



# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

## May 2018 Newsletter

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

First it was my husband. Then it was the Moderator. Then others joined in the chorus – “go!” So, I went. The week after Easter, with resurrection still front of mind, I went to New Haven and the hallowed halls of Yale Divinity School, for what was billed as a dialogue: a dialogue about the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. During the two-and-a-half days on campus, we engaged topics ranging from theological relevancy to the shape, form, and function of the church. At each session, three accomplished leaders shared their perspective on the topic at hand. Then, we attendees had a chance to respond and reflect in a large group setting and in small groups at our tables.

As you might imagine, the perspectives spanned the gamut both of substance and emotion. There were cries of joy and pain, visions of the church’s future painted with strokes of possibility as well as dire circumstance, cries of “amen” and “say it isn’t so.” As you also might imagine, some of those perspectives felt more relevant to our journey here in Stockbridge, while others, though compelling and interesting, felt more distant.

Regardless of the topic addressed or perspective being offered, one element that made this conference so life-giving was the chance to hear stories of how attendees were discovering faith and life in different ways, how the circumstances of people’s lives intersected with how they needed the church, or even how they were being hurt by it.

It brought to my mind an experiment that we tried a couple of years ago: inviting those in our church family to tell their stories in worship. To share the ways that faith and church intersect with their lives, the meaning that our church community brings to their lives, or the ways both tangible and intangible that God shows up in the decisions they make each day. People like Nell, Nick, Jon, and others shared in short reflections both what they bring to our faith community and what they take away from it.

More through circumstance than by design, this experiment ceased, but it is one that I am eager to resurrect. You may know that storytelling has become increasingly popular in our culture, whether through programs like The Moth Radio Hour, community storytelling sessions, or even in churches. I think the reason is simple: in our increasingly isolated and divided society, telling our stories provides an opportunity to know and be known, which is at the heart of all relationships, both human and divine.

We often discuss how we don’t just go to church, we become church. Sharing our stories, our hopes, our hurts, our joys, our fears, and our blessings is an important part of doing just that. So if you get a phone call from me asking if you might be willing to share, I hope that you’ll say yes. If you would like to share, please give me a call so that we can talk about it. I’m excited to hear your stories in the months ahead

Peace and Blessings,

Brent

## From Our Pastoral Assistant

On most Sundays during the school year the children of our church leave worship, following the Children's Time, to attend Sunday School. We are blessed to have a sizable group of kids, and I'm thrilled to say that we are pushing the limits of our capabilities. We have two classes: a Primary Class for kids in Pre K through 3rd and a Junior class of kids 4th grade and up.

This year we had four Primary teachers: Alexis Kennedy, Amy Freeman, Casey Jones, and Jenna Knauss. The Junior class had four teachers as well: Ann Hutchinson, Ted Randolph, Diane Piraino, and Joshua Hall. Jill Wheat has graciously stepped in when we have been in need of a substitute. These volunteers have faithfully demonstrated the love of Jesus to our kids each and every Sunday through story telling and activities that bring the Gospel message to life.

This practice of providing children faith formation opportunities is critical to the health and well-being of our congregation. According to the *Cooperative Congregations Studies Partnership*, a multi-faith group of religious researchers and faith leaders, "positive alignments among what members believe, what they uphold, and what they teach and learn are powerful means for strengthening the effectiveness of religious bodies." We have such an amazing opportunity to uphold and teach the Gospel to our littlest members, and in effect strengthen the effectiveness of our congregation except for one thing....**the First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge needs more teachers!**

Our volunteer teaching team must expand if we are to grow this ministry and do it well. Please consider whether you might be a good match for this work. Each person who volunteers teaches an average of one Sunday a month. We provide a complete curriculum and typically have the arts materials needed to teach any given lesson. Training is offered in the fall and this year we hope to have a teachers retreat to kick things off.

If you are interested in finding out more, please give me a call or email me at: [mandolin.fox@gmail.com](mailto:mandolin.fox@gmail.com).

I look forward to hearing from you!

