



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

April 2019 Newsletter

Dear Friends in Christ,

On Easter (like Christmas) I usually include in my welcome the statement that this is a day that changed the entire course of human history. I reference that on Easter, “love smote hate, humility bested power, truth triumphed over deception, and life overcame death.” I stake out the claim that those events in Jerusalem fundamentally changed the whole world and how we live in it even today. Easter changes everything.

When I consider the idea of change, there is much in our faith, our world and culture that commends being part of change making. Gandhi famously wrote “be the change you wish to see in the world.” Likewise, Margaret Mead offered the thought that is often so inspiring to those facing tough times in the face of great obstacles when she said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” The idea of being part of changing the world is powerful and important -it calls us forth to live into our faith.

But there is another equally famous and faithful person who offers a different thought on the whole idea of change – one that is equally present in the great Easter story. Leo Tolstoy penned the truth that “Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”

I think that it is one of the fundamental challenges of Lent and Easter – to accept the world changing events of Easter into our own hearts that we might change ourselves. The truth is that it can be far more daunting to let go of things in our own lives that we have grown accustomed to even if they keep us from living fully or being our best selves.

In the face of God’s great gift of grace, we hold onto ideas of earning our place in life. In the invitation to find new life if we just let go and give our hearts over to the way of Christ, we often stubbornly chose to follow the path we are on.



The events of Holy Week and Easter are profound, inviting us in to remember and to embrace the world-changing new gift of life God offers in resurrection. On Easter we will leave the glory of worship with a fundamental decision to make. Will we live as Easter people? Will we be part of change?

We will have a better chance of doing so, if we think back to Christmas Eve. At the end of that worship service, with candles still glowing we ask the same question – will you live as if Christmas was not a day, but a way of living. As part of that, we invite people to consider the testimony of the Christmas Creed from Latin America. The closing line goes like this, “I believe that Christmas is strength and power, and that this world can change if, with humility and faith, we kneel before the manger. I believe that I must be the first one to do so.”

Blessings on our Lenten and Easter journey may they bring about profound change beginning with changing ourselves.

Peace, Brent

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	April 11	Tracy Wilson
	Hannah Alsdorf	April 12	Olivia Doerr
April 7	Bronly Boyd	April 18	Jack Brown
	Casey Jones	April 19	Anna Grace Nimmo
	Margaret Bradley Davis (1962)	April 22	Bronwyn Dix
April 8	Virginia Berry	April 23	Keith Raftery
		April 25	Seth Ivas
		April 26	Wendy Nicolosi
		April 27	Chet Douglass
		April 30	Ivy Cote
			Samuel Connor

PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS:

Stan Osak, Jr., Nell Ezequelle, 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.

About Those Reports to Pledgers—Ron Hanft, Financial Secretary

Last month I put a note in the newsletter that I was working on using email to send the quarterly giving reports to those who pledge. It turns out that I have not yet worked out the kinks in the emailing of reports. Therefore, your spring 2019 reports will still come by hard copy mail in early April. I'll notify you if and when a switch to email is ready. I am keeping a list of those who do not want e-mail reports. So, for future planning, if you do not have or want email reports, let me know. And if you do prefer email, but do not have your email address in the directory, let me know that as well. Until further notice no reports will be sent via email. Thanks for your patience. Questions? rphanft@yahoo.com or 413-232-4179.

Follow Team Puerto Rico

A team of volunteers will be traveling to Puerto Rico to help with hurricane recovery efforts through Disaster Ministries of the UCC. If you'd like to follow us March 30th to April 6th just sign on to our Facebook page (facebook.com/StockbridgeUCC). We will be posting pictures and reflections throughout the week.

Gifts that Support Our Shared Ministries

Our budget presents a snap shot of how we allocate and spend our financial resources. As we discussed at our Annual Budget Meeting, there are also significant funds that support things we care about that come to the church as anonymous donations. These do not show up in our budget and you will not see them even if you do look. These gifts are not solicited, but usually go toward an identified need. These arrived recently:

A gift of approximately \$350 to cover the gifts presented to Pastor Patty at her sending and blessing.

A gift of approximately \$1,250 to finance efforts of Mission and Action to respond to relief efforts.

In our budget is a line called "gifts." These are unsolicited and undirected gifts. Often these gifts are given in gratitude or in memory, but they also are given in recognition that the church needs such funds to live into our ministry. Thus far in 2019 we have received \$2,772 including a gift of \$1,000 for support of ministries, \$500 in gratitude for care extended to a loved one, and \$1,250 to support the ministries of the church. Thank you to all who support this church through their time, their talent and their treasure.

