

News from the Pews

"the voice of the congregation"

First Congregational Church UCC

Ashfield, MA 01330

JANUARY 2019

It's no longer Christmas

A post-Christmas let-down may soften the edges of a frantic, joyful explosion of gift-giving. Then the realization hits: It's no longer Christmas! What now?

Try carrying our Christmas Eve service with you during the cold, icy January ahead of us. Between trips to the Return Centers with ugly sweaters, sing along with your memory of "The First Noel" because the First Noel doesn't end on December 26, the First Noel is every trip to the mall, every dish you wash, every gallon of gas you pump. When the darkness descends at 4:30 and goes on FOREVER, replay Rev. Ann's story of the rascals who stole the sun quarter by quarter leaving people in darkness, until we were given Light for all for free forever.

The choir lifted our souls with glorious music, remember? I can sing off-key as loudly as I want on Christmas Eve. Remember "Ave Regina Caelonum" sung during the Offering? Mysteriously haunting music carried from the 12th century all the way to our little church by Margery Heins and our choir. We can listen to it on computer, or we can sit in the space it created within us.

"Make Christmas Last All Year" is a hackneyed expression. Except that our congregation creates a space that makes the sacred physical, with music, stories, light. We do not pull it together in the last week before Christmas, we live with it in every season. We do the dull sacred work that culminates in a roomful of people holding candles and singing "Silent Night" led by our youth.

Hold that all year.

Blessings,

Alice Barrett

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January Choir News

After a wonderful and full December of Youth and Adult Choir, the singers will take a break. The January schedule is listed below. Anyone interested in Choir should contact Margery Heins after church on Sundays the Choir sings, or call 625-8461. The "Come and Sing" listed in the schedule below means you can come to Sunday Choir and sing without previous practice. Youth and Adult singers, come try it out!

Weds. Jan. 16, 7:15 Filing in the Choir library

Sun. Jan. 20, 9:00 Rehearsal; 10:00 Service (Martin Luther King, Jr. Service)

Mon. Jan. 21 - Singing for the MLK, Jr. Program at GCC
11:00 Rehearsal in Room S-358, The Music Room
12:00 - 12:30 Lunch (provided) and performance, GCC Dining Commons

Weds. Jan. 23, 7:15 Rehearsal

Sun. Jan. 27, 9:00 Rehearsal; 10:00 Service (Annual Meeting Sunday)

Margery Heins

ABOUT OUR CHURCH

Ministry - the Congregation
628-4470, home 625-6967.

Sunday morning Worship is at 10:00 am. Children and Sunday School are concurrent with Worship.

The governing body of the church is its members, who traditionally gather the second Sunday of March, June, September and December at 11:30 am for the Monthly Congregational Meeting.

Call or email the church clerk, Wendy Pree (628-3875), wendypree@gmail.com; or the church Moderator, Keith Obert (978-502-9166), obert@aol.com with any issues/concerns you wish to include on the agenda by the Wednesday preceding the meeting.

FRIENDS AND MEMBERS ARE WARMLY WELCOMED
News from the Pews is published monthly by the Ashfield Parish, First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ. P.O.Box 515, Main Street, Ashfield, MA 01330, 413-628-4470.

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That little church-like box as you drive in to the church is our new Little Free Library, sponsored by Mission and Social Justice and built by myself. We are now part of a national organization of little libraries all over the world, a way to share books and connect through reading. Nancy Marshall, Joe Osterman and myself are the caretakers. This morning I found Alice Barrett's new book of poems "The Bridge" in there. Her poem "Kitchen Counter Love Notes" made my day, I'll put the book back so others can share. I placed a mystery by Vermont author Archer Mayer in, Wendy Pree said she read it and liked it especially because it was local.

Reading, connecting, community, church; let's keep it rolling.

George Butler

ed. Thank you, George. It is absolutely beautiful!

From the Trustees...

How Far Can We Go?

With our new paved parking lot, there is a strong preference for many of us to park “between the new lines.” However, there is also still room for us to park in the unpaved portion to the right-hand side as you enter the parking lot. Here the challenge is to see how well we can utilize that space. If we all just pull slightly off the paved area, we may block others from using more of that potential parking area. So here’s the pitch: Can we figure out a way to accommodate more cars over there, without blocking each other in?

It’s not quite a Rubik’s Cube puzzle, but it will be tricky. However, I bet we’re up to it!

How Bare Can We Go?