Peace,  
Pastor Patty

## From the Organ Bench

As the last of the snow is finally melting at my house, I already am turning my mind to the end of the program year. Special music is in the works, and I hope you are enjoying the variety of styles that our exceedingly versatile choir is serving up. One of the best parts about church music is the rich history and wonderful diversity of styles, and we are so fortunate to have a choir who bravely tackles everything that I put in front of them. Hopefully this variety of music brings richness and meaning to your worship experience.

As the choir's summer break approaches, other opportunities arise for soloists during the offertory, prelude, and postlude. If you know of any musicians who would be interested in contributing to our music this summer, please put them in touch with me. I would be happy to provide accompaniment should they wish.

Enjoy our budding Spring!!

Catherine Schane-Lydon

# ***OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER***

## **HAPPY MAY BIRTHDAYS**

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

<b>May 10</b>	<b>Sarah Conly</b>	<b>May 22</b>	<b>Gene Kalish</b>
<b>May 12</b>	<b>Erving Henderson</b>		<b>Diane Fogarty</b>
<b>May 15</b>	<b>Chuck Wales</b>	<b>May 24</b>	<b>David McCarthy</b>
	<b>Jean Wilson</b>		<b>Cary Quigley</b>
<b>May 18</b>	<b>Marissa Peyron</b>	<b>May 26</b>	<b>Suzanne Dower</b>
<b>May 19</b>	<b>Marie Raftery</b>	<b>May 27</b>	<b>Marc Fadding</b>
<b>May 20</b>	<b>Terry Wise</b>	<b>May 30</b>	<b>Al Wermuth</b>
	<b>Jeremy Ridenour</b>		<b>Ed Ivas</b>

## **PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS:**

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



### **Mother's Day – Bring a Flower**

Growth and Fellowship invites you to bring a flower as part of worship on Sunday May 13. We will use the flowers to lift up prayers for moms of all kinds in thanksgiving, honor and memory.

## ***NEWS FROM BOARDS AND COMMITTEES***

### **Christian Education**

#### **Easter Egg Hunt**

It was a chilly and cloudy Easter morning but that didn't keep the children of Stockbridge UCC away from the annual Easter Egg Hunt. The service was beautiful, the sanctuary was full and the children came out the doors in anticipation. Some of the children who searched for the brightly colored eggs years ago; now have brought their own children back to search for these eggs in their favorite hiding places.

Jesus tells us He is the Good Shepherd and we are like lost sheep. All of Heaven celebrates when even one of us turns back to God and is found. (Luke 15:1-6)

It was a fun filled ten minutes and when the children opened their eggs and their new Bibles, the hope was that we would all remember how God wants to put His life (and all these special things) in us when we trust Jesus. God loves us so much that He showed us by sending Jesus; reminding us of the real reason we celebrate Easter.

Amy Freeman, CE Committee Member

## Trustees

The Trustees would like to mention a spring clean-up of the grounds on Saturday, May 5<sup>th</sup>. This will take place in the morning after 9:00am. An announcement will be made in Church the week before. We will mostly be involved in picking up the sticks and other detritus which have fallen from the trees over the course of that lovely winter we think we've left behind. While on the subject of our grounds, the bears have awakened and are once again wreaking havoc on our dumpster. I have received a report from Anne Roy about papers and garbage strewn about the aforementioned grounds. Anne, being the steadfast member she is, was out there picking it all up and placing it back in the dumpster in the hope it would stay there. The point is – we need to work on a solution to the bear/dumpster problem. We are looking into buying a nifty little shed in which to house the dumpsters. This will (hopefully) cure the problem and keep everything where it should be – including the bear.

The Endowment Committee (a subcommittee of the Trustees) has finalized a shift of the investment portfolio from Merrill Lynch to Northeast Investments in Boston. Endowment made the switch to gain a better performance advantage. The church draws monthly from the Endowment and better performance will improve our ability to maintain the fund's principal value over the life of our church. This does not mean we won't constantly require more contributions from your pledges. The practical reality is - expenses always seem to want to grow faster than our bottom line. As a friend of mine used to say, "We're going at 100 and the devil's doing 99."

