

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

March 2019 Newsletter

Dear Friends in Christ,

I love to ask Jakey questions – all kinds of questions. I love to hear him answer and to catch a glimpse of what is swirling in that developing mind of his. Sometimes I ask open-ended questions and sometimes either/or. Often, I am joyfully surprised at his answers. That is especially the case when he refuses the limits of an either/or instead insisting that both parts of the question are part of the answer.

Lent is arguably the most profoundly engaging season of the church year (by the way, I would be joyfully surprised if one of you picks up the phone or stops by to tell me why another one is). In many ways Lent interrupts the trajectory of our lives by asking us to slow down and expose ourselves to deep and fundamental questions about our faith.

Through the history of the church Lent was the season where confirmands and those interested in Baptism learned the core Biblical and theological truths of the church that they could affirm them and find new life on Easter Sunday. Equally present in the history of the church is the notion of either giving something up or taking something on throughout the season of Lent to bring our living into parallel with Jesus – the one who took on the brokenness of the whole world and who was willing to give the ultimate sacrifice.

So I ask, which is more important, the learning and formation that has long been part of Lent or the doing and the sacrifice which too has a strong history?



That is where I hope you will pause like Jakey does and then say, but Papa (or perhaps Pastor) both have to be part of the answer. If we are to remember who we are and to whom we belong we need to know the story of our faith and embrace it with

heart and mind, **and** we need to practice the living of our faith with hands and body.

I understand our faith to be an embodied one. I resist dichotomies that neatly divide flesh from spirit. I understand that God invites us into fullness of relationship and because and the heart of my faith is a God who decided to break down that barrier by taking on flesh and becoming one with us in Christ. I also have experienced the beauty of transcendence when that barrier has been torn down in my own faith life.

Maybe you have spent more time on one part of the equation than the other. Maybe because you are more drawn to one or more worried about the other. Maybe this Lent you can bring them together or maybe explore the side you often resist. In either case know that I would love to hear your thoughts and questions. I would love to contemplate what kinds of resources might be helpful. And I would be delighted to take your hand (just like I do with Jakey) and walk along with you this Lent listening and sharing, exploring and imagining.

Blessings,

Brent

From the Organ Bench

As we prepare for Lent and Easter, we in the choir are preparing for a memorial service for Marjory Fuller on April 20th. Marjory (and her husband, Bill) were beloved longtime members of the choir, and she passed away on January 14th. I still have the photos from Bill and Marj's farewell party in 2011 on my wall in the music office. They are assembling a choir for the memorial service (being held at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Albany), and if you would like to participate, please let Tracy Wilson or me know.

- Catherine Schane-Lydon, Minister of Music

A notice for all who pledge:

Most of you know that all those who pledge receive a report on their giving to the church every Spring, Summer, and Fall. Due to increased postage and handling, I am exploring sending these reports to you via the email address you've put in the church directory. In the case of families, the first email address listed would be used. If you're happy with that you needn't do anything. If you would not want your statement sent to you via email; or, on the other hand, if you would like that but haven't put your email in the address book, please let me know at: rphanft@yahoo.com or 413-232-4179.

Many thanks, Ron Hanft, Financial Secretary

Puerto Rico Trip

According to NBC News reporter Nicole Acevedo "A decade long recession has left Puerto Rico unable to fund reconstruction projects on its own," and "fulfilling these efforts are under threat since President Donald Trump has threatened to cut funding for Puerto Rico on multiple occasions." In response to the needs of our brothers and sisters in PR, a group of 12 people from this church will set off from Bradley International Airport and head to the island of Puerto Rico, on March 30th, for a full week of repairing hurricane damaged homes. Disaster Ministries of the UCC is working in partnership with Iglesia Evangélica Unida de Puerto Rico, a church in PR led by the Rev. Edward Rivera Santiago. Rev. Santiago insists that "the people of Puerto Rico are strong [and] are working hard together to overcome the devastation and rebuild our homes, but there are so many needs."



