

# LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**



Saint Stephens United Church of Christ  
Merrill, Wisconsin

Senior Minister  
Wisconsin Conference,  
Northwest Association

United Church of Christ  
**[Validation Date]**

## LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE CONTENTS

Position Posting  
Who Is God Calling Us To Become?  
Who Are We Now?  
Who Is Our Neighbor?  
References Consent and Validation

*"God is able to provide you with every blessing, so that having  
all sufficiency in all things at all times,  
you may abound in every good work." (2 Corinthians 9:8)*

## INSTRUCTIONS

The new Local Church Profile supports the calling and discernment of United Church of Christ congregations with their current or future pastoral leadership.

For many congregations, the interim time between ministers is an intentional season that is guided in part by the work of preparing a Local Church Profile. Through the Profile, the congregation can discover its data and express its story for the reliable discernment of a search committee and the beginning of a new pastorate. Searching ministers will want to see this document in its entirety.

The interim season is not the only time to give attention to questions and exploration of a congregation's vocation, however. Three sections of the Local Church Profile – WHO ARE WE NOW, WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR, and WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME – are meant to be updated every 3-5 years. Known as the "Discovery Document," these three sections can be completed by a visioning group, a governing body, a transition team, or other entity in the church – not just by a search committee – in order to draw forward the gifts and imaginative possibilities of a congregation. The more participants, the better!

Some questions are easy to answer. Some are not so easy. Prompts are provided to stimulate narrative response if needed; these prompts are merely examples from which to choose or to inspire your own. Efforts to answer the questions will prompt conversations and explorations and storytellings and many prayers, and as the Spirit moves throughout the process, congregations will shape a collective articulation of Christ's leading (WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME). This last question to be answered becomes the first section to be read by searching ministers in the Local Church Profile, and it is the boldest and most actionable piece for faithful leadership into the future.

Your conference can provide materials referenced in the Local Church Profile, such as the 11-Year Report containing data as reported by your congregation annually to the UCC Data Hub and MissionInsite reports containing demographic information on your community. More information on types of pastorate in the United Church of Christ can be found in the *Call Agreement Workbook*. Be sure to use the *Call Agreement Workbook's* Scope of Work to describe in this Local Church Profile the position being sought.

When it is time for ministerial search, the conference can counsel you on posting the Local Church Profile together with your public listing at UCC Ministry Opportunities (<http://oppsearch.ucc.org>).

The last page of the Local Church Profile contains a statement that parallels the consent statement signed by ministers in the UCC Ministerial Profile. In keeping with the covenantal relationship between a church and those it seeks to call, this statement encourages an open, honest exchange of information. On behalf of the United Church of Christ, and on the basis of the best knowledge available to them, your conference staff will validate your completed Local Church Profile when it is ready to be shared in relationship with prospective new leaders.

---

***Still active 136 year old seeks partner! Body is in good working order with good bones, solid foundation, and working parts. Soul is community and mission minded, open to new ideas, and growth oriented. Looking forward to raising many children, celebrating God's love, and sharing a path of discovery together. Enjoys music, food, and weekly 60 minute discussions. Partner must be accepting of large family and be willing to relocate.***

---

## **POSITION POSTING**

LISTING INFORMATION

SCOPE OF WORK

COMPENSATION & SUPPORT

WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?

### LISTING INFORMATION

Church name: Saint Stephens United Church of Christ  
Street address: 903 E. Second Street, Merrill, WI 54452  
Supplemental web links: [www.ststephensucc.net](http://www.ststephensucc.net)

Wisconsin Conference Northwest Association  
UCC Conference or Association Staff Contact Person Name:  
The Rev. Rob MacDougall  
Title: Associate Conference Minister  
Phone: (715)308-6120  
Email: [rmacdougall@wcucc.org](mailto:rmacdougall@wcucc.org)

Summary Ministry Description: In a short paragraph, reflect on where your church is going and what it might look like when you get there. What do you need to get there? Who are you seeking to join you on this part of your church's faith journey?

*Where are we going? That's a great question, and we are still doing the work to figure out what that's going to look like and how we might get there. What we're doing in the meantime is saying "yes" a lot. We are working on breaking a culture of resistance and hesitation. In particular, we're saying yes to hands-on mission work and to outside groups using our building. We know our general direction: toward more faithfulness in broadening expressions; toward deeper engagement with our community to even better meet the needs of the people and raise the standard of living in our town; toward a more extravagant welcome. We are seeking someone with a pastoral heart who leads with love. We imagine this person to be engaging and creative - willing to help us imagine a new and deeper faithfulness, rooted in tradition, with a spirit of innovation. We anticipate a person who is centered around the gospel - the life of Jesus - and the richness and challenge for life that this offers.*

Photographs:



What we value about living in our area (2 – 3 sentences):

*Living in central Wisconsin gives a true appreciation of the seasons. Merrill offers a comfortable blend of “northwoods” opportunities such as hunting, fishing, boating, and camping, while being near cultural opportunities like the arts, sporting events, and shopping. In the center of the state, Merrill is just two hours from Appleton, Green Bay, Eau Claire, and Madison, and just 20 minutes north of Wausau, home of the Rib Mountain/Granite Peak ski area. Merrill is a small town that is learning to peck through its shell by engaging with movements that are current and trending nationally in the broader culture.*

Current size of membership: 487 giving units and 774 Head of Household

Languages used in ministry (other than English): None

Position Title: Senior Minister

Position Duration: *Settled* – a called position intended for longer-term ministry in which the minister moves church membership to the congregation and moves standing to related association

Compensation Level: *Full Time*

Does the total support package meet conference compensation guidelines? *Yes*

## SCOPE OF WORK

Core Competencies:

*Pastoral Care*

*This means both the direct offering of pastoral presence with people in need and it is the disposition through which we hope this person will do all ministry.*

*Program Development*

*This is not as dry as it might sound. We seek someone who will help us design and implement new programs, while helping oversee current ministries through the gifts of equipping, empowering, and encouraging other leaders in the hands-on work. We are looking for a catalyst for innovative ministry to partner in bringing the gospel to those with 21st Century ears, so that they might hear and find life abundant.*

*Creative Worship*

*Worship is still the center of the life of our congregation, and we rely on it to bring the good news and give us life. We seek someone with a creative spirit found in the image of the Creator, so our worship might be as compelling as it is enlightening.*

## COMPENSATION AND SUPPORT

Salary Basis: *Follows conference guidelines*

Benefits: *Salary includes optional benefits, also along conference guidelines.*

What is the expected living situation for your next minister?

*We believe proximity to the life of the church is valued by the congregation and integral to becoming engaged in the church and broader community. The church parsonage is preferred.*

Describe peer and professional supports available for ministers in your association/conference:

*There are a variety of collegial opportunities available to clergy in our area. The Merrill Ministerium is a collection of local pastors and chaplains who gather monthly for fellowship and collegial support. The Merrill District is a gathering of UCC clergy in our corner of the Northwest Association that meets monthly September-May. This group meets here at Saint Stephens. The group has been reading a book together and generally does check-ins about life and ministry, and shares ideas and resources. The Wisconsin Conference also has Communities of Practice. These are small gatherings of clergy that gather in confidential settings to share the life and work of ministry.*

## WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?

Describe the ministry goals you envision your next minister co-collaborating with the congregation to achieve.