You may notice a "Suggestion Box" in the J.E. Room. Everyone is encouraged to place suggestions regarding buildings and grounds items (lighting, loose nails, burnt out light bulbs, random maintenance or cleaning issues, etc.) into the box. If you have questions, please feel free to corner one of the trustees as we're sipping our coffee after church. We'll be glad to point you in the right direction.

Lastly, we always welcome those people who might be interested in serving on the Board of Trustees. Anyone with knowledge of building maintenance or even just a desire to assist us in contacting professional repair and maintenance people as needs arise will be of value to us. If you have questions—please contact me. If you have interest, please get in touch with members of the Connections Committee (Ron Hanft, Jo Ann Levitt, or Deb McMenamy).

Thank you.  
Robert Doerr, Chairman, Board of Trustees.

## Mission and Action

**I want to say how proud I have been to serve with the committee that is in place right now. As May comes to a close, I want to say thank you to members leaving the committee:**

Hal Brink. The perfect wingman. Hal agreed to serve on the committee for three years and then re-upped for an extra one, four years in all. In the four years, he was joined by his wife Ann for the first three and that duo was unstoppable in their drive to make Mission & Action all that it could be. Hal has been treasurer for the last two years which is a key position in the committee since that's what we do, donate to charities on behalf of the church. Hal's extensive experience with the Red Cross organizing food in disaster areas, motivated Hal to get our church to participate in *Cathedral of the Beloved*, an initiative from St. Stephen's in Pittsfield to feed the homeless. Despite health challenges this past year, Hal has been a tireless member of the committee and someone who makes you think that you're not doing enough because he does so much.

Jen Germain. Jen captured the energy of the committee. She launched herself into being the prime leader of the Green Team, which is a sub-committee of our M & A group. During her three years on the committee, Jen worked on recycling efforts at the church, educating our congregation on the environment and how it dovetails with our faith. A devoted mom with three teenage boys, Jen offered youth perspective on important topics including teen depression and suicide. Thank you, Jen. (over)

Jeannene Booher. Jeannene has served on many committees as a member of our church. Luckily, M & A was a committee she wanted to serve on for these past three years. Always up on current affairs, Jeannene added to the discussions of charities seeking funding. I thank Jeannene for her suggestions for funding projects both locally, nationally and internationally. I'd also like to thank her for the dozen years of organizing the People's Pantry volunteer list from our church.

Betsey McKearnan. Betsey has been a great member of our committee and always someone who spoke her mind. She was unafraid to disagree with the committee and thoughtfully explored charities we might be willing to fund. Betsey was inspiring in her crafting of our Mental Health initiative last year. Her life experience and her volunteer work at Gould Farm added to our monthly discussions. Thank you, Betsey.

Vicky Cooper! I'm not sure if Vicky is leaving the committee this year. Mission & Action is a committee so close to her heart. She is a librarian by profession and this year spearheaded literacy as a major goal of the committee. *Jolabokaflot*, or Yule Book Flood, was enacted this past year and hopefully will become our church's favorite holiday tradition: giving a book with every tag on our Christmas tree. Vicky volunteers for Literacy Network, and has a deep commitment to the local immigrant community. Social justice is paramount for Vicky. Every solicitation M & A receives is vetted by Vicky. She brings very thoughtful and powerful discussion to each meeting. Thank you, Vicky!

Madonna Meagher: Also known as Miss Bossy Boots. Yes, I will be leaving this committee after adding an extra stint of one year. Four years is a long time but I'm proud of all that has been accomplished in those years in Mission & Action because of amazing committee members. We've been hit hard with natural disasters: Ebola, Syrian refugees, tornados, earthquakes, multiple hurricanes and famine. Our committee has given support to local, national and international causes and, in some small way, I believe God spoke to us through all our giving.

