

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
Stockbridge, Massachusetts

PO Box 825 Stockbridge MA 01262



**December 2025**

Join us **Christmas Eve** for a candlelit worship service. The service begins with preludes at 4:40pm, with the service beginning at 5:00.

This service, one of the largest of the year, requires lots of help. If you would like to be a reader or usher, please contact the church office.

Pastor: The Rev. Brent Damrow - [bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org)

Minister of Music: Sean Lewis – [music@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:music@stockbridgeucc.org)

Administrator/Sexton: Will Garrison – [office@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:office@stockbridgeucc.org)

Financial Secretary: Marion Pomeroy - [finance@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:finance@stockbridgeucc.org)

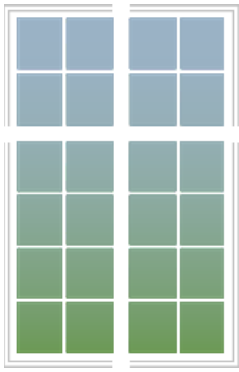
(413) 298-3137 | [www.stockbridgeucc.org](http://www.stockbridgeucc.org)

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

# December 2025

The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge

<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>
<i>Yoga Classes Wednesdays at 9:00am</i>	1 <i>2nd Nature Arts 3:30- 5:15pm</i>	2 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm</i>	3 Morning Prayer 8am Church Council 5:00pm Choir 6:30pm	4 Bell Choir 4:30pm Advent Sermon Series 6:00pm	5 Service League 10:30am	6 Holly Fair 10am- 1:00pm <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm Concert 5:00pm</i>
7 Worship 10:00am Advent potluck and craft fair	8 Building Resiliency 10:30am <i>2nd Nature Arts 3:30- 5:15pm</i>	9 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm</i>	10 Morning Prayer 8 am Choir 6:30pm <i>2nd Nature Arts 3:30- 5:15pm</i>	11 Bell Choir 4:30pm Advent Sermon Series 6:00pm	12 Service League 10:30am	13 Stockbridge Festival Chorus Concert 3:00pm <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
14 Worship 10:00am	15 Building Resiliency 10:30am	16 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Tuesday Club 1:30pm Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm</i>	17 Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Meetings of the Boards 5:00pm – 6:30pm Choir 6:30pm	18 Newsletter deadline Bell Choir 4:30pm Advent Sermon Series 6:00pm	19 Service League 10:30am	20 Wedding 1:00pm <i>Berkshire Lyric Concert 4:00pm Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
21 Worship 10:00am	22	23 Brent's Sabbath Day <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm</i>	24 Bible Study Zoom 1:00 Christmas Eve Service 5:00pm	25 Christmas Day Offices closed	26 Offices closed	27 <i>Al-Anon 5:00pm</i>
28 Worship 10:00am	29 Offices closed	30 Offices closed <i>Al-Anon 7:00pm AA 8:00pm</i>	31 Offices closed Morning Prayer 8 am Bible Study Zoom 1:00		<i>2nd Nature Arts M &amp; W, 3:30 – 5:15 through December 10</i>	



# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

## December 2025 Newsletter

Dear Church Family,

Advent is both an incredibly important and an incredibly special time. It is a time of both memory and anticipation. We recall the coming of Christ to a stable in a tiny town over two thousand years ago even as we prepare to make room in our hearts to welcome him this very year.

At the heart of Advent is light – and even more, the idea of light coming into darkness. In the Book of Isaiah, the great prophet proclaims that “the people who had been living in darkness have seen a great light.” (Isaiah 9:2) In the gospel of John, Jesus is in fact described as that light a light that the darkness tries to put out but cannot.

Advent, here in the Northern Hemisphere, takes place intentionally in the darkest time of the year. During advent, we respond to the growing darkness by bringing light. Small flickering candles appear in windows, great swaths of light cover yards and fences, and throughout the area trees are brought inside, swathed with glowing lights and placed in windows to shine both to the residents and as a gift to everyone.

This year, we will be focusing on light as the central theme of our Advent worship. The writer CS Lewis has commented that the gift of light is not just the light itself but how through the light we see all things. This Advent, we won’t bring candles and light to worship to try to blot out or ignore the darkness, the shadows, the challenges of life. We bring that light that we may see those

difficulties in new ways: that is to see them through the gift of God's love in Christ.

Advent is a time that we do things not primarily that they in themselves make a difference, but rather they remind us of what God has already done and the difference that can make in our lives if we but make room. In the coming weeks each of us will face pressures to send cards to buy gifts, to host parties, to make this Christmas perfect. But all of that risks distracting us from what already makes Christmas perfect - the gift of Incarnate love.

