

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



**Reports for the 309<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, covering the events of 2024**

**March 9, 2025**

**First Congregational Church of New Milford, Connecticut**  
**2024 Annual Report**  
**Table of Contents**

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Explanation of Church Ministries Reports</b>	3
Interim Pastor	4
Church Council Chair	5
Pastoral Search	6
Worship Ministry	
Deacons	8
Music	10
Flowers	13
Ushers	14
Audio Visual	14
Book of Remembrance	15
Christian Education Ministry	16
Outreach Ministry	
Baby Bundles	20
Social Concerns and Missions	21
A.Russell Ayre Scholarship	23
Growth & Congregational Care Ministry	
Called to Care	24
Lunch & Learn	25
Bible Study	26
Intensive Prayer Unit	26
Chapel Stitchers	27
Fellowship	28
Pie Peeps	29
Women's Ministry	29
Men's Breakfast	30
Chapel Quilters	30
Church Management Ministry	
Buildings & Grounds	32
Stewardship	34
Information Technology	34
Finance	35
Communications	37
Investments	38
Treasurer	40
Clerk	41
Recording Secretary	42
<b>Covenant</b>	46

Annual Report compiled by Janet Wittmann



***The following information is taken from the church constitution, and may be helpful in better understanding how the church works. There are five major Ministries of the Church.***

**THE WORSHIP MINISTRY** consists of the Pastor(s), other relevant staff, and lay representatives involved in worship. **Deacons** assist in the preparation and administration of the Services, Ordinances and Sacraments of the Church and in ministering to the welfare and spiritual needs of our Church, its Pastor(s) and this community. 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 **Flower Team** takes charge of all floral arrangements for the services of worship. The **Audio-Visual Team** provides assistance running the technology during worship services, special congregational meetings, etc. The **Book of Remembrance Team** takes charge of the Book of Remembrance and the Book of Remembrance Fund celebrated during special worship services twice a year.

**THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION MINISTRY** consists of the CE Director, other relevant staff, and lay representatives from Sunday School, Youth Group, and people focused on faith formation for all ages. They have general oversight of all educational work of the church including the Church School and Youth groups.

**THE OUTREACH MINISTRY** consists of relevant staff and lay representatives involved with local, national and global outreach. The **Social Concerns & Missions Team** has a special concern for the church's ministry in and beyond its own parish, reaching out in Christian love and service and interpreting the wider mission of the United Church of Christ (UCC) for the congregation. The **Baby Bundles Team** is responsible for the collection and/or purchase and distribution of baby and children's supplies to families in need in the greater New Milford area. The **A. Russell Ayre Scholarship Team** awards college scholarships that are not limited to members of this church. Recipients may have service to the community and church, financial need, and academic achievement.

**THE GROWTH AND CONGREGATIONAL CARE MINISTRY** consists of relevant staff and lay leaders with a passion for attracting, welcoming, and integrating new members and friends; inviting existing members and friends to deepen their relationships with the Church; and increasing the spirituality, connectedness and numbers of participants in church life. Included in this ministry are a variety of smaller special interest groups. The **Fellowship Team** encourages fellowship among all members. The **Called to Care Team** provides comfort and assistance in a variety of meaningful ways.

**THE CHURCH MANAGEMENT MINISTRY** consists of relevant staff and lay people who are charged with the faithful management of the Church's properties, finances, technology, record-keeping, and personnel. The **Buildings & Grounds Team** is responsible for the care of the Meetinghouse and Parish House plus any other real estate that the church may own or control. The **Finance Team** prepares and monitors the annual general operating budget, and updates the forecast of income and expenses. The **Stewardship & Fundraising Team** plans and conducts the stewardship campaign of the church, and coordinates overall fundraising throughout the year. The **Investments Team** serves as the custodian of the church's investment portfolios. The **Information Technology Team** plans for, purchases, installs, and trains people in the use of technology required for the effective functioning of the church. The **Communications Team** keeps the parish informed of matters of church life, and enhances the promotion of the church. Also included in the Church Management Ministry are the Church Administrator, the Clerk, the Treasurer, and the Recording Secretary.



## Interim Minister

“...those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.  
They shall mount up with wings like eagles.  
They shall run and not be weary,  
They shall walk and not faint.”  
(Isaiah 40:31)

First Congregational Church is a remarkable church and in 2024 it has, in the words of Isaiah, “mounted up with wings like eagles.” It is flying high with God's help and a core of dedicated people. God is worshipped and many people are helped through its ministries. A lot has taken place in this transition period.

Think of the excitement of our children in the Christmas pageant or Vacation Bible School. The music of the choir enriches our worship on a Sunday morning. A children's choir was started. There is barely an empty seat at Lunch and Learn each month. Safe church policies are being developed. Our service to the community is impressive. Food is collected for the hungry and hard pressed families are helped with diapers and items for little children. I am impressed with the laughter I hear in the hallways and the fun—as well as the seriousness—of our board meetings. We have a living church to be proud of.

Deep gratitude goes to our Search Committee for their hard work developing a church profile. An unbelievable amount of work goes into getting a new minister. Very soon interviews will begin. Kudos to Corey and his people.



My thanks to our hard working staff: Rachael, Katie, Sarah, and Diane. First Congregational is blessed to have such capable and good people on board. They are a joy to work with. My thanks too to Dan for his leadership as head of council. The faith, warmth and friendship of this congregation has made my interim ministry with you a privilege.

May 2025 be a year when First Congregational “mounts up like eagles” to ever greater heights. God bless.

In Christ,  
Rev. Dave Buchan

## Church Council Chair

# Imagine Together

“The power of imagination is the ultimate creative power... no doubt about that. While knowledge defines all we currently know and understand... imagination points to all we might yet discover and create. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Your imagination is your preview of life's coming attractions.”

**Albert Einstein**

I love this quote for a number of reasons, but mostly because it describes the core work of the Church Council. We spent a lot of time in 2024 “imagining” our future. A large part of that work was completing our Strategic Plan, which was started in the fall of 2023. This required a significant investment of time, discussion, and debate. I want to thank all of our five Ministries for their dedicated participation. We ended up with a good roadmap of how we can “Be the Church” that New Milford needs. Our focus for the next few years will be on six strategies:

1. **Resolve** structure and process issues to reduce confusion and conflict, and to streamline effectiveness
2. **Implement** an expanded collaborative approach with the community service providers and other churches to enable better member understanding and better mission
3. **Leverage** digital tools to better communicate with the community and with members
4. **Create** more non-Sunday events, both small and large, to bring people inside our space, to generate awareness and member unity in shared projects
5. **Explore** new ways to generate funding, and to make it easier for the church to receive funds
6. **Establish** role in community for LGBTQ+ and hunger awareness and issue resolution

We decided that strategy #1 should be our initial dedicated focus because making progress would enable success for the other five strategies. We made a lot of progress in 2024 with strategy #1. For example, we implemented a protocol to help with our interactions called Holy Manners, and we helped create a new gift policy, that the finance team presented, and received approval for, from the congregation.

We also did a good job of working together to leverage the **Imagine Together** theme to support the stewardship campaign, and creating a new way to illustrate ways to serve our church. We also began discussing and planning work to leverage the digital tools at our disposal, to reach our community effectively.

In 2025, we have some exciting work to accomplish! We will continue to work on implementing the Strategic Plan, take a more active role in promoting stewardship and fellowship, and support the new ad hoc committee being formed to work on our Steeple Project.

Can you “imagine” some ways to help in 2025? Church Council meetings are open to everyone in the congregation. Come join us. Come help us imagine the coming attractions of our church!

In Faith,  
Dan Martin





# PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE

*Per the church constitution: "When a vacancy occurs in the Pastoral duties of this Church, a Pastoral Search Committee shall be nominated by the Church Council. The committee shall be formed of 7-9 church members who have relational and detail skills and a willingness to dedicate time to meetings; who have a commitment to the future of the church; and who represent diverse ages, races and cultures, genders, life experiences and perspectives present in the church. The Search Committee shall be elected at an Annual, Regular, or Special Church Meeting. The committee is charged with surveying and summarizing the needs and wishes of the congregation regarding a new settled pastor and preparing the local church profile; reviewing the profiles of ministers who apply; further evaluating the prospective candidates, and recommending a candidate to be voted on by church members."*

## **Ad Hoc Pastoral Search Committee**

In March 2024, a group of seven individuals were charged with representing the entire congregation and beginning the search process for a new Settled Pastor to lead FCCNM. Per our constitution, this group was comprised of a cross-section of congregants, representing virtually every demographic in the church. The designated committee members are:

Corey Johnson – Chairman  
Bonnie Westerberg – Chaplain  
Katie McKay – Secretary  
Jen Albright - Member  
Paul Mayer - Member  
Holly Meissner - Member  
Meg Wittmann – Youth Member

Since being formed, the Search Team met virtually every week for at least 1-2 hours, with the only exceptions being holidays and during larger Church events. During these meetings, we discussed everything from who we've been to who we want to be, and who can lead us to that.

*(continued)*

In April, the Search Team took part in a day-long team-building exercise to get to know each other and where we were each coming from on our faith journey. This helped us learn how to approach each other's opinions and make certain we're always being respectful. We also attended a Zoom team building seminar with the UCC, detailing every step of the search process from start to finish. We began the group work for devising a Pastoral & Congregational Questionnaire.

