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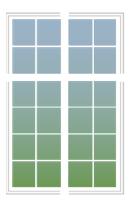


June 2025

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

<b>June 2025</b>	The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge
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	2	3	4	4	6	7
Pride Worship 10:00am		Brent's Sabbath Day Al-Anon 7.00pm AA 8:00pm	Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Council 7:00pm	Book Club – How Firm a Foundation – 6:00pm	Service League 10:30am	Al-Anon 5:00pm
8	6	10	11	12	13	14
Worship 10:00am Welcome reception for Sean Lewis 11:15am Berkshire Waldorf High School grad. 2:00pm		Brent's Sabbath Day Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Community Supper 5:30pm Bells Fundraiser 6:30pm	Book Club – How Firm a Foundation – 6:00pm	Service League 10:30am	Al-Anon 5:00pm
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Worship 10:00am		Brent's Sabbath Day Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm	Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 8:00pm	Juneteenth	Newsletter deadline Service League 10:30am	Al-Anon 5.00pm
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Worship 10:00am Strawberry Social		Brent's Sabbath Day Al-Anon 7.00pm AA 8:00pm	Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00		Service League 10:30am	Al-Anon 5.00pm
29 Worship 10:00am	30				Yoga Classes Wednesdays, at 9:00am	2 <sup>nd</sup> Nature Arts M-T-W, 3:15 – 5:30pm, through June 11.



# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

## **June 2025 Newsletter**

Dear Church Family,

In J.R.R. Tolkien's masterpiece The Lord of the Rings, an intrepid group sets out on a journey to save the world against formidable odds. It isn't long before the energy and purpose so present at their departure gives way to the reality of their predicament. They become literally and figuratively lost in the dark Mines of Moria. Gandalf, their leader, has the whole group sit down. Then, Frodo, the smallest of them carrying the biggest burden confides, "I wish it need not have happened in my time." "So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

I wonder if we too are at a similar moment. In our own times, we have come together to engage our prayers and our lives on great topics despite steep odds: wars in Ukraine and Gaza/Israel, political discord in Washington, legal disputes in the Supreme Court, and the division that has shown up in our families as a result. I remember as we lifted them in worship or talked about them at meetings, each time we recognized the formidable odds yet found energy, purpose, and hope in naming them and addressing them. I wonder if we too are feeling a bit lost – wondering whether anything is moving in a good direction or whether it all feels like a downward spiral.

Barbara Brown Taylor advises we follow Gandalf's lead and first, sit down. In Learning to Walk in the Dark, she reflects that all too often when the church finds itself lost in deep dark places like the Mines of Moria, we jump into action turning on every light in order to turn the dark into light. But when that proves beyond us and when all our spotlights and flashlights dim or go out, we don't know what to do. She advises that if the dark is persistent, we should sit down and get used to it - not to give in but to lose our fear and to see a way to live even in its midst. It is the same logic that the Hebrew prophets advised in the time of the exile. People were to make their homes where they were - not to give in but to hold on, to have hope, to remember God.

Richard Rohr's work The Tears of Things has given me great comfort for these times. It explores how to make our homes now in what he calls "an age of outrage." Through the Hebrew prophets Rohr offers a path to real hope and honest living. He starts by asking us to sit and acknowledge our own vulnerability, fears, and tears. Like the poet Christian Wiman he asserts that when we come to the end of all we know and all our striving there we find not only the God of our times, but the God who has acted in all times to bring about restoration. It was a great blessing.

Sometime after that fellowship sat down in the mines, Gandalf got back up. When Frodo asked if he had remembered the way out, Gandalf smiled and said, "no, but the air smells less foul this way." That was enough to stoke the hope of that fellowship and they rose and set off again. May this summer offer us the chance to sit and take stock. I have extra copies of Rohr's book and I would welcome company in reading it and thinking about it. I imagine sometime later this summer gathering all who have read for a time of food, drink, and conversation. I believe that Rohr and the Prophets might eventually help us discern in our own times where the air is less foul so that we might find hope and set off once again. Grace and peace in these times.

