

**The First Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ
New Milford, Connecticut**



Reports for the 308th Annual Meeting, covering the events of 2023

March 3, 2024

At the First Congregational Church of New Milford, our mission is to:

Seek—to love God and our neighbors “with all our hearts, souls, and minds”;
and to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God”

Share—God’s love with all people

Serve—our local and global communities

First Congregational Church of New Milford, Connecticut
2023 Annual Report
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Annual Report compiled by Janet Wittmann

Interim Minister

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell the people of Israel to go forward." (Exodus 14:15)

Each morning as I drive into town, I look up at our white steeple rising above the trees and buildings. It's a sight of beauty and inspiration. Since its founding, First Congregational Church has been a beacon to the community. Over the years the people of this church have worshipped God, welcomed the stranger, cared for the sick, taught children, and reached out to those in need. And today we continue that heritage of faith and service.

Moses told the children of Israel to go forward. They had the Egyptians chasing them and the challenging Red (or Reed) Sea lay ahead. Yet they went forward to freedom. We are a strong church. And we have been on the move in this time of transition and change. The music of our choirs resounds through the sanctuary on a Sunday morning. God is worshipped, and people are nurtured in the faith. The story of Jesus is told.

We make a difference to people's lives in many ways with everything from support for the town food bank to diapers for babies here in New Milford and the surrounding area. Laughter and good spirit mark our lunches and social occasions. A search committee to seek a new settled minister will shortly be formed. I have been with you a short time, but as a newcomer I am impressed with all this church is doing.

Let the children of Israel go forward. We are doing a lot in a time of transition, but there are areas we may wish to discuss as we look ahead. What kind of church is God calling us to be? And how do we get there? What is our mission? What kind of minister would we want to lead us into the future?



My deep appreciation to Rev. Pat for her help to me and to this congregation. My thanks to Sarah and Diane for the magic they work with the choirs here. It's great to have Rachel in the office and Katie in Christian Education. My praise and gratitude to all our officers and lay leaders who have done so much for the life of this church.

My thanks also to the congregation for the many gracious and warm ways you have made me feel welcome. It's a privilege to serve as your Interim. This is a congregation that can soar in Christ's service. May the children of Israel go forward!

In Christ,
Rev. Dave Buchan

Church Council Chair

“Hope” is the Thing with Feathers - by Emily Dickinson

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea
Ye - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

Here at the First Congregational Church of New Milford, 2023 was a year filled with hope! In every service, every meeting, every Sunday School class, every song, every event, all of us came together as a church family in hope. Once again, our church leaders have worked hard to move our church forward and welcome new opportunities.

It has been my honor to serve as Church Council Chair for a second year in 2023. Every step of the way is a learning process with the most important aspect being the ability to listen. Listening to our members, listening to our staff, listening to our community, and always having the church's best interest in mind.

At the end of 2022 we received a grant from the Ellen Knowles Harcourt Foundation which was specifically earmarked to replace the lift located in the church proper. In the first part of 2023 our members and community generously gave to our capital campaign for this project, and quickly met the deadline for funding. This allowed the Building and Grounds Team to order the custom lift, have the old lift removed, and make the necessary repairs/improvements for our new lift. The new lift was installed and ready for service in November of 2023.

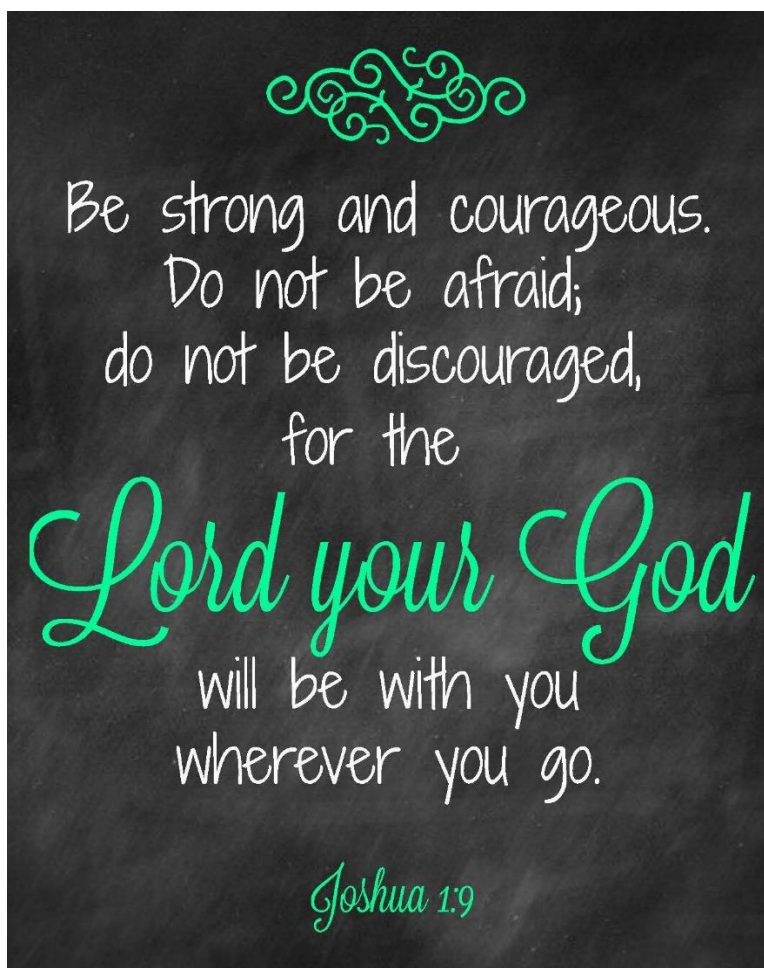
The Church Council successfully worked on two specific goals this year. One was to keep the church calendar up to date. We discuss it at each Council meeting, putting down what all of the teams have going on. The second goal was to bring back events/happenings that we regularly hosted pre-COVID. In 2023 this was accomplished, along with adding many new events. These include but are not limited to the Souper Bowl of Caring Soup Luncheon, evening Bible study, women's Bible study, Lunch & Learn daytime fellowship, opening the church during the Artisan Festival, The A. Russell Ayre Scholarship tag sale, opening the church during the 8-mile road race, participating in the Apple Festival, Walk a Mile, The CE Vendor Craft Fair, Silent Movie Program, and our annual Christmas Concert.

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In April of 2023 we welcomed Rev. Dave Buchan as our Interim Pastor. One of his first action items was to meet with all of the ministry leads. His guidance to me has been very valuable in filling my purpose as Church Council Chair. Rev. Buchan brings a lifetime of experience and knowledge working with congregations in transition. He has given our leadership the stability to start planning ahead. We are actively working on a SWOT analysis to help with our strategic plan. This is a framework evaluating our **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats.

There are good things ahead in 2024!

In Faith,
Leslie Schlemmer



WORSHIP MINISTRY



Deacons assist in the preparation and administration of all services, ordinances, and sacraments of the church, and in ministering to the welfare and spiritual needs of our church, its ministers, and the community.



The **Flower Team** takes charge of all floral arrangements for services of worship.



The **Book of Remembrance Team** receives memorial gifts and recommends the usage of these funds to the congregation.



Music

The **Music Team** has the responsibility for supervision of all church music, vocal and instrumental, at all services of public worship.



The **Usher Team** has the responsibility for providing ushers at all public worship services.



The **Audio-Visual Team** provides technology assistance during services and meetings.

Board of Deacons

For our church - 2023 was a year of moving forward. The close of 2022 was marked by a special holiday season as we returned to many of our traditions, events and renewed friendships. January was a quiet start to the New Year. We were lucky to have the pulpit filled by a wonderful group of guest pastors with whom we had built a relationship over the previous year. We continued our search for an Intentional Interim Minister with guidance from Litchfield South Association. Reverend Dr. Pat Nicholas was a tremendous help with providing pastoral care and guidance to those in need. We were happy to offer a New Members orientation for a number of families.

February was an exciting month. We held our traditional Souper Bowl luncheon and food drive. It was wonderful to all be together and to continue our mission to support the local food pantry. We also celebrated "Called to Care" Sunday which reminded us of all the caring ways this congregation helps others. Through the month the Deacons continued to work on cleaning up our membership lists and updating the Deacon handbook. We were pleased to increase our membership by welcoming 5 new members and celebrated their joining with a cake during Fellowship Hour on February 26th.

On March 19th we were blessed to have Rev. Darrell Goodwin, the Executive Conference Minister, Southern New England Conference of the UCC, in the pulpit. Rev. Goodwin brought an energy and enthusiasm to the worship service and a message of love and light. He joined us for Fellowship Hour, answering questions, sharing his mission with us, and encouraging us to have patience as we searched for our Interim Minister.

Our patience paid off on March 26th when the Deacons announced that Reverend David Buchan had accepted our Call and would begin as our Intentional Interim Minister on April 17th!

Easter Week was very spiritual, beginning with Palm Sunday led by Reverend Carra McFadden in the pulpit and the children's voices singing in the service. Our Maundy Thursday service was led by Rev. Pat, as was the Ecumenical Faith Walk on Good Friday. Maundy Thursday was a very moving service. The Faith Walk was well attended with about 60 people and had representation and participation from several churches. As with last year, people on the Green joined in as we progressed! The sanctuary was beautifully adorned on Easter Sunday. We were thrilled to have Reverend Jake Miles Joseph back to lead us in worship. The Bell Choir played and the Senior Choir sang and there was cake!

