

Glad Tidings

First Congregational Church of West Brookfield
United Church of Christ
December 2025

36 North Main Street, PO Box 371
West Brookfield, MA 01585 508-867-7078
Facebook: First Congregational Church of
West Brookfield, UCC
Website: westbrookfieldcongregationalucc.org



From Our Pastor

Dear Friends,

Where Karen and I lived in Ohio for the past six years, the sun sets 45 minutes later each day than it does in the West Brookfield area. For me, the earlier sunsets here at this time of year accentuate the darkness of the impending winter season. Coupled with what seems to be a spiritual darkness pervading many aspects of our life in our nation, that physical darkness might threaten to immerse our souls in sadness, or even depression.

More than ever, then, for Christians the journey through the season of Advent can be an uplifting journey of hope, as well as a journey of moving toward the light and love of God that we celebrate at Christmas. I would like to encourage us, as individuals and as a community of faith, to take that journey this year with intentionality, reflecting regularly on God's gift to us of Jesus and, in anticipation of celebrating that gift at Christmas, finding time to share the fruits of that gift—light, love, laughter, and gratitude—with others in the days ahead.

The Advent Interlude program on the evening of December 2 is designed to inspire us to find meaning and joy in the season ahead. I hope some of you will be able to join us that evening at 7 for an hour of music, videos, readings, and reflection. On the next page is a sample of the kind of reading that might be included in that program—I hope folks will find it meaningful as we prepare for Christmas.

Wishing Advent blessings, grace, and peace to all,
Doug



Advent Adventure, by Carol Penner

A story of light dawning,
light that is yearned for, longed for, desperately sought,
a story of light dawning in darkness;
darkness that covers the deep,
darkness that speaks of death.

A story of hope dawning,
hope that is yearned for, longed for, desperately sought,
a story of hope dawning in the midst of despair;
despair that defeats us,
despair that speaks of death.

A story of peace dawning,
peace that is yearned for, longed for, desperately sought,
a story of peace dawning in the midst of violence;
violence that destroys us,
violence that speaks of death.

The story is about Jesus.
A baby dawns as light in the world,
a dayspring of hope, the bright and morning star.
He is the Prince of Peace.
We take our place in this gospel story;
hesitant, unsure, not knowing our lines.

O God, you are the Author who imagines us.
You created us, you know this story inside out.
In this dark season of adventure,
give us light for the journey, and hope.
Guide our feet into paths of peace.

From our Boards and Committees

Open And Affirming Committee (ONA)

The Open and Affirming Committee met recently with Kathie Carpenter, ONA coach for the Open and Affirming Coalition for the United Church of Christ. We reviewed the educational journey that we have taken with the congregation and shared our proposed ONA Covenant with her. Kathie has recommended that we add one more piece to our plan and that will be to have a panel discussion with a couple of members of the LGBTQ community. This would most likely occur after one of our services on a Sunday around the beginning of the new year. After this event a date will be set to vote on the covenant that has been proposed and if it passes we will officially become an Open and Affirming church welcoming all even wider than we already do!

Please watch this newsletter and the weekly email announcements for updates and speak to anyone on the committee with your questions.

Thanks for your support,

Doug Showalter, Angela Carville, Stephanie Beland, Beverly Prestwood-Taylor, Karen Murphy, Pat Jackman, and Terry Hall

Nominating Board

We are close to completing our work for 2026 but have found that we could use a couple of more people to volunteer to serve on the Parish Board. The Parish Board handles decisions regarding the church building and grounds in addition to some financial decisions in consultation with the Church Council. If interested to learn more please see Karen Murphy or Terry Hall.

The Ad Hoc Bylaws Committee, composed of Al Collings, Dee Blanton, Doug Showalter, Doug Williamson, and Juan Bacigalupi, are hard at work updating the Church Bylaws. The group has met twice. Having two pastors on the committee is very helpful, as they can offer suggestions and examples from other churches. The Committee is striving to clarify roles and responsibilities and hopefully simplify the organizational structure, to match the limited number of people available to fill the Boards and Committees. The Committee is aiming to have revisions drafted in late December/early January and will hold a Q & A session after a service in January to gather feedback from the Congregation.