*We envision growth for our future. Growth may be defined as gaining in numbers or dollars, but more importantly, we envision new, meaningful and relevant ways to connect with our community and one another. We desire to discover and live more fully into what sets us apart from other churches in our community: a progressive theology, a welcoming spirit, and a desire to live out the gospel in particular ways. Since January of 2014, we have an increased sense of being community with one another and a renewed sense of mission in the community around us. We imagine a senior minister who will join the team in collaboration with the congregation and our associate minister to move toward this future.*

Describe how your vision of the minister you are now seeking will assist the congregation in making an impact beyond its walls.

*Saint Stephens is known for its leadership in community outreach within our city/area. The local food pantry originated here and continues to be a well-supported priority. We have been leaders and strong supporters in Fill the Gazebo (food drive), Christmas Spirit Giving Tree, backpacks for Food for Kids, and Lunch in the Park (a summer lunch program for kids). We host Dinner @ Five (a weekly free community meal in our building) where members of our church also volunteer. Our Wausau Under the Bridge program is where members of the congregation prepare a weekly meal to deliver to homeless individuals during the summer months when shelter is not available. They also donate clothing and other necessities that are delivered. These missions and programs have been embraced by the congregation after someone from within or outside of the church has become passionate about a need and brought it to the church. This summer (2019) we will be taking our fourth trip to South Dakota with adults to work with Re-Member on the Pine Ridge Reservation.*

*One of the interesting outreach ministries we offer from our building is our Medical Ministry. It's a loan closet for the community to come to borrow medical supplies such as walkers, canes, commodes, wheelchairs, and an assortment of other devices that are loaned out for as long as someone needs it. We just ask that they return it when done so we can loan it out again.*

*There are certainly pieces of ministry that require the pastor's expertise, but we additionally seek someone with the leadership skills to help empower the congregation to continue searching out needs and passions, and then designing creative ways to make that impact, however large or small.*



Specify language requirements or culturally-specific capacities preferred in a next ministerial leader, and why those matter to the congregation's sense of calling.

*There are no specific language or culturally-specific requirements, as the community is primarily English speaking, of German and Scandinavian descent. We're learning that living in the Northwoods of Wisconsin does have its own cultural elements. We are starting to do work to understand stories that are not our own, and therefore understand ourselves better.*

Based on what you have learned about who your church is, who your church's neighbor is, and who God is calling the church to become, describe four areas of excellence from *The Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministry* that your next minister will display to further equip the congregation's ministry in these areas.

Here are the four marks that speak to us from the previous Manual on Ministry:

- *To function as part of a team, to give and receive supervision, and to mutually equip and motivate the community of faith.*
- *To provide effective and appropriate pastoral care and Christian education, and to equip and motivate others to share in these ministries.*
- *To possess healthy awareness of strengths, weaknesses and limits, and assumption of responsibility for one's body, mind and spirit.*
- *To appreciate, practice, and pass on traditions of faith while interpreting them in light of the context of a diverse and changing world.*

Here are the four marks that speak to us most from the updated Manual on Ministry:

- *Understanding the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the elements of Christian worship to nurture faith.*
- *Empowering the Church to be faithful to God's call, reflective of Christ's mission, and open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit.*
- *Providing hope and healing to a hurting world.*
- *Practicing the radical hospitality of God.*

## WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME?

Who is God calling you to become as a congregation?

*Our Vision: "We are a Christian community called by God's Love to be a force for good in our neighborhood and our world."*

*Our Purpose: "We seek to tell stories of God that challenge our assumptions, to open our doors wide with radical hospitality, and to use our own hands and feet to change the world." We have taken bold steps in this direction and continue to wonder as a congregation how we might be guided to push our limits further.*

Describe how God is calling you to reach out to address the emerging challenges and opportunities of your community and congregation.

*In some ways God is calling Saint Stephens to address emerging challenges alongside challenges that others have already faced. As a former logging, mill, and factory town, our people are still struggling through what de-industrialization looks like as a town and individually. There is still an industrial labor force, but the town itself has been in a period of stagnation as the work to discover what comes next is still in process. Economically, the city of Merrill is middle-class and working class, with a fair amount of working poor, some that are truly impoverished, with outliers of a handful of homeless and of upper-middle class on the other end.*

*After two decades of transition, the church is more ready to embrace today's concerns than it has been for quite some time. There is a clear willingness to move forward to address the concerns of the wider church. We are not currently ONA, but we are moving further toward progressive theology. Much of the conversation is around Biblical interpretation and the value of creating a safe space to worship and belong for all people.*

*There is plenty of energy, present and still in the wings, to engage the spiritual needs of people today. Of course, the ever-present conversation about millennials does come up, but in ways that there is an openness and desire to help meet the needs of generations that are underrepresented in the life of the congregation. We are finding that we provide an alternative church option for people in our town who are oriented toward church but reject the more exclusionary theology of other local churches.*

*The congregation is not afraid of politics. However, there are many political and social viewpoints represented in the congregation, so politics is best approached through the life of Jesus in a way that leaves space for personal choice, rather than theological mandate. We are open to being challenged in the ways of Jesus that help us live more faithfully.*

*God is calling us to continue to push our own boundaries to become more extravagantly welcoming and to better care for our community.*

## WHO ARE WE NOW?

CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS

11-YEAR REPORT

CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING

CHURCH FINANCES

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS

Describe your congregation's life of faith.

*We are a devoted congregation. You will find many walk into the sanctuary, find their pew, stand, and pray before they take their seat. Communion is important, both because of tradition, but also because the sacraments have special meaning to this congregation. People come to worship to be fed by what they hear from music and the word - both scripture and preaching. Tradition is very important, but there is plenty of space to experiment and try new things. Anything can be worth trying once, and if it works, there is space to incorporate it. There is also plenty of room for growth in this area, in terms of adult education, retreats, and spiritual practices. The God of love and forgiveness is the God that is worshiped in this congregation.*

Describe several strengths or positive qualities of your congregation.

*Saint Stephens quickly embraces no-nonsense, concrete projects and missions. We are known to be generous in our commitment to projects and our acceptance of others. Some strengths of our congregation are:*

- *Willingness to try new things*
- *Openness to being led by clergy and lay leaders*
- *Deep concern and desire to serve and engage in the community*
- *Loyal and steadfast; we keep our commitments*
- *If you're willing to ask, people are willing to help*
- *Most progressive church in town*
- *New energy and growth, after many years of transition*
- *We are willing to work and willing to learn*
- *We don't place the responsibility of growing the church solely on our ministers' shoulders, and we see it as a collaborative enterprise.*

Describe what worship is like when your congregation gathers.

*We currently offer two services, both meeting in the sanctuary. The 9:00 AM Sunday service is traditional in both format and music. The Sunday School classes gather in church for the first portion of the service, through the “children’s message.” The second worship happens on Wednesday evenings. This worship is meditative in tone, with time for silence, reflection, and simple music, often from the Taize community. Communion is offered every week on Wednesdays. Baptisms are celebrations of the congregation, most often witnessed by the Sunday school children surrounding the baptismal font. Communion is important to the congregation, and our clergy make a big deal out of the “open table,” stressing that there are no barriers to receiving communion for anyone who desires to partake.*

Describe the educational program and/or faith formation vision of your church.

