

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

April 2018 Newsletter

Dear Friends in Christ,

My parents are “clippers” and it makes me happy. At least once a week in Box 895, I look in to find a small, simple envelope from Wisconsin. In that envelope are clippings from a variety of newspapers – some with a political analysis, some with cultural announcements, but many of them written by pastors relating to either the secular or liturgical calendar. Wrapped around those clippings is a single piece of stationery, usually with a heart on top, that sends love and explains why this particular batch of clippings found their way to Stockbridge.

In one recent batch, there was a short clipping about a Lutheran pastor giving thanks for Lent as a season whose heart is rooted in joy - joy for the love of God made flesh, joy for the teachings and ministries of Jesus, joy for the way God works and is still working. I have no doubt that in a batch soon to come there will be another Pastor making a similar argument about Easter and how its heart is also rooted in joy - joy for the victory of life over death, joy for new beginnings, joy for the way God works and is still working. Joy, you see, is part and parcel of every liturgical season, for it is part and parcel of our shared journey with the divine. Here, in this church, we take our calling as followers of Christ seriously. We challenge ourselves to live fully and deeply, to look the world in the eye and offer love. We need to remember equally, especially when times are hard and our reserves running low, simply to focus on the blessings, the joy, the unmerited, unbounded gifts of grace from God.

Did you know that in the days after the first Easter, the Book of Acts tells us that only 120 followers of Jesus remained? Following the crucifixion, the throngs of people who had pressed in to hear what he said, the multitudes who had thrown palm branches at his feet, the onlookers and miracle seekers, had faded away, lost their way, slipped back into the demanding work of living in a broken world.

Just as importantly, though, do you know what those 120 were up to? The Book of Acts tells us they spent days together, days eating together, praying together, sharing communion, engaging in fellowship, days growing closer to God and one another. When they were at the end of their ropes and facing a daunting challenge, they focused on the simple joys of faith. Then, what the story tells us is that the Holy Spirit found them, strengthened them, emboldened them, and then connected them with others who needed a little lift, or a little fire, and joy spread.

This Easter season, our church will continue to be active in worship, service, formation, fellowship, music-making, and welcoming, as we always are. I also hope, that if you are feeling your reserves running low, if you feel battered and tossed, that you do what the earliest followers of Jesus did – find joy! Find joy in the simple gifts of food, fellowship and faith. Find joy this Easter season not with any other goal than to let it permeate your heart and bring you closer to the source of life itself. What happens after that, well, who knows exactly what will happen, but I promise it will be the stuff of miracles!

With love and joy, Brent

From Our Pastoral Assistant

In our harried and often violent world, teenagers struggle to figure out who they are and who they want to be. A growing body of evidence suggests that mindfulness practice can help adolescents navigate these challenges and help them cultivate empathy, as well as, skills for concentration and impulse control. In matters of faith, most teens do not have a clear spiritual identity of their own, and many have no interest in being part of a church community. For some this is because they don't have a connection with the traditional practices of worship and prayer. It was with all of this in mind that I decided to make myself available to meet with teens from our church, and the surrounding community, once a week to teach and practice meditation skills.

The goals of meditation include reducing stress and increasing control of one's thoughts. Meditation also involves experiencing reality as it is; living life with eyes wide open. One specific meditation practice that I teach kids is that of Loving Kindness. This practice is designed to increase love and compassion for ourselves and for our loved ones, for friends, for those we are angry with, and for those we find to be difficult people. It has been suggested that Loving Kindness can protect us from developing and holding on to judgmental thoughts, having ill will, and fostering hostile feelings toward ourselves and others. One thing I'm sure of is that this meditation practice can help us connect to God and to our essential "goodness" as God's creation. If anything, teens need to be assured that they are loved and lovable, so this meditation is perfect for them.

When weather permits, we meet on Wednesdays at 3pm at the church. If you or someone you know might be interested in attending, just give the office a call so we know to expect you!

Peace (and loving kindness),
Pastor Patty Fox

From the Organ Bench

The music committee is putting together a survey, and I hope you'll take the time to complete it and send it back. We are happy to hear any input you have regarding the music program at the church. Do you have favorite hymns? Let us know which ones they are! Loved a Sunday anthem? (or, conversely, would be happy to never hear that one again!) Let us know! Please get it back to us ASAP, and I promise, it will be less painful than filling out your tax forms! Happy Easter!

Catherine Schane-Lydon

OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER

HAPPY APRIL BIRTHDAYS

(Please let someone on the Growth Committee know if we have not included your birthday or listed it incorrectly.)