As Reverend Buchan joined us as our new Interim Pastor, we gratefully remembered all the inspiring guest pastors who led us in worship for the previous 14 months. The congregation of the church warmly welcomed Reverend Buchan at a meet and greet prior to the April 17th Church Council meeting. This was an exciting occasion for us, as it marked the start of a new chapter. As our Intentional Interim Minister, Reverend Dave's role is to help us transition to a Settled Pastor, Reverend Dave is helping us identify who we are now and who we want to be, so we find a pastor who is a good fit for our church.

In June, Cary Westfall was installed as a Deacon and the Deacons thanked Sharon Millard for her dedication and outstanding leadership over the past four years. We honored those memorialized at our Book of Remembrance service. Baccalaureate Sunday was a celebration for all our graduating families and the ARA Scholarship recipients. A successful church picnic was held in a new location -our parking lot - and many young people shared their talents with us at the Youth Service. The Senior Choir and Village Ringers were recognized for all the joy their music brings to our worship and our community.

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During the summer months the Deacons had a chance to help Rev. Dave better understand our church and our needs. We are grateful to the past Deacons who offered to fill in as Deacon on Duty during the summer. This assistance, along with the slower pace of summer, allowed the current Deacons to work on a number of tasks that needed to be addressed. In an effort to make the church building more accommodating for all, we have added listening devices in the sanctuary, large print bulletins on Sunday, and of course our new lift is working to allow handicapped access to Fellowship Hall.

The Deacons accepted the resignation from Rev. Pat as the Transitional Minister for Pastoral Care. She came out of retirement to help the church during a time when her advice and guidance was greatly needed. The Board of Deacons is extremely grateful for all that she did during the past year and a half for both the Deacons and the church. She will continue to chair Called to Care as that is where her passion lies. Rev. Dave continues to offer pastoral care to anyone in need.

September brought the return of the choir and the start to this season's Sunday School program. We were thrilled to see all the faces and hear the many voices as we kicked off the new season. It also heralded the start of an evening Bible Study lead by Rev. Dave. Sunday afternoon on October 1st was another first for us - we held a Blessing of the Animals service in our parking lot. It attracted animal lovers from the church and the town, as well as children with their favorite stuffed animals. Acolyte Training was held in October and we now have a well-trained group of Sunday School students who are very eager to help out with lighting the candles and other parts of our worship services.

As the year neared an end, the planning for church events became the main focus for the Deacons and many other groups. November had an event almost every Sunday including welcoming a new member and dedicating the memorial gifts for Book of Remembrance. New Milford Congregational Church once more hosted the regional Transgender Day of Remembrance on November 20th.

The Deacons are grateful to the many church members who volunteered during the month of December to make our Advent season memorable. It was a collaborative effort among all of the ministries and is an example of our church at its best! Among the new events we introduced this year was the Blessing of the Crèche. We had a wonderful collection of crèches on display from many families during the first Sunday of Advent. The decorated sanctuary was a beautiful scene. Our Choir and the Village Ringers supplied beautiful music for the second Sunday service in Advent, and then performed in the Christmas concert that afternoon. The sanctuary was packed with church members and townspeople for an uplifting performance.

The third Sunday in Advent was a showcase for all the children in our Sunday School. Of course, all the parents and grandparents who assisted the children with costumes and practices deserve equal praise. The Christmas Pageant was big and bold and the children outdid themselves. This year the fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve were on the same day. This posed some challenges, but both services went as planned and were very well attended. Standing on the front steps surrounded by friends and family, singing Silent Night together, makes Christmas at the First Congregational Church very special. The last day of 2023 was also the last Sunday service of the year. It was a quiet service that gave us time to reflect on all the joys we had experienced together and all the challenges we worked through as a congregation. We look forward to 2024 as we carry this positive energy into another year.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jan McCarthy

Music Team

The Music Team includes Dave Elmore - Chair, Barbara Ahern, Cary Westfall (until May 2023), Anne Olson, Paul Mayer, and Jeff Gammons.

Music Director Sarah Fay provides strong leadership. She has helped the choir members improve their vocal technique and continues to select a wide variety of music including classical and contemporary anthems.

Diane Taylor led the Village Ringers Bell Choir again this year. The bells played at numerous services during the year. Diane organized several small group Sunday service performances during the summer. Members of the group played at a Lunch and Learn for church members and friends on November 6 at which time they also provided background information on handbells. A small group also played at Butterbrook Apartments and at the Mayor's community Christmas party at Town Hall in mid-December.

The Christmas Concert on December 10, entitled "Go Tell It on the Mountain," was very well attended. The audience size was estimated at 200, and numerous people commented that it was the best concert ever. The Village Ringers played seven pieces including one jointly with the choir. The Christmas Choir performed nine pieces, with Dave Sommerville accompanying them on guitar for two selections. The enthusiastic audience generously contributed \$1,174, which is earmarked to enhance the church's music program.

The church benefits greatly through the hard work and dedication of the choir directors and members. Thanks to all for a wonderful year of music.

Senior Choir: Sarah Fay, Director

Barbara Ahern, Jim Baird, Pam Cafiero, Susan Chapin, Kathy and Dave Elmore, Chris Fay, Melanie Fay, Jeff and Sandy Gammons, Cindy Hendricks (Christmas Choir), Peggy and Jerry King, Nancy Loder, Lorna and Don MacInnis, Dan Martin, Paul Mayer, Jan McCarthy, Sharon Millard, Anne Olson, Diane Taylor, Bonnie Westerberg

Handbell Choir: Diane Taylor, Director

Barbara Ahern, Mary Eherts, Dave Elmore, Kathy Elmore, Katie Elmore, Carrie Martin, Keiko Nayuki, Debbie Poole, Leslie Schlemmer, Cathy Setterlin, Dave Sommerville, Joan Vill, Cary Westfall, Meg Wittmann

The Music Team has several bank accounts established by gifts to the church. They are the Platt Music Fund and the Hunt Organ Fund. Balances for these accounts are included in the Treasurer's report.

Respectfully submitted,
David Elmore, Chair



Christmas Concert 2023

featuring

Christmas Choir and The Village Ringers

Master of Ceremonies, Dan Martin

Go Tell it on the Mountain Village Ringers	African American Spiritual arr. Cynthia Dobrinski
Welcome	The Reverend David Buchan
An English Carol Village Ringers	Traditional arr. Arnold Sherman
Christmas Time is Here Choir	Mendelson and Guaraldi, arr. Steve Zegree
A Merry Christmas Choir	Traditional arr. Arthur Warrell
Now Let Every Tongue Adore Thee Choir	Phillipp Nicolai harmonization by J. S. Bach
I Wonder as I Wander Village Ringers	John Jacob Niles arr. Peggy Betcher
God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen Village Ringers	English Carol arr. Benjamin Tucker
Caroling, Caroling Choir	Burt and Hutson arr. Greg Gilpin
Candlelight Carol Choir	John Rutter Soprano, Susan Chapin
Silent Night Choir	Franz Gruber arr. Wolfgang Lindner Flute, Diane Taylor Soprano, Melanie Fay
Up on the Housetop Village Ringers	Traditional arr Mary Kay Parrish
Jingle Bells Village Ringers	James Pierpont arr. Lloyd Larson
Glory Choir	Maher, Popadic & Stevens arr. David Wise Guitar, Dave Sommerville
Go Tell It on the Mountain Choir	Traditional arr. Phil Nitz Tenor, Chris Fay Guitar, Dave Sommerville
Concertato on "O Come All Ye Faithful" Choir & Village Ringers	John Francis Wade arr. Mary MacDonald

Flower Team

The mission of the Flower Team is to provide floral arrangements for the sanctuary during Sunday service, to coordinate Easter and Christmas decoration, and to oversee the Parcels Flower Fund. Except for the first Sunday of the month, Communion Sunday, we coordinate flowers on the Communion Table. Membership may have flowers placed in memory/honor of a loved one, or in recognition of a special occasion.

The Parcels Flower Fund account was transferred from Webster Bank to the Savings Bank of Danbury with an opening balance of \$3,933.30.

Easter Sunday, 2023: This year the Committee purchased a variety of plants: daffodils, tulips, and hyacinths for the sanctuary. The plants were for sale after service, and all were sold at cost. The congregation enjoyed being able to “shop” for their Easter plants in the sanctuary, with no extra stops on the way home. This option is being considered again in 2024.

Christmas, 2023: Poinsettias were offered for a \$15.00 donation in remembrance of or in honor of a loved one. 14 requests were received. As only a handful were taken home after the Christmas service and the rest discarded, the Committee is considering another option for next year.

Committee members include Sandy Gammons, Anne Olson and Bonnie Westerberg. I would like to thank each for their dedication during the year. Thanks also to all those who assisted with the holiday decorating and cleanup, and a special thanks to Barbara Ahern for her support and assistance in keeping up with the flowers during the week.

Respectfully submitted,
Debbie Poole, Chair

Usher Team

Ushering on a Sunday morning is a great way to meet and greet people, while handing out bulletins before worship. Ushers collect gifts and prayer cards during the Offertory. After the service, some general straightening up is needed.

