? We do many wonderful and beautiful things, maybe even too many things, so how can we identify and cling to shared and collective sense of purpose that we might set our sails and our rudder in a common direction of purpose?
- Finally, from that vision or purpose, how do we both identify those things that really matter to us and then we engage the people to sustain them? One of the unique but fundamental parts of being church is that we show up not just because we want to, we like it, or it is good for us, but rather because it is good for the whole or for particular others. How do we discern what matters and then commit to doing it for us, all of us?

Thank you again for all that you do. In these times our church our sailing vessel continues to be blessed with endurance, with peace, with love, and with hope. I look forward to engaging with you and working with you to see that it remains so in the coming year too.

In gratitude and hope,

Brent

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In the fall we met with prospective volunteers and parents to give them an overview of the programs for children and youth. Storytelling time, Sunday School, is staffed by volunteers from the wider church. There are generally several elements each week – singing (led by Elisabeth Bellows and/or Liza Catino), praying, reading the Bible stories and then doing activities that reinforce the story. The CE Board follows the Narrative Lectionary and Pastor Brent's suggested themes. We brainstorm craft, drama or learning activities to yield creative and varied activities. We are extremely grateful for our storytelling leaders and assistants – Terry Wise, Ted Randolph, Cindy Brown, Cathy Clark, Jon Geldert, Elizabeth Young, Diane Piraino, Elizabeth Evans, Hannah Fries, Ashley Collins, Megan Kolano, Charlotte Rodgers, Kirsten Fredsall, Casey Jones, Martha Floyd, Vicky Cooper, Elisabeth Bellows, Jeremy Ridenour, Rich Geiler and Kim Ruffing. We have increased the number of volunteers (which is great) but we continue to find that members of the CE Board staff the majority of lead storytelling positions.

This year, Elisabeth Bellows led and organized the children in writing, creating costumes, rehearsing and performing a Christmas skit. The skit took place during an Advent worship service. The children were very enthusiastic about the project and it was a meaningful experience for them. The adults were able to learn something about the novel perspective that children bring to a Christmas story. A special thank you to Elisabeth and the volunteers who helped make this special event happen.

The youth group met monthly this year, which represents a significant increase from last year. Fall activities included boating at Benedict Pond, an ice cream buffet, and making crafts at the all-church potluck and Advent craft party. Winter activities included seeing Naumkeag, game nights and sponsoring a winter-clothing drive for those affected by the hurricane in Asheville, NC. Parents and youth also attended meetings to discuss possible new programs of mentorship, confirmation and church membership. Attendance at Youth Group ranged from 3 to 10 youths. The Youth Group planning team was Terry Wise, Elisabeth Bellows, Diane Piraino and Ted Randolph – thank you for your tireless efforts to coordinate, plan and shepherd the various events. Looking ahead to next year, we will need more adults to get involved in planning and executing the expanded youth program.

Our nursery care providers for the year were Emily Goudey, Scarlett Richter and Rae Geddes. Scarlett and Rae have been with us since September. We're delighted that families are assured about having nursery care each Sunday.

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

In Adult Education, we held numerous small group studies. CE offered multiple adult education studies that were led by Jeremy Ridenour, including a book group focused on the theologian Jürgen Moltmann. During Advent, a small group gathered together to discuss Dietrich Bonhoeffer's writings on Advent and Christmas. For the season of Lent, Jeremy Ridenour and Rick Floyd co-taught a class on the doctrine of atonement. Pastor Brent led a book group during the fall on the book of Genesis and a supper club that read Mark Longhurst's *The Holy Ordinary*. Also, a huge thank you to Rick Floyd for continuing his weekly Bible study. The convening of groups continues to be a vital part of growing our collective faith and our connection to one another. Thank you to all who led or participated in these small group studies.

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

Respectively submitted by the CE Board - Kim Ruffing (Chair), Vicky Cooper, Elisabeth Bellows, Jeremy Ridenour and Rich Geiler.