It has been an honor to serve and guide this committee. Thank you to the entire congregation who responded with additional financial support to those in need as unexpected disasters hit one after another. From cookie bakers to sandwich bag stuffers, from rainy day outdoor volunteers, to marchers to prevent homelessness, from Christmas present organizers, wrappers, sorters and deliverers to Little Eden garden planners, growers, harvesters and deliverers, my heart is heavy with gratitude.

**As for those remaining on the committee, M & A is in good shape for a core of leaders - deeply experienced in the ways of committees, and two new to the flow of M & A.**

Anne Hutchinson. Anne, a long-standing member of our church, has served on every committee the church has to offer. She is a Rotarian and embodies their motto "Service above Self." Anne sees need and works on eliminating or easing the need. As many of you know, Anne initiated the weekly meal our church served at the Grange Hall in Stockbridge for 6 years. For the past several years, she has organized The Back Pack Project filling back packs to feed middle school children and their families during summer vacation camp. Anne is focused and thoughtful in her discussions at committee meetings. Thank you, Anne!

Ivy Cote. Ivy has been on the board for the last year. She has been eager to learn the flow of the M & A committee. Always willing to help on a project, she is also thoughtful about discussing charities the committee wants to support. In her busy life as a working professional and mom, she always finds the time to be a regular attendee at the monthly meetings. She is a real asset to this committee.

Jill Fleming: Jill, like Ivy, has been eager to learn the flow of the committee. She is always ready to be given a job to do. This year she took on the staffing of the People's Pantry for our church. Jill has been so successful that our church team is booked until June! During the past year, both Jill and Ivy have been adding their voices and experience to initiatives M & A has listed as important goals, such as literacy, feeding the hungry, disaster relief and the mental health initiatives. Thank you, Jill and Ivy.

(over)

I am not sure who will be joining M & A in June, but we have a solid core committee and we welcome fresh ideas and new initiatives. It takes so many more people than just the committee of 8 or 9 to keep our projects viable. We have hope that the Little Eden garden project will continue. Hal Brink will mentor anyone who wants to continue Cathedral of the Beloved, and there are a host of do-gooders who want to work on the Christmas Giving Tree. I myself hope to continue to work on the KIVA project. Please let us know if there is a project you'd like to be part of, we have a place for you and I assure you the rewards are great!

## **KIVA UPDATE:**

### **We loan because: Mission and Action is an essential part of our congregation's work.**

Since 2012, I have discussed making KIVA microloans part of our global giving and it has taken nearly 6 years to see it come full circle. In 2016, the M & A committee made its commitment of the first \$500 to the account but because it was confusing how to start a KIVA account, in mid 2017, after much research, working with Patricia Strauch and the Mission & Action board, we opened a KIVA account for First Congregational Church of Stockbridge. We began with a \$500 loan to KIVA to help four borrowers, all women from across the globe. We financed Joan in Uganda, Basma in Jordan, Aipopo in Samoa and Rosa Milena in Ecuador. To date, Joan who had been in default, has fully paid back her loan to our KIVA account. Basma, Aipopo, and Rosa Minena are halfway or three quarters paid back. Now we can re-lend our investment. Currently we have nearly \$800 to re-loan.

The M & A bulletin board in the hallway outside the JE room shows the flow of and the KIVA organization. You can view the profile of each of these women we funded thus far or you can view them on our team site on KIVA.org.

What is so exciting about KIVA, is that Pastor Brent wanted to have different committees exchange ideas and have crossover in our goals at the church. KIVA does just that! The KIVA organization is so vast with so many variables for lending, that the first \$500 loan was narrowed down to: 1. Women seeking loans; 2. Women in different parts of the world; 3. Loans based on agriculture. Lily and Noah Hassmer were in the room with Patty Strauch and me, when we were deciding recipients of the loan. We asked them what animals they liked, as we had some suggestions from the KIVA profiles. Then they chose one borrower with chickens, another with cows, another with goats and one needing banana tube seedlings and tools. Yes, Lily and Noah chose our first four recipients of our loans.

Since then, we have had Rev. Patty Fox along with Anne Hutchinson and Diane Pirano discussing KIVA with the older students in Christian Education. They will be deciding the criteria for the next round of funding. When M & A completes its 2018 transfer of \$500, the CE students will have nearly \$1300 to loan.

