First Congregational Church of West Brookfield
United Church of Christ
an Open and Affirming Church

November 2026

Glad Tidings

Dear Friends,

In her excellent stewardship presentation this past Sunday, Karen Murphy had one paragraph that especially caught both my ear and my brain. “As a steward of Jesus,” she began, “I do all I can to accentuate his teachings and spread his message of welcoming and caring for others. I don’t know about you, but the older I get, the easier it becomes to let go of things that don’t really matter. With his help through prayer, I can stop dwelling on the minor issues in life and focus instead on the bigger picture.”

I found those thoughts to be wise counsel, but they also dovetailed nicely with a piece written by Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber, my favorite cranky, tattooed, brilliant Lutheran pastor, that I had read just two days before. I wasn’t sure what I would write for this introduction to the November *Glad Tidings,* but after hearing Karen’s words, I decided Karen and Nadia had much better wisdom than I did this month. Nadia’s essay is entitled “being less cool=the gift of aging.” I’ll include the whole piece now (I think it’s worth it!) and add a note at the end.

On loving things I never did before.

*On November 2nd last year I found myself six days out from a bilateral mastectomy, in a rented recliner, surprising myself by **yelling** when the Broncos, who seemed beaten, came alive in the fourth quarter to win an ugly game with a last-minute field goal.*

*Reader, I’d never watched an NFL game before. I knew most of my friends didn’t love football. I knew plenty of other people did, but I always imagined they “weren’t my people.” And I knew **I** had never loved it. But what I did not know is that **I COULD love it**.*

God help me, to the utter bafflement of myself and my friends, I do. I love the Broncos so much. I spent 45 minutes yesterday in my kitchen discussing the offensive line with Eric, and why I think our running game is so weak. So, I’m in pretty deep at this point. And I’m just so delighted by that.

Because these last 12 months I’ve lost a lot: my breasts, my vitality, my ability to think as quickly as I used to, all my estrogen, and my dad.

On losses and gains.

So with that much loss, I feel like I could either cling to everything I still have - fearful of losing more, or I could just swing my newly flabby arms wide open to receive what this life has on offer. In other words, I’m slowly aging out of some of my fairly snotty opinions, and you know what’s replacing them? A bunch of stuff I’d never have allowed myself to enjoy before.

After decades of plain brewed coffee, it turns out I am not too good to love a Starbucks drink: I mean, the brown sugar oat milk shaken espresso is delicious. I eat Raising Cane’s chicken fingers. I enjoy instant coffee. And last year I bought my first ever pair of Crocs.

*My 20-year-old self would be **horrified** at my current level of un-coolness. but damn if my 57-year-old self isn’t delighted.*

For my money, one of the best things about getting older is that I find myself opening my aperture of appreciation. (However, I can only take this thing so far, so for the time being, I reserve the right to continue my utter rejection of American cheese slices and Starship’s We Built This City On Rock & Roll).

On aging.

Richard Rohr says the first half of life is for building the container of our life and the second half is for filling it. He warns that some people spend their second half incuriously clutching a short list of what's allowed in the container. Those are the older folks who tend not to be a whole lot of fun to hang out with.

Others, he argues in his book Falling Upward, let the all-or-nothing thinking go the way of skinny jeans and embrace paradoxes and possibilities.

So I'm determined to stop rationing my love for only what's on some imaginary curated list of approved items. F--- the list.

Sacred Harp singing wasn't on my list, and yet here I am in the year of our Lord 2026 going to singing conventions nearly every weekend. It fills me with gladness to sit facing others and belt out songs about death that were written 250 years ago. Without this weird sub-culture I only discovered 3 ½ years ago, my life would have so much less enjoyment.

I saw a video recently of Buell Cobb, a beloved, brilliant Sacred Harp singer. In it he says that when he discovered Sacred Harp in the late '60s he felt he'd come home. "I thought," he added, "I can't believe you guys have been singing this whole time without me!"

There are things and hobbies and people out there that we will discover and then love so hard that we cannot believe they had been out there the whole time without us.

On with or without.