This Advent we will be bringing small flickering lights to our worship to remind us of that fragile gift of a baby in a manger. I invite you to do the same in your life. Before you engage in the many expectations of the season, each time, sit down, light a candle, take a breath and let that light help you see what you are about to do. Let that candle, signifying God’s incarnate love, permeate how you understand decorating, buying, cooking, and sending.

In these times, with all of the shadows that abound, change the world. Do so by first changing your heart. Do so by making room for light to enter in. Do so by remembering that the perfection of Christmas has already been accomplished through the love and light of Christ. Our job is to welcome it and reflect it. What an incredibly important and special opportunity!

Come and see,

**Brent**

### HAPPY DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

December 3 Nicole Arrell  
December 4 Liza Catino  
December 8 Khalil Haddir  
December 12 Ted Hornick  
December 13 Nancy Fitzpatrick  
December 17 Niti Martin  
December 21 Brent Damrow  
Ron Hanft  
Parker Smith  
December 23 Cris Raymond  
December 23 Lisa Johnson  
December 27 William Barrett  
Gary Burke  
December 28 Bruce Wilkens  
December 29 John Canning  
Joe Nicolosi  
December 31 Hal Brink

### Active Prayer of Thanksgiving People's Pantry

On Sunday, December 7, we 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 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!



### Stockbridge Festival Chorus

The annual Christmas concert will celebrate the 80th birthday of composer John Rutter by performing his Magnificat on Saturday, December 13, 3:00pm here at The First Congregational Church. Sir John Rutter is an English composer, conductor, editor and arranger whose works are frequently performed by choral groups around the world, including his popular Requiem and this Magnificat, composed in 1990. Other anthems to be performed include works by Bob Chilcott and John Gardner.

Stockbridge Festival Chorus (SFC) was founded in 1987 by Penna Rose, who was the music director at our church at that time, to broaden the church music program. Currently SFC numbers 55 singers from the wider Berkshire community and is conducted by Tracy Wilson. The hour-long Christmas concert will be accompanied by Aaron Likness, piano; Ed Lawrence, organ; Bailey Forfa on timpani and Hugo Pizarro-Gundelfinger on percussion.

Soprano soloist for the Magnificat is Jordan Rose Lee. Lee earned a Bachelor of Music degree from Western Connecticut State University. At WCSU she was featured as a soloist with the Concert Choir and Chamber Singers and played several leading roles in the Opera Ensemble's productions. She was the singer of choice for the composition students at WCSU, where she debuted several pieces, has been a soloist with Crescendo, Gaudeamus, St. John's Choir, Connecticut Lyric Opera (Young Artist Program), Composer's Choir, and St. Andrew's Music in the Nave. She is the soprano section leader and soloist for South Church Chancel Choir in New Britain, CT. Lee is a Speech and Language Pathologist and works with young children and families with communication disorders.

Admission for the concert is a recommended donation of \$20 and \$10 for members of other Berkshire choruses, payable at the door. People age 18 and under are free. For more information, call 413-298-3137, or email me at [tracywilson290.tw@gmail.com](mailto:tracywilson290.tw@gmail.com). Tracy Wilson

## Advent Sermon Series

Jeremy Ridenour and Rick Floyd are offering a three-week Advent series on Thursdays from 6-7:15 pm on December 4th, 11th, and 18th. For each week, we will read a sermon or reflection by a preacher or theologian. On December 4th, Jeremy's friend, John Azer, who is a Coptic Christian, will present a sermon by an Orthodox theologian and lead a discussion about how Orthodox theology thinks about the incarnation and Christmas. On December 11th, the group will reflect on a sermon by Martin Luther who wrote powerfully about the humanity and humility of Jesus in the incarnation. For the final meeting, the group will discuss an Advent sermon by Fleming Rutledge, a contemporary Episcopal theologian. Please let Jeremy know if you plan to attend: [eremy.ridenour@gmail.com](mailto:eremy.ridenour@gmail.com). Readings will be emailed to the group. There will be no book.