The members of our small group of volunteers are ready and willing to help with those needs. "It feels so good to help others" says church member Carl Bradford. "The comradeship felt when working together is always memorable. When we worked together on Katrina recovery, it was an unforgettable experience." Two community members will also be joining our group. "I went on one of the trips that the UCC organized after Hurricane Katrina to help with the restoring of homes in New Orleans" notes Wendy Noyes. "It was a heart-felt experience for me of being able to be useful to others when they most needed it and at the same time allowing me to learn first-hand about the remarkable resilience of these people facing hardship. I worked side by side with folks from my own community in a way that we grew to know each other in an intimate and precious way. I expect this trip to Puerto Rico to offer me a similar experience and I am looking forward to that."

Volunteers such as these are a blessing. We ask that you keep us in prayer as we prepare for this trip and again as we travel to do this critical work. If you would like to support this ministry by helping to defray the costs involved please speak to Financial Secretary Ron Hanft or me.

With love, Pastor Patty

OUR SHARED LIFE TOGETHER

PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS:

Joyce Hovey; Rosemarie; Lindsay Hermanski; Aleva Henderson; Jean Damrow; Philip Connor; Mishel Kulibaba Epstein; Cary Quigley; Gail Dunlop, mother of Mary Jane Dunlop; Colin Cunningham, son of Ronnie Cunningham; Gege Kingston; Barbara Bracknell; Betsy Wheat; Ann Underwood; Betsey McKearnan; Jeanne Fleming; Sarah and Michael Zanin, and Jen Germain.

HAPPY MARCH BIRTHDAYS

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

March 2	Andrew Hall
March 6	Joyce Hovey
March 8	Joy Douglass Jim Erwin
March 11	Stephanie Bradford Don Paine Maria Carr
March 13	Bruce Mandel

March 14

March 19

March 21

March 23

March 25

March 26

March 28

March 30

March 31

Russell Fadding

Steve Alsdorf

Ted Randolph

Doris Brochu

Angela Vuagniaux

Julie McCarthy

Gege Kingston

Thomas Randolph

Donna Jacobs

David Wampler

Noah Hassmer

Mary Jo Erickson

Oliver Thomas Brown

NEWS FROM AROUND THE CHURCH

REPORTS FROM BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND SERVICE LEAGUE

Christian Education

The Christian Education program is readying for Lent. Brent and Rick Floyd are preparing a study on Isaiah that will take place on Sunday mornings and continue with meetings during the week. Children and adults are looking forward to attending both Sunday school and worship on Sunday mornings throughout Lent. And don't forget to pick up your Lenten Devotionals!

But before we get there, we are planning on a parade to the music of the Saints band on March 3. After a special service for and with Patty, the kids will lead us into the JE room for a **celebratory potluck luncheon**. Be there in that number!

- Diane Piraino

Service League

Many in the congregation know that, every year, the Service League assembles hygiene and school kits which are sent to Church World Service for distribution in refugee camps, where families await relocation when fleeing wars and natural disasters. The need for the supplies these kits contain is always acute. During Lent, we will be soliciting donations from the congregation to purchase the contents of these kits. Because Church World Service provides very specific requirements, we find it is most efficient to shop in bulk for the necessary items. You can see a sample of each kit on the table in the JE Room, where there will also be a box where cash or checks made out to the Service League will be gratefully received. Thank you for your support!

- Margaret Hornick

Board of Deacons

Our Lenten **journey** this year begins on Ash Wednesday, March 6, and culminates on Easter Sunday, April 21. Our Ash Wednesday service is at 7:00 pm, a service of contemplative worship, full of quiet candlelight, prayer, song, repentance, ashes, and gratitude for God's forgiveness. Easter Sunday will include a Sunrise Service as well as 10:00 am Festival Worship celebrating Christ's resurrection, God's triumph of life over death. And so much will be happening in between these bookends of our most holy season.

Lent is a 40-day time of solemn preparation, traditionally observed with prayer, almsgiving and fasting. Pope Francis suggests some new ways to fast, such as fasting from hurting words and instead saying kind words, fasting from sadness and instead being filled with gratitude, fasting from anger and instead being filled with patience, fasting from bitterness and instead filling our hearts with joy, fasting from selfishness and instead being compassionate to others.