The other day a fellow alcoholic was talking about the 11th step;
sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God,
and said that if there is such a thing as conscious contact with God, there must also be such a thing as unconscious contact with God. I loved that idea; the presence of God, the Word of God, the love of God, the power and majesty and humor and longing of God, is entirely unaffected by whether or not we happen to be conscious of it at any given moment.

That's a kind of faith that feels right to me. The trust that there is more. More goodness to life, more stuff to become obsessed with, more people to become friends with, more contact with God to become conscious of than we feel in any given moment.

Martin Luther, writing about the Lord's Prayer in his Small Catechism, says of the petition ***Give us this day our daily bread****:*

"God gives daily bread, indeed, without our prayer, also to all the wicked; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to know it, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving."

The world is beautiful with or without our noticing. There is daily bread with or without our praying for it. The autumn light around 5 p.m. is still golden whether or not I notice it. The Broncos were down eight in Houston last Nov 2nd whether or not I was on the couch yelling at Bo Nix.

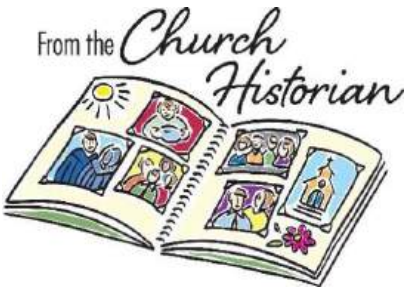
And out there in the world are joyful ways of being human that I haven't discovered yet, and once I do, I hope I unashamedly wear the jersey, shout the lyrics, and wonder how I ever lived without them.

With our Thanksgiving holiday ahead this month, may we ponder the thoughtfulness of the words of both Karen and Nadia and "receive our bread with thanksgiving" and "spread Jesus's message of welcoming and caring for others." Amen.

Grace and peace,

Doug

Historian Report – November 2026



We come to the month of November once again. A very special aspect of this month is our nation's celebration of Thanksgiving, which looks back to the Pilgrims from England and their great faith in God, who enabled them to endure in this new world to them. The Pilgrims' first winter on these American shores (1620-1621) was a terrible one. That winter, those Pilgrims were sick and starving. Nearly half their company died. Only 52 of them survived. But then, with the help of Native American kernels of corn and Squanto, the Wampanoag, teaching them how to plant and fertilize that corn with fish, those Pilgrims enjoyed a rich, full harvest of corn the next fall, the bounty of God's good earth. That harvest enabled them to survive the next winter season. That harvest also led them to hold a joyous festival of thanksgiving to God, which they shared for several days with their Native American neighbors and their neighbors' king, Massasoit.

~ In 1789, U.S. President George Washington proclaimed that the people of the United States should observe "a day of public thanksgiving and prayer" on Thursday, November 26, to thank God for helping us create our new nation with its freedoms.
~ In 1863, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed that a national Thanksgiving Day would be observed every year on the fourth Thursday of November.

You might be interested to know that American churches of Congregational heritage--Puritan and Separatist Puritan (Pilgrim)--like ours celebrated Thanksgiving years before they even began to celebrate Christmas. Because they did not view the celebration of Christmas as a biblical mandate, our Congregational churches did not commonly celebrate it until the later 19th century.

May you have a blessed Thanksgiving this year, as you remember our Pilgrim forebears, the birth of our nation, and so many other blessings from God in our lives, which we all have to be thankful for.

Over the years, I have created, updated, and now uploaded to Archive.org a guide to having an early Puritan worship service for Thanksgiving in our modern churches. Here is a URL to it for those who would like to get a better sense of what such early Puritan services were like.

https://archive.org/details/early_puritan_worship_service_for_thanksgiving_showalter/mode/2up

Stewardship Sunday – November 1st

Thanks to everyone who has turned in their pledge cards for 2027. They will continue to be accepted but we are hoping to have them all by November 1st if possible. Knowing what you plan to donate helps the Parish Board and the church treasurer plan the budget for the year. It is appreciated! Please plan to join us on Sunday, November 1st for the conclusion of our Stewardship season and a special coffee hour. Hope to see you all!