Thank you! Dee

From the Stewardship Committee:

We would like to thank everyone who pledged this year! So far we have received 25 pledge cards, totaling \$92,076. We are so grateful for your faithful generosity in supporting our church!

We would also like to thank Shelley Fullam, Bruce Prestwood-Taylor and Linda Daskowski for sharing their Stewardship Moments during our campaign.

If you have not returned your pledge card, you are encouraged to do so, as it helps the Parish Board in creating next year's budget. Additional pledge cards are available from one of the committee members. Again, THANK YOU!

Your Stewardship Committee: Dee Blanton, Angela Carville, Mary Deotte and Terry Hall

Parish Board

The Parish Board continues to be busy taking care of maintaining our beautiful but needy building! Fortunately, with the help of many of you a lot of work is done. Included in this newsletter is the annual letter that is sent to the Irving England Fund expressing our gratitude for their continued support. This year, our church moderator, Dee Blanton wrote the letter, and we felt that everyone should have an opportunity to read it (see it at the end of the letter). Dee has truly captured the essence of our church and all the good that it does for the greater community. The Parish board was very appreciative of her work.

In addition to this letter, John Lapierre volunteered to scrape and repaint the tall white light post in front of the church that was rusting and peeling. That job was not an easy one and was so appreciated by all! Church handyman Dave Steltzer continues to do important odd jobs around the building and most recently completed the repairing and painting of our handicap ramp. It looks so much better! See the pictures of John and Dave's work and say thanks when you see them!

Be sure to let the Parish Board know if you see anything throughout the building that needs attention.

Wally Hall, Mike Murphy, Linda Daskowski, and Juan Bacigalupi





The "hanging of the greens" decorating Sunday went wonderfully. Thank you to all that helped out! We purchased a new complete Nativity set in preparation for this season. Rev. Doug Williamson will be teaching our kids about the whole Nativity story during children's message. The Advent wreath is ready for our Advent season as we eagerly look forward to celebrating this glorious season!

Tuesday, December 2nd we will be having an Advent Interlude at 7pm with music, videos and more. Hope you can come! Many thanks to all that have volunteered to do readings and candle lighting for this Advent season.

A get well... a few kind words... we want our church family and friends to know we are here for them. If you know of anyone that our church family should reach out to please contact Karen Murphy at kmurphy718@charter.net.

Blessings from your Deacons!

Nancy Arsenault, JoAnn Bakulski, Pat Jackman, Karen Murphy, Chris Showalter

It is that time of year again!

Shovels are in the back hall & sand buckets are placed at all doors. The Parish Board can't be everywhere so we are asking for your help. If you see that an area is slippery or has a dusting of snow, please help out. If you cannot do it safely, reach out to a Parish Board member and thank you for your help!



W. Brookfield Farmer's Market

The W. Brookfield Farmer's Market that is held on the town common during the spring and summer months has returned to our Fellowship Hall for another season. Visit any Wednesday from 3 pm - 6 pm and enjoy a bountiful selection of wonderful fresh foods, farm products and handmade items from local artists and farmers.



The holidays are fast approaching and Nancy Arsenault will be ordering poinsettias to decorate our church sanctuary for Christmas Eve. Order forms are available on the table in the rear of the sanctuary with a deadline of Sunday, December 14th. Please note that *Green Thumb*, our local West Brookfield florist, is offering us more choices this year than we have had in the past. In addition to the traditional red and white poinsettias, there is now also a choice of pink as well as variegated! The price this year will be \$15 ea. Thank you for helping to make our sanctuary festive for Christmas Eve!



White Christmas in West Brookfield

December 7, 2025

11:30am – 5:00pm

Mark your calendars!

Our church will be open to the community at 11:30 am with an absolutely delicious lunch (see menu below), glorious bake table and a HUGE raffle with gift items and gift cards. At 1:30 pm we will host the Hardwick Memorial Handbell Choir (Deanna Randall-member) and the Elf on a Shelf will be hiding all day in our Fellowship Hall as part of the great elf hunt! Truly not a day to miss!