*We have been rebuilding our educational programming over the last couple of years. In the fall of 2016, we redesigned our Sunday school for pre-school through 6th grade children and youth. We are using the SparkHouse Whirl Lectionary curriculum. It is being well-embraced by students and teachers alike. Our 7-8th graders participate in what we call Faith Formation and that uses a curriculum designed by a previous Associate Pastor.*

*One of our more recent changes came in our Confirmation program. In January 2019, our confirmation program, 9<sup>th</sup> grade, changed to be a largely self-directed spiritual exploration. The intention behind this is to accommodate already busy schedules of youth and families. It also is a way for the youth to take ownership of their own spiritual growth through the completion of specific projects that provide hands-on opportunities to experience key elements of our Christian tradition. Confirmands have class once a month for discussion and have been assigned mentors to help them along this journey. Confirmation is led by our Associate Minister, who often receives assistance from the Senior Minister for class sessions, and is a one-year program, with Confirmation Sunday being held on December 8, 2019.*

*Our Youth Groups have also been resurrected and revitalized since calling our Associate Minister in the summer of 2018. We have two youth groups, a middle school (grades 6-8) and a high school (grades 9-12). The Associate Minister leads, coordinates, and handles all things youth group, with the help and aid from lay leaders. Both youth groups meet once or twice a month. These gatherings consist of service projects, lock-ins, movie nights, and regular get-togethers where the youth can learn about one another and what the church does and can look like, all while having fun!*

*When it comes to adult education there is not much in place, though there is ample opportunity and space for it. In the past, some have gathered to have book studies as a part of our larger theme for the various church seasons. We are trying to find new ways to engage the lives of our members and those outside our community, taking into account the changing culture and schedules, but also people’s desire for spiritual*

*growth and nourishment. An example of this would be our Lenten and Advent boxes that were put together to provide daily enrichment to members that chose to participate. We value younger generations and are working to do better to meet their needs.*

Describe how your congregation is organized for ministry and mission.

*Our by-laws were recently changed to make the structure for both ministries and missions more flexible. We now have a minimal number of “critical function” committees that are required to meet regularly for the necessary functions of the church. Most “standing committees” were removed from the by-laws, allowing groups to form with the approval of church council for a singular mission. For example, the team serving Tuesday lunches in the park to children and families during the summer is not required to meet throughout the year but rather to do what is necessary to carry out their mission. This frees members to become part of other groups about which they are passionate rather than becoming burned out by over-commitment of their time to a singular group. It also allows for new missions to form and completed missions to dissolve without rewriting the by-laws for each change. An example of this is our new Green Team. We are still living into this intentional way to create new paths and missions.*

When it comes to decision-making, how many hours are spent in meetings per month?

*6 – 8 Hours in total. Monthly: Church Council and Church & Ministry/Personnel Committee. In light of our 2015 bylaw changes, we no longer have standing committees that need to meet monthly. We are able to have task forces that meet when needed.*

Think of a time when action had to be taken quickly, for example when a crisis or disaster occurred. How was that accomplished?

*In 2011, a tornado devastated parts of Merrill. Sixty-seven houses and multiple businesses were destroyed or impacted and dozens of families displaced. Saint Stephens was quick to mobilize a relief and donation center where the community could come for needed supplies such as drinking water, bedding and clothing, household items, hygiene kits, and clean-up buckets to begin the recovery and healing processes. Crews were also formed to help with the clean-up efforts. The response was overwhelming, both of widespread community support (joined by Good Samaritan hospital, Merrill Area Chamber of Commerce, St. Vincent DePaul) and the tremendous need. This was a classic example of the congregation’s quick response to a need and the compassion and generosity in both monetary support and volunteered time.*

Can you provide the next minister with a copy of an organization structure, bylaws, and/or annual report to further explain the patterns of the church’s activity and governance? Yes

# 11 YEAR REPORT

## CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Describe those who participate in your church.

		<i>Is this number an</i>
Number of active members:	487 giving units and 774 Head of Household	Statistics from ACS
Number of active non-members:	16	
Total of church participants (sum of the numbers above):	See below	

*We are in the process of getting accurate numbers and we have just recently started keeping track of active non-members, as we've worked on how we welcome new members. We realize that the number of giving units is not an entirely satisfactory way to measure active participation, but with our new membership software, we are still working out the kinks to get accurate numbers. Hopefully, this gives you some idea of what our church census is like.*

Percentage of total participants who have been in the church:

		<i>Is this percentage an</i>
More than 10 years:	90%	Estimate
Less than 10, more than 5 years:	1%	Estimate
Less than 5 years:	9%	Estimate

Number of total participants by age:

0-11	12-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	<i>Are these numbers an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
148	85	114	132	116	145	187	152	187	Estimate

These numbers do not reflect actual participation, but are active in our church database.

Percentage of adults in various household types:

		<i>Is this percentage an</i>
Single adults under 35:	15%	Per data in ACS
Family household with minors:	14%	Per data in ACS

Single adults age 35-65:	7%	Per data in ACS
Family household with no minors:	53%	Per data in ACS
Single adults over 65:	11%	Per data in ACS

Education level of adult participants by percentage: Data Not Available

Percentage of adults in various employment types: Data Not Available

Describe the range of occupations of working adults in the congregation:

*Within our congregation, working adults are employed in a wide variety of fields including municipal (includes police/fire/EMT), health care, manufacturing (factory workers), farming, retail, and white-collar industry. A good number of our congregation members are employed at one of our area's largest employers, Church Mutual Insurance Company.*

Describe the mix of ethnic heritages in your congregation, and the overall racial make-up. Most UCC congregations tend to describe themselves as "diverse." Yet, the vast majority of UCC congregations are mono-cultural. What does diversity mean in your context?

*Most of the members of our congregation are white and are of European descent. German immigrants founded the church and descendants of German immigrants continue to have close ties within our congregation. We are still discovering what diversity looks like for us. We are certainly not of one political mind and share a wide range of opinions and beliefs.*

## **PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING**

Complete the following chart. Please leave blank any fields that are not applicable to your congregation.

Ways of Gathering	Estimated number of people involved in attendance	Who plans each of the listed gatherings? <i>(list any and all worship planners, such as various lay leaders, pastors, musicians, other staff)</i>
Adult Groups or Classes	8	Pastor(s)
Baptisms (number last year)	21	Pastor(s)
Children's Groups or Classes	100+	Pastor, Staff, Sunday School Volunteers, Nursery volunteers

Christmas Eve and Easter Worship	800, 500	Pastor(s), Music Staff
Church-wide Meals	100+	Various Groups
Choirs and Music Groups	40	Music Staff
Church-based Bible Study	8	Pastor(s)
Communion (Once per month, every Wednesday)	300	Pastor, Church Council, Lay People
Community Meals	100+	Volunteers
Confirmation (number confirmed last year)	6	Pastor(s)
Funerals (number last year)	22	Pastor(s)
Intergenerational Groups (incl. service projects, Food in the Park, caroling, etc.)	35	Volunteers, Lay People
Prayer or Meditation Groups (incl. Prayer Chain)	12	Volunteers
Public Advocacy Work	N/A	
Retreats	15	Pastor(s) & Lay People
Theology or Bible Programs in the Community	N/A	
Weddings (number last year)	2	Pastor(s)
Worship (time slot: Sunday 9:00 AM)	220	Pastor, Musicians, Worship Team
Worship (time slot: Wednesday 6 PM)	12	Pastor, Musicians, worship Team
Young Adult Groups or Classes	currently NA	
Youth Groups or Classes	28	Associate Pastor & Lay People



Additional comments:

List all members or regular participants in your congregation who are ordained, licensed, or commissioned ministers. Indicate those with current United Church of Christ Three-Way Covenants (i.e. serving in a congregation) or Four-Way Covenants (i.e. serving in a ministry beyond a congregation).