April 2	Olga Schwede Hannah Alsdorf	April 19	Anna Grace Nimmo Bronwyn Dix
April 7	Bronley Boyd Casey Jones Margaret Bradley Davis	April 22	Keith Raftery
April 8	Virginia Berry	April 23	Seth Ivas
April 11	Tracy Wilson	April 25	Wendy Nicolosi
April 12	Olivia Doerr	April 26	Chet Douglass
April 18	Jack Brown	April 27	Ivy Cote
		April 30	Samuel Connor

PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS:

Cary Quigley; Barbara Kershner; Gail Dunlop, mother of Mary Jane Dunlop; Penney; Colin Cunningham, son of Ronnie Cunningham; Gege Kingston; Lindsay Hermanski; Barbara Bracknell; Morgan Middlebrook; Betsy Wheat; Ann Underwood; Madonna Meagher; Betsey McKeenan; and Jen Germain.

NEWS FROM BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

Growth and Fellowship

Save the Date! The Growth and Fellowship Committee cordially invites you to attend the annual **All-Church Birthday Party** following the service on Sunday, April 29th, in the JE Room. There will be CAKES galore (provided by the church's own talented bakers). There will also be a family-style potluck lunch; we ask that those with last names from A to L bring a main dish, M to Z a side dish (though if you prefer one over the other, bring what you like).



Deacons

HOLY WEEK AND EASTER SCHEDULE

PALM SUNDAY, March 25, 10:00 am worship service: Procession of palms will include our congregation's participants in the New York City March for Our Lives, as well as our choir and children.

MAUNDY THURSDAY, March 29, 7:00 pm worship service: We remember the events of that Thursday long ago as told in Mark's Gospel. The service will include communion and will conclude with a service of light (Tenebrae). All are welcome.

GOOD FRIDAY, March 30, 6:15 pm: – (meet at the First Congregational Church)

Stations of the Cross: We will travel together to the stations up on the hill at Marian Fathers. Engage the ancient tradition of walking in the steps of Christ from Pilate to tomb. Childcare available. If inclement weather, we will worship (using the Stations of the Cross) here at the church.

EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE, April 1, 6:30 am: Join us for a brief worship service at sunrise as we greet this special day! If weather permits, we will be on the church lawn. If weather is inclement, we will meet inside. A light breakfast will follow.

EASTER FESTIVAL WORSHIP, April 1, 10:00 am: Celebrate Christ's resurrection with joy and gladness! And children are invited afterward to an Easter Egg Hunt on the lawn (bring a basket)!

Cindy Brown, Board of Deacons chair

Service League

Ever wonder what we're up to when we're not asking for help with the Holly Fair and the Summer Fair? Well, we meet every Monday morning in the classroom for "work bees", at which we make the crafts we sell, work on service projects such as clean-up buckets for areas struck by natural disasters, school and hygiene kits for refugees, dolls for children undergoing cleft-palate surgery, and much, much more. And we always talk, share stories, and laugh. And we ALWAYS welcome anyone who wants to join us. No special talent required, just come, hang out, enjoy the fellowship (and the coffee and treats). We'd love to see you!

Trustees

The Trustees have a rather unromantic report this month....We've finally managed to remove the paper towels from the bathrooms (hopefully to eliminate the clogging of drains we've experienced) and have replaced those towels with state of the art electronic hand driers. For future reference, if anyone needs to use paper towels to clean anything up in the bathrooms, please toss them in the trash. We also have biodegradable toilet seat cover dispensers to use in place of paper towels.

In other news, the Endowment Subcommittee has nearly completed all signatory requirements to facilitate the shift to our new investment manager, Northeast Investments.

Robert Doerr

Mission and Action

Several lucky people will be asked to serve on our board by the connections committee in the near future. The solid core members you will have the pleasure of working with over the next year are: Anne Hutchinson, Ivy Cote, Jill Fleming and Vicky Cooper.

So what does it take to be successful at Mission & Action? 100% success rate guaranteed if you show up for meetings.

Mission and Action Important Facts

Showing up for meetings: 100%

Monthly Meeting Breakdown:

- New business - 5.0%
- Review of previous minutes - 5.0%
- Budget Report – 10.0%
- Old Business – 10.0%
- Funding Requests – 70.0%

Duties and Responsibilities:

- Treasurer reports – 20.0%
- Organize funding – 30.0%
- Attend monthly Council – 20.0%
- Take minutes/write draft – 10.0%
- Write monthly newsletter – 20.0%



Respectfully submitted,
Madonna Meagher

CHURCH MUSIC SURVEY QUESTIONS

Please leave your completed survey in the basket in the JE Room

The Music Board would love to hear from you about all aspects of our music program. We look forward to your open and honest input. Let us know what moves you, inspires you, lifts you up in worship. If you would like to speak with any of us ~ we welcome the opportunity!

Age: under 30 30-45 45-60 60-75 over 75

Number of years attending Stockbridge UCC: _____

Name (optional but helpful): _____

Give us three hymns you really love and why.