Dear Friends in Christ,

I remember the day that I sat in Brent's office to talk about the possibility of assisting in the pastoral work of First Congregational Church. We had been introduced to each other through a clergy colleague, and it seemed right from the "get-go" that something wonderful might be in store for both the church and the two of us. That premonition, in my opinion, has proved to be very true.

I was so surprised to have found an opportunity to minister once again. When I left an associate pastoral position in NJ, to move with my family to the Berkshires in 2013, I was convinced that I would never have another chance to serve as minister of Word and Sacrament. And yet you, dear ones, changed my life dramatically. You opened your arms and your hearts and welcomed me into this church family. You encouraged my call to preach and teach, to pray and pastor, and for this I am deeply grateful. Because of your loving support of me, and my sense of vocation, I have found a place for settled employment as a minister. I honestly never thought that would happen, and I'm convinced that it wouldn't have if not for all of you!

Saying goodbye is never easy. It's especially challenging in this situation because I'm both leaving and staying. I will continue to work with the Children and Youth Faith Formation program at First Congregational Church through the end of May. However I will not be in worship on Sundays, or teaching Sunday School, because of my responsibilities at the West Stockbridge Congregational Church. This complicates our farewell.

The United Church of Christ encourages clergy and congregations to maintain healthy and appropriate boundaries when a pastor departs. The UCC suggests this guideline, "while mutual love and affection remain, the professional relationship between pastor and parishioner must end." This is suggested in order "to help model life giving ways to say "goodbye" to one another, as well as provide opportunities for congregations to be able to say "hello" to new pastoral leadership." The UCC The boundaries that we develop together will be a bit fluid given the unique nature of this change in my role. Brent and I also hope to find ways to develop collaboration between the two congregations. So, again, our boundaries will fluctuate depending on the circumstances of our work together. But I'm sure we will figure it all out!

And finally I want to thank you for the beautiful send off earlier this month. It was a joy to have so many kids involved in the service and to be with you over food and drink afterwards. The gorgeous stole you gave me, and the commentaries and Book of Worship, will be put to very good use. Thank you!

I pray that the Eternal Spirit guides you and blesses you all.

Peace,

Pastor Patty Fox

NEWS FROM AROUND THE CHURCH

REPORTS FROM BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND SERVICE LEAGUE

Service League

The congregation has donated \$470 In just two weeks for Church World Service school and hygiene kits. This will allow us to make about 30 kits. We expect the youth group will help us assemble some of the kits.

We will use any additional funds for clean-up buckets. This will allow us to respond to the devastating flooding in Iowa, Nebraska and neighboring states.

Thank you so much for the congregation's support in responding to the needs of those suffering from acute loss both in the US and abroad.

Please keep us in mind when doing spring cleaning. Grandma's Attic will take your nice knick-knacks, collectibles and good tableware.(no furniture or clothing, please). Drop off anytime on the table in the coat area of the education wing. We meet on Mondays at 10am to sort, price and store until the Summer Fair on August 10. We welcome anyone to join us for coffee and conversation with some handiwork on the side.

Board of Trustees

Window and Shutter Restoration Update

The church was recently awarded a grant of \$35,770 from the Stockbridge Community Preservation Committee to complete our window and shutter restoration project. This generous grant will allow us to focus now on restoring the shutters, adding new hardware, and other miscellaneous tasks. The grant is provisional and must be approved at Stockbridge Town Meeting in May. Assuming that things go as planned, work will continue throughout the summer months into the fall.

Celebrating an Anniversary

We are also delighted to report that it has been one full year since we have needed to call a plumber in to unclog our pipes. It has also been one year since we removed paper towels from our bathrooms and installed the hand dryers.

We ask that you continue to help us by not disposing of anything but human waste and toilet paper in our toilets.



From your Friendly Connections Committee:

Dear Friends,

We're approaching that time of year when the church comes alive with multiple holy events from Lent to Easter, culminating 50 days later with the renewal of the church through Pentecost. We three Connections Committee members (David Anderegg, Deb McMenemy and Jo Ann Levitt) invite you not only to celebrate this season but also to join us in enlivening and strengthening the church through service and shared acts of goodness.

A list of all the Board's current roles and responsibilities is available for you to read online or pick up a copy from the Jonathan Edwards Room so you can learn more about each important function. Please feel free to approach any of the three of us for information on Board membership 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 opportunity to give of your gifts and talents. If you haven't heard from us, don't hesitate to get in touch!