BOARD OF DEACONS

We welcomed new members, Gary Cilley, Helen McCormick, and Elizabeth Young.

We defined our goals for the year:

- 1) To facilitate congregants' opportunities to communicate with "the church family," access the pastor, and contribute personal prayers during service;
- 2) upgrade the pew bibles;
- 3) support the pastor both during worship and in addressing pastoral care needs that arise in the church family; and
- 4) create an opportunity for church youth to engage in some aspects of worship services.

Spearheaded by Drea Pecor, the Prayer and Welcome Cards were revised and placed in card holders in the pews. The attractive presentation and simplicity of the materials foster participation during prayer time and contribute to the "extravagant welcome" of visitors to the church.

Updated New Revised Standard Version Bibles were purchased in the fall to replace extant bibles. Congregants were invited to donate \$15 for a bible given in honor or memory of a loved one. The donations fully covered the cost of the new bibles. We thank Elizabeth Evans for her skill inscribing each bible's bookplate.

Throughout the year, the deacons helped develop efforts to make the children's experience of the worship service meaningful and age-appropriate: the children attend communion each month, and every week share their Sunday School experiences during Children's Time, when they often express their understanding of the featured Bible story studied in class as well.

"Supporting the pastor" addresses both traditional elements of worship and imagining new ways to interpret our well-loved practices. Beyond weekly meetings with the pastor to ensure the smooth execution of our worship service, the deacons reviewed worship practices at our monthly meetings, and discussed ways to strengthen the worship service, including drafting a document on applause in church; reviving the Sunday flower ministry; and providing a donkey for Palm Sunday.

We assisted the pastor in creating a place of peace, and a worship service of hope and reconciliation, on Election Day. A self-led liturgical program and prayers were made available from 7:00am-7:00pm, and a deacon was on hand in the sanctuary to help if needed. A prayer service followed at 7:00 as the polls were closing. Community and church members remarked how helpful the support was in the context of this election process.

Advent and Holy Week emphasized services that focused on how the stories of those seasons resonate meaningfully. The Christmas Eve service, as well as two Easter worship services, provided "extra" engagement with people in the community and visitors to the area. Those services were richly augmented by music from Berkshire Brass (and the singers "Formerly

Known as Quintessential.”) We are grateful for them--and all the musicians who have enriched worship this year.

We have a plan to engage our youth actively in worship service. We hope that this engagement will encourage them to become active participants in future services as they mature into leaders of their communities.

We wish to thank Deacon Sarah Conly for her artistry, humor, energy, and can-do attitude during her term of service on the board. We also wish to express our gratitude to Pastor Brent for his wisdom and leadership, which have made this year such a rich and meaningful experience for all of us.

~ Gary Cilley and Elizabeth Young, on behalf of David Anderegg, Sarah Conly, Helen McCormick, and Drea Pecor

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Trustees, through the Stewardship subcommittee, conducted the campaign to fund the operating budget. Pledges totaled \$255,200 with expectation for additional new member pledges throughout the year. Individuals on the Stewardship subcommittee included Frank Russell, Chair, Joe Catino, Don Rodgers, Treasurer Patty Strauch, and Pastor Brent. Financial Secretary Marion Pomeroy provided invaluable support for the team as well. The Trustees manage the finances and assets of the church on an ongoing basis: we have also undertaken efforts to maintain and beautify our grounds with flowers and trees.

The primary focus for the Trustees over the past year has been to manage the projects funded by the Capital Campaign. The Campaign was initiated in 2021. Pledge commitments were to span up to three years, 2022-2024. A total of \$756K was pledged by the congregation and friends of the congregation along with \$200K pledged through grants. The initial list of projects was estimated to cost more than \$1.2 million, (in 2020). Of course, over the term many of the projected costs were more than estimated due to inflation so additional monies will be needed to complete all the high priority projects. Also, it should be noted that as projects are planned and executed, we are considering ways to make our church more accessible to individuals with mobility issues.

Capital Campaign Projects

The following is a list of the completed projects and those soon to be completed.

