

Glad Tidings

First Congregational Church
of West Brookfield
United Church of Christ
April 2026

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Facebook: First Congregational Church of
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Website: westbrookfieldcongregationalucc.org



From Our Pastor

Dear Friends,

The reading from the lectionary, the three-year cycle of scripture passages used by many Christian churches, for Holy Week, is John 12:1-11, which has Jesus coming to the home of Mary Magdalene and Lazarus—and tradition adds Martha as well.

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.



Three years ago now many folks were beginning to read the findings of the research done by the superb Biblical scholar Professor Elizabeth Schrader. Perhaps the biggest surprise I, and many others, encountered in her work is that several ancient manuscripts say that Mary served the dinner and then she anointed Jesus, and that the character of Martha was added decades, or even centuries, later by church leaders. This new research and historical investigation suggest a powerful alternative narrative in the Gospel of John, one long hidden in plain sight: Mary Magdalene confesses the Christ, serves Jesus, anoints him for burial, witnesses his death and resurrection, and proclaims the first Easter message. She is truly *Mary the Tower* as she models a five-fold vocation for all of Jesus' followers (*Magdala* is derived from the Hebrew word *Migdal*, meaning "tower," or "fortress," which symbolizes her strength, faith, and pivotal role as a leader among Jesus's disciples).

As we begin Holy Week this year let us consider following the admirable example of Mary Magdalene in the journey with Jesus from Palm Sunday to the cross and beyond — trust, serve, bless, witness, and proclaim. It is a path we can all walk.

Grace and peace,
Doug

P.S. Below this note is a simple prayer we might consider adopting on our journey to Easter:

*Lord, you bring us into being
and let our lives touch your heart:
may the fragrance of our worship
draw us closer to your open heart
and free us from our clinging
to the things we can control;
through Jesus Christ, the passion of God.
Amen.*

— Steven Shakespeare



Dismas Farm Dinner

Dismas Farm dinner will be taken to the farm on
Tuesday, April 14.

Dinner is at 6 pm and we try to arrive by 5:30.

If anyone would like to contribute to the meal,
please let Deanna or Angela know via email, or
Millie Gushue, by phone.

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



Spring is here *woohoo* and we are getting itchy to start some Spring cleanup in the basement. If you are interested in helping please let Karen Murphy know. Date of first cleanup is still to be determined.

The Parish Board requests that if you have something that you would like to donate to the church... PLEASE! Speak to a Parish Board member before just dropping it in a room downstairs. Also, if you have something you would like to donate for the GIANT raffle at our White Christmas event see Dee Blanton or Angela Carville before leaving anything in the raffle room.

Exciting news: We hired a new cleaner that will be starting April 2nd. Her name is Joyce Tibbetts, if you see her be sure to introduce yourself and say hello.

Parish: Juan Bacigalupi, Karen Murphy, Dave Stelzer (handyman)

Wally Hall, Mike Murphy & Doug Showalter (assistants)

An FCCWB Historian report – 4/2026

I have created a Google Drive folder for sharing historic documents and my own writings on the history of our FCCWB church. And I am making that folder available for all who are interested in learning more about our church's history. Here is the current link to that folder:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1WKYMBDAMgxt_unYZfBik9cJdaR2GnukX?usp=sharing

I am continuing to add files to that folder and I have divided its larger files into sections, so it is not necessary to download them in order to read the pages within those files. At present that drive contains PDFs of the following documents:

Three record books copied from the website of the Congregational Library in Boston

- ~ FCCWB record book 1756-1818
- ~ FCCWB record book 1819-1867
- ~ First Parish record book 1754-1826

One record book currently held in our church

- ~ First Parish record book 1909-1947

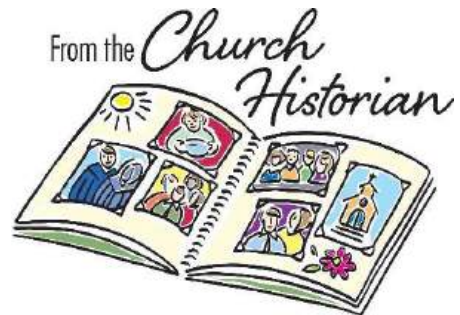
Assorted documents

- ~ Congregational Library holdings list - FCCWB records 1754-1917
- ~ FCCWB Glad Tidings 2023-2025