Please plan to join your church family and friends in celebrating the beginning of the Christmas season!

Our Thanks....

Thanks to everyone who has signed up to volunteer their time, for all of the food and monetary donations and for your continued support. This is one of the 3 big fundraisers our church has each year and your support is so important.

Still needed:

- Someone to purchase the ingredients and to make the chicken salad for sandwiches (reimbursement available)
- Greeter from 11 – 1:30 pm
- One more volunteer for the bake table from 11:30 – 2:30
- Someone to make one more soup....any kind is fine (reimbursement available)
- From 2:30 – 5:30 one to two more order fillers and deliverers would be helpful.

Do any of these jobs fit your skill set??

Please call Karen Andersen and let her know you're available! 413-230-7476

Thanks!

Our Mouth-Watering Menu

We will be having our delicious, mouth-watering menu as we have for years!

- Hot Turkey Sandwich w/stuffing, gravy, and cranberry sauce
- Ham, Chicken and Egg Salad Sandwiches with chips and pickles
- Hot dog or chili dog
- Bowl of Chili
- 2 kinds of homemade soup
- Pie by the slice (Apple, Pumpkin and Blueberry)
- And this year we will also have cheesecake by the slice!

Thank you all in advance for all you do to help make this a great fundraiser for our church!

The Big Raffle is Back!

Baskets needed! The White Christmas Raffle Team of Dee and Angela are seeking donations of new or very gently used items to create the very popular gift baskets! Think of this as a regifting opportunity, if you received something in the past year that is not quite your style, pass it on. If you have any baskets in good condition, please bring those in before Thanksgiving. We are also seeking gift cards to local businesses like restaurants or coffee shops to add into the raffle. Please bring in any donations to the raffle no later than December 1. If you have questions, please email Dee at deeblanton86@gmail.com Thank you!

Clothing Drive for Worcester Fellowship

The Mission Committee is currently holding a clothing drive for the folks at Worcester Fellowship Church. They are collecting NEW socks, underwear, tee shirts, gloves and hats for women, men and kids in all sizes.

The deadline for contributing is Sunday, December 7th and all donations can be placed in the bucket located in the rear of the sanctuary.

Thank you for your generosity!

The Mission Committee

2025 Quilt Raffle

Another beautiful quilt has been donated for us to raffle at the end of the day on White Christmas, December 7th. It measures 58" x 68" and is in the "Potato Chip" pattern. Tickets are \$2 each or 3 for \$5. Don't miss your chance to take a chance!



Dismas Farm Dinners

Dinner will be at the church
Tuesday, December 9th at 6.00 PM.

We are having a potluck at the church for the gentlemen. Main dishes, sides, salad, and dessert are all welcome. Please check with, Deanna, Angela or Millie if you are able to attend and bring something to share! Let's make it festive!!!

Dismas Volunteers:

Deanna Randall - 413-436-7849
or drandall444@comcast.net

Millie Gushue - 413-436-7125;
or gushoo@comcast.net

Angela Carville - 508-347-1148 or
angelacarville67@gmail.com



Helen McDonald – 12/1
Gloria Hanks – 12/4
Rev. Sharron Lamothe – 12/5
Eric von Bleicken – 12/8
Adam Walters – 12/10
John Lapierre – 12/11
Nancy Zurawka – 12/25
Joanne Dirlam – 12/30

Bryan & Pamela Griffing – 12/7
Dave & Debbie Steltzer – 12/20
David & Karen Larkham – 12/26
Mike & Ellen Spencer – 12/28

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR YOUR CHURCH OFFICERS & CHAIRS

Moderator: Dee Blanton – deebblanton86@gmail.com

Deacon Chair: Karen Murphy – kmurphy718@charter.net

Parish Board Co-Chairs: Wally Hall – terryle56@yahoo.com & Mike Murphy – kmurphy718@charter.net