#### Brent

## **Music Notes**

As you read this, my time with all of you as Minister of Music in Stockbridge most likely won't have started quite yet. Last month, LIza and Jon eloquently and graciously shared some insights with you about the musician I am, my professional experiences, and a bit about some of my other interests. As June approaches, I was asked to share a little more with you, and what follows is in no particular order.

Beyond music, I have a lot of interests that keep me busy. I love spending time with and taking care of my family, traveling, and visiting friends. I enjoy tackling DIY projects around my house and yard. I love planting and cultivating my vegetable garden, as it's something that connects me to my grandparents (though my vegetables never come close to being what theirs were!), and it brings me joy to see it grow from seed to harvesting!

I will watch, play, and talk about all kinds of sports - golf, baseball, basketball, football, Formula 1, soccer, or rugby, to name a few. Growing up in Connecticut I am one of those Red Sox/NY Giants fans when it comes to MLB and NFL; I grew up in a split home - my dad a life-long Yankees fan and my mom loyal to the Red Sox. Needless to say, the events of the fall of 2004 brought me much joy! I love being on



#### HAPPY JUNE BIRTHDAYS

	L DIRTIDITIO
June 1	Lynda Morse
June 2	Randy Johnson
June 2	Rebecca Hall
June 6	Evelyn Battaglia
	Beth Rodgers
June 7	Mary Hoeltzel
	Barbara Moore
June 12	Michael Deegan
June 12	Joe Catino
June 13	Anne Hutchinson
June 16	Thomas Frelinghuysen
June 19	Fiona Brown
	Ruth Wheat
June 21	Gary Cilley
June 24	Anne Fix
June 26	Pat LaBagh
June 28	Becky Smith

the golf course and I try to do so as much as possible this time of year, though given my scoring average, sometimes I'm not sure why I continue. I am a founding (fan) member and season ticket holder for the New England Free Jacks, the Major League Rugby team in Quincy, MA, and I love international rugby (Wales and Ireland especially).

When it comes to my musical tastes, Billy Joel, James Taylor, Marc Cohn, Bruce Hornsby, Howard Jones, John Pizzarelli, and Dianna Krall top my list, but the list is long and varied! Nothing compares to live music and being there in the moment. My favorite musical to have seen on Broadway is *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812* (saw it three times in one summer); my favorite musical to have been music director and conductor for is *In the Heights.* 

I hope all of this gives you some more insight into who I am and what my interests are. I'm looking forward to beginning my time with you in Stockbridge, getting to know more of you, and having you come to know more of me. See you on June 8th! ~ Sean Lewis

#### Fun & Games, and Formidable Obstacles, of Course

With dexterity and determination, five youth tried out Chinese Jump Rope, then tackled the Formidable Obstacle Course, the three-legged races, and the clothing relay. What was especially fun was the spontaneity of it. Can't get the course set up ahead of time? No problem, the kids can put it together! They did a great job of that, and then did a great job of running it, over and over again, in imaginative ways... Did I mention the blind-folded, three-legged version?

The course took up the entire JE Room, half the hallway, the Nursery, and the ramp outside. What were the obstacles? Hop-Scotch, Army Crawl, Stepping Stones, Bowling Alley, Bag Pitch, Balance Beam with Egg-in-a-Spoon Combo, Bubble Blow, Ramp Rappel, Sawhorse Hop, Somersault (or Roll), and a grand finale Dive into the Beanbag Chair. We did keep times, and everyone was a winner.

Thanks to Ashley Collins for assisting with this event. Also, thank-you to Megan Kolano for lending her belaying gear for the Ramp Rappel. Other organizers were Ted Randolph, Diane Piraino, and Elisabeth Bellows. Youth participants were Ryleigh Fillio and her friend Sam, Khalil Haddir, and Lilly and Noah Hassmer.