Worcester Fellowship Sox Drive

The Missions Committee will once again be having our annual Sox and Underwear drive for the Worcester Fellowship Church. The Worcester Fellowship Church holds a service every Sunday on the Worcester common and helps those who are homeless in the community. The drive will run from November 1st – 22nd. Please leave them in the donation box in the rear of the sanctuary.

The following items are needed:

- New sox for men, women and children
- New underwear for men, women and children- any size.
- New T-shirts for men , women and children – Any size.
- They would also be grateful for new hats, gloves, mittens and scarves.
- Monetary donations are always welcome. We thank the members of our church for their continuing support with all of our outreach endeavors to help others.

Missions Committee
Linda, Debbie, Stephanie, Neil, Shelley

Stairs and Railings Are Complete!

The repair work that was voted on this past spring was completed last Friday afternoon! The replacement of the stairs that lead to the coat room and the pavers outside both front doors was done last week. This creates a new wide top landing to make it easier and safer to get in and out of the church. The pavers are now level with the sidewalk, eliminating a tripping hazard. Check out the safer and very beautiful entrance to our church!

We are grateful to contractors RN Glidden from Hardwick and Hillside Ironworks from New Braintree for their excellent work on this project.



Help to preserve a piece of church history....
If you'd like to contribute a small amount to a special project (estimated cost of $450) to turn 2 of the old steps into an outdoor bench, please contact Dee Blanton, Church Moderator at 413-887-1213 or deeblanton86@gmail.com. No one knows exactly how long those steps have ushered people into the church, but it has surely been a *very* long time. Allowing them to continue to serve us as bench is only fitting!

Thank you for your contributions!

Deacons Update

As we enter the season of Advent the deacons are happy to share the plans laid out in conjunction with Pastor Doug. Please make note of our special events and dates.

- **11/22 – Decorating of the Sanctuary** – Please join us after worship on Sunday, November 22nd. All who love Christmas decorating can join in to help trim the church Christmas tree, put lights in our windows and bows on the pews. All are welcome to participate!
- **11/29 – First Sunday of Advent**
- **12/6 – White Christmas** – No Communion today. Communion will be held on another date in December, TBA.
- **12/9 – Advent Interlude** – Wednesday at 7 pm
- **12/24 – Christmas Eve**

Why the Doors are Locked at 10:15 am
You have probably noticed the sign on the back door that reads, "Please note, these doors are locked each Sunday at 10:15 am. Please enter the church through the front door."
Years ago, the Board of Deacons made the decision to lock the doors that we do not have immediate visibility to once our morning worship begins. This was done for safety reasons. If you would like more details please speak to a deacon. Please be sure to plan for the rear doors and the single front door to be locked if you are arriving a bit later than usual. Thanks for understanding.

Your Board of Deacons

Senior Fraud Alert Update!

In last month's issue of Glad Tidings, we mentioned that Incidents of fraud have exploded, with older adults suffering the greatest financial impact from fraud last year, according to the FBI's 2025 IC3 Annual Report. Americans age 60 and older reported losses of $7.7 billion — about a 60 percent increase from 2024. In comparison, those in their 30s and 40s reported $4.6 billion in losses. When possible, we will continue to offer articles and information on this topic with the hope that it will prevent anyone from getting involved in an online or telephone scam. Please beware, be alert and don't be too trusting!

This Month: How to spot a romance scam
To avoid placing your trust in the wrong person, pay close attention to these red flags:

1. **A 'wrong number' text.** If you reply, you'll soon find yourself in conversation with them. "All of a sudden, they create a relationship out of thin air," says Solomon.
2. **They want you to move the communication to another platform**. If you met on a dating site, they'll quickly ask for your number or suggest communicating via WhatsApp or another messaging platform. "They want to take you off those sites because those companies have the ability … to identify [scammers] and block them," says Solomon.
3. **They live far away**. You can't meet in person — yet — because they claim to live in another part of the country or to be abroad for business, a military deployment or charity work.
4. **They are constantly in contact**. They love bomb you (lavish you with attention), texting at all hours and promising a life together.
5. **You make plans to meet, but something always comes up**. Just as they're finally on their way to meet you, there's a last-minute crisis.
6. **They need money for an emergency**. Your online companion has a sudden medical problem, legal crisis or business disaster; they need cash fast and you're the only one who can help.
7. **They have an investment opportunity**. They have a relative who's done well in cryptocurrency investing, and they want you to benefit from their knowledge.