In May, we finished and administered the Pastoral Survey for the Congregation to take demographic data on who we are, as well as information on the qualities we would like from our next pastor. It was made up of 25 questions, with room for the congregants to express what they would like in our next pastor in essay form. The Pastoral Survey was a great success and gave incredible insight into the needs of the congregation.

In June, we held an open Question & Answer session with the congregation in Fellowship Hall. This Q & A let the congregants ask questions, as well as express their thoughts and feelings on what they would like from our next settled pastor. With the survey and the Q & A with the Congregation behind us, we then began work on the Local Church Profile for the UCC – which fully moved to an electronic platform for Church Profiles & Pastors seeking one another. Unexpectedly, Jen Albright had to resign from the committee due to a family health issue.

From June to December steady work on the Church Profile continued. To adequately complete many sections of the Church Profile, we consulted and met with several other members for information on their respective ministries. These included Dan Martin – Council Chair, Susan Chapin – Finance Chair, John Wittmann – Buildings & Grounds Chair, Dave Elmore – Finance and Technology Chair, and Reverend Dave Buchan. Margaret Hofmeister with the UCC has also been a huge resource and guide to devising and delivering the best Church Profile that we could as a representation of our church and of the person we would like as our next Settled Pastor. In February 2025, the Church Profile is due to be verified by the UCC for official posting.

Respectfully submitted,  
Corey Johnson, Chair

For with  
God nothing  
shall be  
impossible.

-Luke 1:37

# WORSHIP MINISTRY



## Board of Deacons

As the year dawned, the deacons of our church embarked on a journey filled with dedication, community spirit, and heartfelt service. January began with a positive review of our holiday events, which saw a significant increase in attendance. The deacons diligently revised the Deacon Handbook and updated the membership lists, ensuring our records were current and comprehensive. We also made strides in accessibility by adding announcements and bulletin information about the availability of large print bulletins and hearing devices. With a renewed sense of purpose, we began planning for upcoming events and initiated efforts to attract new deacons to our fold.

February brought the warmth of community through our Souper Bowl Sunday, a delightful event filled with delicious soups and generous donations. Cary Westfall's pea soup was a particular highlight, earning special thanks from all who tasted it. On February 25, we welcomed Margaret Hofmeister, the Area Conference Minister of the Southern New England Conference, UCC, to our church. Her visit coincided with the first Sunday of Lent, and the Sunday school children handed out prayer eggs and led the call to worship. A special coffee hour with Margaret answering questions was well-received, fostering a more profound connection within our congregation. We also engaged in meaningful discussions on how to afford a full-time pastor and introduced a new Welcome Brochure in the pews. Our plans for the Easter season began to take shape, promising a time of reflection and celebration.

March was a month of spiritual enrichment as we observed Easter Week. Palm Sunday was celebrated with a joyful waffle breakfast, setting the tone for the days ahead. On March 28, the deacons led the Maundy Thursday service, followed by Rev. Dr. Pat Nicholas' Good Friday Faith Walk, which was well received by the community. The Christian Education (CE) team provided craft time for children during the walk, ensuring that all ages were engaged. Our Easter service on March 31 was well attended, and we welcomed new visitors with information cards in the Easter bulletin.

April was a bustling month, starting with a celebration of Jim Baird's birthday on April 7, complete with cupcakes at coffee hour. The new Search Committee was installed, marking a significant step forward for our church. On April 13, the current Board of Deacons hosted a brunch to honor the service of past deacons, recognizing their invaluable contributions. April 21 saw our first "Music Sunday" and a grand celebration of Thelma Aldrich's 100th birthday, with a cake and balloons. The month concluded with a luncheon for confirmation students and their families on April 28, reflecting our commitment to nurturing the next generation. Attendance remained strong, with new faces joining our community.

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May was a month of milestones, beginning with Confirmation Sunday on May 5, where we joyfully welcomed three young people—Brynn MacDonnell, Jase Reichin, and Katelyn Simmons—into our congregation. On May 12, the children handed out Mother’s Day flowers, adding a sweetness to the occasion. May 19 was Book of Remembrance Sunday, a time to honor and remember those who have passed. Our Spring Meeting saw the election of a new Board of Deacons, including Sheri Gunn, Cary Westfall, Hannah Albright, and Debbie Poole. The month concluded with the Book of Remembrance/Memorial Day service on May 26, a solemn and heartfelt observance.

June was a time of transition and recognition. The membership list was updated at the July 8 deacon meeting, ensuring our records were accurate. New deacons Hannah Albright and Debbie Poole began their training, with Hannah starting in June/July and Debbie in August. On June 2, we installed the new deacons and recognized those completing their service. June 9 was Scholarship Sunday/Youth Sunday, where we honored acolytes, teachers, helpers, and CE members, and awarded scholarships. Father’s Day on June 16 saw Sunday School kids handing out tie bookmarks to all the men, adding a personal touch to the celebration. The month concluded with Music Recognition Sunday on June 23, featuring performances by the Bells and Choir.

July was a month of administrative diligence. We finalized the membership list review and sent out letters to graduates regarding full or associate membership. The Deacon Handbook was updated, and we reviewed the supply chain minister list, process, schedule, and payment, ensuring everything was in order.

August saw the deacons holding a Worship Management Meeting on August 11, where we began planning for Gathering Sunday and fall events. These events included the Blessing of the Animals, Apple Fest, Worldwide Communion Sunday, and Acolyte training. We also started preparing our budget, purchased replacements for Maundy Thursday candles, and updated the usher schedule for Church Council. New deacon training was completed, and we provided recommendations regarding the rental of the Sanctuary. Thank you cards were sent to guest ministers, expressing our gratitude for their service.

September was a month of welcome and preparation. We welcomed the full choir back on September 8 for Gathering Sunday and continued planning for fall events and Advent. Acolyte training was scheduled for October 6, and the date for the Animal Blessing was set for October 6, with a rain date of October 13. We decided to continue offering different types of bread for Worldwide Communion on October 6 and planned to recognize Veterans and Remembrance Sunday on November 10. We confirmed hosting the Transgender Day of Remembrance in November and continued our Advent planning, with Advent starting on December 1. A fire drill planned for September 29 was postponed until spring 2025 due to weather. In his sermons, Rev. Dave Buchan introduced the UCC Statement of Faith, sparking thoughtful discussions.

October was a month of tradition and new beginnings. The Blessing of the Animals continued with an excellent turnout, and our Worldwide Communion service included different breads and hearing The Lord’s Prayer in Spanish. Acolyte training was held on October 6, and we welcomed new members Toni and Steve Sullivan on October 27. The deacons voted to add the UCC Statement of Faith reading on every Communion Sunday starting January 2025. Dates were set for Veteran’s Day and Book of Remembrance Sunday, and Advent planning continued. We worked with Jan McCarthy and Jen Albright to prepare gifts for our friends in nursing homes and coordinated with Rev. Dr. Pat Nicholas for card writing.

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November was a month of final preparations and meaningful observances. Advent planning was completed, and on November 30, Christian Education held the Live Nativity in front of the church, following the town Christmas tree lighting. We coordinated with CE for the pageant on December 15 and planned to have the annual Blessing of the Creches on December 8. Prayers for Veteran's Day and Remembrance Sunday were finalized, and we proudly hosted the Transgender Day of Remembrance on November 20, which was well attended and profoundly moving.

December marked the beginning of Advent on December 1, as the world prepared its heart for the birth of Jesus Christ. The deacons challenged the congregation to read The Gospel of Luke daily during Advent, with 24 chapters for 24 days. The Christmas letter was well received, and we thanked our Advent readers and candle lighters: the Johnson Family on December 1, the Metz Family on December 8, the Jones Family on December 15, the Wright Family on December 22, and the Archer Family on Christmas Eve. The Blessing of the Creches was held on December 1, followed by the annual Advent Luncheon. The Christmas concert occurred on December 8, and the pageant on December 15. Our Christmas Eve service of Lessons and Carols ended with the congregation singing "Silent Night" on the front steps by candlelight. The year concluded with Rev. Nicholas leading the Ugly Sweater Service on December 29, bringing a lighthearted end to a year of dedicated service and community spirit.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sheri Gunn  
Cary Westfall  
Jan McCarthy



## **Music Team**

The Music Team included Dave Elmore - Chair, Barbara Ahern, Paul Mayer, Jeff Gammons, Sarah Fay and Diane Taylor.

Music Director Sarah Fay continued to provide strong leadership for the Senior Choir. She helped the choir members improve their vocal technique and continued 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. A small group also played at Butterbrook Apartments and at the mayor's community Christmas party at Town Hall in mid-December.

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Toni Sullivan joined the choir this year, and in the fall she started two choirs for children. The Cherub Choir is for grades Pre-K to Grade 1 while the Alleluia Choir is for Grades 2-4. The children performed at several services in the fall and at the Christmas Concert. We are indebted to Toni for taking this on and are hoping that it will grow.

The Christmas Concert on December 8 was the best attended concert in many years, with an audience estimated at over 200. Numerous people commented that it was the best concert ever. It included a mix of traditional pieces and contemporary music. The "Muppet Christmas Carol Medley" included hand puppets. The children's choirs joined the Senior Choir on "How Quietly". The enthusiastic audience generously contributed \$1,481 which is the largest amount collected in recent memory.