1)

2)

3)

OK, how about your favorite seasonal Hymns

Advent

Christmas

Lent

Easter

While you may value many different styles of music, which of the following do you prefer in congregational worship? (Check all that apply)

_____ Traditional Hymns

_____ Praise music or choruses

_____ Contemporary Hymns

_____ Other contemporary music or songs (not hymns)

_____ Sung responsorial psalms

_____ Classical music or chorales

_____ Southern Gospel Music

_____ African American Spirituals/Gospel

_____ Don't Know

_____ Music or songs from a variety of cultures

_____ No Music or Songs

What kind/style of church music speaks to you most?

What kind/style of music would you like to hear more of?

Rate each of the following as they relate to you personally.

From 1 (Not Important) to 5 (Very Important)

Choir:

Technical execution	1	2	3	4	5
Style of Music/Anthem	1	2	3	4	5
Relevance to Worship Service	1	2	3	4	5
Makes you “feel” something	1	2	3	4	5
Choice of Music	1	2	3	4	5
Use of Soloists	1	2	3	4	5
Participation of children in the music of service	1	2	3	4	5

Hymns:

Familiarity with Hymn	1	2	3	4	5
Text of Hymn	1	2	3	4	5
Style of Hymn	1	2	3	4	5
Difficulty of Hymn	1	2	3	4	5
Relevance of Hymn	1	2	3	4	5

Other:

Gathering Music/Preludes	1	2	3	4	5
Postludes	1	2	3	4	5
Guest Vocalists and Musicians	1	2	3	4	5
Special Music integrated into Worship Service	1	2	3	4	5

How important was the music in your choosing to attend Stockbridge UCC?

Regarding congregational and choir music in the service, do you feel the amount of music is:
Not enough Just right Too much

My vision or hope for our church's music ministry is:

Please complete and return by Sunday, April 15th.

Leave in the basket in the Narthex or the JE Room.

Music Board Members: Patty Strauch, Steve Hassmer, Stephanie Bradford, and Margaret Hornick.

EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS

From your Connections Pals

Dear Friends,

We're soon approaching that time of year when the church comes alive with multiple holy events—and not just in the shift from Lent to Holy Week to Easter—but also in the celebration fifty days later of the renewal of the church through Pentecost. So, we of the Connections Committee invite you not only to celebrate this season, but also to join with us in enlivening and strengthening the church through involvement in service and shared acts of goodness. For that reason, we have compiled a more detailed summary to be made available in the Jonathan Edwards Room of the various Boards' activities. See what wonderful things we're up to!

Please feel free to approach one of us for information on Board membership & involvement and know that we may also be approaching you in the next few months to find out your areas of interest and where you'd enjoy the fellowship and opportunity to give of your gifts and talents. This is the time when the Holy Spirit moves among us. This is the time when we feel the call to be engaged—and, as a result, find ourselves building a network of more robust action and interaction. And this is the time when our combined efforts generate a certain “glow”—just watch the church light up for miles and miles around!!

Sincerely,

Ron Hanft, Deb McMenemy and Jo Ann Levitt

Update on the Vision Implementation Process

Dear Friends,

As our Visioning group continues its efforts, we'd love to have your input. You will remember that the Vision is broken into three main areas of endeavor: *Grounded in God*, *Becoming the Body of Christ*, and the third area, our chosen point of focus: *Responding to Spirit*.

The specific area in development has been called: *“Responding to God's grace (love freely given and fully offered), each of us strives to deepen our Christian relationships with one another and embolden our engagement with the world.”*

Here's what we're giving emphasis to in our thinking and planning:

How do we let interests and passions bubble up to the surface, pointing to new initiatives and ways of interacting?

What kinds of small group engagement can we foster? Are there new areas of service, programming, or pilgrimage to pursue? Can they get us beyond those we already know and into relationship with new folks?

How can such endeavors both build community and become a built-in part of the church ethos?

What other means of deepening our Christian relationships may we consider?

This would be an excellent time to give feedback to our committee members: Martha Floyd, Joyce Hovey, Nick Pohl or myself. Please feel free to call, email or “chat us up” during coffee hour with your thoughts on any of these questions. Thank you!

Jo Ann Levitt



Don't miss this year's Holy Week services and opportunities. They bring us into the story of what happened between the joy of Palm Sunday and the joy of Easter Sunday. Through worship, fellowship and prayer these events remind us of the great brokenness of the world and the even greater love of God. If you have participated in the past, you know how meaningful it can be and how much more joyful Easter feels when it arrives. If you have not yet participated, perhaps this is the year to give it a try. If you have questions about any of these things, please contact Pastor Brent or Pastor Patty.