And if that isn't enough great news...I was contacted by a donor who wanted to add to our KIVA account and asked that we use the money to fund loans in Africa. Except for the region, there are no restrictions. That is so exciting to research, to give, to track the progress and re-lend. I am encouraged about lending to Africa because our first loan to Joan in Uganda has been completely paid back.

As I've mentioned in previous newsletters, our Mission committee will not be soliciting the congregation outright for donations with a pitch from the microphone. However, we would encourage anyone in our church to become a First Congregational Church of Stockbridge team member. You can always write a check to the church with the memo line KIVA, or become a micro-lender yourself and link to our team.

It was decided by church Council that the funding Mission and Action has given and will give in the future will remain with the KIVA account we've set up and we will not seek to get our money back to the church. Should the church (M & A) decide to discontinue our investing, the KIVA account will be closed and KIVA will take control to make the final loan.

(over)

Any church members who start their own KIVA account and link to our team will be handling their own loans, and it will be separate from our church account. Therefore, an individual member can always ask for their investment back from KIVA and that is stated on their website.

Respectfully submitted and signing off,  
Madonna Meagher  
Chair, M & A Committee

## **Service League**

Right now snow is falling, so it is a bit of a challenge to imagine a warm August day (August 11, to be specific) with the doors open in the JE room and friends and visitors streaming in to enjoy the Summer Fair. But it will happen, I promise, and that's where YOU come in. When you start your Spring cleaning, keep your eyes open for forgotten treasures that could capture someone else's imagination in Grandma's Attic. When you're planting vegetables or flowers, stick an extra seedling in the ground for us - and those divided perennials? Sure, we'll take some! And, just a heads up - as the date draws near, you may be getting a call for help - to contribute a plate of cookies or a loaf of zucchini bread, to help with set-up or take down, and definitely to come, shop, visit, and support the Service League's fundraiser. When you help us, you help people right here at home, and all over the world. THANK YOU!

## **Music Committee**

### **Music - We Want Your Voice to be Heard!**

Have you had a chance to complete the Music Survey? It was attached in the April newsletter - but maybe (like me!) your copy got buried under some other mail? Or tomato sauce got spilled on it while cooking dinner? Or the dog ate it?

Well, that's ok! We have extra copies you can pick up in the JE Room, and a basket where you can leave the completed survey.

Your voice is very important to us. The Music Board wants to hear about your favorite hymns; how music moves, uplifts, and inspires you during worship; and what your vision of our music program looks like.

Or - you can always speak with one of the committee members - Patty Strauch, Steve Hassmer, Margaret Hornick, and Stephanie Bradford.

# ***EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS***



## **Pentecost Sunday**

### **WEAR RED!!**

We will celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday, May 20<sup>th</sup>. While the church and the clergy will be dressed in red as usual, this year we invite EVERYONE to find some red and put it on – be creative – let the SPIRIT run wild!!

Come and See!

# Exploring Church Membership

Membership in the United Church of Christ is an important part of our life together. We see it as a covenant that joins us together as one body. As part of the reception of new members promises are made by those joining and promises of support, love and fellowship are made in turn to those joining by the congregation. Church membership is something based in relationship and commitment. It is a forward-looking promise to walk together; support one another, this local church, and the larger church; and grow together in faith and love. Being a member brings both responsibilities and gifts – it is a public declaration of togetherness. We are blessed to be growing as a church and many of our new members come from different traditions and backgrounds. As a result, we hold a Connections Class where we get to know one another, explore what membership is (and what it isn't), share the history of this church and our denomination, and decide whether membership is right for you or not.

We are planning to welcome new members to the church on the day of our Annual Meeting (May 20). As a result, we are scheduling a class on Saturday, May 12 from 9:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. There is no obligation to join by attending and we will offer childcare if requested. If you would like to join, but cannot attend the class, please contact Brent as soon as possible.

## Earth Sunday, April 22

Children's sermon on composting, cool earth rug