Diane Taylor ended her tenure as bell choir director at the end of the year. Diane has been an important member of the Senior Choir for many years and has often played flute accompaniments for both choir and Village Ringers. Her dedication over the years is greatly appreciated. She will be missed as a regular member of the choir but will be living in the area part-time. Dave Sommerville had become an important part of our music program as a guitarist, bell ringer and percussionist. He is relocating with Diane and we hope he will join us when he can.

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.

The Music Team's bank accounts were established by gifts to the church: the Platt Music Fund and the Hunt Organ Fund. Balances for these accounts are included in the Treasurer's report. The Music Team used \$6,400 to repair the seats on sixteen antique choir chairs. The Music Team contributed the concert donations to the church's General Fund.

**Senior Choir:** Sarah Fay, Director

Barbara Ahern, Pam Cafiero, Susan Chapin, Kathy and Dave Elmore, Chris Fay, Melanie Fay, Jeff and Sandy Gammons, Peggy and Jerry King, Nancy Loder, Lorna and Don MacInnis, Dan Martin, Paul Mayer, Jan McCarthy, Sharon Millard, Anne Olson, Toni Sullivan, Diane Taylor, Bonnie Westerberg.

Vincent Antezzo, Jim Baird and Cindy Hendricks performed with the Christmas Choir. Dave Sommerville played percussion during the Christmas Concert and guitar during the year.

**Village Ringers Handbell Choir:** Diane Taylor, Director

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

**Cherub Choir:** Toni Sullivan, Director

Harper Haddad, Eleanor Hart, Evelyn Johnson, Olive Wright

**Alleluia Choir:** Toni Sullivan, Director

Jameson Johnson, Georgia Lisk, Christian Metz

Respectfully submitted,  
David Elmore, Chair



## Christmas Concert Program

The First Congregational Church of New Milford

# Community Christmas Concert 2024

featuring

Christmas Choir & The Village Ringers  
Cherub Choir & Alleluia Choir

- December 8, 2024 at 4:00 PM -



***Goin' to Bethlehem***

Jay Althouse

**Welcome**

The Reverend David Buchan

***I Saw Three Ships***

Traditional English  
arr. Sandra Eithun

***Lo! How a Rose E'er Blooming***

16<sup>th</sup> Cent. German Carol  
arr. Cynthia Dobrinski

***A La Nanita Nana***

Traditional Spanish  
arr. Sherri Porterfield

***Variations on Deck the Hall***

Traditional Welsh Carol  
arr. Ryan O'Connell

***How Quietly***

Joel Raney  
featuring the Cherub Choir and Alleluia Choir

***Christmas Carol Fest***

arr. Douglas E. Wagner

***Dormi, Jesu***

John Rutter  
Melanie Fay and Anne Olson, soloists

***Sleigh Ride***

Mitchell Parish and Leroy Anderson  
arr. Michael Edwards

***A Muppet Christmas Carol Medley***

arr. Ryan O'Connell  
Pam Cafiero & Diane Taylor, soloists

***Welcome, Christmas***

(from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*)

Albert Hague  
Ron Mallory

***Christmas Don't Be Late***

(*The Chipmunk Song*)

Ross Bagdasarian  
arr. Mitchell Eithun

***And the Glory of the Lord***

(From *The Messiah*)

George Frideric Handel





## **Flower Team**

Our mission 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. Members 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 to a long-term interest-bearing account with Bank of America (\$3,000.00) to be incorporated for reporting of the assets of the Church, with a small amount left in the Ives Bank account for the purchase of supplies.

Easter Sunday, 2024: After success in 2023, the team again purchased a variety of plants (daffodils, tulips, and hyacinths) for the sanctuary. The plants were for sale after the 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. An artificial lily was placed on the Communion Table as some members of the choir were sensitive to the aroma of live plants.

Patriotic wreaths were purchased for the front of the Church. Anne Olson and Jan McCarthy decorated the front with wreaths and bunting for July 4<sup>th</sup> and Veteran’s Day holidays.

Christmas, 2024: New garland was purchased for the sanctuary, replacing the old after 25+ years of service. The cost of the new garland was \$770.00; \$550.00 was used from the Parcels Fund, and the remainder was covered by an anonymous donor. A switch was made from live poinsettias to artificial. A one-time cost of \$20/plant to be made in honor/in remembrance of a special person was offered to the congregation. In recent years the plants were not taken home after Christmas, but were thrown away, as they were not wanted by local nursing homes/hospitals/senior housing after the holidays. This change was embraced by the congregation. The window sills in the sanctuary were decorated with Christmas Village scenes, which received very positive feedback.

Committee members include Sandy Gammons, Anne Olson and Bonnie Westerberg. I would like to thank each for their dedication during the year. I would also like to thank those who assisted with the holiday decorating and cleanup. 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.

2024 proved to be a year of regaining normalcy within our Sunday church services, with more people becoming available to help with ushering duties. We resumed the normal ushering schedule, which was in place prior to the Pandemic. The second Sunday of the month had various Teams helping out. The third Sunday showcased our youth, and they thoroughly loved helping out! Our Christmas Eve, 7 PM service featured the Deacons ushering. We were happy to see our Sanctuary filling up for this blessed occasion! We worked to ensure everyone's safety, so that we could continue to gather and worship together.

Respectfully submitted,  
Gail Peck, 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 live stream audio and video. This year Steve McCarthy and Dave Elmore are team members.

The live stream webcast continued 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 this technology to several funerals and the Transgender Day of Remembrance in November.

The A/V team is 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 in the future.

*(continued)*

## Summary of 2024 Livestream Statistics

- Views (the number of individuals accessing the livestream or recording) – 5,112
- Viewers (the number of IP addresses from which views were made) – 1,121
- Hours watched – 2,727
- Websites - 4

Respectfully submitted,  
David Elmore, Chair



### **Book of Remembrance**

The Book of Remembrance was started in 1940 by Miss Marion Tenny, who thought that gifts given in memory of certain people should be remembered by transcribing their names in a special book. Since that time, gifts given to our church have been inscribed into a book so that a permanent record of these individuals will live on even after the donors are gone. Gifts are dedicated twice a year, in May and November; during a special part of the service, the names being memorialized are read aloud and the bells are tolled. Gifts of any amount are accepted anytime of the year and are used, when approved by a congregational vote, for projects of a more lasting nature that are in keeping with the memorial spirit of the Book of Remembrance and the spiritual ministry to its people. Anyone interested in remembering a loved one can find donation envelopes at the entrances of the sanctuary. A list of donors is posted in the church two weeks prior to the dedication in May and November.

In May 2024 donations from 7 individuals and families were given in remembrance of 28 people. For the service in November 2024, donations were received from 14 individuals and families in remembrance of 36 people. Names of all memorialized and donors were transcribed into the Book of Remembrance. Church members and families continued to generously donate. There were no requests for funds this year.

In February 2024 \$1,040 was transferred from our checking account to our money market CD. In October our CD term was up and monies were moved to our Vanguard Money Market account. Total interest from our CD and Vanguard Money Market account was \$926.73. Our year-end Vanguard Money Market balance was \$22,926.73; the year-end balance in our checking account was \$3,854.42.

In closing, it is important to note that Donna Ramsey retired as chairperson of the Book of Remembrance Committee in January 2024. Many thanks to Donna for her years of dedicated service and leadership in this role.

Respectfully submitted,  
Barbara McGiver and Judy York, Co-chairs

# CHRISTIAN EDUCATION MINISTRY



*Vacation Bible School*



*Vacation Bible School*



*Live Nativity*



*Trunk or Treat*





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

In January, CE started to help once a month with ushering. The younger children loved to help with the offering, while the older kids followed a monthly schedule to acolyte every Sunday. We also welcomed Chris Simmons as our new chair and Mike Curley as assistant. They were very excited to lead us with as much enthusiasm and kindness as Dave Eherts did.

February brought the fun of the Souper Bowl! Katie Johnson put together a First Congregational Cookbook. Many members of the congregation contributed - there was soup, main dishes, and desserts galore in the book, which Katie McKay and Corey Johnson helped put together. The cookbook raised \$250.00 to go towards a donation to Loaves and Fishes. Katie made a First Congregational of New Milford apron which went to the winner of the Souper Bowl, Cindy Hendricks. We also celebrated Valentine's Day in February. Families of church school signed up and brought flowers to the homebound members of the church. The flowers were well received and appreciated. Unfortunately our Brinner Dinner that was Valentine's Day themed was canceled due to a snow storm. The children handed out Prayer Eggs to the congregation to kick off Lent.

In March we celebrated Palm Sunday. The children of the church handed out palms to the congregation and sang "This is the Day" during the prelude. After service the Jackson family and many members of the congregation worked together to put on an amazing Waffle Bar breakfast for everyone. Then the children got to enjoy an Easter egg hunt in the sanctuary. Thanks to everyone's help in the congregation, the kids had over 262 eggs to find. The fun continued with our Good Friday egg dyeing event. Children got to dye eggs, make sock bunnies with Katie McKay, and color while the adults enjoyed the Faith Walk on the Green.

In April the Jackson family did a beautiful job cleaning and getting our church ready for spring. They worked very hard on weeding, planting, and mulching the grounds. The mulch was donated by Mike Curley from Lowes. CE contributed to Music Sunday in April by helping celebrate Thelma Aldrich's 100th birthday. The kids made a birthday sign for her. Katie Johnson, Carol McKay and Katie McKay blew up 100 balloons. The balloons were put on the balcony and Mike Curley, Carol Schwartzman and Tom Tucker tossed them over onto the congregation as the children sang Happy Birthday to Thelma.