2023 proved to be a year of regaining normalcy within our Sunday church services. The COVID-19 Pandemic will always be in the background; however, we have all adapted and will continue to move forward.

Our Sunday services began to feel back to normal with more people becoming available to help with ushering duties, as well having our youth back with the third Sunday ushering. Our Christmas Eve 7 PM service featured the Deacons ushering. We were happy to see our sanctuary full for the occasion, since before COVID!

We will all continue to work to ensure everyone's safety, so that we may continue to gather and worship together.

Respectfully submitted,
Gail Peck, Chair

Book of Remembrance

The Book of Remembrance was started in 1940 by Miss Marian Tenney, who thought the gifts that were given in loving memory of a designated person(s) should be remembered by transcribing their names in a special book so that a permanent record of these individuals would live on even after the donors are gone.

We gratefully accept gifts at any time; they are dedicated twice a year. If donors wish, they may make a yearly donation (please note on application) and names will be listed on both the May and November lists. Anyone interested in remembering a loved one can find applications at the back of the church. A list of donors is posted in the church at least two weeks prior to the two aforementioned dedication services. Church members and friends continue to generously donate.

Dedicated work by Barbara McGiver resulted in locating the Grimm Book Bindery, Inc. This company was able to exactly duplicate our current Book of Remembrance, which has run out of room. Barbara negotiated with the company and got an excellent price (\$830.59) for two books which should fill our needs for a long time.

Beginning Balance	1/1/2023	\$20,133.79
Transfer to Vanguard Money Market Fund		-20,000.00
Ending Balance	12/31/2023	\$ 2,648.61

Respectfully submitted,
Donna Ramsey, Chair

Audio / Visual Team

The A/V Team supports the Deacons, church staff and other members with audio and video during services and events. In addition to managing the sound in the sanctuary, the team runs the livestream audio and video. The webcast continues to be an important part of the church's mission to reach as many members and friends as possible each Sunday. In addition to weekly services, the team provided services to a wedding in June and the Transgender Day of Remembrance in November.

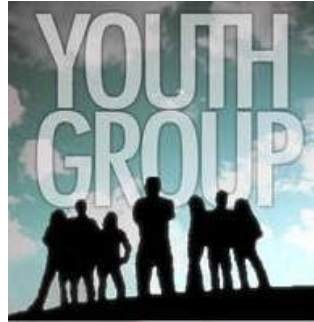
This year Steve McCarthy, Cary Westfall and Dave Elmore have been part of the team. We are actively looking for additional volunteers as that would ease the workload. This will be even more urgent if additional outside events are held in the church.

Summary of 2023 Livestream Statistics

- Views (the number of individuals accessing the livestream or recording) – 8,003
- Viewers (the number of IP addresses from which views were made) – 1,242
- Hours watched – 2,403
- Websites - 5

Respectfully submitted,
David Elmore, Chair

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION MINISTRY



The Christian Education Ministry had an amazing year filled with growth and new opportunities to join our community. Many individuals from our committee and the congregation have joined forces this year to put on successful events for both the Church and town of New Milford.

The year started off in January with the Souper Bowl, where our youth group helped Outreach gather and count cans for donations. In February, Donna Mackenzie had the children in church school make gift bags for homebound members of the congregation to celebrate Valentine's Day.

We followed this up with our Brinner Pancake Dinner in March, where we had a low attendance from the congregation, but many kids came to help. We also introduced Heifer International to the kids this year, and they were excited to raise money for such a worthy cause. The children were able to buy two flocks of chicks, a sheep, a goat, and water buffalo to donate to families in need.

CE teamed up with Fellowship in April for Palm Sunday to host an amazing Waffle Bar. There was a great turnout, and the kids had a blast dyeing Easter eggs with Carol McKay and Donna. In May, Donna passed out paper flowers on Mother's Day.

Our summer picnic was held in June, and more than 90 people from our congregation attended. The kids enjoyed water fights, while everyone else enjoyed the food and snacks provided by CE and Fellowship, and participated in judging the bake off! Katie Johnson and Carole Schwartman joined our team, just in time for Vacation Bible School. VBS was a huge success as per usual, thanks to Carol and Katie McKay, and the Jackson Family. The camp had 45 children attend, and an additional 38 teens and helpers for the week. The theme for VBS was "Twist and Turns", that Jesus may help you through the twists and turns of life. Marianne Schirizzo from Brookfield Congregational Church did a fantastic job teaching the children the songs to put on a performance in the sanctuary for their families at the end of the week.

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In August, we decided that CE should play a more influential role in Outreach, and volunteer more time in worship. Moving forward, every third Sunday of the month CE will be in charge of ushering, the children will take turns doing the acolyte, and will be more present during church services.

We kicked off September with "Welcome Back" Sunday, where the children in church school and additional children from VBS performed for the congregation the songs they had learned. The town's Apple Festival was unfortunately canceled this year due to weather; however, we still had an amazing day at the church. Katie Johnson was able to get 100 pumpkins donated from local farms for children to decorate with their families. We set up paint, markers, and stickers for children inside the Taylor Room - and over 40 families came and decorated pumpkins! Later in the month the CE provided pizza, drinks and cookies to those who donated food and time to the Walk-a-Mile food drive.

In October Katie Johnson officially became the new CE Director, bringing a lot of enthusiasm and excitement to the role. Dave Eherts, Bill Jackson, and Katie participated in Halloween on the Green. It was an incredible opportunity to meet many new families and spread the word about our growing church and our Children's Church School. They handed out welcome packets and candy, and also contributed bookmarks with our Church information on them to the goody bags the mayor's office handed out to over 300 kids. There was a First Congregational cornhole game for the kids to play, a bubble machine, and another 100 pumpkins donated from local farms for the kids to paint.

Later that evening, the Johnson Family participated in "Trunk or Treat" on the Green, representing our church with a Noah's Ark theme that the community truly enjoyed. The congregation had generously donated candy, which Carol and Katie McKay and Jan McCarthy helped hand out to the over 5,000 people that attended.

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The youth group teamed up with St. John's youth group to go apple picking in October as well. Everyone had a great time, with a good turnout. They teamed up again later in the month for a pumpkin carving contest, where the winner received a Dunkin' Donuts gift card.

November was an exciting and fun time for CE. We started the month by taking some teens to the mall to shop for four children being sponsored by the Santa Fund. We then went back to the Parish House to wrap the presents. Katie delivered the gifts and gift cards to Social Services where they were very appreciative.

The CE Team hosted a Holiday Craft Fair which was a huge success. The fair had over 25 vendors, including the Stitchers from church, and other members of the congregation. The Fellowship Team was helped, and sold refreshments and snacks. We raised \$1,305.00 for the church: we donated the \$400.00 in proceeds from the raffle table to the General Fund, and \$895.00 went to the CE account, helping to pay for the Santa Fund gift cards and the VBS kit.

Next up was our Live Nativity that took place after the Mayor's tree lighting on the Green. It was a beautiful collaboration with many members joining in to help, from Bill Jackson's amazing handiwork that created the manger, and Mike Curley donating bales of hay, to John Wittmann lending a helping hand with lights. Even Rachael Wright loaned her beautiful star. We were extremely grateful to the Poudner family who came out with their sheep and to all the teens and young adults who participated. The Eherts family and the McKay's so generously handed out hot cocoa to over 100 people.

December was another amazing month for CE, with lots of fun activities and lessons for the children. We had an amazing turn out for our advent chili luncheon. Fellowship hall was packed, and the kids decorated over 35 Christmas cards to add to the bags the Deacons collected for the nursing homes. Parents and children alike truly enjoyed themselves. Katie Johnson and her family brought 6 beautifully decorated wreaths to members of the congregation that our home bound. It was truly a rewarding experience for her family, and they loved spreading the holiday cheer.

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We turned up the fun this year with our pageant practice and turned it into an Ugly Sweater Christmas Potluck Party. The kids had a blast and even St. John's was invited to participate. Then we had our amazing Christmas Pageant directed by Katie, and it included 23 kids and teens from our congregation. Sarah Fay was an incredible help and played the piano and Bill Jackson provided the manger. Afterwards more than 100 people enjoyed themselves in Fellowship Hall for a wonderful brunch put on by the Fellowship Team. Christmas Eve services were lovely, and a portion was dedicated to the children. Katie read the story of the first Christmas to those at the 10 AM service, and Sheri Gunn read at the 7 PM service. It was wonderful to see so many children.



This year Church School has more than doubled its attendance. We currently have 18 children registered, with more coming every week. The nursery is open and thriving. We will soon need to open another classroom and split those attending by age. Carol McKay has poured her heart into her lesson planning, making each Sunday fun and enjoyable for the kids. Between stories, crafts, and games, the kids are learning, laughing, and making wonderful new friends.