That's it for the Youth Group Programming this year – see you in the Fall!



## From the Service League

Well, the receipts are (mostly) in, and we're happy to report that the Spring Fair netted about \$1500, which will, of course, go to some of our favorite causes. Before we decide that, though, we have a lot of people to thank, and, in no particular order, they are: Rich Geiler, Anna Smith, Liza Catino, Diane Fogarty, Christine Rasmussen, Susan Moor, Charlotte and Don Rodgers, William and Ali Barrett, Cindy Brown, and, of course Will Garrison and Brent Damrow. There are also many contributors, whom I won't attempt to name individually, of baked goods, plants, Grandma's Attic treasures, and helping hands. You know who you are - Thank you! We couldn't do it without you. This was our first Spring Fair (as opposed to Summer Fair) and we welcome any feedback on that shift.

Meanwhile, there are all the other special things about Spring to mention - the graduations, for instance. Anne Hutchinson took off for North Carolina to attend the high school graduation of her grandson Jay, who's now going to study to become a fireman, and we missed Helen McCormick at the Fair because she was in Virginia to celebrate her grandson Bryce's college graduation. He's now headed to veterinary school.

And I wanted to share a picture from my recent trip to the Caucasus. Turns out you can see Mt. Ararat from there (no ark, though) and some of the oldest Christian churches in the world. Who knew! Well, Brent did - but it was news to me. Also, many, many, gorgeous icons depicting saints I'd never heard of, and crosses everywhere ~ Margaret Hornick





## Pollination, anyone?

Herewith a brief note regarding the pollinator garden (the four garden boxes in the parking lot median). The Board of Trustees asked for volunteers to take over the pollinator garden, and I answered the call! The garden has been lovingly maintained for the past three years by Sarah Boyd, Stephanie Bradford, Anna Smith, Liz Murray, and Lenore Sundberg and sustained by a grant from the Lenox Garden Club as well as the church; thank you to these lovely people for their hard work. It is now in my care, and I am doing a lot of research about pollinators and the

gardens they love. It turns out there are a lot of variables to consider: native versus cultivated plants, the needs of different pollinators- bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds- and aesthetic concerns for human observers. (Frankly, bees would probably prefer four full raised beds full of wild bee balm, but that might be less than appealing to the human eye.) One should also consider feeding pollinators in spring, summer and fall if possible. Also in the mix is the sad fact that many native plants and the pollinators that co-evolved with them are now out of phase thanks to global warming; the plants bloom before the pollinators are mature enough to use them.

It's a complicated project. I am, for now, going with a lot of native species and a few cultivars thrown in for color, seasonal rotation and for attracting hummingbirds; they like all things red, but there are not too many native red flowers to choose from that can tolerate full sun. Some of the new plantings are traditionally viewed as weeds: yarrow, goldenrod, common milkweed, and New England asters to name a few. But as we know, all are welcome at the table. ~ David Anderegg

## **Online Bible Study**:

I would like to take a moment to heighten awareness of one of our Christian Education opportunities. Wednesdays at 1:00pm, there is an online Bible study led by The Reverend Dr. Rick Floyd.

It is an informative and fun group activity. We start with a bit of a warmup in which we greet each other, catch up, share joys, voice concerns, and offer prayers before we begin the study session. The assigned scripture verses are read in preparation for Sunday's forthcoming worship service. The passage is read, we take some time to consider it, read it again in a different translation and then we have a lively discussion. Rick helps to put things in context for the participants. One enriching exercise is when we examine the points of view of the participants who appear in the narrative. Toward the end of the hour, we often speculate as to which direction Pastor Brent will go with the sermon. Every once in a great while we actually come close.

The group also shows the regional nature of the congregation. There are days when everybody online is not in Stockbridge. I'm usually seventyfive miles due south of town while on my lunch break at work. I recommend our online Bible study to all. It is a wonderful avenue to follow to nurture our Christian faith in a welcoming environment. Joining has been made to be simple. Begin at the homepage of the Church's website and scroll down to Upcoming Events. Thank you for your attention.