In May CE held a Spring Craft Fair. This was very successful with 36 vendors, including members of the congregation, Chapel Stitchers, and Chapel Quilters. The craft fair raised \$1,577 for CE. The CE awarded Katie Simmons a \$300 scholarship to help further her Christian Education at Silver Lake Summer Camp. Other proceeds of the craft fair will help with church events that CE is in charge of, classroom supplies and curriculum, outreach programs such as Santa Fund, and VBS. On Mother's Day the children handed out flowers to the ladies in church, with a beautiful scripture quote attached, which expressed the importance of mothers in our lives. CE purchased a lovely cake for Fellowship to celebrate Mother's Day. Dan Martin, on behalf of Social Concerns & Missions, so nicely donated the funds raised for Mother's Day outreach to VBS. CE was extremely grateful for the \$435 and for the members of the church who donated.

*(continued)*

June was an exciting and busy month for CE, as we teamed up with Fellowship to put on a successful end of the year picnic, even though the rain tried to halt the fun. Fellowship provided hot dogs and cheeseburgers and members of the congregation contributed side salads and desserts. Janet Junz was the winner of the bake off. There was water play, bubbles, chalk, and corn hole for the kids.

Vacation Bible School took place from June 24th to the 28th, with the theme of Camp Firelight. Carol McKay spent months planning and prepping, and executed the most magical experience for over 50 campers that week. The church grounds were filled with laughter and the Parish House was turned into the most amazing outdoor camping scene. Thanks to Jack Costable, Bill and Kelli Jackson, Katie McKay, Katie Johnson, and Amy Passero for working so hard on all the decorations. VBS had 50 volunteers, many from our congregation. Carol and Katie McKay, Jan McCarthy, Carole Schwartzman, Sandy Gammons, The Jackson family, Katie and Corey Johnson, Peggy King, and Toni Sullivan were just some of the many faces that helped create such a successful week. Special thanks to Mike Bensema for capturing the most amazing pictures and sharing them with all the families. Toni Sullivan and Marianne Schrizzo did a great job teaching the children beautiful faith-based songs all week. At the June 30th church service, some of the children and counselors from camp came and performed "Trust and Follow" for the congregation, and enjoyed an ice cream party after church.

July was a lot of fun in church school. We celebrated Christmas in July, reading our favorite Christmas stories of the night Jesus was born, did fun crafts that celebrated the birth of Jesus, and watched the Christmas movie *The Star*.

August brought some new and old friends to church school. Peggy King did a wonderful lesson plan where the kids played a game about rainbows and what they were thankful for. Sheri Gunn also came and taught us a prayer and did a craft with us. It is always a treat when members of the congregation come to church school and spend time in our classroom. The Johnson family teamed up with Bill Jackson during the Farmers Market. They had crafts for the children of the community and handed out information on church school and the new Children's Choir.

We kicked off September with "Gathering Sunday". CE supplied the congregation with pizza and an ice cream bar. Leslie Schlemmer and Sheri Gunn provided the entertainment with a bingo game. Many winners were very happy with all the donated prizes from the congregation. Katie Johnson, Carole Schwartzman, and Carol and Katie McKay teamed up with the Chapel Stitchers and Pie Peeps during the town's Apple Fest and supplied crafts for the children of the community. It was a great way to inform people about church school and the children's choir.

October was a busy month for CE! Katie Johnson got over 200 pumpkins donated from local establishments and farms and supplied them at Halloween on the Green for kids to paint. Bill and Kelli Jackson made amazing face-in-hole cutouts for the kids to enjoy. Even the adults loved the Beetlejuice and Winfred cutouts! CE also supplied 300 faith inspired bookmarks for the mayor to give out in goodie bags for the event. Our address was proudly stamped on the back so everyone knew who supplied them. The fun continued that night when the Johnson family, the McKay's, Jackson's, and Jan McCarthy gave out over 5000 pieces of candy at Trunk or Treat, at our 'Jesus is Our Superhero' themed trunk. All our candy was so wonderfully donated by the congregation.

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In November CE hosted another Craft Fair in the Parish House. It was a huge success and over 200 people from the community came to shop and enjoyed the 33 vendors Katie Johnson had arranged. The Craft Fair raised over \$1600 for the church. The craft fair was an opportunity to all come and work together as a church. The quilters, stitchers and other members of the congregation sold their unique and beautiful work. Steve McCarthy, Debbie Poole, and Dave Eherts worked in the kitchen selling food. Mary Eherts took on the task to ensure that all our paperwork was in order and Jan McCarthy made sure shoppers were pointed in the right direction with her signs. Carole Schwartzman supervised the raffle table and Bill Jackson worked endlessly on organizing the layout of the craft fair. CE was able to take \$400 from the fundraiser and provide four children with Christmas presents via the Santa Fund. Chris Simmons so nicely volunteered and took Katie Simmons and some other teenagers shopping. They took hours picking the perfect presents from the children's wish list and then wrapped and delivered the gifts to Social Services. Social Services was very thankful for the church's involvement.

CE also put on a Live Nativity following Mayor Pete Bass's tree lighting on the Green, providing another amazing opportunity for people of the church to work together and be involved in the community. John Wittmann got lighting from the town and it really highlighted the beauty of our church for all to see. Dave Eherts supplied hot chocolate for the bystanders and the mayor was happy to help and pass it out. Beautiful music played while Rachael Wright's gorgeous Christmas star shined brightly over our crèche, which was supplied by Bill Jackson. Teenagers from our church and community smiled through the cold and dressed as characters from the first Christmas, while some of our youngsters dressed as animals.

December started off with a chili luncheon to celebrate Advent. Bill Jackson did most of the preparation while Katie Johnson, Carrie Martin, and Joan Vill contributed chili, and many members of the congregation brought toppings and side dishes. After everyone ate a delicious lunch the children got to decorate small trees for our homebound church members. Rev. Dr. Pat Nicholas very nicely delivered the trees to those who resided in Candlewood Valley Health & Rehab, or who lived outside of New Milford. The Johnson family delivered to those who resided in New Milford. Everyone really appreciated the trees and loved the Christmas spirit they brought into their homes. Next, CE got ready for the pageant. The rehearsal was fun when kids and adults wore ugly Christmas sweaters and rewarded their hard work with a pizza party in Fellowship Hall. The next day's pageant was a success - the kids did a wonderful job and everyone truly enjoyed the new animal costumes. Then the Fellowship Team led by Mary Eherts put on a lovely brunch for the church.

Christmas Eve service was beautiful. Katie Johnson prepared a time for children, reading the story, "The First Christmas". The book highlighted the special animals that were there the night Jesus was born. She then discussed the meaning of Christmas and Jesus's birthday.

Carol McKay worked very hard this year picking out engaging and fun lessons for church school. Attendance varied each week, but there were 21 children registered. Carol continued to pick activities geared for all ages, as our class ranged from kindergarten to 4th grade. The children learned about so many important people from the Bible and amazing stories to go with them. The nursery continued to be very popular with the non-school age children, Leslie Schlemmer and Corey Johnson always provided a fun and safe environment for them.

We are looking forward to 2025 and continued success for the CE Committee.

Respectfully submitted,  
The CE Ministry Team

# OUTREACH MINISTRY



## **Baby Bundles Team**

The Baby Bundles program continues to be an important part of our church's outreach initiative. This year was very busy and rewarding. There were 33 new families referred into our program. We received many donations of gently used baby items and clothes. This kept our many dedicated volunteers busy sorting and displaying these items for families to select what they need.

In January we got a very welcome Christmas gift from our friends at Brookfield Congregational Church. So many boxes of diapers and wipes were delivered that we had to find extra storage for them! We were in constant contact with Sue Metcalf at New Milford Thrift Mart. They provided many gently used baby items that were quickly claimed by the families.

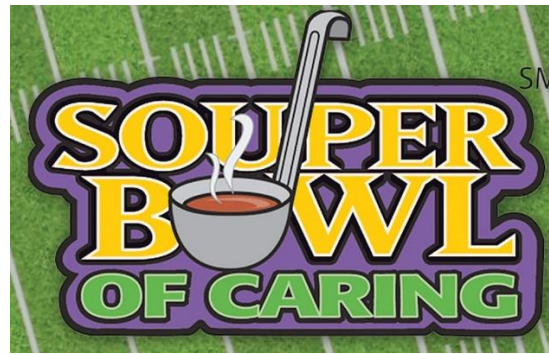
We worked at being a source of help for young families. By keeping in touch with other local groups we were able to let families know where they could get help and find programs for young children. We coordinated with Literacy on the Green and the New Milford Library.

Baby Bundles, along with Social Services, participated in the Community Baby Shower, a one day event held at New Milford Library. It was a great opportunity to talk to expectant families, and to share ideas with other local organizations that help parents of young children.

Our thanks goes out to all the wonderful groups that have raised funds for Baby Bundles this year. We rely on donations and this congregation has always been generous and supportive. We are lucky to have such a large and friendly place that families can come to. They feel welcome and safe. We look forward to continuing to improve our outreach to our community. Thank you all for being part of something special.