We are looking forward to 2024 and continued success for the Christian Education Ministry.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Simmons and Katie Johnson

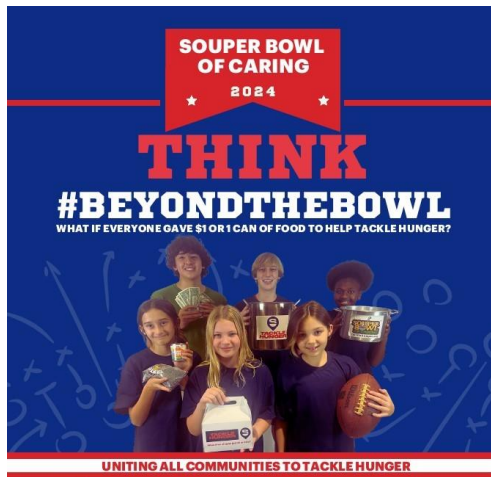
OUTREACH MINISTRY



The **Social Concerns and Missions Team** reaches out in and beyond our community in Christian love and service.



The **Baby Bundles Team** is responsible for the purchase and distribution of diapers to families in need in our area.



The **Food Outreach Team** coordinates with Christian Education for various efforts to fight hunger in the community.



The **A. Russell Ayre Scholarship Team** awards scholarships to recipients not limited to church members.

Social Concerns and Missions Team

Matthew 25:35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.

In 2023, the Social Concerns Team was once again blessed by working with a congregation eager to help our neighbors and to welcome the stranger!

Helping Our Neighbors

- Our congregation has consistently contributed to the New Milford Food Bank ever since it was established. Our members have also played an integral role in the operation of Loaves and Fishes, which provides daily hot meals to those in need. In 2023, our food outreach expanded to include the Blessing Box in front of the church, where people can get needed items at any hour and any day. You should know that all of the Blessing Box installations in town were completed by our church members! With this three part focus (Food Bank, Loaves and Fishes, Blessing Box) we are now asking members to bring their food donations to the side door entrance, and place them on/near the hutch. This allows us to distribute your donations to the greatest need. The need is growing, and your continued help will make a difference!
- In March, we aligned with the Deacons on a plan to reinstate our participation in One Great Hour of Sharing. This used to be an annual program in our church, but was suspended while we were focused on repairing our roof. It feels good to get it reestablished! We raised \$625 for this great cause!
 - One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that lets you help in disaster, refugee/immigration, and development ministries throughout the world. When a disaster strikes or people are displaced or made refugees by violence or extreme poverty, you are part of the immediate response and of the long-term recovery.
- In May, our Mother's Day Baby Bundles program raised \$300 for Baby Bundles.
- In June, we offered up our garden space (behind the Parish House) to the Malikzada family (the refugee family we support in our work with New Milford Refugee Resettlement) for their use this summer. This was a good activity for the entire family, and provided comfort and food with very little cost for our church.
- In October, the "Walk a Mile" event that we host on behalf of New Milford Social Services was successful, even with the threat of rain causing the event to morph into a "drive or walk a mile". We had a lot of our members helping with the cookies/water/lemonade. There were many individuals, school groups, scout troops, etc., that came to our church! Overall, it raised 3,250 pounds of food for the Food Bank. New Milford Social Services was very appreciative of our help.
- In November we hosted a Silent Movie fundraiser to benefit the New Milford Fuel Bank. The live organist was amazing! We had approximately 80 people attend, with good representation from the community. The overall feedback from attendees was very positive. The participation, spirit and enthusiasm of the many members that helped with this event was wonderful. These types of events can not only help us increase our public presence, but they help bond the congregation. We are hoping to do many more in the future. We were able to donate \$500 to the community Fuel Bank, which enables people to keep their heat from being shut off in the winter.

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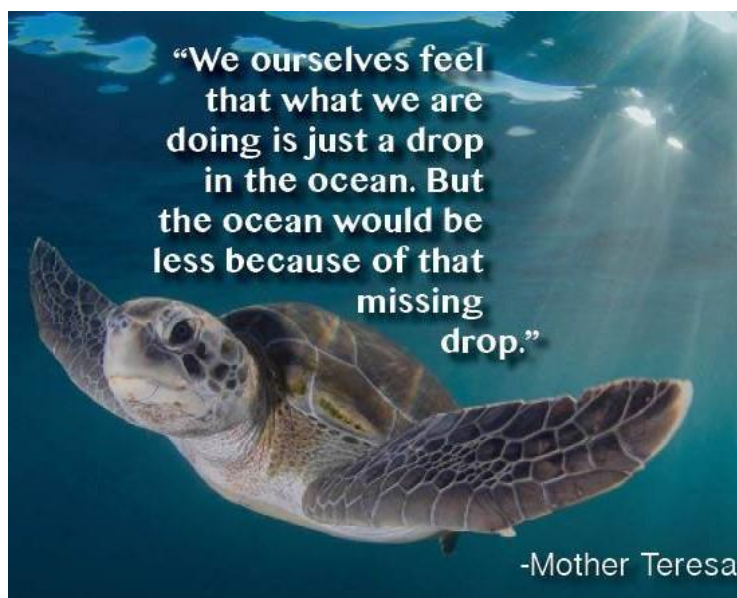
Welcoming the Stranger

- Our work in 2023 with New Milford Refugee Resettlement (NMRR) was very successful. We were able to complete our work enabling the Malikzada family to become 100% independent! This included:
 - Getting a driver's license and a car. Matin received his driver's license in May and a donor gifted him a car large enough for his entire family.
 - Securing a place to live. In December, Matin signed a year's lease in their current apartment with no need for a co-signer.
 - Securing a path to citizenship. With the help of a pro-bono attorney, the Malikzada family won their asylum claim in October. In a year, they will receive green cards, and in five years, they can apply for citizenship.
 - Firming up a way to earn a living. Matin is a talented potter, and his wife Najila helps him with his creations. Two NMRR volunteers have worked with Matin over the past eighteen months to establish the foundations for a successful pottery business.
- This is the third family that NMRR has worked with since 2016, and each family has successfully become 100% independent, and contributing to the community.
- In 2024, we are hoping to work with a new family. We are working to bring the family of Mohammad Mohammadi to New Milford. Mohammad is the young man that helped us as a translator the last 18 months. Mohammad's parents ran a private school in Kabul. At first, they were forbidden to teach girls, and then the Taliban closed the school. After selling all their possessions, they were able to secure visas to Pakistan where they currently reside in Islamabad.

Our church is filled with members with many passions. Our hope in 2024 is to gain new members in our work as Social Concerns, and through the strategic plan, help our church focus on a few core passions that will produce many blossoms.

1 John 3:18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Respectfully submitted,
Dan Martin, Chair



Baby Bundles Team

Our church has been directly involved in this mission for over 30 years. The Baby Bundles program finds ways to help young families with infants and toddlers. This year we saw an increase in families in need of clothing and baby items, as well as diapers and wipes. In July we were able to move the Baby Bundles program to a larger space in the church which gave us more room to display the donations we have received. The families now have better access to all the items we have collected. It has been exciting to see the moms and dads finding things they need and then bringing friends to the next distribution so they can pick up clothing and baby items. The clothing items sitting on our shelves are not helping anyone - we want to put them to good use by sharing them with our community.

We have been in contact with Thrift Mart and greatly appreciate the help from Sue Metcalf. We have coordinated with them to locate the needed baby items and are working on ways we can send families there to pick up the needed items directly. We are also working closely with Social Services to make sure that families know what other programs are available here in New Milford. We have been blessed to have Ryan Rebstock, Young Adult Services Librarian from New Milford Library, come to our distributions to share information on what library services are available for young children, and to help us communicate with families that speak little English.

We want to thank all the wonderful groups that have raised funds for Baby Bundles this year. Proceeds from our Mother's Day offering were donated to Baby Bundles. The Chapel Stitchers have contributed proceeds from their knitted and quilted item sales, and the Pie Peeps donated proceeds from their apple pie sales. Our friends at the Congregational Church of Brookfield have delivered many boxes of diapers and wipes twice this year! Their members have also given new clothing and stuffed toys for the babies. Many church members and neighbors have donated gently used clothing and baby items.

As the saying goes, "It takes a village to raise a child." The First Congregational Church and the town of New Milford have stepped up to help raise many children. We are blessed to live in such a safe and giving town. Our thanks to all who have supported this program. We look forward to finding new ways to help those families in need in 2024.

Our team consists of a dedicated group of volunteers including Katie Elmore, Carol McKay, Katie McKay, Gail Peck, Susan Sennello, Diane Taylor, Nicole Henderson, Katie Johnson, Kathy Elmore, Anne Olson, Sandy Gammons, Bonnie Westerberg, and Jan McCarthy.

Respectfully submitted,
Jan McCarthy, Chair

A. Russell Ayre Scholarship Team

The A. Russell Ayre Scholarship Team was pleased to award scholarships in the amount of \$13,250 to sixteen students in 2023. The recipients performed well academically and demonstrated a commitment to helping others. They were actively engaged in the school community through sports, band, honor societies, Wingman, business and arts clubs, and participated in community service through Scouts, tutoring, coaching, church groups, addressing food insecurity, and volunteering at numerous non-profits within New Milford.

We were proud to award scholarships to: Mia Antonucci, Nicholas Coloneri, Gretchen Davis, Isabel Delpa, Jennifer Ferreira, Donald Hassiak, Grace King, Kylie Lane, Julia Meadows, Ruby McSherry, Kara Murphy, Philip Passero IV, Giovanni Puglia, Abbey Sarich, Connor Sterling, and Amanda Williamson. "PJ" Passero was recognized in honor of Reverend Michael Moran, for his commitment to service having recently achieved the rank of Eagle Scout, his strong academic achievement, and willingness to lend a hand to help others.