For almsgiving, one suggestion is on each day of Lent to remove one item from your closet that you no longer wear or need and put it into a large bag. At the end of the forty days, donate these 40 items to a place that can share them with someone who can really use them. Another idea is, on each day, to count things that you are blessed with and set aside an amount of money for each thing (a penny, nickel, quarter, dollar, depending on your ability). For example, on one day you could count how many blankets are in your house, another day how many pairs of shoes, or cans of soup, how many beds, bathrooms, toys, games. You get the idea. Then put the money in the offering plate on Easter.

For prayer, you can set aside a special quiet personal time each day to hear the voice of God over all others. And join together in Sunday morning worship, as well as Sunday school for all ages, and adult study on Mondays (3:30-4:30 pm) and Thursdays (5:45-6:45 pm), and Wednesday morning prayer group (8:00 am).

Now for the **experimental** part! For the 6 Sundays of Lent (March 10-April 14), we are trying an experiment that separates Sunday school and worship into separate hours, with Sunday school classes for both children and adults at **9:30 am** (adults will study the prophet Isaiah, and coffee will be available in the JE Room for parents not going to adult class), and worship at **10:30 am**. This will enable our children to join us for the entire worship service and participate more fully in the worship life of the church (with child care available for those who need it at any point during the service). The Deacons are very excited to be joined by children to help us with some of our deaconly duties in worship. We will do our best to have a service that invites engaged participation from all ages, and that will end at 11:30, to be followed by coffee hour. Like any new practice, it may take awhile to get used to, and there will inevitably be additional "joyful noise" in the sanctuary, but give it a chance. And at the end, your opinions and suggestions will be most welcome.

The Rev. Quinn Caldwell sums up our Lenten journey to Easter: "You guys, the news doesn't get much better than this: God loves you so much that there's nothing in heaven or on earth that could keep you apart. God was ready to forgive your sins before you made them; God missed you long before you missed God. God was ready to welcome you home before you even turned. In Jesus Christ, you are new, and holy, shining, and true. Your sins are forgiven. Tomorrow will not be the same as yesterday! Amen."

Submitted by Cindy Brown, Chair of the Board of Deacons

p.s. Don't forget the **time change** on March 10 – set your clocks ahead one hour. Otherwise you'll miss Sunday school (heaven forbid)!



Growth & Fellowship

As we embark on another year ahead, I would like to recognize and thank the wonderful folks who have volunteered to host **coffee hour** so far (in no particular order): Brent and Jakey Damrow, Vicky Cooper and Christine Smith, Tris Osgood, Jill Fleming and Steve Bankert, and, on a particularly snowy Sunday when only a smattering of brave souls made the trek, Madonna Meagher and new members the Wilkins.

In the ongoing effort to give new faces a chance to serve as hosts, I would like to encourage anyone who has not yet done so to grab one of us (see names below) so we can answer any questions and allay any concerns about what's involved. Meanwhile, here's the upshot in a nutshell (a reminder, however, that we are nut-free church!): The church provides cheese and crackers and coffee and tea and creamer and juice. One could get by on those items alone. Although never required, hosts can use their own discretion to bring sweet and/or savory offerings, whether homemade or store-bought (again avoiding anything with nuts). Fresh fruit, a vegetable platter with hummus, tortilla chips and salsa...those are all simple suggestions (and you can get reimbursed for any expenses).

This need not be a solo venture, either, and if you do not have a partner, we can help find you one and make a good match. For example, if you are a baker but cannot handle the setting/cleaning up part, one of our team can often handle those tasks, and vice versa. We will always walk first-timers through the process, too (and after that it's all down pat). We also accept any scratch-baked items that can be tucked into the freezer for hosts to rely on as needed (so many things keep well and for long).