Our team consists of a dedicated group of volunteers including Gail Peck, Katie Elmore, Carol McKay, Katie McKay, Susan Sennello, Nicole Henderson, Sharon Shuster, Katie Johnson, Kathy Elmore, Rachael Wright and Jan McCarthy.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jan McCarthy



## **Social Concerns and Missions Team**

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

**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. Matthew 25:35**

In 2024, the Social Concerns and Missions Team was once again blessed by working with a congregation eager to take action to help our neighbors, and to welcome the stranger!

In January, we brought to the attention of our congregation that the New Milford Shelter Coalition was no longer active. Our church was one of the original partners of the coalition, which provided overnight shelter to the homeless in the coldest months of the year. We began working with the team of original organizers to resurrect the coalition, because the need had resurfaced. There were multiple barriers to getting this accomplished, but the primary one was insurance. As a result, the coalition was not able to provide shelter in early 2024.

*(continued)*

In February we had yet another fantastic Souper Bowl of Caring. We again reached record levels - we collected 213 food items and \$978 in cash for Loaves and Fishes. We had an added element of a Church Soup Cookbook, created by Katie Johnson, which raised \$200.

In March we raised \$567 for our One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) campaign. This is a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that provides help in disaster, refugee/immigration, and development ministries throughout the world.

Donations from our May Mother's Day program totaled \$435, and were designated for our Vacation Bible School, to provide financial assistance to families that might require some help, and to help offset overall costs for this signature program of our church.

The June Father's Day program raised \$850, dedicated to reestablishing the Homeless Coalition. This was another example of what happens when our congregation sees a need....we respond!

Speaking of responding, in July we really stepped up with our New Milford Refugee Resettlement work. The congregation helped prepare the apartment for our arriving refugee family of 7 by donating many needed household items, and moving some very large pieces of furniture. This is the family of the translator that we have been working with for the last two years.

During August we continued to help move furniture and set up for our refugee family from Afghanistan. They were delayed from departing from Pakistan (refugees have to come to the US via a third country), due to system process issues. We also had a request from New Milford Social Services to help with the distribution of school supplies/backpacks, and we quickly got volunteers to help handle that. The fast response, and answering "YES" consistently, builds our reputation in the community as a church that walks the talk.

Once again, In September we hosted Walk-a-Mile in partnership with New Milford Social Services. We had several members help with the distribution of cookies and drinks for the walkers, which was most appreciated. Our church was showcased beautifully, we made a difference, and we had some fun.

In October, our family from Afghanistan finally arrived. It was a testament to the power of prayer, the influence of a few motivated people, and the new US Welcome Corps program.

November was a busy month for our refugee family. Their medical exams were completed, the kids enrolled in school, and they began ESL classes. Our members helped us to begin the process of getting employment for the father. We also helped our neighbor - St. John's Church - with their annual Coat Drive. The generosity and contributions from our congregation went above and beyond, and they were very appreciative.

In December we welcomed our second refugee family in less than six weeks! New Milford Refugee Resettlement received a request from the IRIS Agency to consider taking another family, given the unsettled situation with refugees. Once again our church stepped up to Welcome The Stranger and contributed furniture, household goods, and labor to help set up an apartment.

Also in December, we received a request for our help in spreading holiday joy for the residents of our local nursing homes. Our church family and friends answered by providing 88 festively decorated gift bags to be given to residents in need of holiday cheer. In the beginning of December, the gift bags began to arrive and were placed under the Christmas tree in our sanctuary. It was uplifting to see the beautiful response to the request and to know that these gift bags would be spreading cheer to those who were not at home for the holidays. It was also a reminder that we are part of a loving and caring church family.

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In addition to the monthly highlights, our church lovingly maintained the Blessing Box by our front steps. The usage has been increasing, and it is a valuable ministry that we offer every day.

Our church is filled with members with many passions. Our hope in 2025 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.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dan Martin, Chair



### **A. Russell Ayre Scholarship Team**

The A. Russell Ayre Scholarship Committee volunteers (Joan Vill, Steve Hendricks, Carol McKay, Sandy Gammons, and Katie McKay) are committed to the mission of providing scholarships to high school seniors and maintaining the longevity of the Fund.

Fifteen New Milford High School students received scholarship awards totaling \$14,500 in May of 2024: Caleb Cerra, Connor Ciaglo, Jack Costable, James Galbraith, Zachary LaCava, Anna MacDonnell, Leo Mahlke, Sarah Maia, Grace Miller, Amy Passero, Landon Pokrinchak, Olivia Pouder, Hannah Rainey, Leanna Ryan, and Hannah Seo. Amy Passero was recognized in honor of Reverend Michael Moran, for the hours she has dedicated to the church and VBS and for demonstrating willingness to do the work required when others need a hand. Once again, we were impressed by the recipients' academic achievements and involvement in both school activities and community service organizations. We were touched by their personal stories and know that the awards we were able to give were greatly appreciated.

The annual tag sale to raise funds took place on Saturday, July 20<sup>th</sup> during the Artisan Festival held on the Green. We were fortunate for the donations of goods and time from our church family and friends, and over \$2,000 was raised towards scholarships from the sale. We were thankful for all the help we received!

#### 2024 Scholarship Financials:

Opening Balance: \$2,064.51  
Deposits: \$15,384.00  
Checks issued to students \$14,500.00  
Ending Balance \$2,948.51

Respectfully submitted,  
Joan Vill, Chair  
Steve Hendricks, Treasurer



# GROWTH AND CONGREGATIONAL CARE MINISTRY



## **Called to Care Team**

Called to Care is an essential ministry of the church that focuses on caring for each other. We are blessed to have so many people pledge their time through our Gifts of Caring. It does indeed take a village. This year our Gifts of Caring campaign was in October – November 10<sup>th</sup>. On that Sunday our volunteers were recognized during worship. Thankfully, whenever a need arises there is always someone willing to step up and help.

## **Intensive Prayer Unit (IPU)**

Jan McCarthy coordinated the IPU team. Prayer requests were continually coming in and Jan did a wonderful job of updating and keeping track of prayer requests. She also sent out the prayer list every week so our prayer group could pray throughout the week.

## **Chapel Stitchers**

Leslie Schlemmer continued to do an excellent job leading the Chapel Stitchers, going well above and beyond knitting prayer shawls.

**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 was a blessing and continued to be an important part of Called to Care.

**Condolence Reception Team** – The requests for condolence receptions can come at any time and this group was ready to spring into action at a moment's notice. This year the group hosted two receptions. One on June 20<sup>th</sup> for Ron Stewart, and one on July 27<sup>th</sup> for Fran Terry. Every time we do a reception, it's a sacred 'loaves and fishes' event. We are never sure what will come and if we will have enough; and time and time again, we have more than enough food and more than enough helping hands. Both receptions were very much appreciated. Called to Care received several generous donations in memory of Ron Stewart. There was a bit of confusion on the best way to record and use the funds, but it was resolved quickly, and the ministry was blessed to have the extra resources. Once again, a number of bakers provided delicious goodies for the Transgender Day of Remembrance Service. This was a very meaningful service for members of the LGBTQ community and their guests. They were very appreciative of the service, the support, and the time of fellowship after the service.

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**Parish Drivers** – There were three requests for rides this year and we were able to fulfill all of them.

**Parish Visitors** – I was in contact with people who couldn't get to church, via phone conversations or email, or with personal visits.

**Correspondents** – Easter and Christmas cards were sent to about 25 homebound members and those we hadn't seen in church for a while. At Easter I delivered small flower baskets to three of our members who were in Candlewood Valley Health & Rehab. At Christmas, Katie Johnson, the CE team, and the children decorated ten small Christmas trees, complete with ornaments and lights. These were delivered to our homebound/nursing home members. I delivered five, and Katie and CE members delivered the other five. Several requests went out to the group for get well cards, sympathy cards and special birthday cards.

I am blessed to be able to work with this group of compassionate and caring people. Our biggest challenge is to get people to allow us to help. Please know that if anyone is in need of a meal, a ride, a cheery note, a visit, or a phone call there are people in our congregation who are more than willing to meet the need with kindness, generosity, and love.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Rev. Dr. Pat Nicholas



## **Lunch and Learn**

Lunch and Learn is a relatively new program offered by the church. It happens literally at lunch the first Wednesday of every month, with a break during the summer months. Attendance is open to all church members and to anyone in the community, and only requires that you give up your “regular” lunch and come to the Taylor Room around noon to listen to a variety of talks, followed by a pot luck luncheon. Past presentations have ranged from a brief history of this church and the building issues that have been dealt with in the past, to the history of Harrybrooke Park, to a C.E.R.T. volunteer explaining their program, to a talk about the Merwinville Hotel, to just about anything. All events were well attended, but we always have room for more. Attendance only requires a curious mind and a good appetite.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sharon Millard and Jeff Gammons



## **Bible Study**

The Women of the Bible study group met about once month and was open to any member of the community. They consistently had between 10 and 12 participants who read a selected book and then met to discuss it.



## **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.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jan McCarthy



## Chapel Stitchers

The Chapel Stitchers started 2024 reflecting on what we accomplished since our inception in 2009. Many good deeds have come from our ministry, with our priority being to have prayer shawls available to anyone in need. At this time our supply of shawls is full and ready to be given out.

In February we welcomed one new member to our group but saw declining participation. The group had a core membership who continued to share their time and talents. In March we were able to donate shawls and lap blankets to the Cancer Center at New Milford Hospital.