The Scholarship Team resumed the tradition of holding a tag sale to raise funds during the third weekend of July during a new craft fair event being held on the Green. We collected donations during the week and held the sale on Saturday, raising \$1,175. Once again, the congregation was very supportive in donating goods and helping out during the sale and clean-up. We thank you!

2023 Scholarship Financials:

Opening Balance	\$4,673.41
Deposits	\$11,676.10
Interest	\$0.00
Fees (stop payment)	\$35.00
Checks issued to students	\$14,250.00
	(includes a re-issued check of \$1,000 to a 2022 graduate)
Ending Balance	\$2,064.51

Respectfully submitted,
Joan Vill, Chair
Steve Hendricks, Treasurer

Chapel Stitchers

2023 was a year of giving time and talents, meeting regularly on the second Sunday of the month as much as possible. Shawls and baby blankets were given out to many throughout the year. Shawls were sent to Partners in Lyme, a non-profit organization that supports those suffering from Lyme Disease.

Donna Ramsey set up a quilting room in the Parish House, which is all ready to go with sewing machines, supplies, etc. Throughout the year Donna shared her expertise in providing several quilt workshops, benefitting both beginner and experienced quilters. After each workshop some items were donated to the Stitchers' sales. Many beautiful quilted table runners were made for the fall and winter sales.

On July 22nd we set up our wares in front of the church during the Artisan Festival on the Green. The fair and our sales were successful.

On September 23rd, we were scheduled to participate in the Apple Festival on the Green, but due to rain the event was canceled. We did open the church that Saturday morning, setting up our sales in the sanctuary. Tours were offered as well, and an enthusiastic CE Team set up pumpkin decorating. The turnout was great, and we were able to donate \$413 to the Baby Bundles Mission.

On November 4th, Janet Junz, Kathy Maher and Chris Mrozinski traveled to Hartford for the annual Prayer Shawl Gathering, which includes speakers, a time with other prayer shawl ministries, sharing, and stitching. The ladies brought our extra yarn for the yarn swap. This year the Prayer Shawls for Families of Fallen Service Members spoke about their mission. Our members signed up to provide shawls when requested.

On November 18th the Chapel Stitchers participated in the Holiday Craft Fair Sponsored by the Christian Education Team. On December 16th during the pageant brunch in Fellowship Hall, the knitters set up a sales table. We had several Christmassy items that we felt could sell. Combined with the craft fair sales, \$240 in donations were deposited in the General Fundraising line of the budget and another \$138 was given to Baby Bundles.

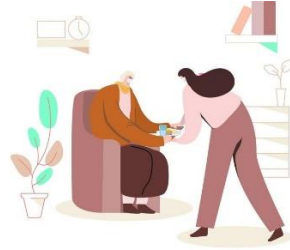
Thank you to all of the members for sharing their time and talents to our ministry.

Respectfully submitted,
Leslie Schlemmer, Chair

GROWTH AND CONGREGATIONAL CARE MINISTRY



New Members Team



**Called to Care -
Parish Visitors Team**



**Called to Care -
Meal Chain Team**



**Called to Care -
Intensive Prayer Unit**



**Called to Care -
Chapel Stitchers**



**Called to Care -
Condolence Reception Team**



The **Fellowship Team** encourages fellowship among all members.

New Members Team

Over the past year we have been blessed with many new people coming to worship with us and joining us at our special events. In January the Deacons held New Member Orientation meetings. It was a chance for people to ask us questions and learn more about us, our church, and our missions. As a result of those meetings we were pleased to welcome these seven new members in 2023: Donna MacKenzie, Katie and Corey Johnson, Lisa Reichin, Alecia Coronas, Chris Simmonds and James Baird. It is wonderful to have new members bringing fresh ideas and energies to our church.

Respectfully submitted,
Jan McCarthy, Deacon

Called to Care Team

Called to Care is a ministry of people helping people, which seeks to care for members of the congregation through all of life's joys and sorrows. Each group within the ministry has a specific call. This allows many people to contribute their unique gifts in ways that make a difference to those in need, and also creates a community of caring and support for the entire congregation. From January 22 – February 5, we had a "Gifts of Caring" time in which people could volunteer their gifts to the various groups. On Sunday, February 12th, we celebrated our gifts during the worship service. The Gifts of Caring Sunday will be a bit delayed this year, but I will coordinate with Rev. Dave to have one this year before Easter.

Jan McCarthy coordinates the IPU team. She does a remarkable job updating and keeping track of prayer requests. She also sends out the prayer list every week so our prayer group can pray throughout the week. Leslie Schlemmer continues to do an excellent job leading the Chapel Stitchers. They have used their talents in a variety of creative ways to benefit a number of ministries in the church.

Meal Chain – There were no requests this year for meals. Just having a list and knowing there are people ready and willing to provide a meal is a blessing and continues to be an important part of Called to Care.

Condolence Reception Team – Thankfully, this vital team can spring into action at a moment's notice. Once again, a number of bakers provided delicious goodies for the Transgender Day of Remembrance Service. In the same week they more than fulfilled a request to provide desserts for the celebration of life for Sheri Gunn's mother. In the last week of November they responded with speed and grace, hosting an elegant reception after the memorial service for Deirdre Wittmann. The following weekend they came together to host an equally lovely reception after the memorial service for longtime member Cathy Pond. Generosity and love were evident in every thoughtful contribution to these events.

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Parish Drivers – There were no requests for rides this year. This is another area where even though there aren't a lot of requests it's important to have a list ready if the need arises. Those who are willing to drive have obligations on Sunday mornings, which makes it difficult to bring someone to church, so we definitely need a few more people willing to drive.

Parish Visitors – We don't have a long list of homebound members. I have been in contact with visits, or by phone or email, with people who can't get to church. In February I delivered Valentine bags that the children created in Church School. This Christmas, the CE Director, Katie Johnson, and her children delivered wreaths to six homebound members. The visits were met with great enthusiasm by both the givers and receivers.

Correspondents – This was a new group added last year. So far, it has limited success. Easter cards were sent to about 24 homebound members and those we haven't seen in church for a while. Several requests went out to the group for get well cards, sympathy cards and special birthday cards. Response was limited. The Deacons have done a great job updating the membership roll, so going forward we hope to resume sending birthday cards to members.

It is a joy to continue to work with this group of compassionate, caring people who are so willing to give of their time. The most often heard complaint is that people sign up and are never called to help. However, when a need arises, like the condolence receptions, it is a blessing beyond words to see how people respond so quickly with enthusiasm and love.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Dr. Pat Nicholas

Intensive Prayer Unit (IPU) – This is a vital part of our Ministry of Caring. The members of the prayer group receive the Pastoral Prayer list each week and continue to pray for those on the list. There is no formal training for this process. Each of us prays in our own way and time. We hope that we make a difference by praying for those in need and for their families and friends. We believe that for each person who requests our prayers, God is already at work in their lives. In praying for them, we join God's team to bring change, healing, reconciliation, renewal and transformation in their lives.

Prayer requests come from many sources and by different pathways. Many requests come from people who feel overwhelmed and alone in dealing with illness, pain and loss. We hope by continuing this mission of prayer, we show all those who are suffering that God's love is all around them and we are here for them. We are blessed to have so many caring people in our church family. Together, our prayers and actions can spread God's love.

Romans 12:12 "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

Respectfully submitted,
Jan McCarthy

Women's Ministry

The Women's Ministry has continued to meet monthly for our book club. We have great participation and involvement. In June 2023, we had a fellowship dinner.

Thanks to all who continue to attend and support our meetings. We plan to continue meeting monthly for book club. We hope to plan other fellowship and service events in the coming year.

Respectfully submitted,
Nicole Henderson, Chair

Fellowship Team

In 2023, Fellowship continued to be managed without a chairperson, made possible by volunteers who generously gave their time and talents so church members and visitors could gather together and enjoy good food and conversation. Times of fellowship include weekly coffee hour after the service and special events. Coffee hour was held in the Taylor Room over the summer and in Fellowship Hall the rest of the year and was well attended. Sandy Gammons volunteered to manage coffee hour, which includes obtaining volunteers for individual Sundays and restocking supplies. We are grateful to her and to the groups and individuals who volunteer to host.

The SouperBowl luncheon was a great success with about 80 people enjoying many different soups, along with grilled cheese and desserts. Fellowship joined CE to host the Church Potluck Picnic in June, this time next to the Parish House, and the many people attending enjoyed the good food, shade, and games. The church hosted a potluck with BINGO in October, with members donating small items for a prize table, which was a lot of fun. Church members also volunteered to sell pie and hot drinks at the Craft Fair in the Parish House in November.

Many thanks for Mary Eherts for working with the town Health Inspector to renew the permit for the kitchen in Fellowship Hall, allowing us to make items such as apple pies for sale to the public. The Pie Peeps continued to combine fellowship with fundraising. Two groups met regularly over many weeks to make dozens of apple pies over the summer and fall, intended for sale at the town Apple Festival in September, which was unfortunately cancelled due to weather. Instead, the pies were sold to members and the community, whenever the opportunity arose. All pies were sold and the proceeds, about \$1,000, were donated to the Flower Committee, Baby Bundles, and the General Fund.