Name	Three-Way or Four-Way Covenant? (3 or 4 or No)	Ministry Setting	Type of Ministry Role	Retired ? (Y or N)
Rev. Dale G. Kuck	No	N/A	Former Minister	Retired

If one or more previous pastors or retired ministers currently hold membership in the church, describe their role(s) in the life of the congregation:

*The Rev. Dale Kuck has maintained membership and participation in the life of the congregation continuously since he retired in December of 1995.*

List all current staff, including ministers. Exclude the position you are seeking to fill. Indicate which staff person serves as head of staff.

Staff Position	Head of Staff?	Compensation (full time, part time, volunteer)	Supervised by	Length of Tenure for current person in this position
Church & Ministry (HR Duties)	Yes	N/A, Volunteer	N/A	N/A
Rev. Lucas Williams, Associate Minister		Full-time, salary	Church & Ministry	June 2018
Tina L. Scott, Business Manager		Full-time, hourly	Head of Staff	January 2015

Kim McCaskill, Administrative Assistant		Part-time, hourly	Head of Staff	February 2019
Darlene Johnson, Accompanist & Director of Chime Choir		$\frac{3}{4}$ time accompanist, salary	Head of Staff	September 2007
James Bjorklund, Music Director		Part-time, salary	Head of Staff	August 2016
Ann Applegate, Accompanist		$\frac{1}{4}$ time accompanist,	Head of Staff	November 2018
Jason Chandler, Facilities Manager		Full-time, hourly	Head of Staff	April 2017
Mary Pat Campbell, Interim Pastoral Associate		Part-time, salary	Head of Staff	May 2017

## REFLECTION

Reflection: After reviewing the congregational demographics and activities above, what does this information reflect about your congregation's overall ministry?

*If we look at the longevity of the majority of parishioners in this congregation, it reflects that the majority of the congregation values tradition. There was a lag in growth during our times of transition. However, as we see a rise in new membership and the transition to a new and growing staff, we are finding new energy and vision for the life of our congregation.*

## CHURCH FINANCES

Current annual income (dollars used during most recent fiscal year)

Source	Amount
Annual Offerings and Pledged Giving	\$359,678
Endowment Proceeds ( <i>as permitted within spending policy, such as a cap of typically 4.5%-5% on total return</i> )	Proceeds from Endowments are continually reinvested.
Endowment Draw ( <i>beyond what is permitted by spending policy, "drawing down the principal"</i> )	\$0
Fundraising Events	\$0
Gifts Designated for a Specific Purpose	\$90,935 (Restricted Funds)
Grants	\$0
Rentals of Church Building	\$2,200
Rentals of Church Parsonage	\$0
Support from Related Organizations ( <i>e.g. Women's Group</i> )	\$0
Transfers from Special Accounts	\$0
Other (specify):	\$0
Other (specify):	\$0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$452,813</b>

Current annual expenses (dollars budgeted for most recent fiscal year):

*We have budgeted \$433,657 in expenses for 2019.*

Considering total budgeted expenses for the year, compare total ministerial support. What is the percentage?

*Total compensation packages for ministerial staff represents 34% of our operating budget for 2019.*

Has the church ever failed to pay its financial obligations to a minister of the church?

*No. Even as we worked to bring our expenses in line with income, payroll was always paid before all other bills.*

Is your church 5-for-5, i.e. does it include each of the following contributions during the church year? (*indicate those included during the most recent fiscal year*)

Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM – Basic Support)

One Great Hour of Sharing

Strengthen the Church

Neighbors in Need

Christmas Fund

*Yes, our congregation has contributed to all five campaigns for all of recent memory.*

In what way is OCWM (Basic Support) gathered?

*OCWM is currently gathered via gifts designated for a specific purpose from our congregation. There is a long history of Saint Stephens supporting OCWM. We have recently reinstated OCWM back into the operating budget, and we also rely on individual specifically designated donations. We have pledged \$52,000 to the conference camping programs over the next 3-5 years and have kept that commitment current.*

What is the church's current indebtedness?

*Saint Stephens UCC carries no debt beyond our current accounts payable.*

If a building program is projected or underway, describe it, including the projected start/end date of the building project and the total project budget. If a capital campaign is underway or anticipated, describe:

Year(s)	Purpose	Goal	Result	Impact
2018-2021	stated below	\$700,000	Launched in 2018 for pledges over 3 years	New Roofs, New organ, and window lead abatement completed

*We have received Now! Pledges of \$442,511 as of May 15, 2019. We also have bequests received in addition to that amount of \$156,336.*

Describe the prominent mission component(s) involved in the most recent (or current) capital campaign.

*We have not currently decided what the mission component will be, but it is our intention to have mission be a part of the campaign.*

Does your church have an endowment? Yes.

What is the market value of the assets? *Current value is approximately \$675,202.*

Are funds drawn as needed, regularly, or under certain circumstances?  
*We are not currently drawing from this endowment fund and have never used it for regular expenses or to meet the annual budget.*

Other Assets

Reserves (savings):

*We do not keep any appreciable amount in savings. Depending on the time of year we have \$10,000 - \$30,000 in savings.*

Investments (other than endowment):

*We currently have two other primary investments other than the endowment fund.*

- 1. The Staats Memorial Scholarship Fund is invested, and draws are taken from the earnings each year to award scholarships to students graduating high school and planning to attend college and/or attending college as set forth in the guidelines when the money was gifted to the church as a scholarship fund. This fund is currently valued at approximately \$382,146.*
- 2. Bequests received that have been invested, potentially to be used for capital campaign purposes. These funds are currently valued at approximately \$156,336.*

Does your church have a parsonage? Yes

Fair market rental value of the parsonage: *It has not been assessed for this but is valued at \$469,000 for insurance purposes.*



How is the parsonage used? *The previous senior minister and his family occupied the parsonage through June 30, 2019. It would be available for the new senior minister.*

Street / City / State / Zip: *106 Poplar Street, Merrill, WI 54452*

Finished square footage: 3,000 square feet

Number of Bedrooms, Number of Bathrooms: *5 bedrooms, 1 ½ baths*

Assessed real estate value: *The full value of the parsonage for insurance purposes is \$469,000. (not real estate value as it has not recently been assessed for this)*

Condition of structure, systems and appliances:

*Structure and appliances are all in very good workable condition, with new dishwasher, refrigerator, plumbing, flooring, and roof. The window replacement project is in progress. There have been substantial updates to the interior of the home. There is first floor laundry, substantial closet space, a working fireplace, and classic built-in cabinetry.*

Entity in the church responsible for review and needed repairs:

*The Executive Committee (officers of the Church Council) are authorized to review and approve needed repairs and improvements.*

Describe all buildings owned by the church:

*The church property consists of the church itself that is part of a larger church building complex consisting of multiple classrooms (a former three-story school building), a wing containing offices and restrooms, a large entry/narthex area, a large multipurpose*

*lounge, and both large Fellowship Hall and Choir Room on a basement level, in addition to the parsonage and two separate parking areas which make up the church's total real estate assets.*

Describe non-owned buildings or space used or rented by the church: *N/A*

Which spaces are accessible to wheelchairs?