Completed in 2022:

- Reset Sanctuary front steps and new railings
- Hallway and office renovations
- Egress lighting per Town code and electrical repairs
- Exterior painting classroom windows and facias
- Weatherization and insulation of church and manse basements
- Accessibility ramp design, stonework and automatic door
- Manse: new roof, rebuild three chimneys

Completed in 2023:

- Sanctuary: pew encapsulation and painting, mahogany pew refurbishment, prime and paint windowsills, baseboard trim, paint upper balcony molding
- JE Roof rehab: north and east slopes, deep valley between JE and main church and downspout, flat shelves, and other roof areas
- Organ repair: Initiate contract, place deposit and schedule work
- Electrical service upgrade

Completed in 2024:

- Organ repair
- Steeple repair and painting; repointing front brick facade
- Manse: remodel first floor half bath to include a shower

- Replace front walkway and landing area
- JE/Kitchen plan and design under contract

Completed in 2025:

- Narthex wall and ceiling repair and painting

We have spent \$924K on the above projects.

For the coming year:

The JE room/kitchen project is currently in detailed design. The current estimate for completion is \$221K including a new stove. We are currently approximately \$100K short of this amount which we will need to raise to complete the project. Construction is planned for January-March 2026.

There are two additional high priority projects being addressed regarding the Manse: 1) painting the outside structure and 2) replacing the windows. These two items are long overdue and are currently being scoped and priced by the Trustees. We will be seeking funding for these projects as well.

Thanks to all those who accomplished these many projects and to the congregation for the needed financial support. The repairs to the organ have been very successful and we all appreciate the wonderful playing of our organists each week. The work completed on the steeple and front of the church is also impressive. Again, thanks to all who supported this work.

We are blessed to have a very capable team managing the work of the church. Thanks to Marion Pomeroy, Financial Secretary, for assisting with the Stewardship and Capital campaigns, and diligently recording and reporting pledges. Thanks to Will Garrison, Administrator, who keeps our church office running smoothly and handles sexton duties as well. A key contributor is Patty Strauch, Treasurer, who carefully manages our annual budget as well as expenditures from the Capital Campaign. Thanks to Frank Russell, Chair of the Endowment Committee who manages our investments. A special thank you to Pastor Brent for the inspirational leadership he provides to all of us.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Rodgers, Chair; Tim Bosworth, Bronly Boyd, Joe Catino, Cathy Clark, Brian Hyatt, Christine Rasmussen, and Patty Strauch

BOARD OF MISSION AND ACTION

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
- James 2:14-17

We continued to review and support local community, national and international needs as they arose. We kept the congregation informed of our activities and involved them where possible. We supported the Justice Task Force's (now the Social Justice Committee) efforts as they moved forward with active processes to address social justice issues.

LOCAL OUTREACH

Housing Insecurity:

We gave financial support to the Construct, "Warm Up the Winter" Campaign, Berkshire Housing Services, Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity, and ServiceNet (administers homeless shelter in Pittsfield).

Food Insecurity:

People's Pantry: We financially supported the People's Pantry in Great Barrington and regularly delivered goods donated by our congregation.

Pop Up Pantry: We continued to supply and stock our own congregation's Pop-Up Pantry twice a week to provide emergency nonperishable food goods 24/7.

Cathedral of the Beloved in Pittsfield: This ministry provides community to the homeless and vulnerable throughout the week. On Sundays, different churches take turns preparing and offering a meal after their worship service in Pittsfield - on the lawn at St Joseph's Church in summer, indoors at the First United Methodist Church through the winter. Our church provided 2 meals to Cathedral of the Beloved during the year, October 23, 2024 and April 6, 2025. Twelve to fifteen members are involved each time, shopping, cooking and serving the meal.

Active Prayer of Thanksgiving: We continued the practice of bringing non-perishable food items and/or monetary donations to be given to local food pantries. We alternate our donations between our Pop-Up Pantry and the People's Pantry in Great Barrington. This is an act of gratitude after receiving communion.