How to avoid romance scams
The best way to avoid getting involved with a romance scammer is to protect yourself from the get-go.
Be careful not to overshare online. "People don't realize that they are setting themselves up to become a target… They overshare about their recent heartbreak or the fact that they've been recently widowed," cautions the vice president of research at RSAC, which provides conferences, insights and education for global cybersecurity experts. "The scammer immediately knows that this person is vulnerable [and] how to target them."
Make sure your social media account is set to private, so strangers can't find any of your personal information.
Block uninvited communications. Set up filters in your email and use spam-blocking tools for texts and calls. Also avoid answering unknown numbers.
Discuss new love interests with family and friends. Experts agree that this is the best way to prevent becoming a fraud victim. Talk to someone you trust to get an outside perspective. This is particularly true if the person in question asks you to keep the relationship secret (a big red flag).

Investigate suitors. Do a reverse image search. If the same picture shows up elsewhere with a different name attached, a scammer may have stolen it. And research their background, "get as much information from this individual [as you can] without giving away your own information and try and verify that information," says Solomon.

Avoid investing with someone you've met online. As Solomon notes, "There are safer ways to make investments."

What to do next:

If you realize a romance scammer is targeting you:

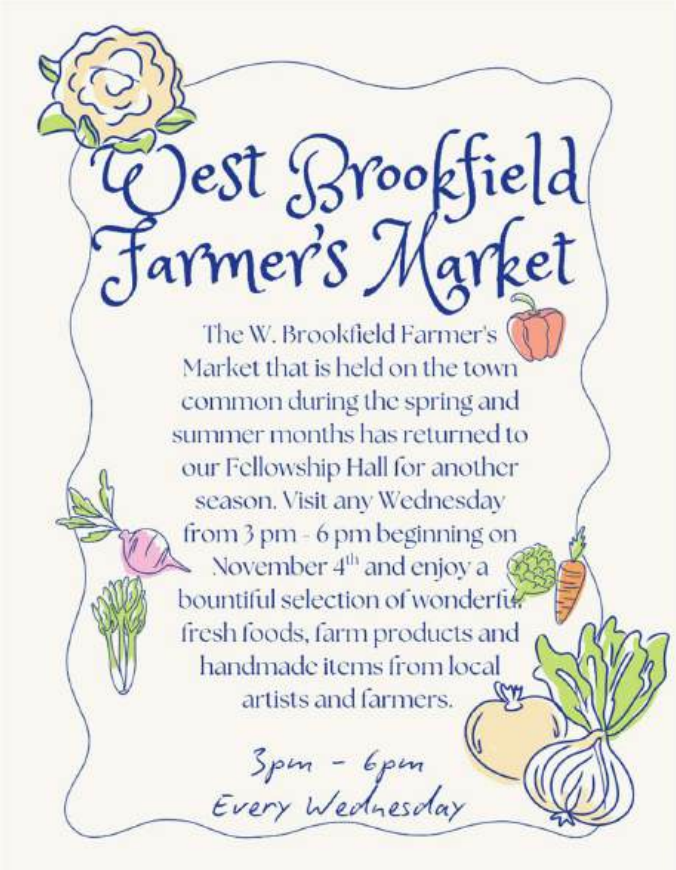
Cut off contact. Immediately stop communicating if you suspect the individual may be a scammer. Do not re-engage with them. Notify the dating or social media site on which you met the scammer.

Report the scammer to local law enforcement (follow these tips) and the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3.gov). Not every complaint leads to enforcement action, but the information can help officials spot trends and sometimes identify the criminals.

For support and guidance, call the free AARP Fraud Watch Network Helpline at 877-908-3360, where trained fraud specialists can share information on what to do next and how to avoid future scams. The AARP Fraud Watch Network also offers online group support sessions.

An additional source of wonderful information is a 2-hour PBS Frontline show, "Scammed".

Be Careful!





Parish Board Update

Hello from the Parish Board!