*The majority of our church facility is accessible to wheelchairs. The altar area (several steps) and the pulpit, are not wheelchair accessible.*

Reflection: After reviewing the church's finances and assets described above, what does this information reflect about your congregation's mission and ministry?

*The last budget change occurred roughly 5 years ago. In the past, we did not budget based upon projected income, only for planned expenses. We now incorporate projected income into our budgeting process. This comes primarily from the previous year's income, since the congregation does not engage in a pledging campaign. This is due to many church members' experiences with friends and families in other churches in town that have excommunicated members because they failed to meet a pledge. And we stand firmly against this practice. We have been working over the past 5 years on a stewardship campaign to help the congregation understand the value of regular scheduled giving. Each year of the last five, the congregation has given more in their regular weekly offering than the year before.*

*The budgeting process is as follows: The executive committee looks at the prior year expenses and estimates what the current year amounts will be based on those numbers. It is then presented to the entire council who approves and presents the proposed budget to the congregation at the annual meeting. The congregation is able to discuss the budget, and it must be approved by a majority vote. When the outdoor ministry of the Wisconsin Conference did a capital campaign, our congregation made a pledge to support this over the next 3 – 5 years through our annual budget. We care a lot about mission projects, and we have taken on Merrill Community Food For Kids, under our 501c3 umbrella, and gather outside donations for this project. We also gather donations for and fund other projects on an as-needed basis outside of our operating budget with regular success.*

*Since the budget year of 2015, we have paid all of our bills on time, without using any savings to meet our obligations. We don't know exactly how long it's been since the last time we met all of our financial obligations because of bad financial record keeping. We now have modern software, and multiple means of accountability (business manager, ministers and church leaders), and our senior minister and church council have a commitment to financial stability and solvency that has not been present in recent past. It is our expectation that this level of committed collaboration and intentional budgeting and spending will continue.*

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Name one to three significant happenings in the history of your church that have shaped the identity of your congregation. Add the most important event in the life of your church in the past 10 years.

*In late 2013, our most recent senior pastor was called to our congregation after years of flux. Upon his arrival, the congregation found new stability. We have revitalized community involvement, mission projects and congregation enrichment. The church has a different feeling and we are happy with the direction that we are going. The recent calling of our new associate minister in early 2018 was significant. Reverend Williams has revitalized the youth groups for both high school and middle school along with planning educational and social events with members of the congregation. The new energy among the youth has been something that the congregation has been looking and hoping for.*

*In 2014, we replaced our sound system to improve sound quality in the sanctuary and on our radio ministry. The radio ministry is a significant part of our ministry, reaching those who are not able to meet with us in person. The system was paid for, along with a partial roof replacement, in just a year's time. This may seem like a small thing; however, the congregation has a long history of showing up when asked, and this is just a recent example of that commitment. In 2019, we also replaced the organ with a Rodgers Infinity 3-Manual Organ and the church/parsonage/parsonage garage roofs were replaced with shingles that are warranted for at least 75 years.*

Describe a specific change your church has managed in the recent past.

*Prior to 2014, there had been transition of staff which was a catalyst for change throughout the church. This change caused the church to lose some members, but the overall life of the congregation had remained resilient in the face of change. The congregation entered something like a season of dormancy. Like trees in winter, some of the visible signs of life were lost throughout the last few decades, but this time of transition did not keep us from doing ministry, and it did not kill our Spirit. Transition is difficult, and while our personnel changes may look discouraging, it was a combination of situations that led to these changes and is not a direct reflection of the health of this congregation. As of the last few years, we are a congregation that has continued to grow.*

Every church has conflict, some minor, some larger. "Where two or three are gathered, there will be disagreement..." Describe your congregation's values and practices when it comes to conflict.



*We are a congregation free of major conflict. There was some disgruntlement regarding the bylaw changes around the removal of standing committees. This did not consume the life of the congregation, but a minority chose to not grasp the minimal change that this adjustment required.*

Ministerial History (include all previous ministerial staff for the past 30 years)

Staff member's name	Years of service	UCC Standing (Yes/No)
Rev. Lucas Williams: June 2018 to Present (Associate)	1	Yes
Rev. Kyle Carnes: January 2014 to June 2019 (Senior)	5 years, 6 months	Yes
Rev. Michelle Holdorf (now Miller): March 2005 to December 2016 (Associate)	10 years, 9 months	Yes
Rev. Linda Kuhn: September 2012 to January 2014 (Interim Pastor)	1 year, 4 months	Yes
Rev. Jack Kraaz: July 2011 to September 2012 (Interim Pastor)	1 year, 2 months	Yes
Rev. Scott Hawker: July 2009 to June 2011 (Senior)	1 year, 11 months	No
Rev. John Eldred: February 2007 to June 2009 (Interim Pastor)	1 year, 4 months	Yes
Rev. Deb Kunkel: October 2002 to November 2004 (Associate)	2 years, 1 month	No
Rev. Ohris E. Bartholomew: September 2000 to September 2002 (Interim Pastor)	2 years	Yes
Rev. Scott Callaghan: July 1996 to July 2000 (Associate)	4 years	No
Rev. David McBride: January 1996 to June 1996 (Interim Pastor)	5 months	No data available
Rev. Earl R. Eckhart: November 1992 to February 2007 (Associate; Senior after Rev. Kuck retired)	14 years, 3 months	Yes
Rev. Dale G. Kuck: January 1965 to December 1995 (Senior)	31 years	Yes
Rev. William S. Clyma: June 1988 to April 1992 (Associate)	3 years, 10 months	Yes
Rev. James Martin: September 1983 to June 1987	3 years, 9 months	Yes

Comment on what your church has learned about itself and its relationship with persons who provided ministerial leadership:

*We have learned that we are a resilient congregation. Throughout changes in leadership, we still gathered as a community of faith. Through our most recent senior pastor and new associate pastor, we have learned that we can have a large impact in our community. We desire strong pastoral leadership, but we are able to survive in the midst of transition.*

Has any past leader left under pressure or by involuntary termination?  
*Yes, and we're happy to talk more about it.*

Has your church been involved in a Situational Support Consultation? *No*

Has a past pastor been the subject of a Fitness Review while at your church?  
*No. However, as a result of actions taken while on staff, Rev. Hawker was subject to a Fitness Review of the Association after he tendered his resignation, and subsequently lost his standing in the UCC.*

# WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?

COMMUNITY VISION  
MISSION INSITE

## COMMUNITY VISION

How do the relationships and activities of your congregation extend outward in service and advocacy?