My own writings

- ~ Explore FCCWB History - version #4
- ~ FCCWB Minister Censuses
- ~ Rev. Eliakim Phelps 1818-1826

I am currently researching and compiling a document on the history of the West Brookfield Common and its connection to our First Parish and the town. I am also photographing and scanning the FCCWB record book, held in our church, which begins in 1890. In time, I may need to divide files in this Google Drive folder into separate subfolders, and that would require separate links to share. I am also continuing to examine the large number of files/documents stockpiled in the second-floor historical room and its closet to see which of the most important ones could/should be reorganized and possibly scanned for better preservation of their contents.



Open and Affirming Committee

At the most recent meeting, your ONA Committee reflected on the past 2 years of education programs we have brought to you, and the wonderful discussions that we have all had. In addition, we reviewed the results of the straw poll that was taken at our annual meeting regarding the Open and Affirming Covenant that we

drafted together. The straw poll resulted in 29 of the 30 members signaling in the affirmative with 2 non-members agreeing as well. With plans to move into our future, and reflecting on feedback from those in the church, the committee has set a date for a vote on our ONA Covenant.

Open and Affirming Covenant of First Congregational Church of W. Brookfield

We, the members of the First Congregational Church of West Brookfield, UCC, are a people of faith, following Jesus and sharing God's abundant love, believing each of us is created in God's image. We seek to demonstrate God's love through respect and care for one another. We celebrate and learn from differences in race, culture, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, economic and political background, and physical and cognitive challenges. We welcome those who have no church home, need strength, want to follow Christ, or are seekers in their spiritual lives.

All are invited to participate fully in the life, leadership, ministry and mission of this church as we strive to grow in a safe and nurturing community of faith. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

The special church meeting to vote on the covenant will be held on Sunday, May 3rd following our morning worship service. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend! Please remember that *everyone* is invited to attend this meeting but only the votes of church members will be counted in the total. Please note that regardless of the results of the vote on May 3rd, education regarding our LGBTQI+ community will continue. With that in mind please plan to join the committee on **Sunday, April 26th** when we present two short videos: *Gatekeeping* an interview with the late Rachel Held Evans and another containing a brief interview with Nadia Bolz Weber. We will begin our meeting during coffee hour. In addition, many have asked the committee for a vocabulary list with definitions to assist in understanding our LGBTQI+ brothers and sisters. Copies of this list are located on the bulletin board in the Fellowship Hall. Please help yourself to a copy.

Keeping our ongoing education in mind, please read the following article that shares the experiences of one gay Christian man.

As always, please speak to any member of our committee with questions or comments on any of the upcoming plans.

Thanks for your ongoing support!

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

Being queer, I never thought I'd find God; then he found me

I grew up thinking that I wasn't allowed to love or praise God precisely because I am gay. Yet, God kept appearing in my life.

By Josh Kruger June 18, 2017.

“Homos go to hell,” the sign said. “Stop sinning,” another placard clumsily belched. “Obey Jesus.”

The people holding the signs shouted slurs, and passers-by gawked at the hateful display. I’d had enough of this group’s little sermon — if you can call it that — and continued walking to evening prayer.

I was very confused. I do not know what god those demonstrators were shouting about. It sounded like a knockoff deity, some sort of small, manmade figure — a false idol, if you will.

A few minutes later, I was in a dark sanctuary with two other people. We sat opposite each other where the choir sits on Sundays.

They read a line of Psalm, we all paused, and I responded with the other line. We continued this call and response, each of us steadfast in our prayer for peace, our praise of God, our thanks for life.

A thousand years ago, this was chanted by monks in Latin.

Like those monks, we performed this medieval ritual because we were called by God to do it — in Philadelphia, in 2017, with iPhones in our pockets.

It was so quiet there in the sanctuary that night, and God was limitless.