We would like to share a few updates regarding church property improvements and upcoming activities.

The gutters and downspouts have been cleaned and repaired, and the parking lot project has finally been completed. We are also looking into completing some roof repairs before winter arrives.
We are in the process of obtaining a trash trailer to dispose of old furniture stored upstairs, as well as unwanted books and other miscellaneous items around the church building. We kindly ask that you do not drop off items for donation without first speaking to a Parish Board member. While these donations are always well-intentioned, we have had to pay for several dumpsters over the past few years to remove items that could not be used.

Reminder: Winter Farmers Market
The Winter Farmers Market will begin on November 4 and run through March 31, every Wednesday from 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM.

Important Reminder
Please remember to check the church calendar regularly to stay informed about scheduled activities. We must remain mindful of the groups that rent our facilities and do our part to ensure their events are not disrupted.

Thank you for your cooperation and support!

Parish: Juan Bacigalupi, Karen Murphy, Dave Stelzer (handyman)
Mary Deotte, Mike Murphy & Doug Showalter (assistants)



White Christmas in West Brookfield

December 6, 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, glorious bake table and a HUGE Christmas raffle with a variety of unusual 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! Plan to join your church family and friends in celebrating the beginning of the Christmas season!

What is Needed:

Your Volunteer Help
Please check the sliding doors in the back of the sanctuary for the signup sheets where you can volunteer for a variety of jobs that will need to be done. Options will include the kitchen, the bake table and cleanup crew!

Grocery Items & Turkeys
A variety of grocery items will be needed – check the signup sheets
9 – turkeys, 20-25 lbs (Due to space, parameters, pan availability and time the kitchen can only accept 20-25 lb turkeys. Thanks for understanding.)
Deadline to drop off turkeys to kitchen: MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30TH

Bake Table Goodies
Yummy cookies, squares, breads, pies, candy, etc.
Items can be made at home but MUST be labeled with all ingredients listed. Need help making labels? Contact Karen Andersen. Deadline for delivering baked items: Saturday morning, December 5th.

Our Fantastic Annual Christmas Raffle
Dee Blanton and Angela Carville will be heading up our giant Christmas raffle again this year. Due to many factors, donations of items *are not* needed but they are requesting

GIFT CARDS. Suggestions include: Dunkin' Donuts, Hitchcock Tavern, Ragged Hill Cider, Hardwick Farmer's Coop, Klems, Joy of Beans, Rose 32 or any other local business. Cards for larger stores are welcome as well (Hannaford, Walmart, etc.).

Beautiful Handmade Quilt Raffle

White Christmas will be your LAST opportunity to buy a chance to win the beautiful quilt made by Mary Deotte. Tickets have been sold throughout the year and the winner's name will be drawn at the close of day on December 6th.
TICKETS: $5.00 each or 3 for $10.00
Good Luck!





PATTERN: Blue Onion
SIZE: 68" X 78"

If think you can lend a hand, sign up on the sheets on the sliding doors and see Karen Andersen with questions you may have.
413-230-7476
Thanks!

Our Delicious and Hearty Christmas Luncheon Menu
Served 11:30 – 5 pm

We will be having our delicious, mouth-watering menu again this year!

☐ Hot Turkey Sandwich w/stuffing, gravy, and cranberry sauce
☐ Ham, Chicken and Egg Salad Sandwiches/chips and pickles
☐ Hot Dog or Chili Dog/Chips
☐ Bowl of Chili
☐ 2 kinds of Homemade Soup
☐ Pie by the Slice (Apple, Pumpkin and Blueberry)
☐ And back again this year we will also have **Cheesecake** by the slice!

What We Really Need:

One of the most important things you can do to help make this a successful fundraiser for your church is to *tell your friends and family what is happening at First Congregational during White Christmas in West Brookfield!* The more people walking in our doors the better for all! Thanks!