*Our congregation is actively searching for ways to extend outside our walls. When a need is presented, we are open to offering whatever resources we can provide. For example, we were active in the Busia Compassionate Center in relationship with the WI Conference of Credit Unions, Dinner at Five (a free community meal), Re-Member (in Pine Ridge, South Dakota), Make a Difference Day, Food For Kids (providing food for school children throughout the year), and the Lincoln County Christmas Spirit Tree. We have established a Hospitality Corps that greets before the 9:00 AM service on Sunday. In 2018, we planned a new community outreach event, Oktoberfest. The event was a success for members of the congregation and community at large. We are in the planning process for our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual event.*

Describe your congregation's participation in meetings, relationships and activities connecting the wider United Church of Christ (association / conference / national setting).

*The congregation is connected to the Association and Conference primarily through the participation of our pastors in leadership roles in the adjudicatory levels of the denomination. We try to have delegates go to the Conference annual meeting which is a large celebration of church at the state level, at Green Lake Conference Center. We are a 5 for 5 congregation and have been for many years. We support the Wisconsin Conference outdoor ministry United Church Camps, Inc. [www.ucci.org](http://www.ucci.org) and have sent youth there for many years.*

Check all of the following "statements of witness" that apply to your UCC faith community. (Find more information on these statements at [ucc.org](http://ucc.org).)

- Accessible to All (A2A)
- Creation Justice
- Economic Justice
- Faithful and Welcoming
- God Is Still Speaking (GISS)
- Immigrant Welcoming
- Inter-cultural/Multi-racial (I'M)

- Just Peace
- Global Mission Church
- Open and Affirming (ONA)
- WISE Congregation for Mental Health
- Other UCC designations:
- Other similar designations in affiliated denominations
- None

Reflect on what the above statement(s) mean(s) to your community. Is your congregation interested in working toward any of the above statements of witness in the near future?

*There has been no intentional study to become any of these. There have been some stirrings around becoming open and affirming. There is a reasonable chance that this will become a full conversation in the near future. There was no intentional avoidance of these topics, but more of an absence of someone to spearhead any of these efforts. We believe that these efforts should be led by the laity of the congregation if/when they arise. Even though we do not have any of these official designations, there is much from here that we support and the lack of these designations should not reflect a rejection of or disagreement with any of them in particular.*

Describe your congregation's participation in ecumenical and interfaith activities (with other denominations and religious groups, local and regional).

*We take part in an ecumenical Thanksgiving Service every year. Our pastor(s) regularly participate in the Merrill Ministerium, a collection of ecumenical pastors in town, but there are few other ecumenical opportunities available in Merrill. In the past, our former senior minister participated in "an interfaith dialogue on peace in a polarized world" with Jewish and Muslim faith leaders. Again, the congregation is open to these sorts of things and has no opposition to it.*

If your congregation has a mission statement, how does that mission statement compare to the actual time spent engaging in different activities? Think of the range of activities from time spent gathering, to governance, to time spent going out.

*Vision: We are a Christian community called by God's love to be a force for good in our community and our world.*

*Purpose: We seek to tell stories of God that challenge our assumptions, open our doors wide with radical hospitality, and to use our own hands and feet to change the world.*

*The intention for our process was an attempt to articulate who this congregation is,*

*and has been from its origins, but to also articulate something aspirational-something that we knew we had not yet fulfilled and desired to still live into more fully. As mentioned above, the following programs and projects are some of the ways that we believe we are living into these two statements and we look forward to growing into them even more.*

*A large majority of our time is spent engaging in the acts related to our mission statement. For example, Food for Kids, Re-Member, Dinner at 5, and the Radical Hospitality Corps.*

Reflect on the scope of work assigned to your pastor(s). How is their community ministry and their ministry in and on behalf of the wider church accounted for in the congregation's expectations on their time?

*The congregation is incredibly supportive and encouraging of work on behalf of the wider church and within the community. There is even some expectation that time will be spent outside the church walls and time is granted accordingly for work within the denomination and within the surrounding community.*

## MissionInSite

*We find MissionInSite to be a great resource. We would love to have more conversations with you as you find interest in our congregation. MissionInSite has more capabilities than we've currently utilized. We've decided that rather than putting partial information here, we will do the best we are able to answer any questions about demographics of our area that you might have. We also encourage you to use the internet and other resources to research Merrill and the surrounding area.*

*We look forward to further exploring the demographics of our community and to assess how that effects our current ministry and new opportunities once our new senior minister is in place.*

What do you hear when you talk to community leaders and ask them what your church is known for?

*When we speak to community leaders or even other community members, there is a sense that the community is talking about Saint Stephens around town and that we are engaged in the life of the community. They have a sense that something is happening, even if they don't know specifics of what we're doing.*

What do new people in the church say when asked what got them involved?

*They say that they like how warm and welcoming the church is, and they like the welcoming message they received. They say they've "heard good things" about Saint Stephens from others and wanted to check it out for themselves. They like all of the different things our church is doing in the community and want to be a part of it as well.*

## REFERENCES

### REFERENCE 1

Richard Stine

President and Director of Taylor-Stine Funeral Home, Inc.

(not a church member)

903 E. Third Street

Merrill, WI 54452

### REFERENCE 2

Tina L. Scott

Current Business Manager

(not a church member; belongs to another denomination)

Firsthand knowledge of church dynamics and finances

715.212.0767 OR 715.536.7322

tina@ststephensucc.net

### PROMPTS FOR REFERENCES

Describe some areas of strength in this church's ministry. Describe some areas for improvement in this church's ministry.

Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry. Anything else you wish to share.

## **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

CLOSING PRAYER

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION VALIDATION

### CLOSING PRAYER

Include here any prayer or dream for the minister you imagine journeying toward you... a poem, for example, or a Scripture passage or a piece of music that is meaningful to your Search Committee:

*To be read in the voice of the pastor in search of a call reading our profile:*

*Heavenly Father, I come to you as often as I do, to ask for your wisdom and guidance. You have chosen me to be a leader among your people and blessed me with the talents to do so. I ask for your guidance as I review the profile of Saint Stephens UCC. Give me an open mind as I learn of their history, present, and dreams for their future. Give me strength against negative comparison, enthusiasm for the things we share that are my passion, and hope that I could be a vital part of this Christian community. If this is your plan for me and the Saint Stephens congregation, guide us to make it be so. If it is not, bless each of us as we move forward. For you have great plans for us. Amen.*

*- written by church member Nancy Dabbert*

## STATEMENT OF CONSENT

*The covenantal relationship between a church and those called by that church to serve as pastors and teachers and in other ministerial positions is strengthened when vital information is openly shared by covenantal partners. To that end, we attest that, to the best of our abilities, we have provided information in this profile that accurately represents our church. We have not knowingly withheld any information that would be helpful to candidates.*

*As the committee charged with the responsibility for identifying and recommending a suitable new minister for our church, we have been authorized to share the information herein with potential candidates. We understand that a candidate may wish to secure further knowledge, information, and opinions about our church. We encourage a candidate to do so, recognizing that an open exchange of relevant information builds the foundation for continuing and healthy relationships between calling bodies and persons seeking a ministry position.*

1. Which individuals and groups in the church contributed to the contents of this Local Church Profile?

*Personnel committee (Church and Ministry Committee), the Church Council, and church staff*