OTHER LOCAL OUTREACH

Christmas Giving Tree: Our congregation gave gifts through Construct (Pine Woods in Stockbridge), and the Elizabeth Freeman Center. Thanks to the members of our congregation and visitors who selected tags from the tree and purchased the requested gifts, we were able to provide 130 presents to these two agencies who distributed them to families in need.

Riverbrook: Our longstanding relationship with the women at Riverbrook continued. At the Budget Committee's recommendation, the funding for the work the women do has been moved into the M&A budget for 2024. Funds will be moved out of Office Supplies and Sexton Support

to cover the \$1,900.00 line item. It has been renamed Riverbrook Employment Partnership to reflect the weekly work the women do at the church. It is hoped this transition might lead to increased interaction and activities with the women at Riverbrook. It also aligns the budget with other Boards, namely the nursery workers under Christian Ed. Supervision and coordination of the program will continue by Will.

We provided financial support to the Berkshire Immigration Center and the Berkshire Coalition for Suicide Prevention.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH

We provided disaster and crisis relief through the UCC Disaster Ministries and Americares for Hurricanes Helene and Milton, the Israel-Gaza War, the war in Ukraine, Afghanistan earthquake relief Sudan Emergency Relief and the California Wildfires.

We supported the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the ACLU, and World Central Kitchen.

UCC Mission Offerings:

The UCC collects 4 mission offerings with funds going to support vital ministries that address justice initiatives, humanitarian and development needs, disaster relief and financial support for those who serve the church and are facing financial difficulties. Beginning in 2024 we brought these offerings to the congregation to increase awareness of these ministries and to encourage our broader participation with other UCC churches nationally. The offerings include Neighbors in Need (October), The Christmas Fund (Christmas Eve), One Great Hour of Sharing (Lent), and Strengthen the Church (Pentecost). Many, many thanks to all who contributed so generously to these special offerings. The fifth UCC collection, Our Church's Wider Mission that provides funding for conferences and the national ministries of the UCC is provided from the Mission and Action budget.

PASTOR'S DISCRETIONARY FUND

A portion of the M&A budget is designated as the Pastor's Discretionary Fund to assist those with emergency financial needs.

RESTRICTED FUNDS

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

Special Thanks:

To Liza Catino who, in addition to the many other roles she plays in our church life, was acting Chair of the Board of Mission and Action from May-December 2024 and to Ronnie Cunningham and Marion Pomeroy for contributing their time and talents to Mission and Action these past three years.

~ Beth Cilley, Chair; Alice Collins, Ronnie Cunningham, Anna Smith, Marion Pomeroy

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

(Formerly the Justice Task Force)

In February of 2024 our congregation unanimously accepted a land acknowledgment with a commitment, to the Stockbridge-Munsee community of the Mohican tribe, to work with them around any land disturbance on this property that is sacred both to them and to us.

When our group was formed, Council gave us two charges:

Our first charge was to develop a Land Acknowledgment. We have learned that Land Acknowledgment is an ongoing process. We continue to work with tribal representatives around projects involving land disturbance. We have also received Council approval to place a bronze plaque at the JE church entrance. That plaque has been ordered and should be installed by fall. We see this as a public statement of our ongoing commitment to the tribe and to “building a more inclusive and equitable space for all.”

Our second charge was to develop a process by which we, as a congregation, can continue to address Social Justice issues. To aid us in our charge, we worked extensively with Rev. Noah Brewer-Wallin, Assistant Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ. In September, Rev. Brewer-Wallin came to our church to present a workshop on the tools of community organizing. The evening program was attended by representatives of every church board and was greatly appreciated. Our follow-up work with him has finally led to a protocol, based on the tools we have learned, which has recently been approved by Council. We are excited about the completion of this part of the work and look forward to sharing more information about it with the congregation in the upcoming months.

