

# FIRST CHURCH CHATTER

February, 2023

This is another edition of our church newsletter. We thank those members and friends who have contributed stories, biographies, reflections, letters, poems and encourage any who wish to contribute to our church newsletter. As you can read in this edition, we have many talented friends and church members. We would like to get to know all of you better and encourage you to send your thoughts, poems, stories to us to publish. Thanks so much.

The newsletter will be printed at the beginning of each month and be sent via email to church members and friends, be sent by mail to those who would prefer a written copy and be available in the foyer for all to pick up when the church is reopened. In the meantime, we will deliver the Chatter to those who would prefer paper copy or don't receive email.

We are always looking for stories, poems, thoughts to contribute. If you have notices about upcoming events which you would like published, please let Carrie or Jody know and we will try to include. We try to publish by the beginning but realistically often it is sent out by the 10<sup>th</sup> or so.

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In this chatter:

[Deanna Shorb, called as new Pastor](#)  
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Our new settled Pastor, Reverend Deanna Shorb, beginning July 1<sup>st</sup>

Boy January was a busy month! Not only did we host two Second Hour programs at First Congregational, we also met and welcomed our next full-time “settled” pastor, Deanna Shorb, on her candidating weekend. While we wait for her tenure at FCC to begin July 1, some have been arranging for our “bridge” pastor, James Lumsden, to serve FCC part-time until Deanna arrives. Both James and Deanna have backgrounds in justice ministry (Deanna as Dean of Grinnell College’s Center for Religion, Spirituality and Social Justice and James as pastor of Pittsfield’s First Congregational Church and before that a farm worker/migrant justice organizer with Cesar Chavez). We also sorrowfully said goodbye to Pastor Mark Sunday, February 5th, with deep gratitude for all that he has taught us, led us, and served us. We will really miss his thoughtful, knowledgeable participation with all of our passionate issues which grounded us in the spirit and values of our faith. Thank you, Mark!!!



Our new Bridge Pastor, Reverend James Lunsden  
Serving February 12<sup>th</sup> through June 30<sup>th</sup>



And a Welcoming Cake!



## ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) News and Recognition

After federal funding ran out in December, First Congregational Church donated \$1,000 from the Immigrant Family Support Fund to support the continuation of ESOL classes this semester for refugees at St. Stephen's Church, and I then solicited donations from others in the Berkshires who have supported the resettlement of the Afghan families. Thanks to the generous support of many in our community, the classes have resumed.

A thank you note was sent to all donors to this endeavor, viz.:

Hello everyone,

Thanks to your generous support, sufficient funds were raised for the ESOL classes administered by Berkshire Community College to continue this semester at St. Stephen's Church. I happened to be in the building the first day that classes resumed and the energy and excitement was so uplifting. Many hugs were exchanged as people shared how excited they were to continue. What a gift it is for immigrants and refugees to be able to attend these classes and bring their small children with them if necessary (this is the only daytime ESOL class in Pittsfield for which this is an option). Some refugees have started attending these classes days after their arrival in the Berkshires, which is a big boost for them as opposed to signing up on a wait-list for other ESOL classes. Not only are they studying English, but these students are connecting with a supportive community of learners and helpers and exchanging resources and ideas. When necessary, these students are able to easily consult with their caseworkers from Jewish Family Services and the Berkshire Immigrant Center during breaks or before or after class since both agencies have their offices at St. Stephen's Church.

January 24 was International Day of Education and UNESCO is dedicating this year's International Day to the girls and women of Afghanistan:

UNESCO would like to dedicate the fifth edition of this International Day to all the girls and women in Afghanistan, who have been denied their right to learn, study and teach. The Organization condemns this serious attack on human dignity and on the fundamental right to education.

Thank you for your support for the immigrants and refugees in this English class, who are so eager to learn as they settle into the Berkshires. We are enriched by their presence and thankful to community members like you for welcoming them.

With appreciation,

Bridget Spann

[organizer@firstchurchwilliamstown.org](mailto:organizer@firstchurchwilliamstown.org)  
[www.firstchurchwilliamstown.org](http://www.firstchurchwilliamstown.org)

and the ESL teacher wrote to say:

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Jana Laiz  
ESL Teacher  
67 East Street  
Pittsfield, MA 01201

January 31, 2023

Dear Generous Donor,

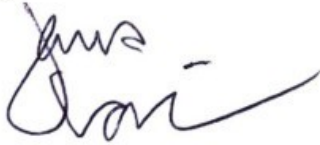
I am adding a few words of thanks to you for your incredible generosity in helping the Refugee ESL Class continue at St. Stephens. The students and I are so incredibly grateful to you all.

I started working with the newly arrived Afghani evacuees (refugees) a year ago, and it is so inspiring to see friendships grow, and a community build in such a short time. We recently added two families of Guatemalan asylees, who have become part of our learning community and friends with all the students. It's a joy to be a part of this.

We are hoping to invite a Haitian couple and several Ukrainian refugee students to join us, and because of your support, we will be able to do that.

Thank you!

Jana Laiz

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jana Laiz', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Dear First Congregational Church,  
Thank you for helping us.  
continue our English class  
we love our class. we are studying  
learning, making new friends and  
creating community.  
we love our teacher!  
we love our class mates  
we laugh a lot we have fun and  
we enjoy learning together  
we are so grateful for your  
generosity

and

Many Thanks

Romina sadigyar



Manizha



We Celebrate Mark on February 5<sup>th</sup> as he says goodbye...



Abby Hatton and Holly Edwards



Bridget Spann and Lauren Stevens



Pastor Mark Receives Gratitude Art



Susan Yates, Sherwood Guernsey, Margy O'Connor



Sally Sussman and Lynne Delay



Pat Phillips and Pastor Mark

Upcoming Formations of Small Groups (this also appeared in last Friday's Eblast)

During this upcoming Lenten season, small groups will be gathering to connect us to spiritual practices and continue our exploration of Social Justice issues. Groups will be organized by Margaret Oxtoby and we encourage you to connect with Margaret for further information.

So far, we have received confirmation of two groups:

- Advancing Justice will meet weekly to explore Excavating Our History: Moving Beyond Black Lives Matter; and Land Acknowledgment: Toward a covenant of shared liberation and Earth healing.
- Our Bridge Minister, James Lumsden, will be using Barbara Brown-Taylor's Learning to Walk in the Dark as his worship theme and inviting us to a small group to go deeper.

More information will follow in next week's eblast. Contact: Margaret Oxtoby - [margaret.oxtoby@gmail.com](mailto:margaret.oxtoby@gmail.com)

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## February and March Birthdays

### February

10 Elayne Murphy  
13 Paul Rix  
14 Carrie Waara  
18 Oliver Longhurst  
19 Carol Johnston  
19 Bob Janes  
27 Carolyn Behr

### March

4 Adriana Brown  
4 Ann Clark  
7 Carl Faulkner  
13 Sam Kobrin  
13 Jake Kobrin  
14 Anna Bennett Robertson  
18 Wendy Hopkins  
20 Phil Smith  
20 Cristina Mancilla  
21 Judy Reichert  
24 Troy Kobrin  
24 Shira Lynn  
29 Cesar Silva  
30 Laura Jones Kobrin

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