This is the time when Holy Spirit moves among us. This is the time when many are called to be more engaged. This is also the time when through our energy and efforts, this precious church can be renewed!

Let us hear from you:

David Anderegg: danderegg@gmail.com

Cell: 413-281-9691

Deb McMenemy: debmcmenamy@gmail.com

413-298-3434

Jo Ann Levitt: 4jlevity@gmail.com

413-298-7023

Mission and Action Mission of the Month: Gould Farm

Actually, we plan to highlight four of the local programs that we support with our budgeted funds this year. So, each project will get at least two months! We hope to provide ways that we can share in the work of these important community members.

I asked Betsy McKearnan, a long-time church member, to share with us her experiences at Gould Farm where she is a board member. Gould Farm is in Monterey. Many people know the Roadside Store and Cafe on Route 23 in Monterey. (They have the best breakfast in the Berkshires!)

Dear Anne,

The following is a quote from a fairly recent Gould Farm brochure that to me, sums up the farm's unique mission.

"Gould Farm is a therapeutic community that promotes recovery for people with mental health and related challenges through meaningful work, community living, and clinical care."

The farm calls their patients "Guests" and to me this gentle nomenclature speaks volumes about their respectful approach to those in their care. Everyone lives on the farm, works on the farm, eats on the farm and plays on the farm together. A constant stream of cheerful volunteers come and go and many of them stay on the farm too! At mealtime, the young children of staff families are always on hand, adding to a very normal atmosphere.

Since its founding by Will Gould and his wife Agnes over 100 years ago, a work program has been a key part of life on the farm. Will believed very early on that the rhythm of work was truly beneficial to those who struggle with their personal demons. Will and Agnes just took in those around them in trouble, and in turn, everybody worked. This was a hardscrabble farm and the need worked both ways.

Today the guests can work in a whole variety of areas - a bakery, a cheesemaking operation, gardening, maple sugaring, the kitchen, housekeeping, care of animals, and even a roadside store. Skills acquired working in these different areas build confidence and help prepare guests for jobs to come.

As a volunteer at the farm, I have benefitted enormously from my time working there. It has taught me humility and I am enormously grateful to have been a small part of it. I know that our church will benefit just as I have by getting to know more about the farm and its unique role in the care of those afflicted with the pain of this terrible illness.

All my best,

Betsy McKearnan

We will be providing more information during worship services and the newsletter about how we can contribute to and learn from Gould Farm

Anne Hutchinson for Mission and Action



Personnel Committee

For those who might not know, there is a personnel committee listed in the by-laws of the church. The Personnel Committee is comprised of a member of most of the boards of the church and two “at-large” church members. They are the “reviewers” of the paid staff at the church, currently Pastor, Music Minister, Administrator, Financial Secretary, and Nursery Attendant. This committee is sort of an HR department, and all information is confidential.



With church board members rotating on and off boards, it’s been difficult to have a personnel committee in place for a period of time. This past February, the Church Council approved the new committee. Their charge is to review our Pastor Brent, who is starting his 7th year and has yet to have a thorough review. The Music Minister will also get an updated review and the new Administrator, Will Garrison, will get a six-month evaluation. This newly comprised committee would like to have at least two of the evaluations done by the May all church meeting.

The committee is as follows:

Madonna Meagher, Chair, suggested by CE to take a spot from Christian Education

Jeremy Ridenour, representing the Board of Deacons

Joan Kopperl, representing the Board of Music

Hal Brink, At-Large

Carl Bradford, At-Large

Pastor Brent, ex-officio

Rev. Dr. Rick Floyd, advisor

Because a church is not like a corporation/business, the regular HR forms used with “on a scale from 1-10) for example, just don’t work for a church, and especially for a called Pastor.

The next eight weeks will be critical for us to give and get feedback from the congregation. We will be developing questionnaires for each position and ask each of us to answer and return the forms, signed, to the committee. We cannot accept unsigned questionnaires.

In the next couple of weeks, we will finalize the questionnaires keeping in mind our vision statement. We will be targeting peers of the employee, congregational members and non-members and the employee himself or herself will also do a self-evaluation. When the data are gathered and synthesized, there will be a meeting with the employee to review strengths and areas of targeted growth in the position.

Additionally, because we really want to know how we are doing as a church with respect to our “employees,” we will have one or two after church open sessions to talk about our strengths and weaknesses as a church. If you can’t attend one of those sessions, we welcome you talking individually to any one of us or email us.

This is a great opportunity to review the health of our church. We hope each and every one of you will fill out a questionnaire and give honest, constructive feedback.