We participated in the May 4th craft fair sponsored by the CE Team. Members volunteered time to man the table and sell our wares. The funds raised were donated to the general fundraising line of the budget.

In July we set up our shop in front of the church during the Artisan Festival on the Green. Both the stitchers and quilters participated. In September we had planned a general "Prayer Shawl Meet Up" inviting area churches to come for a day of fellowship and learning. Unfortunately, we had low interest and the event was cancelled.

On September 28th we were on the Green with two booths during the town's Annual Apple Festival. We shared one booth with the quilting group. The second booth was manned by the "Pie Peeps". This was a very successful day for community outreach. Our church shone brightly. All proceeds (\$400+) were again donated to the general fundraising line of the budget.

Again, in November we participated in the CE Team sponsored craft fair. All proceeds from that went to the general fundraising line of the budget as well.

As we look forward to the coming year we hope to find ways our ministry can serve our church and community. We thank all of those who make this ministry possible.

Respectfully submitted,  
Leslie Schlemmer



## Fellowship Team

We are not just about serving coffee. Our purpose is "to reach out to prospective members, welcome new members and encourage fellowship among all members." We try to fulfill this goal but we know we can all reach out and do more. As the pastor says at the beginning of each service, "All are welcome here."

As with previous years, the Fellowship Team continued to host Coffee Hour every Sunday morning after the service. Our very small committee made the coffee and cleaned up, but we actively sought volunteers who could help by signing up on the white board. We provided assistance when needed and thank all members who helped this year. Instructions for making coffee are posted on the inside door of the supply closet. The committee purchases coffee supplies as well as paper cups, plates, napkins, etc. for church functions. Guest bakers are greatly appreciated and can also sign up on the white board. Thanks also to those giving monetary donations, which go toward the purchase of supplies.

The annual picnic in June and pageant brunch in December were both well attended by young and old alike and were filled with fun, food and fellowship. Although there are still very few people on the Fellowship Committee, these events continued to be held with assistance from many of the committed members of our wonderful congregation. We feel blessed to be part of such an amazing church family and will continue to do our part to keep these events happening.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sandra Gammons and Mary Eherts







## **Pie Peeps**

Our church is well known for making and selling pies.

This year was no exception. The Pie Peeps started planning in late June and began peeling apples in July. We had two groups – one in the daytime and another in the evenings. Together we made 54 apple pies in time for the annual Apple Festival on the Town Green on September 28<sup>th</sup>. It was a beautiful day and a wonderful way to showcase how our church works together. We sold 90 slices of apple pie and 24 whole pies at the event. We continued to make and sell whole frozen pies for the holidays. The pie sales profit of \$1,006 was deposited in the General Fundraising line of the budget.

We are looking forward to next year and hoping for a good apple crop and many helpful hands to continue this tradition. We are thankful for all those who helped make the pies, sell the pies and buy the pies!

Respectfully submitted,  
Jan McCarthy



## **Women's Ministry**

The Women's Ministry continued to meet most months for our book club. We had great participation and involvement, with women from our church as well as some from the community joining the group. In 2024, we also hosted two fellowship nights.

Thanks to all who continue to attend and support our group. We plan to continue meeting to discuss the selected book for each month, and hope to have other fellowship and service events in the coming year.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nicole Henderson

## **Men's Breakfast**

Our breakfast group met nine times in 2024. We meet on the third Saturday of each month in Fellowship Hall. We all really enjoy the fellowship, and cooking for each other. We had a wide variety of themes this year, for example:

- Michael Jordan's favorite breakfast
- Irish breakfast
- Golf themed breakfast
- Breakfast pizza
- Virginia Country Breakfast
- Breakfast Burritos



In addition to the fellowship, we helped out with some events at church like the Souper Bowl, and prepared breakfast for a special Saturday Church Council meeting. This is a great way to get to know each other, and if you have not attended-we hope you give it a try!

Respectfully submitted,  
Dan Martin



## **Chapel Quilters**

The Sewing Room in the Parish House has been very busy this year. We organized the space and continued to sort through the huge amount of fabric and craft donations we received. We enjoyed getting together and learning new techniques, as well as planning and stitching items for the various craft events. The room was available to all who wanted to sew and learn. There were a few "learn to quilt" events held, and we will continue to share our skills.

This year we participated in four craft fairs and numerous other events to showcase our projects. Most of the proceeds from these sales were designated to help the Church budget. We look forward to learning and sewing together in the year ahead.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jan McCarthy

# CHURCH MANAGEMENT MINISTRY



## Note from the Finance Team Chair

### *Current Openings in Church Management Ministry*

In 2025, we have three positions we are interested in filling:

- **Financial Secretary:** Responsibilities include keeping full record of all contributions to the support of the Church, manage the Sunday collection, and remit the money to the proper account.
- **Personnel Team:** 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.
- **Audit Team:** Responsibilities include oversight of the accounting records of the Treasurer and the Financial Secretary.

If you are able to help in any of these important positions, please contact me.

Susan Chapin, Chair





## **Buildings and Grounds Team**

### **Maintenance and Repair**

During 2024 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. Following are several noteworthy activities.

The Parish House remote heating control system was installed with new thermostats located in the furnace room for all six heating zones. The previous thermostat locations now have tiny sensors that only detect ambient temperature. Members of the B&G Team, Rachael Wright, and Katie Johnson all had access and software permissions to set schedules and make changes either on a PC, tablet, or smartphone. This installation mimics what's been in the church building for several years.

A 12 foot section of the steeple was loosened by wind storms and would have become dangerous if not removed. Brian Parnell from I-Climb responded with his 65 foot bucket truck and safely brought the wood to the ground. A contributing factor was the hand-cut nails that were used in 1833. The head of the nails were quite small compared to modern day standards, which allowed them to gradually migrate out of the wood. Jim Lambert and crew replaced the wood and secured it with modern, galvanized screws.



***Tree trimming***

The north side of the Parish House roof had begun to show the first signs of damage from sap that fell from a large tree on the adjacent neighbor's property. We received permission to enter the property with contractor I-Climb and removed all overhanging limbs and branches. A close inspection of the roof showed that the sap had not yet penetrated the shingles. The roof will be cleaned in the spring of 2025.

*(continued)*





**Grease trap**

A new F.O.G. Interceptor (Fog, Oil, and Grease - AKA Grease Trap) was installed in the Fellowship Hall kitchen. The trap is the grey box and the larger, white PVC fittings under the sinks that allow for venting. This complied with town regulations requiring the abatement of grease that enters the sewer collection system. Inspection and cleaning is the responsibility of the B&G Team.



**Driveway repair**



**Driveway repair**

The lower portion of the north church driveway had seriously degraded and presented safety concerns. In the fall it was reclaimed and then paved. Only the lower portion of the driveway was worked on, due to the property line split between the church and the town.

### **Property and Room Rental**

T-Mobile's lease of the church steeple interior and basement renewed for another multi-year agreement in 2024. Their antenna is in the steeple and their electronics are in the lower entrance by the south driveway. This lessee accounted for approximately one half of our budgeted rental income.

There were four full-time renters in the Parish House and several one-time uses such as birthday parties and the Robotics & Beyond summer camp. There remained one room available for rent that had a new air conditioner and other amenities. The church started getting noticed for recitals and baby showers with an event already booked for Spring, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,  
John Wittmann, Chair





## Stewardship and Fundraising Team

The Stewardship Team is focused on the fall pledge campaign and providing pledging projections to the Budget Committee.

Our 2025 Pledge Campaign resulted in 51 pledge units and pledged giving of approximately \$130,000. The totals were similar to those from the previous campaign. Both non-pledged giving and loose collection were greater in 2024 when compared to the prior year.

The 2025 pledge campaign carried the theme **Imagine Together**. The campaign ran from October through November. A mailing to our database, bulletin announcements, Constant Contact messages, and incorporation into several 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



## Information Technology Team

Team members are Dave Elmore and Pam Cafiero. The purpose of the team is to support the church staff and volunteers with information technology, advice, and equipment.

The team assisted with support of PowerChurch software, helped with printers, and also helped with setting up Instant Church Directory online service. The IT team also managed the church website, Microsoft 365 and supported the telephone system.