With our two magnificent maple trees gone in front of the church, it may seem quite bare to all of us.

However, we’re advised by arborists that until we can finally grind out the second of the two resulting stumps and allow the ground to settle (and be re-graded to eliminate ruts from the lifts used to help paint the exterior), we should defer the replanting of trees. So, probably for a couple of years, we’ll have a more exposed look to the building. But we are fortunate to have a remarkably handsome (and recently painted) church; therefore, all is well.

Ted Murray

From the Stewardship Committee....

Will We Make It Next Year?

At the last Trustees meeting a draft budget was proposed for next year that totaled \$109,000, slightly *less* than our 2018 budget (to account for smaller projected investment returns). Of that amount, it was estimated that \$66,000 would be supported by 70 pledges, the goals we had set in our fall stewardship letter. However, as of this writing (December 24, Christmas Eve), we *have only \$51,423 from 44 pledges.*

Included in the 44 pledges are a few new pledges as well as some wonderful 10% increases in renewed pledges. But many who pledged in 2018 have not yet pledged for 2019, so the Stewardship Committee has mailed reminders to several members and friends of our church. **We urge any who have not pledged to do so BEFORE January 8 when the Trustees meet to finalize our budget.** If you need a pledge form, they are in the Stewardship mailbox in the church office. And thank you to all who may have recently submitted their pledges for the coming year. Only through the support of all of us will we be able to sustain our church and its various missions in the year ahead. Your Stewardship Committee: **Bruce, Caroline Mack, Annie, Richard Prée, Ann, Ted.**

From the Capital Campaign

Follow Up Team...

A Recap of the Capital Campaign

1. You will remember from the December issue of News From the Pews, our Capital Campaign has pledged and cash for total of \$365,000 (\$20,000 of which came via an organ restoration grant from the Bradley Foundation).
2. In addition to the originally budgeted items, we've spent \$25,000 for the completed paving project, and the Trustees will propose \$18,000 be allocated to the completed painting of the church exterior. (At the time we voted to proceed with the Capital Campaign, those were the two top priorities that were agreed to in the event we raised more than our goal of \$300,000.)
3. **IF all pledges come in as promised** and we don't incur any further unexpected costs, **we could have a surplus of \$22,000.**

What's next?

1. The Capital Campaign's Follow Up Task Group proposes that we devote some of our Bi-monthly Congregational Meetings (Jan 13, Mar 10, and May 5) to discuss this so, as a congregation, we can make a final decision by early May.
2. At our **January 13, 2019 Bi-Monthly Congregational Meeting**, we'll hear about two options currently being considered: a) There will be presentation from a group that has been researching how we might decorate the façade pipes of our organ in addition to what is currently specified in the contract for its restoration. b) As part of our ongoing upgrade of the energy efficiency of our building, the Trustees will present a plan for repairing/replacing old windows in Friendship Hall.

Stay tuned! We have a wonderful “problem” to solve. Speak with any of the Follow Up Team members if you have questions, ideas, and/or concerns. **Ted, Liz, Annie, Margery, Susannah, Ann, Wendy Swan.**

*“What seems impossible
one minute becomes,
through faith, possible in
the next.”*

Norman Vincent Peale



Dear friends,

I wanted to tell you about an important fundraiser at the IMA - the Institute for Musical Arts - on Rt. 112 in Goshen on **January 20 at 4 p.m.** It's just about 5 minutes south of Ashfield. The fundraiser is for the LGBTQ Asylum Task Force in Worcester. A group of us have been hosting fundraisers for them for many years. These are LGBTQ folk from countries where being homosexual is illegal. All the asylum seekers have stories of trauma in their home countries and stories of hope and possibility working with the Task Force.

Here is what organizer Tony Lemos says of the evening:

"We will be combining stories from the asylum seekers, and songs from their amazing world choir with a stellar line up of killer local hero musicians! "

Please let me know if you have questions. Best for this season of darkness, soon to be lightening.

BUBBLE UP
January 15
7:30 p.m.



Our theme on January 15th will be "What is on our spiritual bucket list?" That is, as we move into the new year, what is it that we want to focus on spiritually for ourselves? This may include-- what might we want support for in terms of making some changes in 2019? What might we be looking for spiritually that would nourish our soul? What experiences might we share that would help us focus more on hope and faith as we struggle to live in this current volatile world environment?

Our recent meetings on prayer and the Virgin Birth have been exceptionally meaningful for us. We would love to have you join us, as this is too good an experience not to be shared.