As someone who has enjoyed hosting duties myself over the past couple of years, I can vouch for how gratifying the experience can be (but please also ask the aforementioned volunteer hosts as well). You'll be participating in a time-honored tradition of providing an opportunity for members and visitors alike to linger a bit after worship service is over and before heading our separate ways. You'll also be showered in appreciation from those who sample your foodstuffs. We Congregationalists (I have quickly surmised) are quick with the praise. If nothing else,

Submitted with sincere gratitude, Evelyn Battaglia

Other members include David Anderegg, John and Janet Canning, Michael Deegan, Mishel Kulibaba Epstein, and Pat LaBagh (with Joyce Hovey in our prayers, as always)

EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS



Our very own **Music on Main** series returns with a slate of three concerts this spring. The first will be on **Saturday March 2** at 4:00 and feature *A Two of Harps*. *A Two of Harps* is comprised of harpists Teresa Mango of Stockbridge and Wendy Kerner from Wilton, Ct. It is a rare event when two professional harpists can find the time and space to collaborate and to share the extraordinary magic of a harp duo. Teresa, a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music and a long-time resident of Stockbridge has preformed with all of the local groups and many times in our church. Her partner for this concert is a graduate of The Juilliard School and has a wide ranging career in southern New England and NYC. Over lunch at a Kent, CT eatery their conversation turned to the possibility of offering a musical twosome to the public. They love sharing the enchantment of their two magnificent instruments (with a total of 94 strings), and the fun they have as *A Two of Harps*. Their performances have taken them to diverse settings throughout the Northeast. The Stockbridge concert will feature music from Spain and France. There is a suggested donation of \$20, \$15 for seniors and students, at the door. Proceeds help support our music ministry. A light reception will follow.

Looking ahead to **Saturday March 30**, Music on Main will present a return of soprano Andrea Bargabos, mezzo Marjorie Dix and bass Jack Brown in a vocal recital. The program will include art songs in several languages and opera arias and ensembles. Our own Jean Stackhouse will accompany on the piano. Mark your calendars now for these two programs and bring some friends.



Connections (New Member) Class

Have you been visiting this church for a while and thinking about calling it home? Then you are invited to come to a gathering we call Connections!

In this class we will have the chance to talk about the ways that this church and the United Church of Christ fit into *Christianity* including both our bold and progressive history as well as our open and hopeful vision for the future.

The class will include conversations with one another, Pastor Brent, and lay leaders. Our hope is that you will learn more about each other, the church's rich history, as well as the many programs, small groups, opportunities for service, and other ministries that are available to you *whether or not* you decide to join. We will close our time together with a light meal.

Please RSVP to Will Garrison (298-3137 or office@stockbridgeucc.org) if you plan to attend. Childcare is available for those who might desire it. ***Once we know who is interested we will set a date and time that work for most people.***

In the Congregational tradition, joining a church is an event that takes place as part of worship and involves the whole congregation. We are planning to take new members into the church on Sunday, May 19. Questions? Please contact Pastor Brent.



Lenten Worship and Education Schedule

Sunday March 10 – Palm Sunday (April 17)

Recent research bears out what our own church and many others have experienced; that children being in worship strengthens their tie to their faith, their congregation, and their church. For the six Sundays in Lent we will be altering our schedule to allow for children and adults to experience “Sunday School” and then for children and adults to worship together in church.

A letter mailed to you in February provides more detail, but here is the schedule to expect. We will go back to our current schedule on Easter Sunday for the remainder of this program year as we reflect on this experiment and decide what, if anything, we want to do.

9:00 a.m. - Coffee and Newspapers Available in JE Room

9:30 a.m. – Children, Youth, and Adult Education Begin

10:15 a.m. – Adult Ed ends

10:20 a.m. – Children and Youth Education ends

10:30 a.m. – Worship Begins

Thank you for your flexibility and willingness to engage in this experiment. We will be providing opportunities for feedback. If you have questions or concerns, please contact our Moderator Deb McMenemy or Pastor Brent.

Adult Lenten Study

The Prophet Isaiah

Sundays 3/10 - 4/14, 9:30 – 10:15 a.m.