Respectfully submitted,
Pam Cafiero

CHURCH MANAGEMENT MINISTRY



The **Buildings & Grounds Team** handles the care, insurance, maintenance, and cleaning of all church properties.



The **Finance Team- Budget** projects and monitors church income and expenses.



The **Finance Team – Stewardship** promotes support through giving.



The **Finance Team – Investments** seeks to maintain and grow assets.



The **Communications Team** keeps the parish and the community informed of church matters.



The **Information Technology Team** plans, purchases, installs, and maintains all technology aspects.

CHURCH MANAGEMENT MINISTRY



The **Treasurer** has charge of the monies of the church, and acts as its legal signature.



The **Recording Secretary** takes minutes at all regular council meetings, as well as the three full meetings and any special meetings that may be called.



The **Clerk** keeps a record of church membership, baptisms, marriages, and deaths.



The **Room Rental Manager** handles both short and long-term usage of various church rooms.

Buildings and Grounds Team

During 2023 there were multiple maintenance and repair (M&R) projects along with several capital and infrastructure accomplishments. Those activities were listed and briefly explained in the monthly reports of the committee. The following explains one of the larger M&R projects, as well as the capital replacement of the church building lift (elevator).

Three room air conditioners were replaced in the Parish House. Lambert & Barr donated the removal of the old units and the installation of the new ones due to the units' locations over the outside doorways. It was not an easy task that took a two-person crew three hours to complete at each location. Subsequently, Eagle Electric was called to remedy several electrical code violations in two of the rooms where extension cords and blocked exits had to be eliminated. To minimize the misplacement of the air conditioners' remote controls and operating instructions, receptacles were added to the walls nearby the units.



The old Fellowship Hall lift was removed on Wednesday, July 12 by Bullock Access' subcontractor Quality Welding. They did a masterful and safe job removing and carting away the steel and hydraulics. Next were needed repairs to the sheetrock walls at the base of the lift shaft.

Over the 30 years that the original lift was there water had found a way to eat away at the wallboard, exposing the wood framework behind it. Lambert & Barr donated and repaired what was far more involved than a church volunteer effort.

The new lift was ordered by our contractor Bullock Access and was mechanically installed and running as of October 12. There was an extensive amount of electrical wiring left to do, along with calibrations. On October 13 work continued and the lift was ready for final inspections with the Town of New Milford Building Department.

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Unfortunately, the automatic door openers could only be installed on the lower door due to space restrictions on the one upstairs, where there was a huge number of hardware parts and wiring bundles in the wall.



The new lift passed all inspections and was ready for service during the long-anticipated silent movie event. Prior to that evening, the lift was dedicated in recognition of the financial support by members, the community, and the Ellen Knowles Harcourt Foundation.



Respectfully submitted,
John Wittmann, Chair

Finance Team

2023 Operating Budget

Income & Expense	2022 Approved	2023 Actual
<u>Income</u>		
Pledge & Collection Income	\$159,850	\$164,609
Use of Building	\$46,603	\$60,135
Fundraisers	\$2,000	\$925
Investment Fund	\$3,216	\$15,400
Endowment Fund	\$38,016	\$38,016
S. J. Johnson Fund	\$4,932	\$4,932
Parsonage Fund	\$14,640	\$0
Miscellaneous Income	\$100	\$90
Total Income	\$269,357	\$284,107
<u>Expense</u>		
Worship Ministry		
Christian Ministry/Pastor	\$92,278	\$69,755
Music Ministry	\$28,705	\$29,100
Audio/Visual	\$1,718	\$1,140
Flowers	\$0	\$0
Christian Education Ministry	\$18,123	\$17,965
Growth & Care Ministry	\$1,000	\$572
Outreach Ministry	\$650	\$314
Church Management Ministry		
Office Expense & Salaries	\$42,325	\$40,076
Insurance	\$26,000	\$27,977
Maintenance and Repairs	\$37,000	\$37,042
Utilities	\$46,700	\$51,601
Communications	\$578	\$253
Total Expense	\$294,599	\$275,795
Net Income Deficit/Surplus	-\$25,242	\$8,312

2023 and 2024 Budget Comparison

Income & Expense	2023 Actual	2024 Approved
<u>Income</u>		
Pledge & Collection Income	\$164,609	\$162,300
Use of Building	\$60,135	\$51,000
Fundraisers	\$925	\$2,000
Vacation Bible School	--	\$1,300
Investment Fund	\$15,400	\$5,032
Endowment Fund	\$38,016	\$39,044
S. J. Johnson Fund	\$4,932	\$5,047
Parsonage Fund	--	\$15,994
Bostwick Fund	--	\$6,516
Platt and Bostwick Music Fund	--	\$1,750
Benevolence Fund	--	\$650
Miscellaneous Income	\$90	\$100
Total Income	\$284,107	\$290,733
<u>Expense</u>		
Worship Ministry		
Christian Ministry/Pastor	\$69,755	\$87,728
Confirmation	--	\$200
Music Ministry	\$29,100	\$29,368
Audio/Visual	\$1,140	\$1,140
Flowers	\$0	\$0
Christian Education Ministry	\$17,965	\$19,773
Growth & Care Ministry	\$572	\$850
Outreach Ministry	\$314	\$650
Church Management Ministry		
Office Expense & Salaries	\$40,076	\$43,565
Insurance	\$27,977	\$26,000
Maintenance and Repairs	\$37,042	\$39,000
Utilities	\$51,601	\$50,000
Communications	\$253	\$513
Total Expense	\$275,795	\$298,787
Net Income Deficit/Surplus	\$8,312	-\$8,054

This year was another good year for our church financially. We ended 2023 with a surplus of \$8,312.14. Both our Unpledged Giving and our Building Use income were much higher than we had expected. In addition, our expenses were lower than anticipated in every section of our budget other than Music, Insurance, and Utilities. We are very grateful to everyone who has continued to financially support our church and also to everyone who has worked so hard to cut our expenses. You are all incredibly important!

Our investments continued to grow in 2023 as well. In total, we withdrew less money than we had planned from our investments this year. We did take more money than anticipated from our Investment Fund but we did not withdraw any money at all from our Parsonage Fund. As a result, we ended up taking \$2,456 less than we had planned from our investments, which is wonderful.

Our church received a generous bequest from Charlotte Bostwick this year. We are all extremely grateful to Charlotte for including us in her estate planning. Her generosity will make such a difference in our financial future. Charlotte was very dedicated to the music program at our church so the Investment Team designated over 10% of her bequest for use by the Music Team. We decided to invest the remainder of her bequest to support our long-term goals, especially since we are beginning the process to search for a settled pastor. Growing our investments as well as increasing our giving are both critical if we want to be able to afford to hire a full-time pastor.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I would like to extend an enormous THANK YOU to everyone for continuing to support our church!

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Chapin, Chair

Stewardship and Fundraising Team

The Stewardship Team, consisting of Mike Curley and Jon Case, remains committed to high-lighting the importance of pledging and giving.

Our 2023 Pledge Campaign resulted in 52 pledge units and pledged giving of approximately \$120,000. These totals are similar to those from the 2022 Campaign.

Non-pledged giving and loose collection was approximately \$40,000 which was significantly more than what was received in 2022 and was also significantly more than what was budgeted in 2023.

The Stewardship Team executed a 2024 pledge campaign toward the end of 2023. A mailing to our database, bulletin announcements, Constant Contact messages, and mentions during Sunday services seemed to resonate with the congregation.

On behalf of the Stewardship Team, thank you to our generous congregation and donors. First Congregational Church of New Milford enjoys incredible loyalty and support from so many.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon Case, Chair

Audit Team

This is a vital aspect of church management, to maintain our church's financial integrity. However, positions on this team are currently vacant. Responsibilities include oversight of the accounting records of the Treasurer and the Financial Secretary.

Investment Team

2023 Performance of Invested Funds

ACCOUNT	Vanguard Fund	2022 Year End Value	2023 Year End Value	Notes
Endowment	VWENX	\$813,088	\$889,052	Budgeted withdrawal \$38,016
Investment Group				
Investment	VWENX	\$108,806	\$108,026	Budgeted withdrawal - \$3,216 Actual withdrawal - \$24,500
Parsonage	VDIGX	\$396,102	\$428,202	
Clark Fund	VWINX	\$7,487	\$9,681	
Book of Remembrance	JPMorgan Chase CD	0	\$19,681	\$20,000 1-yr CD @ 4.80% purchased 2/15/23. Will return \$20,000 + interest
Bequests				
SJ Johnson	VWENX	\$105,521	\$115,379	Budgeted withdrawal - \$4,932
Bostwick	VDIGX	0	\$189,959	\$179,045 invested in July
Maintenance	VDIGX	\$ 12,029	\$15,303	
Scholarship	VWENX	\$140,644	\$151,223	Awards withdrawal \$9,000
TOTAL – ALL INVESTMENTS		\$1,583,677	1,926,810	
Dividends Received	\$40,876			
Capital Gains Received	\$49,225			

(continued)

The team (Dave Elmore-chair, Susan Chapin, Jon Case, and Ken Papp) is charged with managing the invested funds of the church. The Endowment, SJ Johnson, Maintenance, and Scholarship Funds are restricted to specific purposes. All income and principal in the Investment Fund can be used by vote of the church body.