Respectfully submitted,  
David Elmore, Chair

**Finance Team****2024 Operating Budget**

<b>Income &amp; Expense</b>	<b>2024 Approved</b>	<b>2024 Actual</b>
<b><u>Income</u></b>		
Pledge & Collection Income	\$162,300	\$168,966
Use of Building	\$51,000	\$57,071
Fundraisers	\$2,000	\$6,759
Vacation Bible School	\$1,300	\$1,787
Investment Fund	\$5,032	\$11,632
Endowment Fund	\$39,044	\$39,044
S. J. Johnson Fund	\$5,047	\$5,047
Parsonage Fund	\$15,994	\$15,994
Bostwick Fund	\$6,516	\$0
Music Donations	\$1,750	\$2,131
Benevolence Fund	\$650	\$0
Miscellaneous Income	\$100	\$5,609
Outreach Donations	--	\$2,732
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$290,733</b>	<b>\$316,772</b>
<b><u>Expense</u></b>		
<b>Worship Ministry</b>		
Christian Ministry/Pastor	\$87,728	\$82,474
Confirmation	\$200	\$0
Music Ministry	\$29,368	\$29,675
Audio/Visual	\$1,140	\$1,046
<b>Christian Education Ministry</b>	\$19,773	\$21,254
<b>Growth &amp; Care Ministry</b>	\$850	\$705
<b>Outreach Ministry</b>	\$650	\$2,732
<b>Church Management Ministry</b>		
Office Expense & Salaries	\$43,565	\$42,157
Insurance	\$26,000	\$27,179
Maintenance & Repairs	\$39,000	\$55,862
Utilities	\$50,000	\$51,997
Communications	\$513	\$809
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$298,787</b>	<b>\$315,890</b>
<b>Net Income Deficit/Surplus</b>	<b>-\$8,054</b>	<b>\$882</b>

## 2024 and 2025 Budget Comparison

Income & Expense	2024 Actual	2025 Approved
<b><u>Income</u></b>		
Pledge & Collection Income	\$168,966	\$164,800
Use of Building	\$57,071	\$56,600
Fundraisers	\$6,759	\$5,000
Vacation Bible School	\$1,787	\$1,400
Investment Fund	\$11,632	\$4,605
Endowment Fund	\$39,044	\$40,474
S. J. Johnson Fund	\$5,047	\$5,236
Parsonage Fund	\$15,994	\$17,510
Bostwick Fund	\$0	\$7,309
Music Donation	\$2,131	\$1,750
Benevolence Fund	\$0	\$650
Miscellaneous Income	\$5,609	\$100
Outreach Donations	\$2,732	\$3,000
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$316,772</b>	<b>\$308,434</b>
<b><u>Expense</u></b>		
<b>Worship Ministry</b>		
Christian Ministry/Pastor	\$82,474	\$122,591
Confirmation	\$0	\$0
Music Ministry	\$29,675	\$29,341
Audio/Visual	\$1,046	\$2,640
<b>Christian Education Ministry</b>	<b>\$21,254</b>	<b>\$21,543</b>
<b>Growth &amp; Care Ministry</b>	<b>\$705</b>	<b>\$1,100</b>
<b>Outreach Ministry</b>	<b>\$2,732</b>	<b>\$3,650</b>
<b>Church Management Ministry</b>		
Office Expense & Salaries	\$42,157	\$43,515
Insurance	\$27,179	\$32,800
Maintenance & Repairs	\$55,862	\$40,900
Utilities	\$51,997	\$49,150
Communications	\$809	\$613
Information Technology	--	\$3,378
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$315,890</b>	<b>\$351,221</b>
<b>Net Income Deficit/Surplus</b>	<b>\$882</b>	<b>-\$42,787</b>

Our church ended the year with a small budget surplus of \$882 due to higher than anticipated pledging, building use, and fundraisers. Ending the year so close to our projected budget was great news, especially since we tracked many more expenses this year than we have tracked in the past. Thank you to everyone for working so hard. Unfortunately, in 2025 we are projecting a significant budget deficit. Hopefully, our congregation can minimize this shortfall by increased giving and fundraising.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you so very much to everyone who supported our church this year. Your generosity makes it possible to provide all of our important programs.

Respectfully submitted,  
Susan Chapin, Chair



### **Communications Team**

Team Members are Dave Elmore, Sheri Gunn, and Leslie Schlemmer. We thank our contributors: Mike Bensema, Katie Johnson, and Hannah Albright. We are seeking additional volunteers.

Throughout 2024, our team diligently worked to keep the congregation and the public informed about our church and its activities. Our primary means of communication are Facebook, the Sunday Bulletin, and Constant Contact. Notably, we saw a 5% increase in our open rate for Constant Contact communications this year.

#### **Facebook:**

We had 34,618 Facebook visits with 9,624 engagements. This year, we utilized three New Milford Facebook groups (New Milford – Positive Vibes, New Milford, CT, & New Milford, CT – A Wonderful Place to Live, Work, and Visit) to enhance our connection with the public. Our top-performing Facebook posts were:

- October Apple Fest picture with Rev. Dave Buchan, Kathy Elmore, and Leslie Schlemmer (4,046 engagements)
- September Gathering Sunday flyer (1,645 engagements)
- December pictures of the Christmas Concert (1,423 engagements)
- June Vacation Bible School (1,384 engagements)

#### **Constant Contact:**

Over the last 12 months, we sent 48,509 emails. Of these, 52% were opened and 48% were unopened. There was a 3% click rate; 16% bounced back. We had 20,716 opens: 96% from desktops and 4% from mobile devices. Our open rate increased by 7% compared to the previous 12 months and is 8% higher than the industry average. We had 1,144 clicks: 64% from desktops and 36% from mobile devices. Our click rate remained the same as the previous 12 months and is 1% higher than the industry average.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sheri Gunn, Chair



**Investment Team**

**Balances of Invested Funds**

ACCOUNT	Vanguard Fund	2023 Year End Value	2024 Year End Value	Notes
<b>Endowment</b>	VWENX	\$889,052	\$979,567	Budgeted withdrawal \$39,044
<b>Investment Group</b>				
Investment	VWENX	\$108,026	\$113,383	Budgeted withdrawal - \$5,032; \$11,632 taken
Parsonage	VDIGX	\$428,202	\$450,432	Budgeted withdrawal - \$15,994
Clark Fund	VWINX	\$9,681	\$10,254	
Book of Remembrance	JPMorgan Chase CD	\$19,985	\$22,927	\$22,000 1-yr CD @ 4.80% purchased 2/15/24. Redeemed 10/15/2024
<b>SJ Johnson Group</b>				
SJ Johnson Fund	VWENX	\$115,379	\$127,147	Budgeted withdrawal - \$5,047
Bostwick Bequest	VDIGX	\$189,959	\$207,105	Budgeted withdrawal - \$6,516; \$0 taken
<b>Maintenance</b>	VDIGX	\$15,303	\$14,914	\$4,732 withdrawal – Parish House WiFi thermostats
<b>Flower Team</b>	CD	\$3,000	\$3,126	Purchased February 2024 Redeemed October 2024
<b>Scholarship</b>	VWENX	\$151,223	\$159,774	Awards withdrawal \$13,000
<b>TOTAL – ALL INVESTMENTS</b>		<b>\$1,926,810</b>	<b>\$2,085,502</b>	
Dividends		\$ 42,017		
Interest		\$ 1,759		
LT Capital Gains		\$162,347		
ST Capital Gains		\$ 6,731		
Withdrawals (all accounts)		-\$ 89,449		

(continued)



The team (Dave Elmore-chair, Susan Chapin, Jon Case, and Ken Papp) is charged with managing the invested funds of the church. The funds under management are Endowment, Investment, SJ Johnson, Maintenance, and Scholarship. All funds except the Investment fund are restricted to specific purposes. All income and principal in the Investment Fund and Maintenance Fund can be used by the church by vote of the church body. In addition, the Investment Team has managed investments for the Book of Remembrance, Flower Team, and the Parsonage Fund. A large bequest from the Charlotte Bostwick estate is managed as part of the SJ Johnson fund.

We use Vanguard funds to moderate risk while also enabling the funds to grow. It uses "total return spending" to determine how much is available to the church each year to support the General Fund. Total return spending factors in growth and income over time. The church can take a percentage of the return annually to finance operations; the 2024 contribution was 4.5% of the average return over the prior 20 quarters. The remaining growth and income is added to principal to offset the effects of inflation and help the fund grow.

The funds grew moderately during the year. The rate of return since inception in 2018 thru December 31, 2024 was 9.2%. Rate of return is a measure of the net gain or loss of investments over a period of time.

The church made budgeted withdrawals from the Endowment, Investment and SJ Johnson funds to support the General Fund. As planned, several additional withdrawals were made from the Parsonage Fund to supplement the General Fund.

Respectfully submitted,  
David Elmore, Chair





**Treasurer**

<b><u>BANK ACCOUNT ASSETS</u></b>	<b>12/31/2023</b>	<b>12/31/2024</b>
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Checking/Savings Accounts		
PayPal	463.50	101.44
General Fund	<u>11,685.18</u>	<u>990.94</u>
Total Checking/Savings	12,148.68	1,092.38
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b><u>7,448.68</u></b>	<b><u>1,092.38</u></b>
<b>Other Assets</b>		
Ives Bank (formerly Savings Bank of Danbury)		
A.R.A.Scholarship (checking)	2,064.51	2,948.51
Book of Remembrance (Savings)	2,948.66	3,854.42
Building Fund (Checking)	891.86	1,251.86
Christian Education (Checking)	740.68	1,322.44
Hunt Organ Fund (Savings)	557.27	557.27
Parcells Flower Fund (Savings)	3,933.30	371.64
Platt Music Fund (Savings)	7,833.14	4,879.34
Special Office (Clark) Fund (Checking)	<u>14,760.07</u>	<u>6,227.25</u>
<b>Total Ives Bank</b>	<b><u>33,729.49</u></b>	<b><u>21,412.83</u></b>
<b>TOTAL BANK ACCOUNT ASSETS</b>	<b><u>41,178.17</u></b>	<b><u>22,505.21</u></b>

**Outstanding Liabilities as of December 31, 2024**

	<b><u>Current</u></b>	<b><u>Past Due</u></b>	<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>
Aquarion Water Company	19.12	0.00	19.12
Charter Communicatioins	129.99	0.00	129.99
Marandola Fuel Service	1,322.90	0.00	1,322.90
J&D Maintenance, LLC	<u>3,150.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>3,150.00</u>
<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>	<b><u>4,622.01</u></b>	<b><u>0.00</u></b>	<b><u>4,622.01</u></b>

Respectfully submitted,  
Jill Coolbeth



**Clerk**

Baptisms	3
Saylor Kay Martin 4/28/2024	
Lillian Grace McGee 7/15/2023 (not reported in 2023)	
Lelia Rayne Schlemmer 7/15/2023 (not reported in 2023)	
Confirmands	3
5/5/2024	
Brynn Elizabeth MacDonell	
Jase Edward Reichin	
Katelyn Ann Simmons	
Transferred Members	2
Toni Sullivan	
Stephen Sullivan	
Deceased Members:	4
Robert Hungerford 5/21/2024	
Frances Terry 6/18/2024	
Ronald Stewart 7/13/2024	
Robert Burden 7/4/2023 (not reported in 2023)	
Transferred Out:	0
Dismissed:	0
Marriages:	0
Vow Renewals:	0

A membership audit was performed by the Deacons in July, resulting in the transfer of 4 people to Associate Members.