Respectfully submitted,

Madonna Meagher, Chair Personnel Committee



Holy Week 2019

Each year we encounter Holy Week anew. In part it is always different, because we are different – our lives and our world have changed since the last time we went to Jerusalem. In part it is always different because the Lectionary (the source from which we draw our assigned readings for the week) also changes. In some years we get the story from Matthew’s perspective, others Mark’s and so on. Since the Gospels tell the story differently each year we have a chance to glean different elements of beauty, meaning, hard truth and life.

This year presents a unique opportunity both in our shared life together and through what the lectionary provides. And we are going to take it! This year the stars and the stories align in a way for us to tell the great old love story through the lenses of Luke (the Gospel of Amazement) and John (the grand poetic narrative).

Sunday April 14th – Palm and Passion Sunday (Gospel of Luke)

This year, with Luke as our guide we will tell the whole story from Palms to Passion. We will begin with the crowds shouting Hosanna, go to the upper room, travel to the garden and walk the way of the cross. There is something profoundly different when you hear the story in its whole arc and we will gather to see it all unfold. Kids will help throughout bringing the story to life.

Thursday April 18 – Maundy Thursday (Gospel of John)

7:00 p.m. – Maundy Thursday Worship - In this service we will focus on the reading for the day at John tells it. In his Gospel the final meal with the disciples focuses not on the food, but rather on servanthood as Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. We will remember how Jesus gave us a model of mutual love and care and then commanded us to follow it.

Friday April 19 – Good Friday

Ancient tradition invites people to walk with Jesus as he carries the cross. We will meet at 6:30 at the church to travel to the Stations on top of Eden Hill. In case of inclement weather, we will worship in the Sanctuary.

Easter Sunday (April 21)

6:00 a.m. – Sunrise Service. We rush with the women to find an empty tomb.

10:00 a.m. – Festival Worship. We proclaim through word, song and praise that *He is Risen!* Together we re-member that nothing other than God has the last word.

EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS

From the Organ Bench- Catherine Schane-Lydon, Minister of Music

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.

SAVE THE DATE: Church Grounds Cleanup Day – Saturday, April 13th – 9:00AM

The snow has melted, leaving behind winter's detritus. It's time to don your work gloves, grab your rakes and tarps, fire up your leaf blower, and oil your pruning clippers. We'll gather for a few hours to haul off leaves and branches, tidy up flower beds, and make our grounds beautiful just in time for Easter. A pizza lunch will be served at the conclusion of our work. RSVPs are encouraged, but not required. Reach out to Jon Geldert (617-501-3121 or jkgeldert@yahoo.com) with questions or to sign up.

ALL CHURCH BIRTHDAY PARTY COMING—May 5th

Have a birthday? We want to celebrate with you! More information coming soon, but for now make sure to put the date on your calendar and pick out your favorite party hat.



Small Groups Wrap Up a Successful Study

For eight weeks two different small groups gathered to participate in a study of Christian practices including prayer, food, worship, sacraments, money, service and community. Each week we watched a short video, talked about what we saw and learned and then went out into the world to put what we learned into practice. Some weeks that meant sharing a meal with others, other weeks we challenged ourselves to consider how much is enough, and still in other weeks we explored how service can also take place in local settings when we simply pay attention to the possibility to engage.

Each session we shared how our experience went and then intentionally paired up with different people to talk about these core practices and how we understand them. What emerged was not just the chance to learn about them, but also the chance to get to know each other and to share questions and ideas in meaningful ways.

This particular study drew both people who regularly participate in our adult formation activities as well as many newcomers. The over-all feedback celebrated the smaller, more intimate nature as well as the invitation to be far more intentional about daily living. Want to know more? Talk to any of the people who took part: Evelyn Battaglia, Cindy Brown, Cathy Clark, Vicky Cooper, Ivy Cote, Margo Davis, Mary Jane Dunlop, Chuck Gillett, Ron Hanft, Donna Jacobs, Joan Kopperl, Jo Ann Levitt, Liz Murray, Gary Schieneman, Jean Stackhouse, and Patty Strauch.

We anticipate launching another similar small group study exploring key elements of our faith (God, religion, Jesus, salvation, cross, Bible, church) beginning after Easter. If you missed this one, make sure to save room for that one!



Pictures Clockwise (starting below)
 Lighting candles for tragedies in Sheffield & New Zealand.
 Sunday School Blessing Stickies
 Music on Main—2 of Harps
 Adult Sunday School begins with a study of the Prophet Isaiah





Celebrating and blessing Pastor Patty, March 3.