Treasurer – Mary Deotte – hombai@yahoo.com

Collector: Deanna Randall – drandall444@comcast.net

Clerk: Terry Hall – terryle56@yahoo.com

Church Phone: 508-867-7078

From Our Church Office

Pastor - Rev. Dr. Doug Williamson – 913-387-9974 – djwnscaa@gmail.com

Office Hours- Wednesday & Friday 9:30am – 1:00pm

Church Secretary – Bonni Holmes – fccwbworship@gmail.com

Office Hours – Friday 8 am – 10 am

Please note – The *Glad Tidings* deadline for January is Monday, December 29th

SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTIONS

Website: westbrookfieldcongregationalucc.org

Facebook: First Congregational Church of West Brookfield, UCC

Instagram: Search @firstcongowestbrookfield



Our Mission and Vision Statement: *We are a church where all are welcome to worship together, to share in fellowship and to grow spiritually in our journey with Christ. We value justice, diversity, and freedom of expression. We strive to serve our community and all God's creation and to spread the love of God to all people.*

First Congregational Church of West Brookfield, UCC
P.O. Box 371
West Brookfield, MA 01585
Tel. (508) 867-7078

November 3, 2025

Ann Molloy and Francis Russell, Co-Trustees
J. Irving England and Jane L. England Charitable Trust
370 Main Street, Suite 800
Worcester, MA 01608

Dear Ms. Molloy and Mr. Russell,

I am writing to you with an invitation to make a positive difference in the communities of West Brookfield and Warren, Massachusetts. Our church, The First Congregational Church of West Brookfield, works to sustain the bodies and spirits of our congregation, our local community, and the world beyond. We like to think of ourselves as small but mighty. We multiply all of our individual member contributions, whether donated funds or time and talent, to achieve big results. We are grateful for your generous contributions in the past, and hope to hear from you again. Would you be so kind as to help fund our work in 2026 with a donation from the J. Irving England Charitable Trust?

We've been working very hard over the past year. Here are some highlights for 2025:

We have called a new minister, after a two-year search process, and are very excited to now have the Reverend Dr. Douglas Williamson leading our congregation. Doug brings a wealth of experience, leading churches in Ohio, Nebraska, and Vermont, in addition to a long and rich academic teaching and soccer coaching career. He and his wife Karen are settling into New England life and are eager to bring their knowledge and talents to enrich our community.

Our Missions Committee carefully researched charities and provided support to worthy causes at the local, national, and international level. In the central Massachusetts area, we made contributions to a variety of local organizations, including the Dismas Farm, Springfield Rescue Mission, Worcester Fellowship, Abby's House, and Camp Putnam. We also host dinners with the residents of the Dismas Farm at the church every other month, providing personal connection and social time for the residents. Our congregation includes a number of veterans, so contributions were made to Holy Joe's Café and Home Front Strong to support our troops during and after deployment. Reaching beyond the United States, the Missions Committee provided funding to Saving Orphans Nationally and Globally (SONG); Global Ministries; and the United Church of Christ's international work.

The Sharing Cupboard Food Pantry, housed in the basement of the church, serves local families in the communities of West Brookfield, Warren, and West Warren. Each month, between 70 and 85 families are served by the Sharing Cupboard, which is one of the only food pantries in the area with multiple pickup days and evening hours. This flexibility better enables working families to access food assistance. Early in 2025, with the full support of the church, the Sharing Cupboard underwent a major renovation and expansion in anticipation of increased food insecurity. An unused large classroom in the church basement was offered as additional space to the Sharing Cupboard. The floor was cleaned and repaired; the walls were freshly painted; and a new doorway was cut to connect the old pantry space with the new space. An adjustable ramp was built in a bulkhead with stairs, allowing cases of food from the Worcester County Food Bank to be unloaded quickly and safely onto carts that can be moved to the shelves. New shelving and refrigerators and freezers were purchased, doubling the amount of food storage space. The expanded space for food storage has allowed the Sharing Cupboard to take full advantage of the food pickups from the Worcester County Food Bank as well as doing more food drives within the West Brookfield community.

Our new high-efficiency heat pump system, installed in the fall of 2023, has performed well for both heating and cooling. We are working with Interfaith Power and Light to write up our decision-making process and experience as a case study. In addition, Mass Save and National Grid are installing sensors and data loggers to measure real time usage data through the heating season. Results of this study will be used to assist other churches and businesses to make more informed decisions about viable options for heating systems.