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

A Special Message/Request

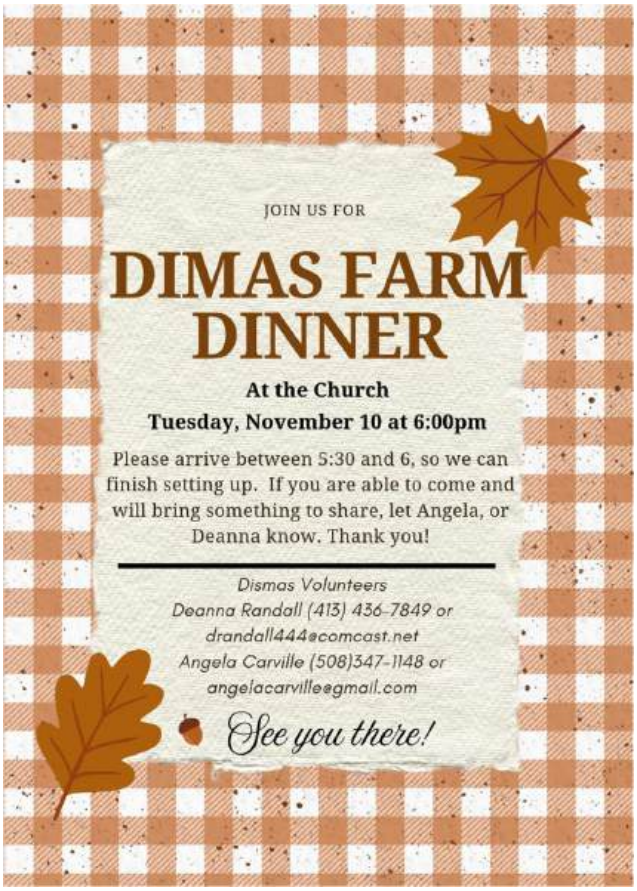
While we understand and appreciate that it is enjoyable to sit in our church dining area during our White Christmas luncheon and raffle, we are asking that everyone keep in mind that our space is limited and that others need seats as well.
We are gently asking that you make note of this and move along within a reasonable amount of time after you are finished with your lunch.
Of course, you are welcome to sit in the sanctuary and enjoy chatting with friends from there.

Thank you for understanding.
Your White Christmas Committee

Copy Paper Donations Requested

Our thanks to all of you who have donated copy paper to the church office in the past. The supply is once again very low and donations will be gratefully accepted. No notice is needed. Just leave the reams or cases on a Fellowship Hall table and they will be put away.
Thanks so much!





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.***



Helen Lapierre 11/05
Ellen Spencer 11/07
Elizabeth Czaja 11/12
Justin Hall 11/22
Chrissy Lamothe 11/22

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR YOUR CHURCH OFFICERS & CHAIRS

Moderator: Dee Blanton – deeblanton86@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 – 913-387-9947 – 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 November is Monday, October 26th

SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTIONS

Website: **westbrookfieldcongregationalucc.org**
Facebook: First Congregational Church of West Brookfield, UCC
Instagram: Search @firstcongowestbrookfield
YouTube:***@FirstCongregationalChurchofW.B***



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 Worship 10 am Coffee & Fellowship Stewardship Sunday	2	3	4 Sharing Cupboard 10 – 11:30 am Farmer's Market 3-6	5 Sharing Cupboard 7 – 8 pm	6	7
8 Worship 10 am Sunday School Coffee & Fellowship Deacon's mtg	9	10 Dismas Farm Potluck dinner at the church 6pm	11 Sharing Cupboard 10 – 11:30 am Farmer's Market 3-6	12 Sharing Cupboard 7 – 8 pm	13	14
15 Worship 10 am Sunday School Coffee & Fellowship Church Council	16	17	18 Sharing Cupboard 10 – 11:30 am Farmer's Market 3-6	19 Sharing Cupboard 7 – 8 pm	20	21
22 Worship 10 am Sunday School Coffee & Fellowship Decorating the Sanctuary	23 ***Glad Tidings Deadline***	24	25 Sharing Cupboard 10 – 11:30 am Farmer's Market 3-6	26 	27	28
29 Worship 10 am Coffee & Fellowship. 	30					

Covenant of Welcome



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.

First Congregational Church of W. Brookfield, UCC
PO Box 371
36 N. Main St
W. Brookfield, MA 01585
November 2026