~ John Canning, Martha Floyd, Michael Lynch, Diane Piraino, Charlotte Rodgers

BOARD OF GROWTH AND FELLOWSHIP

The Board of Growth & Fellowship is charged with providing opportunities to bring members, friends, and visitors together in fellowship. It has been an amazing year of growth from our vantage point. We've seen an increase in attendance during Fellowship Hour each week where folks of all ages linger and build friendships. Guests and visitors experience the warmth of the congregation and come back for more.

Special events have included Rally Day in collaboration with the Board of Christian Education, a reception for members at Kimball Farms, an Advent Potluck, an All-Church Birthday Potluck, Community Dinners for Minister of Music candidates in collaboration with the Search Committee, a reception for the rededication of the organ in collaboration with the Board of Music, and another collaboration with the Board of Music, honoring Tracy Wilson. Collaboration with other board members has enhanced fellowship among us and created a more integrated approach to our various endeavors.

Our visit to Kimball Farms last Fall led to G&F overseeing transportation for residents to attend church each week. We have continued to send handwritten birthday cards to members each month. We also send a greeting to visitors who leave cards during worship. These outreach efforts send the message that everyone is loved and valued, and we are glad to welcome all to our church community

~ Donna Jacobs, Chair; Bob Doerr, Ted Randolph, and Tom Ruffing.

BOARD OF MUSIC

The Board of Music began the year with two goals: further define the role of the board and help promote the Music on Main concerts. This all changed with Peter Frost's announcement in July that he would be leaving in August! Fortunately for the board, and the church, Tracy Wilson agreed to serve 10 hours per week through December (and, eventually, through Easter).

Subsequently, the board's focus throughout 2024-25 followed two phases. Throughout the fall, recognizing the recent challenges of attracting and keeping Ministers of Music, we reflected on the roles of the Board of Music and of the Minister of Music support team. We tried to analyze the "Culture of Music" in this church. It is a blessing to be in an environment so steeped in music and with such a wealth of talent. The flip side is that striving for excellence can be stressful. How do we communicate with each other? How do we handle constructive feedback? The board developed a questionnaire asking for particular preferences in types of hymns and worship music as well as suggestions for other genres that might be offered. These were available in the JE Room following worship in October and early November as well as online. Not surprisingly, the Music program is viewed as a tremendous plus, and there were a variety of preferences.

Once into the new year the board focused on joyful celebrations. Tracy Wilson had arranged a special recital on March 1st to rededicate the Johnson organ. The entire board worked on the reception following the concert, but special thanks to Linda Hoddy for coordinating with the Service League and G&F. Then on April 6th the church thanked and blessed Tracy for her sixth time filling in as Director of Music. We hosted another festive reception with the assistance of the Service League and G&F.

Throughout the year Brian Farrell served on the Search Committee for a new Minister of Music and kept the board up to date. On April 9th we had an opportunity to meet with Sean Lewis before the Community Supper and choir rehearsal. Kudos to the entire Search Committee! We look forward to working with Sean as he (and all of us) make this transition into a new relationship.

It is important to acknowledge the breadth of music here. In addition to the adult choir, we are blessed to have a growing bell choir led by Mary Jo Erikson. The adult choir and bell choir alternate leading music during worship services. We also have a growing children's choir led by volunteers.

The Board bids farewell this year to Michael Deegan who served as chair (and chief photoshopper for flyers) and Linda Hoddy. Brian Farrell, Mary Hoeltzel and Janet Canning look forward to working with two new board members as we embark on a new phase.

**Addendum from Tracy Wilson, Minister of Music Pro Tempore
(August 2024-April 20, 2025)**

I would like to acknowledge the deep and dedicated commitment from the choir and section leaders (Amy, Liza, Rich, John) for sharing their talents and bringing the music making of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter Sunday to such high levels. Thank you to Amy, Rich, and John for soloing both on Christmas Eve and Easter, and thank you to the Bell Choir for your monthly offerings and joining in on Christmas Eve and Easter. Thank you to Berkshire Brass for joining us to celebrate Easter. And always, a big thank you to David and Ron for stepping up to the keyboard to cover Sunday services, and soloists within our midst including Doug and Jack. We are all blessed with incredible and talented musicians within our church and beyond.