Discussion Groups: Mondays 3:30 - 4:30 or
Thursdays 5:45 - 6:45

The Prophet Isaiah looms large in the Christian and Jewish faith traditions. The corpus of Isaiah's writings spans critical moments at the heart of the collective faith memory. The Book of Isaiah includes writings regarding the times preceding the exile of Israel into Babylon through their return. Marvin Sweeny writes, "The book of Isaiah serves as a theological reflection upon Jerusalem's experience of threat, exile, and restoration. It takes up fundamental questions of divine involvement in human history."

Jesus called Isaiah simply "The Prophet." In Advent, we lean heavily on Isaiah's writing both that a Messiah is coming and what that Messiah will do. When disciples of John the Baptist inquired as to whether Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus simply responded saying that the prophecies of Isaiah were coming into fulfillment.

In our study we will attempt to get to know the history and context in which Isaiah was written. We will explore the book of Isaiah, breaking down the writings into the time periods and sections in which scholars believe they were composed. Finally, we will look at the influence of Isaiah both on the ministry of Jesus and the development and ongoing ministry of the church.

We will utilize 45-minute sessions on Sunday mornings before worship (9:30-10:15) to introduce the subject matter. We then invite people to sign-up for a discussion session to more deeply probe and consider what was shared on Sunday. Participation in these sessions is highly encouraged but not mandatory. Sign-up sheets for the study and discussion sessions are in the J.E. Room or you can call the church office. The schedule will be:

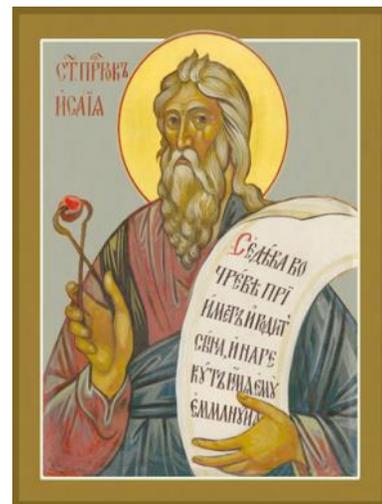
March 10 – Introduction including the setting and context of Isaiah's work.

March 17 & 24 – Isaiah Chapters 1-39

March 31 & April 7 – Isaiah Chapters 40-66

April 14 – Isaiah's influence on Jesus and the Church

Questions? Please contact Pastor Brent (bdamrow@stockbridgeucc.org or 298-3137).



Program Yields Deep Discussion

On February 20th, five people gathered to talk about the intersection of faith and sexuality. Drawn by different reasons, the small group was enlivened by the ability to talk openly and safely about a topic that unfortunately is not often engaged.

We talked about basic concepts like sexual orientation and gender identity. We talked about ideas of welcome and affirmation in contrast to tolerance or acceptance. We talked about scriptural and theological underpinnings of our stance. We contemplated what larger issues of faithful intimacy looks like and where there are contemporary questions (and frankly what the Bible addresses and what it doesn't).

In the end, the group decided to hold another conversation to look more closely at some of the Biblical texts that look at intimacy. In part, this stemmed from the interest of those in attendance as well as the knowledge that there were two others who wanted to come but could not on our scheduled date. We have not yet set a date so if you are interested, please contact either Christine Rasmussen or Pastor Brent.



Question: What do a small stuffed bear, a tube of toothpaste, a girl's ruffled bathing suit, and a pencil sharpener have in common? **Answer:** They can all be found in the **Lost and Found**, which has its headquarters in the hallway near the back entrance of the building. If any of those items, or the ones in the picture, look familiar to you, stop by the office, ask Will to show you where they're kept, and reunite with your missing property!

Church Art News

Our church Art Show features the work of John McKinstry. His exhibit, "Birds as God's Gifts," provides spiritual cheer, refreshing us with the beauty and song of birds. Enjoy these wonderful paintings in the JE Room until early March! - Olga Schwede



Barred Plymouth Rocks and Rhode Island Reds were developed in New England, and were popular during WWII when people were encouraged to raise a backyard flock to supply themselves with eggs and meat. My father, Winthrop McKinstry, had a farm where he hatched these kinds of chicks, selling them to the public.

- John McKinstry