2. Additional comments for interpreting the profile:

*Our hopes for the role of our new senior minister is for it to truly be a generalist position. The previous position morphed between many different configurations over the course of 12 years, as the needs of the church changed. We desire to find stability in this role while working with the gifts and graces of the pastor we believe God calls to be in ministry with us. We want this person to enhance, inspire, equip, and lead the congregation in relationship with lay leadership, staff, and the associate minister.*

*We are looking for someone with a full range of gifts for the whole ministry of the church that specifically includes the proclivities mentioned earlier in this document: pastoral care, designing and leading creative worship, and overseeing program development in many areas of the life of the church.*

*We believe that pastoral care is not just a particular ministry, but a disposition one holds within the role of pastor. We have created and continue to grow a still-new Congregational Care team. It's a way for the congregation to offer support and care to one another that is facilitated and equipped by the staff. We place the ministry of pastoral care under the umbrella of Congregational Care. We see our new senior minister's pastoral care role in this light. Both pastors share hospital calls. There will be some emphasis on the associate minister to take the lead with home visits, either making visits personally or coordinating with visitation volunteers to find coverage.*



*We are a congregation serious about worship and we are indeed open to trying new things. We have great respect for our tradition, but we are able to hold it lightly enough to make room for new music and innovation. Much of our previous senior minister's tenure has been occupied with administration, while still taking steps to expand the worshipping life of the congregation. We hope that our senior minister will desire to engage with creative worship. There will be plenty of space to experiment and take the lead in creative ways when it comes to worship.*

*We are not an overly programmed church. There is space for more programming. We understand, however, that one piece of the changing culture is that there is less interest in the church providing a lot of social activities that only increase demand on people's schedules. We understand that programming must meet the needs of the lives people are leading, and yet still seek out the spiritual needs that are going unmet in ways that will at times go contrary to our over-scheduled lives. We are looking for a person to help us find programs that will address the spiritual needs of our congregation in these transitional times in our culture at large.*

*We see the division of time as a work in progress and would entertain any questions or further discussion about the roles. The Associate Minister has the primary responsibility for youth and children's programming while the Senior Minister has some head of staff responsibilities in conjunction with the Church and Ministry committee. Other work is either shared or divided based upon any given work load with an emphasis on collegiality and cooperation.*

*Our ideal Senior Minister must be joyful and possess a wild imagination, and must be willing to fight for all the people, not just some.*

Signed:

Kelly Wallace & Gary Schwartz

Co-Chairs, Search Committee

July 22, 2019

## VALIDATION BY CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION

The congregation is currently in good standing with the association / conference named.  
Staff Comment:

To the best of my knowledge, ministerial history information is complete.  
Staff Comment:

To the best of my knowledge, available church financial information is presented thoroughly.  
Staff Comment:

My signature below attests to the above three items.

Signature:



Name & Title: Rev. Rob MacDougall/Associate Conference Minister

Email: rmacdougall@wcucc.org

Phone: 715-308-6120

Date: 7/29/2019

This document is created through support to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) and is only possible through the covenantal relationships of all settings of the United Church of Christ.

*"Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God!'" – Mark 11:22*

JUNE 28, 2019

**LETTER OF REFERENCE FOR  
ST. STEPHENS UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

THE STRENGTH OF ST. STEPHENS ARE THE MEMBERS. THIS CHURCH IS COMPRISED OF A LOVING AND CARING CONGREGATION. THEY TRULY CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY WHICH IS EVIDENT BY THE 'FREE MEAL MONDAY'. WHAT A GREAT COMMUNITY OUTREACH! AT ST. STEPHENS NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE OR NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE IN LIFE'S JOURNEY YOU ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO JOIN THEM FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER. ST. STEPHENS IS OPEN MINDED AND OPEN ARMED. AS A FUNERAL DIRECTOR IN THIS CITY FOR OVER 40 YEARS, ST. STEPHENS HAS NEVER FAILED A FAMILY. NUMEROUS TIMES SCHEDULED EVENTS ARE EITHER POSTPONED OR RESCHEDULED TO ACCOMODATE GRIEVING FAMILIES. HISTORICALLY THE CLERGY AT ST. STEPHENS HAS ALWAYS MADE THEMSELVES AVAILABLE FOR 'NON-MEMBER' FUNERALS. I AM GRATEFUL FOR THIS SPECIAL MINISTRY. IN 2016 OUR FUNERAL HOME LAUNCHED A MAJOR REMODELING. THREE DAYS BEFORE THE PROJECT BEGAN, PASTOR'S KYLE AND MISSY SHOWED UP AT MY OFFICE, UNANNOUNCED, AND OFFERED ME A KEY TO THE CHURCH. I WAS ALBLE TO HAVE A FACILITY TO DO BUSINESS, NO QUESTIONS ASKED. I HAVE BEEN BLESSED TO HAVE ST. STEPHENS UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AS A NEIGHBOR AND COMMUNITY PARTNER. MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS THE CHURCH AND IT'S MINISTRY.

RICHARD A. STINE, PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR  
TAYLOR-STINE FUNERAL HOME, INC.  
903 E. THIRD STREET  
MERRILL, WI 54452

July 12, 2019

RE: Saint Stephens United Church of Christ  
903 E. Second Street  
Merrill, WI 54452

This is a letter of reference in regard to the call for a Senior Minister to Saint Stephens United Church of Christ in Merrill, Wisconsin.

Full disclosure: I am the Business Manager here at Saint Stephens (since January 2015) and really enjoy my job, and the opinions/insights I offer are based on my experience in this position. I am not actually a member of this congregation or even denomination, yet I have been welcomed into this church with open arms (a testimony to the ministry and the people of Saint Stephens!). Even though I don't "belong" to Saint Stephens, I *belong* here. I feel called to be here, to be a part of Saint Stephens, to help this church community grow and thrive, and to find ever-growing ways to serve our God right here, right now. I feel like I am making the contribution God wants me to make.

Saint Stephens United Church of Christ has so many strengths. Among them I include the people of this congregation, the "stage" that has been set by our most recent senior pastor's approach to ministry, the building complex, the staff, and the Holy Spirit that is moving in this place.

1. First the people. While our church demographic tends toward a more mature population, consistent with the trend in many churches that do not have a parochial school, Saint Stephens is also attracting a growing number of young families.

The many retired parishioners form a strong network of volunteers that enable Saint Stephens to step out in faith to offer programs like "Dinner @ Five, A Community Table at Saint Stephens," a community free-will meal served here every single Monday night staffed entirely by volunteers; the administration and coordination of the Merrill Community "Food For Kids" program that works with other churches to provide food that goes into the backpacks of many kids in our community for the weekends; and many other church and community outreach programs Saint Stephens supports. These volunteers are critical to the success of such programs, and they also perform vital church functions (from counting money to running the Scrip program to organizing Vacation Bible School and much more). In a culture where the vast number of adults are in the workforce, a mature population supports our needs in this area.