Annual Meeting January 27, 2019

Our Congregation will gather after worship Sun. **Jan. 27**, for a Potluck AND the 258th Annual Meeting of Ashfield's Congregational Church. Our church has a long history in this town, and we are blessed to be stewards of this faith tradition as well as active participants in shaping its future.

This is the time for the entire congregation to gather to look at the bigger picture: What do we want to do, participate in, explore... this coming year? How can we support each other, our church, the wider world? What is God asking us to do? Please come, be part of the celebration and discussion. Each person's voice is needed.

In addition to voting on approval of the 2018 reports and the proposed 2019 budget, we will be voting on having a trial run / "a pilot" of a few new changes to our church governance. First, we propose forming two new official standing committees, **Stewardship** and **Mission & Social Justice**, whose "charge" will be voted on at this meeting. Also, we will be implementing a **Church Council**, made up of the church officers and heads of our standing committees, which will meet bi-monthly. And, lastly, we will increase the frequency of our Congregational Meetings, now meeting bi-monthly instead of quarterly. The Church Council meeting on opposite months from the Congregational Mtg.

We will be voting in church officers (Moderator, Treas., Asst. Treas., Mission Treas. and Clerk) as well as members of our standing committees: diaconate, trustees, stewardship, and Mission and Social Justice.

If you are interested in serving as a church officer or serving on a standing committee (Stewardship, Mission and Social Justice, Trustees, Diaconate) please let me know. You need to be a member of the church to serve as a church officer, deacon, or trustee.

The Annual Report will be available Sun. Jan. 20, so people will have a chance to read the reports and budgetary information one week before our meeting. Please read this; knowing what's in the Report will allow for a more succinct discussion and 2018 review, clearer understanding of the proposed changes to our governance, and more time for discussing '19 and our future.

With gratitude,
Wendy Prée, clerk

First Congregational Church of Ashfield

Calendar January 2019



JANUARY

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14 Rosa Stegeman
- 15
- 16 Wendy Pree
Tom Schreiber
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20 Elias Stegeman
- 21
- 22 Dot Roberts
- 23
- 24
- 25 Annabel Demarino
Rick Hindley
- 26 Richard Bromberg
Virginia Broberg
- 27 Leslie Chaison
- 28
- 29 Bruce Bennett
Jessie Bennett
- 30
- 31

Wed. Jan. 2: Food Pantry and Share the Warmth distribution 3-6 p.m.

Sat. Jan. 5: Search and Call 3-5 p.m.

Sun. Jan. 6: Epiphany Sunday, Worship 10 a.m. led by Nancy Sykes

Tues. Jan. 8: Deacons Mtg. 7 p.m. Trustees Mtg. 7 p.m.

Wed. Jan. 9: COA / TaiChi 9:30 - 10:15 a.m.

Thurs. Jan. 10: Mission and Social Justice / potluck 6 p.m., meeting 7 p.m.

Sat. Jan. 12: Food Pantry Board Annual Meeting 12p.m.

Sun. Jan. 13: Worship 10 a.m. Bi-Monthly Congregational Mtg. following worship.
Search and Call

Tues. Jan. 15: Food Pantry and Share the Warmth distribution 3-6 p.m.

Bubble Up Theology 7:30

Wed. Jan. 16: COA / TaiChi 9:30 - 10:15 a.m.
Choir Music Filing 7:15 p.m.

Sun. Jan. 20: Choir 9 a.m. Worship 10 a.m. led by Rev. Ann Hallstein

Mon. Jan. 21: Search and Call 3-5 p.m.

Wed. Jan. 23: COA / TaiChi 9:30- 10:15 a.m.
Choir rehearsal 7:15 p.m.

Sun. Jan. 27: Choir 9 a.m. Worship 10 a.m. led by Nancy Sykes. Followed by Pot Luck.

258th Annual Meeting following worship.

Tues. Jan. 29: Food Pantry and Share the Warmth distribution 3-6 p.m.

Wed. Jan. 30: COA / TaiChi 9:30 - 10:15 a.m.

Note: If you have a birthday in February, please be sure to put your name on the Birthday Calendar!

**DEADLINE FOR
News from the Pews
COPY FOR FEBRUARY
IS JANUARY 24th...**

Questions? ask Victoria Nelson

**First Congregational Church UCC
P.O.Box 519
Ashfield, MA 01330**



Welcome, Little Free Library