Maundy Thursday

The term Maundy comes from the Latin *man datum* (or commandment) and is based on the new Commandment Jesus gives his disciples in the Gospel of John: "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another*" ([John 13:34](#)). During worship, we remember the events of the Thursday more than 2,000 years ago including the Last Supper in the Upper Room, prayer in the Garden, betrayal and desertion.

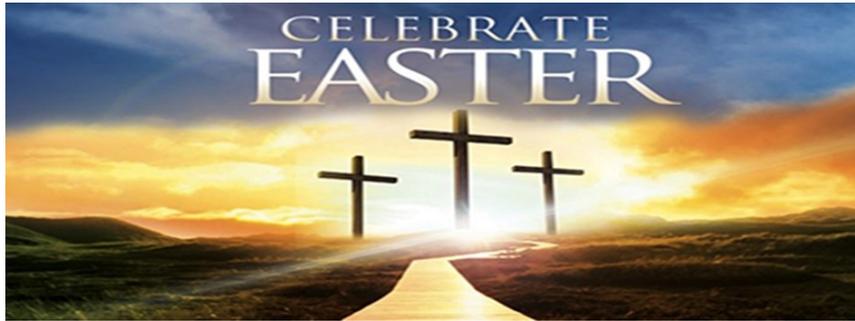
Worship is quiet and contemplative. Using the Gospel of Mark as our guide we will remember that momentous day. Worship will finish with a Service of Lights (*Tenebrae*) where each of twelve candles (representing the 12 disciples) is extinguished as they fade away until only the Christ Candle remains burning. Childcare available upon request. Come and See!

Thursday, March 29
7:00 p.m. – The Sanctuary

Good Friday

On Good Friday, we remember just how far God is willing to go for the sake of love...all the way to the cross! This year we will return to the moving life-sized Stations of the Cross up on Eden Hill (Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception). These stations bring to life and imagination the path of Jesus on Good Friday from judgement to cross to tomb. We will walk the stations together with short prayers to guide our way. We will meet at the church and childcare will be available there. If inclement weather, we will worship using the same stations but here in the Sanctuary. Were you there?

Friday, March 30
6:15 p.m. (Meet at the Church to travel together.)



Easter Sunday – April 1, 2018

Christ is Risen...He is Risen Indeed!

On the most joyful day of the Christian calendar, join together with others to proclaim that love wins, life wins, God wins!

We offer two different services:

Sunrise Service – 6:30 a.m.

(Planned to be outside weather permitting). We experience the rising of the sun and the new beginning of Easter. Alongside the women, we approach the tomb only to find it miraculously empty. With music by Quintessential and fellowship to follow, start your day off with life!

Festival Service – 10:00 a.m.

There will be great hymns, the Easter Story, love breaking forth, Easter Egg hunt for children and much more! Come early and be prepared to remember this stunning, life changing, world altering moment in the greatest love story ever told.

New Nametags

We are excited to announce new nametags for the Congregation. With larger first names and hometowns listed on each tag, we hope that these will help us to extend hospitality and get to know each other better. A few things to remember:

- Please, wear them...they help our visitors and guests to put names and faces together and help those who call our church home know each other better.
- You can choose to have yours available either in the Narthex (front entrance) or the J.E. Room to pick up on Sundays – simply leave your tag in the appropriate bin as you leave.
- You can choose any style. We have started with magnetic tags, but if you prefer another, simply switch out the piece of paper for the style you want (lanyard or clip).
- We have printed from our database. If you wish your name to appear differently or make corrections to your hometown just take a pen and change it before leaving it behind, and we will make the update for you for the next Sunday.
- For now, Growth and Fellowship will be assisting at the table to help people get used to the system and to help visitors. If you would be willing to be a host on a Sunday, please contact Evelyn Battaglia.

Thanks to Growth and Fellowship for their work on this and especially to Mishel Kulibaba Epstein who is volunteering to sort the tags each week and get them ready for the next week.

STOCKBRIDGE FESTIVAL CHORUS

saturday, april 28, 2018 5 pm

first congregational church of stockbridge

4 main street west, stockbridge

O NATA LUX *morten lauridsen*

UBI CARITAS *maurice duruflé*

DONA NOBIS PACEM *ralph vaughan williams*

ANDREA BARGABOS *mezzo soprano*

JOHN DEMLER *baritone*

KAREN LAVOIE, RICHARD STANMEYER *trumpets*

BAILEY FORFA, DEANE PROUTY *percussion*

TRACY WILSON *conductor*

LEE DIXON *piano*

TIM WEISMAN *organ*



*515 recommended admission; 510 for members of local community choirs;
free for children age 18 and under. Tickets purchased at the door. Reception to follow.
Church is handicap accessible. Call 413-298-3137 for more information.*