Our young people and families are another growing strength. As more families with young children join Saint Stephens, the nursery and Sunday School programs are growing in numbers. Baptism numbers are increasing, for both members and non-members, so opportunities for church growth and creating the church of the future are right at our fingertips. We are hearing the stories of the new people who have joined Saint Stephens, and the reasons they are joining, including comments like these: feeling immediately welcomed, feeling valued and loved by the congregation and staff, being encouraged to get involved (even if they aren't actually members yet), and feeling they have entered into a real community.

The people in this congregation are resilient and amenable to change when it is presented with sound reason and enthusiasm and their thoughts/feelings/needs are considered, heard, and respected. This is a huge positive when trying to grow a church and embrace a community and world outlook that can make a difference in today's culture. (Yes, there are still some holdouts. That is reality. But even they are softening as the Spirit leads them.)

Saint Stephens is more than just a church. It is an active and growing community, with all that the word community implies. And what we've seen so far at Saint Stephens (the changes and growth and enthusiasm I've witnessed over the last 4 ½ years) is just the beginning of what Saint Stephens can become, given the leadership of an open, honest, communicative, and engaging team ... of ministers, Church Council leaders, staff, and lay people. Many, many seeds have been sown. Now it is up to all of us, to each of us, to tend those seeds and watch them grow.

2. Our most recent Senior Minister was here five years, sowing seeds, before being called by the Holy Spirit to move back to Michigan. Over the last year, our Associate Minister, Rev. Lucas Williams, has joined him in tending these seeds and sowing seeds of his own, with his seeds planted largely in the areas focusing on our congregation's youth (like Sunday School, Confirmation, youth groups, and Vacation Bible School).

Many of the "seeds" planted in the last five years have been seeds of engagement and interaction ... with people (including staff), with the community, with needs in our community and saying "yes" to opportunities for Saint Stephens to help meet some of these needs, and with a vibrant, engaging approach to ministry. He, and the people of Saint Stephens, embraced new ways of "doing church" and dialoguing with one another, with relating to other people beyond first impressions, and with gently challenging paradigms. I am hopeful that our Search Team will discern, and the new Senior Minister the Holy Spirit is nudging on to come to Saint Stephens will discern, that this is a congregation of fertile soil ... a garden that has been prepared for an even more expansive and inclusive ministry of hope. A place where people will be encouraged to continue listening to and sharing our stories with another. A place where the Holy Spirit can move and live. And I pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the right person to become the new Senior Minister at Saint Stephens, one who will continue to plant, to tend and nurture the seeds already planted, and to grow a garden, a congregation, that will glorify God now and into the next generations.

In the church office, the first place most visitors to church come, we have a saying in big letters on the wall. It says: "BE KIND for everyone you meet is going through something you know nothing about." Countless people have come into the office and commented on it. It resonates with people, both visitors and congregants. It is a guiding principle of our staff here and, it is becoming a part of the culture of Saint Stephens.

3. Our building complex. Saint Stephens has existed in this community for more than 100 years and is blessed to have a large impressive church building that stands as a pillar in this community and is highly visible, and an expansive building complex with ample room for church and community functions. This enables us to be a visible, interactive part of this community and to invite others into this space. The congregation of Saint Stephens is involved in a Capital Campaign (called "NOW!") to make needed improvements to our physical structures and hopefully (if enough funds are raised) for a "mission" piece that can expand our faith beyond our physical walls. Just within the last six months, donations raised have funded the complete replacement of

the sanctuary roof, the parsonage and garage roofs, and the purchase of a new state-of-the-art organ for our worship space. The Spirit is definitely moving here, in many ways!

4. I would be remiss if I did not also credit our current staff as a strength of Saint Stephens. While several staff members are relatively new in their respective positions, each person on our staff is highly qualified and individually performs well, but equally important, we work together as a team with a spirit of warm camaraderie and joint ownership, each doing whatever is necessary to fulfill our individual and collective missions. Each of us is committed to “doing church well,” and we do it with a (most days) joyful spirit and a sense of humor. There is a genuine spirit of love and much laughter that accompanies our mission and our daily interactions, and I think that the congregation relates to that in a truly positive way.

Like all churches, Saint Stephens United Church also has opportunities. There are always areas where a church can expand, grow, and develop, and I guess I prefer to call these things opportunities rather than areas for improvement, though they can be that, as well.

One such opportunity is to provide more ways for adults and young adults to grow individually in their faith. Small groups (for ministry, discussion, or Bible study) is an area yet to be fully developed here, which could help address this need, as an example. Within our current church management software system, we have identified Pathways that children can follow sequentially (and in a few areas as youth simultaneously). For instance, a natural progression would follow a child from baptism to the nursery, then through the various grade levels of Sunday School, then through 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Faith Formation, and then to and through Confirmation and youth group (middle school and then high school). But once a parishioner reaches adulthood, at Saint Stephens, there are no options for continuing faith development beyond participation in worship/music worship. Some social opportunities exist, but a combination of social and Christian growth opportunities to create a Pathway for adults would be a great addition to Saint Stephens, and developing a progression that adults can opt into for their own faith development would be an asset.

Ministries and fellowship that center around family life might also be beneficial, as families can use support, at every stage. Additionally, more opportunities for singles at various stages of life might be beneficial. And more opportunities for congregants to socialize with one another as community doing activities they enjoy is always a plus.

Another opportunity, which has already begun but must be seen through to conclusion, is our NOW! Capital Campaign. It is still a challenge to meet our \$700,000 goal, which would enable Saint Stephens to replace our boilers, refurbish and redecorate the sanctuary, expand the size of the Kuck Lounge, and find ways of reaching out in mission. We have a great start with pledges totaling \$442,511 as of this date, and we can build on that. The new roofs on the sanctuary, the parsonage, and the garage, along with our beautiful new organ, have set the stage for people to see what their investment in the NOW! Capital Campaign can accomplish. And this has long been a church with determined parishioners. When they set their mind to accomplish a goal and can envision it, they make it happen.

There are many other opportunities here at Saint Stephens going forward. Increasing security measures at our building complex, expanding our ministry to include technology that enables live streaming of worship, and community and world outreach in new ways are just a few ideas.

With the size of the building complex, the needs that become apparent in our community when we open our eyes to see them, our mission to “do church better” in original and genuine ways, and diverse groups of people in the congregation and on staff to embrace these opportunities, we have such great potential for doing whatever we set out to do at Saint Stephens, with the grace of God.

Demographically, Saint Stephens is one of the four (or maybe five) biggest churches in our small community of about 10,000 people here in Merrill, Wisconsin. It’s a beautiful place to live and work and raise a family, or retire, and to become actively involved in our faith, our community, and the greater world ... in God-pleasing ways. It has been said that, if we could join together with the other four or five big churches here, and set our minds to a common task, there is almost nothing we couldn’t accomplish. I would like to add that “if God is for us, who can be against us.” The possibilities are endless, not only in conjunction with neighboring churches, but just here alone in this place ... Saint Stephens United Church of Christ ... when the Holy Spirit is at work through the people of God. I pray that God will help the candidate destined to be the next Senior Minister here at Saint Stephens to discern that this is the place he/she is called to be ... to make a difference, to do God’s work, to be a blessing. When we listen to the Holy Spirit, individually and collectively, all things are possible ...

Blessings!

Tina L. Scott  
607 N. Cleveland Street | Merrill, WI 54452  
715.212.0767 | tina@ststephensucc.net