**Members on the Roll as of December 31, 2024**

**Active: 191    Associate: 112    Total: 303**

Respectfully submitted,  
Leslie Schlemmer



## **Recording Secretary**

### **2024 Annual Meeting Minutes Sunday, March 3, 2024**

**Welcome** - Leslie Schlemmer, Council Chair, welcomed all at 11:03 am and thanked everyone for attending.

**Opening Prayer** – Rev. Dave Buchan offered an opening prayer.

**Summary of the 2023 Fall Meeting Minutes**- Pam Cafiero summarized the 2023 Fall Meeting Minutes. A motion to approve the minutes was made by John Wittmann and seconded by Ruth Almond. Motion was approved based on in-person and on-line ballot results.

**Investment Update**- Dave Elmore gave an investment update on the Vanguard accounts. The investments yielded over 12% rate of return over the year. Since 2018, investment with Vanguard has yielded over 9% rate of return, so investments have kept up with inflation and have provided an increasing amount for the church general fund. The investment committee uses a “total return spending” policy to withdraw a portion of income and growth each year. It was not necessary to withdraw the full budgeted amount from invested funds in 2023; it is very fortunate to have these funds to draw upon in future. The income and growth from investments doesn't replace pledging.

**Stewardship**- Leslie talked about the importance of Stewardship on behalf of the committee heads, who couldn't attend.

**Ad hoc Pastoral Search Team Candidates**- Leslie explained that the Church Council puts forth the following candidates and the congregation needs to vote on them. Leslie read the names of the candidates: Jen Albright, Corey Johnson, Paul Mayer, Katie McKay, Holly Meissner, Bonnie Westerberg, and Meg Wittmann. Sheri Gunn made a motion to approve the candidates, seconded by Barb Shimmel. The minutes were approved based on in-person and on-line ballot results. There will be a service to induct the search team and they will start their work after that.

**Presentation of the 2023 Annual Report**- Leslie referred to the electronic version sent out and to the copies in back of church. There were no comments about the report. Chris Simmons made a motion to approve and Barb Shimmel seconded it.

## **Old Business**

**Instant church directory**- Leslie explained that this electronic app had lapsed but has been reinstated now. If people had account before they should be able to log in. People may need to update their information. People can do that themselves. If people want help, reach out to Leslie. The directory keeps us connected.

*(continued)*

## **New Business**

Leslie asked everyone to prayerfully consider serving as leaders in the church. Deacons and Trustees need new members. Even people that served before can serve again. In a Congregational Church members run the church.

Leslie reported that Donna Ramsey is stepping down from leading the Book of Remembrance team. She explained the purpose of the team and announced that Barbara McGiver and Judy York will be co-chairs of the team. This is an example of people serving leadership positions again.

**Adjourn**- Holly Meissner made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Bonnie Westerberg seconded.

### **2024 Spring Meeting Minutes Sunday, May 19, 2024**

**Welcome** – Leslie Schlemmer, Council Chair, welcomed all at 11:00 am.

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

**Summary of 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes** – Recording Secretary Joan Vill, summarized the 2024 Annual Meeting minutes. A motion to approve the minutes was presented by Ruth Almond and seconded by Paul Mayer. The minutes were approved based on the in-person vote.

**Investment Update** – Dave Elmore presented an update on the Investment funds which continue to do well. The (5) accounts are up 4.82% through May 17<sup>th</sup>. The Endowment, Investment, and SJ Johnson funds provide support to the general fund. In the past two months, an additional \$12,000 beyond the budgeted amount.

**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.

**New Business** – None

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

### **2024 Fall Meeting Minutes Sunday, November 17, 2024**

**Welcome** – Dan Martin welcomed the congregation to the 2024 Fall Meeting at 11:09 am.

**Opening Prayer** – Reverend Dave Buchan offered a prayer noting the church's history and heritage and asking we be present for today's meeting.

*(continued)*



**Summary of 2024 Spring Meeting Minutes** – Recording Secretary Joan Vill, summarized the 2024 Spring Meeting minutes. Motion to approve the minutes as read by: Barb Shimmel, second: Dave Elmore. Approved via paper ballot after the meeting (Approved: 45, Disapproved or Abstained: 0).

**Investment Update** – Dave Elmore presented the Investment Report. Funds invested with Vanguard are classified as 'moderate risk'. The committee's 'total return spending' strategy and formula for investments continues to be successful with an overall average growth of 9% per year.

The General Fund (the budget approved for the year) continues to be supported by withdrawals from the through growth and income earned in the Endowment, Investment, SJ Johnson/Bostwick accounts, and the Parsonage fund.

Scholarship withdraws money annually for scholarship awards and the Maintenance Fund is used to cover unbudgeted maintenance expenses.

For 2025, ~\$75,000 is required from the investment funds to support the budget.

**Stewardship Update** – Mike Curley provided the report indicating we are still looking for pledges/income to meet our 2025 income goal of \$164.8K. This can be achieved with 70 pledge units at an average of \$2,350 each.

**Pastoral Search** – Corey Johnson gave an update indicating the Committee was working on completing the Church Profile with the necessary financial information. The next steps would be posting the profile on the UCC site.

**Presentation of the 2024 Proposed Operating Budget** – Dan Martin presented the budget on behalf of Susan Chapin and the Finance Committee. After review, there were no questions. Motion to approve the budget from Ruth Almond and seconded by Judy York. Approved via paper ballot after the meeting (Approved: 43, Disapproved: 2).

## **Old Business**

### **Strategic Plan Update**

Dan Martin gave an overview of the Strategic Plan work to date reading the Vision and Mission statements. He provided an update on the plan's (6) strategies developed out of understanding our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT):

- Resolve structure/ process issues: implementation of a "Covenant of Holy Manners" in meetings and increased adult education opportunities. Funds management discussions are underway.
- Expanded collaborative approach with the community: looking at stewardship (time, talent, and funds) and how we can create opportunities when we 'Imagine Together'.
- Leverage Digital Tools – open
- Create non-Sunday events – open
- Explore new Fund-Raising avenues – discussions started
- Establish our role in the community – started with Hunger Awareness and support of LGBTQ.

*(continued)*

Question: Paul Mayer commented that the Council's work and materials generated in conjunction with the strategic plan have been extremely helpful to the Search Committee. One concern is the "financially sound" wording in the Vision Statement when we are facing a \$42K deficit between income and budget and its impact on the Pastor search.

Answer: Dan replied that being "financially sound" is part of our vision and acknowledged we do need to be better at fund raising.

### **New Business**

**Gift Policy** – Dan Martin presented the Gift Policy drafted by Susan Chapin with input from Church Council as part of improving the church's processes. The intent is to ensure all expenses and all assets are captured within the church's financial practices.

Question: Ross Detwiler asked for clarification on how undesignated monetary gifts are used to support the general operations of the church and its missions.

Answer: Dan responded that designated gifts will be applied to the budget for the specified designation (current and future). Gifts do not become extra money to spend beyond the budget.

Question: Dave Eherts asked how specific non-monetary gifts would be handled (as an example, if the Pie Peeps wanted a new freezer).

Answer: Dan responded that the desired approach would be for the need to be identified as part of the budget planning and approval process and then the gift can be donated against the budget. (If an immediate "emergency" need were to arise, then it should be brought to the Church Council through the appropriate ministry for review and approval.)

A motion to approve the Gift Policy was made by John Wittmann and seconded by Sheri Gunn. Approved unanimously via paper ballot after the meeting (Approved: 45, Disapproved or Abstained: 0).

**Member Database** – Leslie Schlemmer informed the membership that an update to the church database is planned to support improved communication and the ability to match member skills and interests to church needs for talent.

**Adjourn** – Motion to adjourn by Jeff Gammons and second by: Sheri Gunn was accepted at 11:45 am.

Respectfully submitted,  
Joan Vill



**Members' Covenant:** *"We confess our faith in God, our heavenly Creator, and our reverent love for Jesus Christ, our Savior, and our willingness to be guided by the Holy Spirit. We promise, as members of this Church, to walk together as Christians, obedient to the teachings of the Holy Scripture, and to participate in the government, worship, stewardship or mission of this church. This we do for the glory of God, for the good of our neighbors and for the mutual growth in Christian grace, seeking to do all in faith, fellowship and service, in the spirit of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen."*