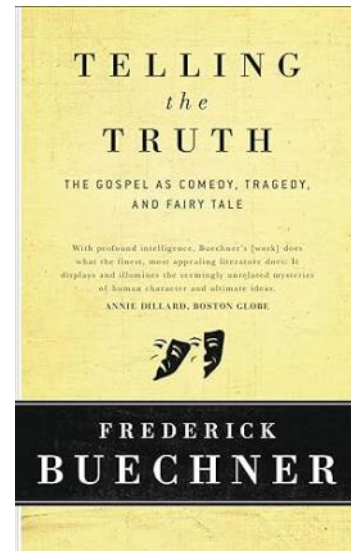
## January Book Group

Jeremy Ridenour and Rick Floyd are offering a four-week study on Frederick Buechner's short book *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Comedy, Tragedy, and Fairy Tale*. Originally delivered in

1977 for the Beecher Lectures through Yale Divinity School, Buechner's book is about how preachers should articulate the gospel, looking at the gospel through the literary lens of comedy, tragedy, and fairy tale. More fundamentally, *Telling the Truth*

examines what the gospel is and what it reveals about God's relationship to humanity. Buechner was both a master theologian and writer who was a finalist for a National Book Award. The group will meet on January 8th, 15th, 22nd, and 29th from 6-7 p.m.

Please let Jeremy know if you are interested: [jeremy.ridenour@gmail.com](mailto:jeremy.ridenour@gmail.com). You can order your own copy online. If you need help to offset expenses, Christian Education can offer assistance.



## The Christmas Fund

For over one hundred years, The Christmas Fund has provided direct financial assistance to the healers in all our lives: retired and active UCC ministers, church workers, and their families. You are part of the community of The Christmas Fund, whether you donate at Christmastime, benefit directly from the grant or leadership programs, or simply believe in our mission to help secure the financial foundation of those engaged in the life of the church.

Envelopes will be distributed on Sunday, December 14. Those envelopes and the vast majority of the Christmas Eve offering will go to ensure more healers receive the loving support of the Church. Your gift is more than just a testament to your belief in the values of the United Church of Christ, it is a critical lifeline for those who depend on these grant programs for care and support.





## The Jonathan Edwards Room

In 1887, the women of the church formed the **Ladies Committee**, dedicated to creating a meeting room, to be attached to the 1824 sanctuary. From “How Firm a Foundation” (2024):

For the next three years fundraising events were held at private homes and the Casino, including suppers, socials, teas, a Christmas bazaar, readings, music, tableaux, ice cream and cake sales, a chocolate drill, and something called a “pound party.” The ladies made their point, and at the April 6, 1889, Annual Meeting, “The members of the parish voted to give the ladies the privilege asked for in their petition, of building church parlors to connect with the church building as soon as sufficient funds have been subscribed to cover all the expenses of building and furnishing the same.”

And then, finally on April 24, 1890, came the announcement:

*Ground was broken last week for the long and much talked of church parlors about to be built by the Congregational society as an annex to their house of worship. The building is to be of brick: Nelson Weeks is credited with having taken the contract for the stone and brick work and George Knowles for the wood work. Mr. Weeks and Mr. Knowles are both first class mechanics and are neighbors on Church street. ...*

On the evening of February 24, 1891, the church parlors were officially dedicated as part of the South Berkshire Fellowship meeting. The Ladies Committee had raised \$4,207.03 toward a cost of \$4,125.82, leaving a balance turned over to the church of \$81.21.

Their work done and the parlors turned over to the congregation debt free, the ladies of the Congregational parish held their first sewing circle in their church parlors that April.

In 1957, the space was dramatically updated as part of the project adding the Sunday School wing to the church building. Named the “Jonathan Edwards Room,” this space has served the church and wider communities for decades.

In 2026, the room will open a new chapter, with freshly painted walls, ceiling, an uncovering of the original wooden floor. We will install new furniture, lighting, and a/v technology. The kitchen will also be updated with new countertops, sinks, and more. Stay tuned! ~ Will Garrison



1990 - The J's: Jay Wise, Jim McMenamy, John Miner, Jack Brown, with Penna Rose at the piano. At a dinner to welcome a delegation from Ukraine.



Holly Fair 1989: Terry Wise, in Berkshire Botanical Garden “Pocket Lady” dress, and daughter Margot on Santa’s lap.

## Advent Potluck Lunch & Crafts Party

GROWTH & FELLOWSHIP will be hosting an Advent potluck lunch after worship service on December 7. There will not be a regular Fellowship Hour, but all are welcome to stay for lunch. A sign-up sheet will be circulated at Fellowship Hour. You may also [sign up](#) on Breeze, or by contacting Will office@stockbridgeucc.org or 298-3137.

Following the lunch, tables will be set up for a crafting extravaganza hosted by the Board of Christian Education. There will be craft projects suitable for all ages and all levels of crafting experience. All materials will be provided.

Please contact

Elisabeth Bellows (ebellowsmd@icloud.com) if you can help set up, clean up, or host a craft table. Start your Advent season with a full belly and a couple of home-made Christmas decorations!

## The Christmas Giving Tree

As we move towards the season of Advent, we invite you to share in the tradition of the Christmas Giving Tree, which offers a wish list of gifts you can purchase to help make a brighter holiday for some of our South County neighbors.