We also intentionally and thoughtfully continue to increase our presence in the local community, beyond our congregation. In addition to participating in the Asparagus Festival in the spring and hosting the Flea Market on the Common in late summer, we offer space to the West Brookfield Winter Farmers Market. Each week many local farmers set up a mini-market in our fellowship hall and invite the public in to shop for locally produced meat, vegetables, baked goods, and other products. We will of course be a key part of the White Christmas in West Brookfield celebration on December 7, with a bake table with homemade treats, a bucket raffle and our very tasty open-faced turkey sandwiches.

We really hope the J. Irving England Charitable Trust can help fund our work in 2026. We are grateful for your generous contributions in the past, and hope to hear from you again. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Dee Blanton
Church Moderator

First Congregational Church of West Brookfield



Sharing Cupboard Renovation

Before: Inadequate food storage space, hard to organize, clean, and work in.



Completed Renovation

Doubled storage capacity, easy to unload food, organize, clean, and pack for clients.

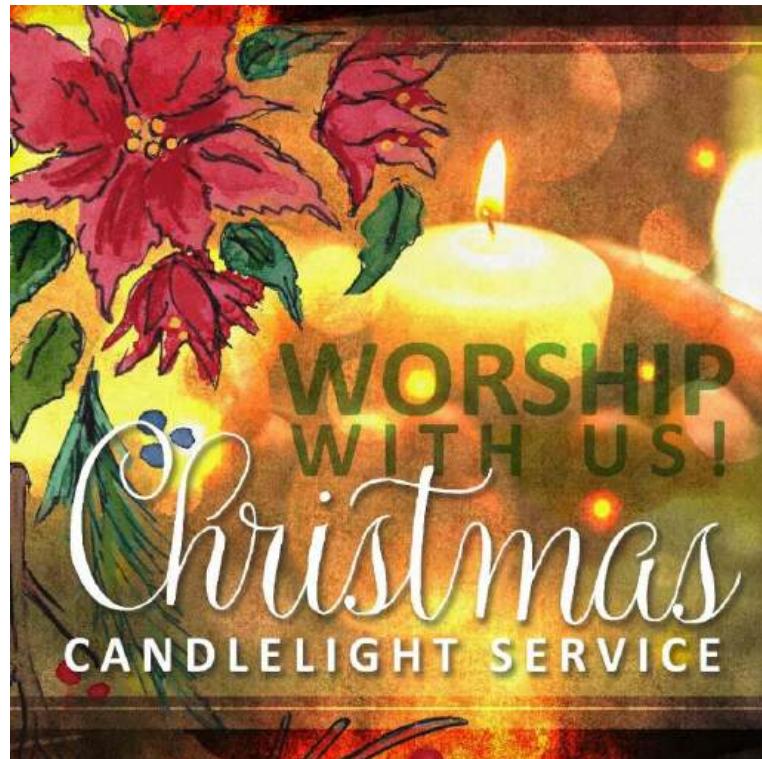




December



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2 Advent Interlude 7pm	3 Sharing Cupboard 10 – 11:30 am	4 Sharing Cupboard 7 – 8 pm	5	6 CLOTHING DRIVE DEADLINE 12/7
7 Worship 10 am Coffee & Fellowship	8	9 Dismas Farm Potluck dinner at the church 6pm	10 Sharing Cupboard 10 – 11:30 am	11 Sharing Cupboard 7 – 8 pm	12	13
14 Worship 10 am Sunday School Coffee & Fellowship Deacons	15	16	17 Sharing Cupboard 10 – 11:30 am	18 Sharing Cupboard 7 – 8 pm	19	20
21 Worship 10 am Coffee & Fellowship Church Council	22	23 Sharing Cupboard 10 – 11:30 am	24  7pm	25 	26	27
28 Worship 10 am Sunday School Coffee & Fellowship	29	30 Glad Tidings Deadline	31 			



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24TH AT 7PM.

First Congregational Church of W. Brookfield, UCC
PO Box 371
36 N. Main St
W. Brookfield, MA 01585
December 2025