THE SEARCH COMMITTEE FOR THE MINISTER OF MUSIC



Music is an angel

Singing out from the skies as she flies

Music is love

Music is the food of all moods

Music is perfect and it is good for you

(Sylvia Chidi)



The Minister of Music Search Committee was tasked with recommending a single candidate to the Church Council for hiring. We started this process in September with Liza Catino, Chair, Brian Farrell, Board of Music representative, Cindy Brown, Jon Geldert, Deb McMenamy, Gary Schieneman, and Brent Damrow (ex-officio). We agreed that we were looking for someone who was equally comfortable on the organ and piano; a person with knowledge of church music; an effective teacher and choir director; and a kind person who could create meaningful and collaborative relationships.

We identified best practices in hiring, advertised the position, shared information with the congregation, and met regularly to accomplish these goals. We started to receive resumés in October, sending follow-up essay questions for further clarification. After our first in-person interviews, one candidate outshone the rest. Sean Lewis impressed us with his musicianship, his depth and breadth of experience, his excellent teaching and conducting abilities, his maturity, and especially his kindness and humility.

As we have reiterated throughout this process, we were not attempting to find the perfect person. We wanted to hire the right person. And in Sean Lewis, we have found the right person.

Sean Lewis, having been approved by the Church Council on April 16th, will start his new job as Minister of Music on Sunday, June 8th. We look forward to experiencing Sean's gifts together as a congregation, as we continue to engage in our mission as a church, together.

~ Liza Catino, Chair; Cindy Brown, Brian Farrell, Jon Geldert, Deb McMenamy, Gary Schieneman, Rev. Brent Damrow (ex-officio)

SERVICE LEAGUE

The Service League continues to meet on a weekly basis on Friday mornings. During these meetings we prepare for our Spring Fair and Holly Fair fund-raisers, and receptions in support of other church events upon request.

The income from fairs, totaling \$6325.05, is as follows:

Holly Fair 2024	\$5049.05
Spring Fair 2025	1276.00

We distribute this money to three categories: To the Church, to the local community, and to national and international organizations. This year, we made donations totaling \$7300 as follows:

To the Church, we contributed to the Scholarship Fund	\$2000.00
Fund for improvement of the JE Room	300.00

In the local community, we contributed to

Construct	500.00
The Backpack Project	500.00
Elizabeth Freeman Center	500.00
South County Food Pantry	500.00

To national and international needs, we donated

Doctors Without Borders	1000.00
Americares	1000.00
World Central Kitchen	1000.00

In addition to these donations, we collect contributions for The People's Pantry at each of our monthly business meetings.

The success of these efforts is heavily dependent on the support and participation of members of the congregation, through donations of goods and labor, for which we are very grateful. We would not be able to continue these fund-raisers without that support.

Respectfully submitted,
Margaret Hornick

STOCKBRIDGE FESTIVAL CHORUS

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

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

Saturday, December 14, 2024 concert featured two significant works by Ralph Vaughan Williams: Magnificat for Contralto and Women's Chorus, and Fantasia on Christmas Carols. Soloist for the Magnificat was Vira Slywotzky who is a champion of Ukrainian music and history, so the concert also included two Ukrainian carols, with John Demler joining in on a duet. Another piece on the concert was The Advent Rose by Dale Jergenson, recently deceased husband of Pat Price. Bob Logan was the piano accompanist, Cathy Mohn on flute for the Magnificat and Annabelle Hoffman, cello, for the Fantasia.

Saturday, April 12, 2025 the Festival Chorus presented Mozart's Requiem and In The Darkest Hour by David Stone, recently deceased son of Fran and Susan Stone, both singers in Festival Chorus. Brass and timpani accompanied the Requiem, and the solo quartet members were Samantha Talora, Mary Verdi, Rich Geiler and John Demler. Aaron Likness was the piano accompanist and Ed Lawrence was the organist for the Mozart.

The Festival Chorus is open to any interested singer.

Tracy Wilson, Music Director, SFC