Mission & Action is in contact with Construct, Inc., and the Elizabeth Freeman Center to receive Christmas wish lists from some of their clients.

This year, the Giving Tree will be in the Jonathan Edwards Room beginning on Sunday, November 23. You can choose one or more gift tags from the tree, sign off on the spreadsheet next to the tree, and then return your gift(s) under the tree, wrapped and with tag attached by Sunday, December 14. (Pack a gift receipt with your gift, as appropriate.) We recommend a price range of \$25 - \$40 for each gift.

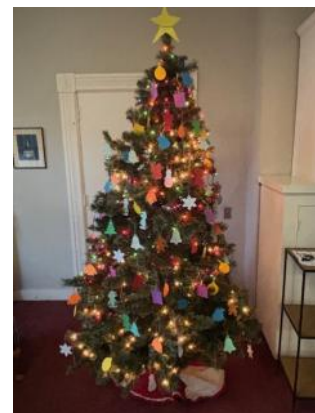
If you are unable to shop, you can also donate to the Giving Tree by sending a check, payable to First Congregational Church, noting "Giving Tree" in the memo line. The Mission & Action elves will do the shopping for you.

If you have any

questions, contact Terry Wise (phone or text: 413-329-2645,

wises@bcn.net) The

Board of Mission & Action thanks you for remembering those in our community who need an extra hand this year. We wish you the Hope, Peace, Joy, Love and Sprit of the Season!



## Family News

Linda Hoddy and John Tracy celebrated milestone birthdays (75 and 80) on Labor Day weekend, with their children and grandchildren from Schenectady and St. Paul, MN. Relatives and friends also zoomed in from Atlanta and Washington DC, for a short video of "Baba's Greatest Life Lessons," produced by Ian, their oldest grandchild.

John's favorite musical performer is Billy Joel. Linda noticed our Minister of Music Sean

Lewis' resume that Sean is also a fan of Billy Joel. So, she surprised John by engaging Sean to sing three songs. He was the hit of the afternoon, performing "Piano Man," "River of Dreams", and "I Love You Just the Way You Are." He even dressed the part, baseball cap and all!

We are very blessed to have Sean, such a versatile performer. He is a treasure! Let's treasure him! Thank you, Sean, for going above and beyond. ~ Linda Hoddy

## From the Service League

By the time you read this, we'll be looking at the Holly Fair, that annual Service-League sponsored Christmas extravaganza, in the rear-view mirror, and I'll be writing a list of the many, many people in the congregation we want to thank for making it a big success. Right now, though, we're just trying to get past Thanksgiving before diving head-first into making centerpieces, baking cookies, transforming the JE Room into a Christmas bazaar, the classroom into Grandma's Attic, and the nursery into Cindy's Cafe. It's always a bit frantic, but always fun, and always for good causes. See you on the other side!

Margaret Hornick, for the Service League



## The Beauty of Christmas

Tis the season of the beauty of Christmas. The joys and the excitement of children of all ages. We all do our best to make the season bright. From decorating our homes, cooking our goodies, etc.

The time has come to find just the right Christmas tree. One child likes that tree way over there. Another child of the family doesn't necessarily agree.

At this point, everyone is getting on edge. The stress starts to rise. As time gets closer to the big day, tensions ease a bit. Especially when Mom and Dad say, "Let's go for a ride to see Christmas lights around town."

All of a sudden it feels like everyone is on the same page. There's a feeling of calmness. Could that calmness be because of the lights? Light affects us in many ways.

Parents have gone through the cleaning, baking, and decorating – or not – in their own homes.

Santa is coming soon. The kids have made their Christmas lists, hoping to get everything listed.

Christmas Eve is here! The family gets dressed up. The children are excited to go to church.

They remembered what it looked like the year before and can't wait to see it again. Will this year be different or the same?

Oh! It's beautiful. There are so many people. The whole sanctuary is filled to the brim. So much joy and happiness to see everyone.

The church is unbelievable. The gorgeous wreaths, simply decorated, hanging along the balcony, and the lamps glowing along the middle aisle. People are holding candles.

Could this be because it is God's house? He knows how we all feel. Christmas Eve is a beautiful moment. It makes people feel the weight of life is not that heavy and we are loved.

The choir starts singing. Sean plays those wonderful sounds that only an organ can bring! Pastor Brent talks to us about light, hope, joys, friendships, and so much more.

The children have been so good checking out the interior of the church, the music, singing, and to Brent himself showing all the love he has for all of us.

God Bless Everyone!