## Pride Worship

Sunday, June 1

As an Open and Affirming Church, we gather in worship at 10:00 a.m. to remember and



proclaim that we are all the beloved children of God each of us made in God's own image. The stirring text from Galatians reminds us that through Christ all barriers have been broken down and that we are all one mosaic in all of our beautiful diversity.

Come and see!

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#### From the retired Minister of Music Pro Tempore, Tracy Wilson:

I'm reminded of the song from White Christmas: "What can you do with a general when he stops being a general?" Well, I'm not a general and I'll probably never stop loving my life in sacred music, but when I officially retired from the Pro Tempore position on Easter Sunday, David and I traveled! We spent two weeks traveling around Malta and Sicily. Here we are on a beautiful estate south of Agrigento, (Mandranova) on the western side of Sicily.



~ Ray Bergmann

## **Growth & Fellowship**

We say good bye to Donna Jacobs, who spent much time over the last year, before and during Fellowship Hour, in the kitchen. Now we'll say hello to her in the JE Room during Fellowship Hour (and maybe occasionally in the kitchen). Thanks for everything, Donna. Meanwhile, we welcome our two new board members, Joanne Conroy and Vicky Cooper, and look forward to a full year of growing and fellowshipping together!

#### OTHER THINGS – Ad hoc Volunteers:

Fay Parker has agreed to provide transportation from and to Kimball Farms regularly on first Sundays of the month, starting in June. If you'd like to drive on other Sundays, or want to know about other volunteer opportunities, we're all ears! – **Reception for MOM**: G & F is collaborating with the Board of Music to

host a Fellowship Hour reception for Sean Lewis, who will play the postlude, June 8 --**Strawberry Social**: -- save the date, June 22, details to follow

Summer Picnic at Lake Mohawk in Glendale, MA: save the dates: July 20, rain date July 27. ~ Ted Randolph, Bob Doerr, Tom Ruffing, Vicky Cooper, Joanne Conroy



Life Update Dept. (Tom Randolph) Fractured Femur Follow-Up re: our son Tom's recovery from a backcountry skiing accident April 19. Thanks for your

concern and prayers! He is doing as well as can be expected for such an injury, and can walk short distances without his crutches. His job allows him to work remotely, but it will be a several more months before overall life and mobility resemble something like normal. ~ Ted & Diane

#### Youth Find a Church Home Away from Home

Andrew Lotto, age 9, and Dominic Lotto, age 8, are still at the stage of life in which they enjoy weekend travel with their great-aunt & their great-uncle. The boys hail from Danbury, Connecticut, yet they are often seen in the Berkshires along with my wife Sengdao and me.

Both of the boys enjoy participating in Church activities. Dominic is outspoken and always asks if we are going to what he calls "The Church." Andrew is daring and got in line quickly to ride the donkey on Palm Sunday. The boys enjoy the Sunday School programs: the singing, the lessons, the crafts which support the lessons and the service projects, including making crowns for the Christmas Pageant and decorating bags for the Easter Egg Hunt. They can often be seen in the balcony during concerts and fundraisers. Sengdao and I are thrilled that the boys have a Church home which is not exactly in their backyard and we are most thankful that they, and we, are received with open arms.

~ Ray Bergmann



Left: Andrew Lotto, with the dark top Right: Dominic Lotto

## A Note to Families about Summer Worship

With Sunday School taking a break for the summer, we want to let families know that we are planning creative ways for our kids to be able to come to worship over the summer and find connection. We will be crafting special parts of worship to engage them in the story and we will be finding meaningful activities for them during worship time. Each week we will send out information to families that alert them to our plans for the upcoming Sunday.

As an example, we have put some shape to the first two Sundays of June:

**June 1 will be Pride Sunday** and is also a communion Sunday. There will be a time with children near the beginning of the service. We will then invite the kids to leave with the Deacons to prepare the communion elements while engaging in conversation. The kids will then bring the elements in and set the communion table before helping the Deacons to serve the meal.