Vanguard Funds are used to moderate risk while also enabling growth. The team uses "total return spending" to determine how much is available to the church each year in support of the General Fund. This calculation factors in growth and income over time. The church can take a percentage of the return annually to finance operations. In 2023 the contribution was 4.5% of the average return over the prior 20 quarters, with the remaining growth and income added to principal to offset the effects of inflation and help the fund grow.

We had moderate growth until the fourth quarter when the stock market had a strong rally. For 2023 the funds showed a 12.2% rate of return. Rate of return is a measure of how much the investments have gained or lost over a period of time.

A further bequest of \$176,268.12 was received from the estate of Charlotte Bostwick. The Investment Team allocated \$20,000 to the Music Team because of Charlotte's love of music, especially the organ. The balance will be used to supplement the General Fund, allocating money each year based on the total return spending formula.

Financing the replacement of the lift in the main church building was achieved through a fundraising campaign. These monies were moved to a money market fund until needed in the fall of 2023.

The church made budgeted withdrawals from the Endowment, Investment and SJ Johnson funds. Several additional withdrawals were made from the Investment Fund to supplement the General Fund when expenses outstripped donations.

Respectfully submitted,
David Elmore, Chair

Communications Team

Team members are Sheri Gunn, Dave Elmore, and Leslie Schlemmer. The team is down one member from 2023. In 2023 this group continued to keep the congregation and the public aware of our church and its activities. The primary means of communication are Facebook, the Sunday Bulletin, and Constant Contact. In 2023 we had 51,513 Constant Contact communications, up 5.5% from 2022.

We have had 26,155 Facebook post reaches (up 1000% from 2022).

Top performing Constant Contact communications are:

- Chapel Stitchers
- Fall and Annual Meetings
- Nov. 2023 Worship

Top performing Facebook communications are:

- Transgender Day of Remembrance
- Christmas Pageant
- Live Nativity
- The first Sunday of Advent & All Dressed Up
- Holiday Craft Fair

Below are the statistics from the Constant Contact "sends" in the last 12 months:

- 51,513 sends
 - 45% Open
 - 55% Unopened
 - 3% Click Rate
 - 14% Bounced back
- 20,031 Opens
 - 95% from desktops
 - 5% mobile
- 1126 Clicks
 - 56% from desktops
 - 44% mobile

The open rate vs. the previous 12 months is +0%, and vs. the industry average of +0%.

The click rate vs. the previous 12 months is +1% and vs. the industry average of +1%.

Respectfully submitted,
Sheri Gunn, Chair

Treasurer

Bank Account Assets as of December 31, 2023

ASSETS

Current Assets

Checking/Savings Accounts	
PayPal	463.50
General Fund	<u>11,685.18</u>
Total Checking/Savings	12,148.68
Other Current Assets	
Prepaid/Early Payments	<u>-4,700.00</u>
Total Other Current Assets	<u>-4,700.00</u>
Total Current Assets	<u>7,448.68</u>

Other Assets

Savings Bank of Danbury	
A.R.A.Scholarship (checking)	2,064.51
Book of Remembrance (Savings)	2,948.66
Building Fund (Checking)	891.86
Christian Education (Checking)	740.68
Hunt Organ Fund (Savings)	557.27
Parcells Flower Fund (Savings)	3,933.30
Platt Music Fund (Savings)	7,833.14
Special Office (Clark) Fund (Checking)	<u>14,760.07</u>
Total Savings Bank of Danbury	<u>33,729.49</u>

Total Other Assets **33,729.49**

TOTAL ASSETS **41,178.17**

Outstanding Liabilities as of December 31, 2023

	<u>Current</u>	<u>1-30</u>	<u>31-60</u>	<u>61-90</u>	<u>>90</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Aquarion Water Company	26.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	26.50
JW Pepper	0.00	0.00	0.00	331.98	100.99	432.97
Marandola Fuel Service	2,154.00	1,483.93	0.00	0.00	0.00	3,637.93
New Milford Sewer Commsn.	0.00	213.75	0.00	0.00	0.00	213.75
TOTAL	<u>2,180.50</u>	<u>1,697.68</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>331.98</u>	<u>100.99</u>	<u>4,311.15</u>

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Chapin
Finance Team Chair

Personnel Team

This is an important aspect of church management; however, positions on this team are currently vacant. Responsibilities include ensuring that the staff is well matched to changing needs, adherence to job descriptions and church policies, and performance management of certain staff positions.

Information Technology Team

The IT Team supports the church staff and volunteers with information technology advice and equipment. Team members included Dave Elmore and Pam Cafiero. They met several times in 2023. Responsibilities also included managing the church website. The job of posting the weekly bulletin has been delegated to Rachael Wright, Manager of Church Operations.

We provided support for staff and volunteers with PowerChurch software and Microsoft 365. A new router and data switch were installed in the Parish House office as part of an equipment refresh.

The Team researched online church directories to replace the Instant Church Directory subscription. However, the decision was made to renew this since it was not possible to find an online directory that would interface with PowerChurch.

Respectfully submitted,
David Elmore, Chair

Recording Secretary

2023 Annual Meeting Minutes Sunday, March 12, 2023

Welcome – Leslie Schlemmer, Council Chair, was sick and arranged for an alternate in her absence. Susan Chapin, Finance Chair and Church Management Ministry Chair, graciously stepped up to lead the meeting. After meeting materials were distributed to the Congregation, Susan welcomed everyone to the 2023 Annual Meeting at 11:18 am.

Opening Prayer – Deacon Sharon Millard offered an uplifting prayer for the meeting.

Summary of 2022 Fall Meeting Minutes – Recording Secretary Joan Vill summarized the 2022 Fall Meeting minutes. A motion to approve the minutes was presented by Barb Shimmel and seconded by Ruth Almond.

(continued)

Investment Update – Dave Elmore presented a summary of the Investment funds for 2022. The committee uses a “total return” investing strategy to provide growth and income over time. The 2022 contribution for operating expenses was 4.5%. After a turbulent 2022, FCC funds were down 11.5% drop as compared to an 18% drop by the S&P. The Church received a generous bequest from the estate of Charlotte Bostwick in the Spring of 2022. So far in 2023, our funds are up slightly.

Stewardship Update – Jon Case reported that 2023 pledges stand at 51 as compared to 55 in 2022. Anyone who hasn’t yet pledged is encouraged to do so. As has been communicated, Amazon has terminated the Amazon Smile program that allowed members to sign-up and purchases made through the program earned money for the church. Members are encouraged to sign-up for iGive, a similar service that will make contributions to designated charities based on goods purchased through the site. Information can be found in the bulletin.

Update on Intentional Interim Minister Search – Sharon Millard reported that the Deacons have met with Conference resources, Rev. Sam Hauser and Rev, Jake Joseph, to receive input on our search. We have been advised to be patient as the spring typically brings an uptick in applicants. A refreshed church profile has been posted and we are now in a time of faithful and patient waiting that the right candidate will come our way. Jen Albright, Cary Westfall, and Pam Cafiero have taken the leadership in interviewing potential candidates.

Sharon also provided the Congregation with an update on the Board of Deacons. Currently 4 of the 9-member board positions are filled, with (2) Deacons scheduled to complete their terms in June. Cary Westfall has stepped up to fill one of these very important positions, but the work of the Church requires more than three dedicated individuals. Please listen to these words from the Deacon installment ceremony and prayerfully consider whether this is a time in your spiritual life to serve as a Deacon.

“From the beginning of the Christian Church, certain men and women who were highly esteemed were appointed as deacons. To this office these people have been elected by this congregation, and it is now fitting that we set them apart for the service to which they have been called.”

Ad Hoc Lift Update – Joan Vill (on behalf of Dan Martin/ Leslie Schlemmer) reminded the Congregation of the grant we received to fix the lift (aka elevator) and the need for “us” to match the grant award as a stipulation of the grant. Using the thermometer graphic provided by Dan Martin, we are at \$9,825 (less than 50% of goal). Joan shared the benefits a lift would have for all and asked people to look for the letter sent home and prayerfully consider giving to this worthwhile need.

Presentation of the Annual Report – Susan Chapin gave a heartfelt thank you to Janet Wittmann for once again compiling the report. The Congregation also offered their thanks and there being no “issues” with the report, a motion was presented to approve the report by Barb Shimmel and seconded by Ruth Almond.

Old Business – None

New Business – Pat Nicholas shared that next Sunday, March 19, Reverend Darrell Goodwin, Executive Conference Minister from the SNEUCC will be preaching from our pulpit and has scheduled to spend an hour after services for Q&A. Please plan to attend as with 600+ churches in the SNEUCC, he is a very busy man and having him come to FCC is a gift indeed.

Adjourn – Motion to adjourn by Joan Vill, seconded by Paul Mayer at 11:36 am.

2023 Spring Meeting Minutes **Sunday, May 21, 2023**

Welcome – Leslie Schlemmer, Council Chair, welcomed all at 11:08 am.

Opening Prayer – Reverend Dave Buchan offered a prayer for the meeting.