I am what some would call a devout Christian. I attend mass several times a week, I pray several times a day, and I’ve let my life become beautifully intertwined with the life of a local church.

I’m also an HIV+ queer man with a history of drug addiction, homelessness, and trauma. I’ve been clean and sober years now — but I have that past regardless.

I’m allowed to be all of these things and still be religious.

I grew up thinking that I wasn’t allowed to love or praise God precisely because I am gay — or that I had to give up the gift of loving or marrying another person if I wanted to practice a faith.

I also saw some self-described Christians often saying the meanest things about us queer people, sometimes in the guise of “humor.” In reality, it was bullying. This wasn’t a crowd I wanted to associate with. So, I wrote off faith.

Yet, God kept appearing in my life. I resisted the call for years. Coincidence after coincidence, I kept being reminded of God’s presence and being pulled toward God. On the rare occasion I acknowledged God, it felt perfectly right. It felt electric.

Frankly, I hated it.

Surely, I thought, I cannot believe in God. Plus, I wasn’t raised with religion. I was never baptized as a child, and Christmas meant presents and Santa Claus, not Jesus.

Regardless, God was very annoying and simply would not take the hint that I wasn’t interested.

This was an extremely awkward, strange situation that lasted years.

In my late twenties, I relented a bit and thought that maybe I could be “spiritual” — but I certainly wasn’t going to be religious — let alone a formal Christian.

What a strange situation it was, then, when I repeatedly found myself praying not just secretly at home but eventually in churches. Later, I got up the courage to actually attend services. I went to different churches until I found one that felt right. I started participating in the community there and learning. I was baptized. It was like a second coming out.

I learned that different churches and religions believe different things and interpret sacred texts differently. It sounds obvious, but if you've only ever heard or paid attention to the loudest, most hateful people, it's hard to believe there's anything else out there.

To be sure, there are plenty of churches and religions that are still not welcoming to LGBTQ folks. But there are plenty of other churches and religions — mainstream ones with millions of adherents — that don't simply "tolerate" the presence of queer people, they affirm and desire it.

At my church, and there are various denominations and religions just like it, I was accepted from day one, loved, and welcomed precisely because of who I am — not in spite of who I am.

I had to change nothing about my sexuality.

I did make a commitment to change a few other things, though: to be actively engaged in my faith formally, to try to love others as God loves me, and to practice patience, charity, optimism, compassion, and peace.

I fail in some way every single day. But I earnestly try my best.

I'm also more mindful that my existence on Earth is temporary. I take a more contemplative route in life. I've looked at things a little less cynically, and I've thought a lot about integrity.

Don't get me wrong, I'm still a 21st century American. I like air conditioning, and I watch HBO. I use profanity way too much. I enjoy memes. Sometimes, I gossip. I get mad. I yell. I think terrible things.

I'm a human being. I'm worthy of love.

I can't explain why, but I believe my faith to be true. And having that little, special dimension of existence remain untouched by the bankrupt cynicism of life today has dramatically changed my life for the better.

There's also something liberating about practicing something so old, so traditional.

See, my entire life I was told that a typical life was not something I was entitled to, that whatever I did was always "alternative" or somehow lesser than the "real thing." But I don't know how my queerness is at all "alternative."

To me, it's my natural state. It's a very real thing.

My relationship with God, and the church, isn't a mealy-mouthed, inferior alternative. It's fully equal. By nature of our existing, we queer people are entitled to a relationship with God just as we are entitled to all the other inherent rights and dignities that come with being human.

Now, I'm not suggesting everyone go out and get religion or that any one set of beliefs is the right one. We all have different parts to play and paths to walk.

I am suggesting, however, that if you want it, you can have a relationship with God.

If you are called to it, it won't be easy. It'll get weird. It'll get really weird.

But, really, it's delightful.

God resides in each of us. To love each other is to love God. To love myself is to love God.