June 8 is Pentecost – it is a great story and a day full of Spirit. We will be inviting the kids to come forward and enjoy the reading as it will be acted out like theater by our adults. Following the reading the kids will have an activity that relates to Pentecost and helps us get ready for the special fellowship hour to welcome Sean Lewis (our new Minister of Music – see page 4).

We hope to make this summer one that both you and your kids look forward to coming to church on Sundays. If you have any questions, ideas, or want to help just give Brent a call.

#### **Bell Choir Fundraiser**

The Bell Choir will be participating in the Festival Conference of the Handbell Musicians of America in Worcester at the end of June. Here is a description of the event (taken from their website): "Handbell ringers, directors and educators from all over New England and beyond will gather for four days of educational workshops, massed ringing rehearsals, concerts, and the opportunity to network with others who share a love for handbells. The event culminates in a closing concert that is free and open to the public, featuring an hour-long presentation of handbell music rung by hundreds of ringers!" They will be holding an event following the Church Community Supper on June 11 in the Sanctuary to help raise funds to offset the costs of the conference. All are welcome to attend and donations will be voluntary. Feel free to bring friends and neighbors (either for the dinner or the bell ringing!).

#### **Richmond Congregational Church Concludes Its Ministry**

After 260 years of congregational life, the Richmond Congregational Church hosted a final worship service on Sunday, May 18 at 3:00 p.m. They invited the community to join them in remembering and blessing. Moderator Ron Hanft, Deacon Gary Cilley, and Pastor Brent were happy to be able to be a part and to represent our church. We invite you to hold the people of that congregation in your prayers as they let go and find new paths and new ways to connect.



## Board of Mission & Action

#### Active Prayer of Thanksgiving: People's Pantry



On June 8, 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 the People's Pantry in Great Barrington.

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

Many thanks for your loving generosity!

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#### ICE Activity in the Berkshires

Most of you are aware of ICE activity and arrests in the Berkshires. The following information has been provided by Roots, Dreams and Mustard seeds, an organization in Pittsfield providing financial and legal assistance to those affected. The Board of Mission and Action has made a donation of \$750 from our Local Needs budget.

May 19, 2025: In light of the fact that two more people from our Berkshire community were arrested yesterday by ICE we are especially mindful of the tenuous instability and fear within our immigrant community and know you all are awaiting an update as to any successful outcomes made possible by your rapid response donations!

To date, \$21,000 has been paid out on behalf of nine families (\$2,500 directed toward cash assistance and \$18,000 paid toward legal representation), leaving us with a few hundred dollars left in the rapid response fund. Out of those nine families, five of our immigrant neighbors have been awarded bond, three of whom are safely home, two others ready themselves for that journey soon, some of them being taken as far as Louisiana and Texas detentions. The 2025 theme for **Strengthen the Church** is **Great and Wide**. This phrase, from Psalm 104, represents the diverse and playful nature of the multitude of ministries the offering supports.

Each Pentecost, we celebrate the church as we have known it, the church we are, and the church that we can be, together. We lean on the story of connecting across difference and listen to the languages of hope. The Strengthen the Church (STC) Offering reflects the shared commitment of people across the United Church of Christ to cooperatively build up the UCC. Conferences and the national setting equally share the gifts given by members and friends through their local congregations. The funds raised support leadership development, new churches, youth ministry, and innovation in existing congregations.

Whether the offering supports an outdoor worshipping community in Wisconsin or the National Ministries MESA team who builds systems to connect pastors and congregations, the movement of God is apparent.

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The final four are still awaiting court dates, and we are patiently anticipating news with hopeful expectation. We want you to know that you made this possible! We don't have data on how many other communities are fighting back, but we are!

Thank you for your unwavering support and commitment to justice. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of those who need it most. In solidarity.