Helen McCormick, for the Board of Deacons





## Advent Devotional

This year's Advent Devotional is back! Written by the popular Still Speaking Writer's Group of the UCC, the devotion offers daily prayers, readings, and reflections to help frame the season. Copies will be available in the Narthex starting on November 30th and will be available on a first come, first serve basis. If we run out, give Will a call in the office and we should be able to send an electronic version to you. The Devotionals are purchased through the Board of Christian Education. Should you wish, you can make a \$5 donation to cover the cost - bring that to Will at your convenience.

The Manse in 1915, soon after it was built.

As part of the capital campaign, we have put on a new roof and repaired chimneys. Next up: replacement windows.

*Photo by George Seeley.*



## The Green Team

There is still time to join the 'Green Team.' This group within our church is dedicated to promoting and implementing sustainable practices to reduce our environmental impact. The Green Team will work to achieve various sustainability goals, such as reducing waste and conserving energy and water. It will also promote sustainable behavior in the members of our congregation and develop programs to educate people on environmental issues.



If you are interested in being part of the Green Team, please contact the church office at (413) 298-3137 or [office@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:office@stockbridgeucc.org).

## Intergenerational Family Advent Series

On November 23 at the Home of the Hassmer-Jones Family in Lee, eight families including nine of our youth gathered for ping pong, a chili supper and the launch of our Narnia Advent program. Using a guide written by the Rev. Heidi Haverkamp we will dive into C.S. Lewis' masterpiece, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*.

The curriculum takes us through the coming of Alsan to break the spell of winter and includes that chance for daily conversations at home and weekly gatherings. To top it all off, we will finish with a journey to Narnia party held as Christmas approaches.

It was a great joy to see our youth connecting and having so much fun! It was wonderful to bring all the families together as we start our adventure. We will give you updates as we go!



## Community

In the midst of the government shutdown and its impact on programs, a resident in Stockbridge wrote an Op-Ed challenging folks in our community to step up and help locally. In response, another local resident made a \$20,000 anonymous donation and asked the church to facilitate the distribution. Thanks to a team of volunteers from Mission and Action, our Treasurer Patty Strauch, Pastor Brent, and especially our Administrator Will the program has already made a huge difference. We have gotten the word out, and distributed already more \$9,000 in gift cards, additional staple goods (thanks to Price Chopper) and paper goods. We will keep spreading the good word and giving out resources until they run out. The gratitude expressed by



those receiving help has been nothing short of amazing. It is another way we are using this place and our hearts and hands to be love in the world.





If you or someone you know has a need for some prepared meals after injury or surgery, or during illness or some other crisis, just tell Administrator Will Garrison (413-298-3137. We will reach out to you to work out the details.

**Drivers needed** for members and friends who live at Kimball Farms (in Lenox) to attend Sunday worship. If you have some availability to help out occasionally, Ted Randolph would love to hear from you. [tedfr4@gmail.com](mailto:tedfr4@gmail.com)

*(1965 Shelby GT350 not provided.)*



The Tuesday Club, which has met at the church for many years, put out a call for canned goods. This is the result from their meeting on November 18.



## Flower Power!

### Flowers for the Communion Table

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. We have organized a simple process whereby members of the congregation can sign up to provide flowers for Sunday worship.

You can sign up to provide flowers using the online registration form [here](#), on the website, or in the weekly email. If you have any questions, ask a Deacon!



# STOCKBRIDGE FESTIVAL CHORUS in concert



**MAGNIFICAT** by John Rutter  
Carols by Bob Chilcott and John Gardner

**Saturday, December 13, 2025**  
**3:00 pm**

**Tracy Wilson, director**

Fifty-five voice chorus    Jordan Rose Lee, soprano  
Ed Lawrence, organ    Aaron Likness, piano

**First Congregational Church**  
**4 Main Street, Stockbridge**

\$20 recommended donation  
\$10 members of local community choirs    free for people 18 and under  
church is fully accessible    for more information, call 413-298-3137

## POINSETTIAS

We invite you to help us transform the sanctuary on Christmas Eve. You may donate one or more poinsettias to the church in honor or memory of someone who is in your heart this Christmas. You can then choose either to take your plant home or allow us to bring it to someone who could use some joy.

To order, find the link in your weekly email, fill out the form, or just call Will in the church office. The gifts will be listed in the Christmas Eve bulletin. **Paper forms may be put in the box attached to the large closet doors in the JE Room.** Deadline for listing is December 15.

How you want the in honor of / in memory of to read:

Your name(s) as you want to be listed in the bulletin:

*Example: In loving memory of John and Jane Doe, from Sam Smith*

Cost: \$20/each

Mailing address: Flowers at FCC, PO Box 825, Stockbridge MA 01262