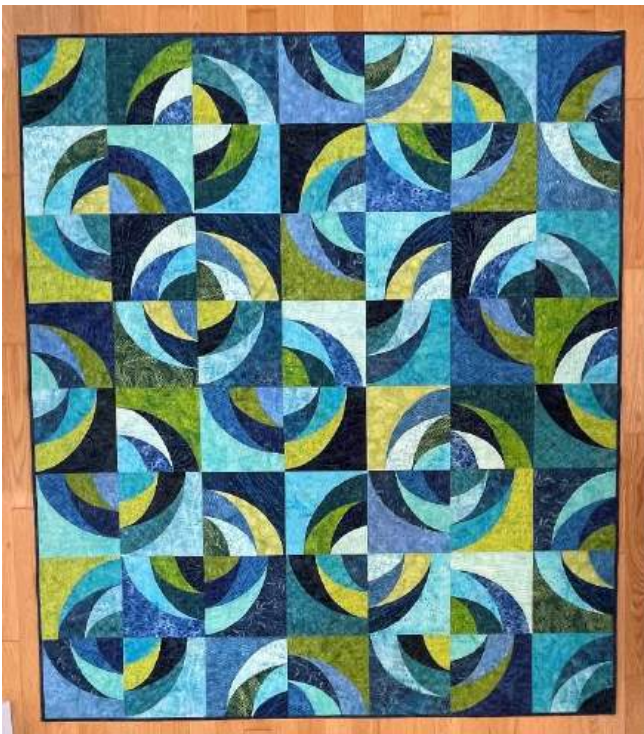
What a joy it is to live this way.



This year's annual quilt raffle will be for a beautiful quilt made by Mary Deotte called "Blue Onion". It is approximately 68" x 78", made entirely from gorgeous batik fabrics. Tickets will be sold for \$5 each or 3/\$10. All proceeds will be added to the Pastor's Discretionary Fund. This fund helps folks in our community with specific needs such as help with their car, help with heating oil, help with temporary housing, etc.

Let's all support this important fundraiser -
we can make a big difference in someone's life when we work together.
Please see Dee Blanton or Karen Murphy for tickets.

And THANK YOU!





Paul Andersen – 4/3
Daniel Mazzaresse – 4/7
Lois Bennett – 4/10
Greg Dwelly – 4/14
Kathy O'Donnell – 4/15
Herrick Spencer – 4/19
Ken Elowe – 4/27

Paul & Karen Andersen – 4/14
Mary & Greg Deotte – 4/21

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR YOUR CHURCH OFFICERS & CHAIRS

Moderator: Dee Blanton – deebanton86@gmail.com

Deacon Chair: Terry Hall – terryle56@yahoo.com

Parish Board: Karen 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 by appointment & Friday 9:30am – 12:00, 1:00 – 2:00pm

Church Secretary – Bonni Holmes – fccwbworship@gmail.com

Office Hours – Friday 8 am – 10 am

Please note – The *Glad Tidings* deadline for May is Monday, April 27th

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.*



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 Sharing Cupboard 10 – 11:30 am	2  MAUNDY Thursday Sharing Cupboard 7 – 8 pm	3  GOOD Friday	4
5 Worship 10 am  EASTER Sunday	6	7	8 Sharing Cupboard 10 – 11:30 am	9 Sharing Cupboard 7 – 8 pm	10	11
12 Worship 10 am Sunday School Coffee & Fellowship Deacons	13	14 Dismas Farm Potluck dinner at the farm 6pm	15 Sharing Cupboard 10 – 11:30 am	16 Sharing Cupboard 7 – 8 pm	17	18
19 Worship 10 am Coffee & Fellowship Church Council	20	21	22 Sharing Cupboard 10 – 11:30 am	23 Sharing Cupboard 7 – 8 pm	24	25
26 Worship 10 am Sunday School Coffee & Fellowship ONA video	27 <i>Glad Tidings Deadline</i>	28	29	30		



- Sunday, March 29th - Palm Sunday - 10 am
- Thursday, April 2nd - Maundy Thursday - 7 pm
 - Friday, April 3rd - Good Friday - 12pm
- Sunday, April 5th - Easter Sunday - Sunrise - 6:15am - Foster Hill Rd
 - Sunday, April 5th - Easter Sunday - 10 am

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