### Roots & Dreams and Mustard Seeds Inc.

## Helping our Community find Connections

At the heart of our faith-filled understanding of the human condition is that it is not good for us to be separated and alone or maybe more to the point it is good for us to be connected in meaningful and reciprocal relationship. In addition, loneliness has been declared a "public health crisis" here in the United States with former U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Muthy noting that it affects more than ½ of all adults.

We know that our church is a place that we find connections – being a church family helps stave off loneliness and build relationship. Our website is an important tool for helping others to find their way here and into connection.

We recognize that church is not the only way for people to be connected. We are blessed to live in an area where there are many organizations that offer the chance to be a part of something and to connect with others. We are planning to create a page on our website that also introduces people to

#### JUNE 21 – A Case for Love

An inter-denominational movie night at Zion Lutheran Church, Pittsfield, at 6:30pm Saturday June 21. Sponsored by Cathedral of the Beloved. Dessert and table conversation after the movie.

Our society is more divided than ever. Many have moved into tribal corners, seeing the world from an "us versus them" point of view. The teachings of Bishop Michael Curry, well-known for his passionate <u>sermon about "The Power of</u> <u>Love</u>" at the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, inspired A CASE FOR LOVE.

This feature-length documentary is a powerful film that examines the question of whether or not love, specifically—unselfish—love, is the solution to the extreme societal and political



divide facing the world. good organizations for connection here in the Berkshires or surrounding areas.

Rather than simply listing all organizations, we want to start by referring people to groups that we are familiar with and have had good experiences through. We want to even provide someone they could contact to find out more information. We are asking you to share organizations that matter to you and that you are part of. Tell us the name of the organization, briefly describe it, and provide a one or two sentence about your experience or why you would recommend that group.

We see this as a ministry to our community – a way to answer an equally central part of our faithfilled understanding – that we are indeed our sibling's keeper. If you have any questions, please contact Brent. You may send your recommendations to Will by email (office@stockbridgeucc.org) or by giving him a call at 413-298-3137 extension 1.

BERKSHIRE ASSOCIATION

Questions? Please contact Pastor Brent.



<b>BOARD OF GROWTH AND FELLOWSHIP</b>	26 CLASS OF 2027	Ted Randolph Bob Doerr Vicky Cooper Joanne Conroy Tom Ruffing	BOARD OF TRUSTEES	CLASS OF 2026 CLASS OF 2027 CLASS OF 2028 Joe Catino Cathy Clark Tim Bosworth Margaret Hornick		Patty Strauch (Treasurer) BOARD OF MUSIC	26	Mary Hoeltzel Dian ration 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     BERKSHIRE ASSOCIATION       Margaret Hornick     Margaret Hornick       John Canning     John Canning
	THE CHURCH		ected at the Annual Meeting shall assume ting. Bylaws: Article 4 D 4. (d)	Terry Wise CL Joe Two-year term ending 2027 Tir	Charlotte Rodgers Bri Two-year term ending 2026 Do	Patty Strauch Two-year term ending 2026	Joshua Hall <u>CL</u>	an M	Liza Catino, Frank Russell	CONS	CLASS OF 2028 Jo Ann Levitt Sk	I EDUCATION	CLASS OF 2028 Rick Floyd	I & ACTION	CLASS OF 2028 Susan Moor Sarah Boyd Lisa Johnson
	OFFICERS, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES OF	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	CLERK	TREASURER	HISTORIAN	LIBRARIAN	AT-LARGE MEMBERS OF COUNCIL	BOARD OF DEACONS	CLASS OF 2026 David Anderegg CLASS OF 2027 Elizabeth Young Drea Pecor Gary Cilley Helen McCormick	BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCAT	CLASS OF 2026 Elisabeth Bellows Jeremy Ridenour Rich Geiler	BOARD OF MISSION & ACTIO	CLASS OF 2026 CLASS OF 2027 Alice Collins Anna Smith Beth Cilley