Summary of 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes – Recording Secretary Joan Vill summarized the 2023 Annual Meeting minutes. A motion to approve the minutes was presented by Jeff Gammons and seconded by Jeff Vill. The minutes were approved based on in person and on-line ballot results: 37 yes 0 no

Deacon Update – Head Deacon Sharon Millard provided an explanation of the role of Intentional Interim Minister for the congregation.

“The way a congregation chooses to use its interim time will shape congregational growth, identity, and health. The interim time provides an opportunity for a congregation to clearly answer the questions: “Who are we?” And “Who is God calling us to be in the future?” To openly and candidly address these questions, a church is best served by the assistance of an Intentional Interim Minister.

An intentional interim minister helps a church discover where God is leading them and how to prepare themselves for their next settled pastor. In this process, the Intentional Interim Minister helps the church self-evaluate and determine what they are looking for in a settled pastor. An Intentional Interim Minister isn't there to maintain the status quo, but to guide the church in addressing their issues and making changes where they are needed.”

Investment Update – Dave Elmore presented an update on the Investment funds. The (5) accounts are up a few percent which the committee feels is positive given the unsettled environment. Dave shared possible ideas for using the generous “undesignated” bequest money from Charlotte Bostwick: music, possibly outreach, or the Investment Fund to use earnings for future needs. No questions were received from the congregation.

Stewardship Update – Mike Curley and Jon Case provided the Stewardship update. At 52 pledge units (~\$123K) for 2023, we're in “pretty good shape”. Members were reminded to sign-up for iGive, a similar service that will make contributions to designated charities based on goods purchased through the site. No questions were received from the congregation.

Ad Hoc Lift Update – John Wittmann provided an update to fix the lift (aka elevator). Our best efforts to remove the existing lift with a group of church volunteers has failed, as we discovered that the steel superstructure is all one piece and not in segments as we had hoped, so we couldn't identify a way to unbolt it and get it through the door to the lift. We also believe that the lift was installed and then the wall with the door to the lift was constructed afterwards. So we reluctantly gave up and called the company who will be installing the new lift to ask them to reinstate the removal option on our contract. That additional cost is \$5,000 and we have that expense covered.

(continued)

Bullock Access, the lift company, has filed with the State of Connecticut for the necessary permits to replace our lift. While the State inspects elevators and not lifts, the permit process is still necessary to notify the State of our intentions. Our local building department has jurisdiction over lift inspections so we'll file with them. Once the state permit is in Bullock's possession, they will order our custom-made lift, which will be fabricated to fit our existing shaft. Our existing doors will be reused and door assist mechanisms will be installed to help them open easily. The malfunctioning door locking mechanisms will be replaced, as those are one of the many reasons why the lift is out of service. Lift company owner Cliff Bullock will be coming back to re-measure for the new lift to be absolutely certain of the dimensions. When he's here we'll meet with the demolition company that will be cutting up and removing the old lift. The existing plan of having the new lift ready for our November public event is still a go and updates will be provided along the way, as was done for the roof project.

One last item remains to make Fellowship Hall ADA friendly, although once the lift is replaced it is extensively ADA compliant. Bathroom automatic door openers can be installed, similar to push buttons or bars you'll see in public places on main doors and bathrooms. The cost 3 years ago was approximately \$3,500 from our contractor Eagle Electric. There is not a definite timeline yet, but trying to have the lift complete for the November church event.

Presentation of 2023 Nominations – Leslie Schlemmer presented the slate of nominees for 2023. A motion to approve the slate was raised by Jan Wittmann and seconded by Jeff Gammons. The slate of nominees was approved. The minutes were approved based on in person and on-line ballot results: 35 yes / 2 no. The two dissenting votes regarding the Teams list involves non-members serving as team members.

Old Business – None

New Business – None

Adjourn – Motion to adjourn Jeff Gammons, second Dave Eherts at 11:17 am.

2023 Fall Meeting Minutes Sunday, December 03, 2023

Welcome – Leslie Schlemmer, Council Chair, welcomed all at 11:05 am, sharing the blessing of being a part of this church and thanking volunteers and those in leadership for all they do.

Opening Prayer – Reverend Dave Buchan offered a prayer for the meeting.

Summary of 2023 Spring Meeting Minutes – Recording Secretary Joan Vill summarized the 2023 Spring Meeting minutes, noting a correction in the header from "2023 Annual Meeting Minutes" to "2023 Spring Meeting Minutes". A motion to approve the minutes was presented by John Wittmann and seconded by Sheri Gunn. The minutes were approved based on in person and on-line ballot results.

(continued)

Investment Update – Dave Elmore presented an update on the Vanguard funds (Endowment, Investment, SJ Johnson, Scholarship, and Maintenance). The committee uses a “total return spending” policy to withdraw a portion of the income and growth each year.

The church received a substantial ‘undesignated’ bequest from the estate of Charlotte Bostwick. The team decided, based on Charlotte's love of music and our church organ, to designate \$20,000 to the Music Team. The balance will be invested and utilized to help support the church's General Fund.

Dave reported that year to date the combined balance of all the church's invested funds has gained 13%. No questions were received from the congregation.

Stewardship Update –Jon Case provided the Stewardship update. We're on target to meet the ~\$120K pledged for 2023. 2024 pledges to date total \$107K with 46 pledging households participating. Jon asked members to please consider pledging if they haven't done so yet.

Jon reminded the congregation that the use of iGive is another way to earn money from the service that makes contributions to the church based on goods purchased through the site. Jon noted that planning bequests to the church are always appreciated.

No questions were received from the congregation.

Finance Team Budget Presentation – Susan Chapin reported that the Finance Team has been working to take a more strategic approach with the church's money. Susan presented the budget, highlighting some of the differences from last year:

- Pledging is anticipated to be higher.
- Income from building use is also expected to be higher.
- VBS monies will be tracked through the General Fund with income and expense lines.
- Investments are vital to the bottom line so a heartfelt thank you to Charlotte.
- Income from the Benevolence money will be used for Outreach.
- 2024 budget reflects an \$8K deficit versus \$25K in 2023. As of today, Susan reported we are “in the green” for 2023 due to lower than expected expenses.

With no questions, a motion to approve the budget was raised by Ruth Almond and seconded by Jeff Gammons.

Old Business – Ruth Almond offered a thank you for the working lift.

New Business – None

Adjourn – Motion to adjourn by Ruth Almond and seconded by Jeff Gammons at 11:18 am.

Respectfully submitted,
Joan Vill

Clerk

Baptisms	
Children (under 13 yrs.)	5
August Engles	
Kinsley Hall	
Mary Loughran MacKenzie	
Robert Steven Loughran	
Connor Hensley Mitchell	
Adults (13 yrs. and older)	0
Confirmands	0
New Members – Adult	7
James Baird	
Alecia Coronas	
Corey Johnson	
Kaitlyn Johnson	
Donna MacKenzie	
Lisa Reichen	
Deceased Members:	2
Forest Putnam	
Cathy Pond	
Transferred:	1
Dismissed:	1
Marriages:	0
Vow Renewals:	0

A membership audit was performed by the Deacons, resulting in the transfer of 142 people to Inactive Member status, and 3 to Associate Member.

Members on the Roll as of December 31, 2023

Active: 194 Associate: 107 **Total: 301**

Respectfully submitted,
Ross Detwiler

Room Rental Manager

The majority of the Parish House's available rooms were either rented or occupied by local individuals and not-for-profit organizations. There were still opportunities open for rental office and meeting space. Those opportunities and all existing room use relationships were managed by Room Rental Manager Mike Bensema with help from Church Administrator Nicole Henderson, followed by Church Administrator Rachael Wright who came onboard after Nicole's retirement from the position. Larger rental opportunities, similar to the movie companies that used multiple spaces, were negotiated by Mike Bensema with assistance from our real estate representative, Chris LaCava, as needed.

The church sanctuary, Fellowship Hall, and Taylor Room were sporadically occupied throughout the year during Monday-Saturday for weddings and receptions, memorial services, and community events. Fees were charged accordingly by our standard rental rates as they applied to either internal or external renters. During 2024 we will be working diligently to maximize fair market rate rental income while continuing to be mindful of our mission as a church.

Here's the list of organizations, businesses, and individuals occupying space in the Parish House and church building as of December 31, 2023. The not-for-profit category is a mixture of rental/lease, annual donations to the church, or church mission related.

Not-for-profit organizations room or space use

- Two Scout troops – Parish House monthly meetings
- Literacy on The Green – Parish House weekly meetings
- Baby Bundles – storage of donations and supplies
- Northville Amateur Radio Association – Fellowship Hall monthly meeting
- Philadelphia Brazilian Church – Parish House twice weekly meeting

Businesses

- Greater New Milford Business Association – Taylor Room most Friday's
- Thorne Irish Dance School– Parish House Youth Room weekly
- Northwest Hills Consulting – Parish House annual lease
- Hawthorne Therapy –Parish House annual lease
- HH Taylor & Son –Parish House office space
- Malikzada Pottery – Parish House storage space

Individuals

- Jocelyn Ayers – Parish House office space

Respectfully submitted,
John Wittmann
Chair, Buildings & Grounds Team

BE THE CHURCH

Protect the environment.

Care for the poor.

Forgive often.

Reject racism.

Fight for the powerless.

Share earthly and spiritual resources.

Embrace diversity.

Love God.

Enjoy this life.

God is still speaking.
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**

