

Southern New England Conference, United Church of Christ  
Church Mini-Profile for Bridge Ministry

Congregation: First Congregational Church of Westbrook

Date: September 1, 2021

*1. A one paragraph description of your church's identity:*

The First Congregational Church of Westbrook (WCC) is a covenantal church. Although our membership comprises people from different faith backgrounds and individual beliefs, the members agree “to walk together in Christian love and sincerity, and to support the church, so far as we are able, by our prayers, our presence, our gifts and our service.” WCC is a medium-size congregation, located on the Connecticut shoreline of the Long Island Sound. WCC places high value on traditional worship, including prayer, scripture, sermons and music. The music program is strong and includes a dedicated, talented choir, organist/pianist and bell choir. Small groups for faith formation and fellowship have high importance. A strong youth ministry includes fellowship opportunities and an annual mission trip. WCC is actively developing its community service programs, including the operation of a Shoreline Soup Kitchen and Pantry (SSKP) meal site. Community outreach activities continue to resonate with the congregation as WCC has recently proclaimed itself to be a Mission Driven Church.

*2. A one paragraph summary of the church's history:*

The First Congregational Church of Westbrook was organized on June 29, 1726 by Reverend William Worthington, and fourteen charter members consisting of 8 women and 6 men. The first meeting house was forty feet long and thirty feet wide and built in 1728. After 100 years, it became too small for the growing congregation, so a second meeting house was built on the same site to house the expanding membership which included its Ladies Society, which was organized in 1854. A Young People's Society was formed in 1890 and developed into today's Senior High Youth Group. This church building was destroyed by fire on Christmas Eve, 1892. In July 1894, the cornerstone for the foundation [of a new building] was laid. During the Great Hurricane of 1938, the roof collapsed, the bell tower was torn off, and water filled the sanctuary. Repairs were made and the church continued to serve the needs of its growing membership with enlargements and renovations occurring in 1964, 1970 and the early 1990's to add classrooms, offices, Pastor's study, a parlor and a new wing. The current sanctuary, with its newly restored stained-glass windows, can hold two hundred members and its classrooms can support a bustling Sunday School of one hundred thirty children. During its 294 years of history, the First Congregational Church of Westbrook has had only twenty-six resident ministers. The church has enjoyed a long history of tradition with many long-standing minister services and a congregation with strong community connections.

*3. A one paragraph description of the mission and/or purpose of your church:*

### **Our Church Vision Statement**

To be a people inspired by the Holy Spirit;  
Passionately committed to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ;  
Faithfully living the Great Commandment;  
And through whom God brings his kingdom on earth.

### **Our Mission Statement**

Inviting all to connect, through love and service, to God,  
to one another and to our community.

The congregation decided to move forward in areas that carry out our Vision and Mission and include tangible, specific outcomes:

- Small Group Ministry
- Family Faith Formation
- Physical Plant Upgrade (Fellowship Hall and Kitchen for Meal Site)
- Youth Ministry
- Open and Affirming Process
- Community Ministry (Literacy Volunteers)

Our vision, mission and these priority areas make up our current map and focus. Connection to community both internal and external is highly valued and sought by the congregation. Many see these priorities as the need to identify and participate in specific community programs that have an impact on Westbrook and surrounding communities. Some interpret community outreach as embracing larger social issues such as equal rights, social justice and environmental stewardship. A key objective for a bridge minister is helping the congregation explore and refine its sense of community outreach while encouraging individual spiritual growth.

### **Sermons**

The sermon is the focus of our worship service. Our congregation expects a well thought out, Bible-based message delivered with expertise and passion. Sermons should relate to the daily lives of everyone regardless of age or life circumstances and reflect our times. Our sermons are encouraging and sustaining but also challenging as new ideas and ways of thinking are presented. They should engage the listeners in discovering new ways to discern God's will and be able to reach our youth, the future of our congregation. Sermons are available on-line at our church's website.

#### *4. Statistical Summary:*

Active membership: 150

Total reported membership: 318

Sunday morning average attendance:

In person = 30 to 40 in the summer after opening up after Covid

Zoom = 12-16 after opening up after Covid

Facebook views of Sermon video after Sunday = 20

TV rebroadcast = unknown

Church School registrants during Covid: 3

Members serving on Boards and Committees (not including ad hoc committees or small groups): 69

Church Cabinet (10)

Board of Deacons (9)

Vision and Planning Council (3)

Pastor / Parish Relations Committee (4)

Board of Trustees (7)

Mission Committee (4)

Stephen Ministers (11)

Delegates to State, Regional & other ecclesiastical organizations (0)

Personnel Committee (4)

Property Committee (7)

Historian and Publicity (2)

Moderator, Vice-Moderator (2)

Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer (2)

Financial Secretary, Assistant Financial Secretary (2)

Parish Nurses (1)

UCC Delegate (1)

Total budget: \$265,000

Results of stewardship campaigns:

2018: 87 pledges, received \$190,569/\$193,948 pledged

2019: 88 pledges, received \$230,534/\$233,035 pledged

2020: 83 pledges, received \$240,010/\$232,357 pledged

2021: 64 pledges, \$160,000 pledged

Missions Giving, average over 5 years: 4.8% of budget

5. *Describe the compensation package you are offering, including dollar amounts. If less than full-time, specify the hours to be worked.*

The compensation for this position is \$105,000 annually (total package) consisting of salary and benefits. Package is negotiable based on experience and candidate's requirements for benefits. We attempt to adhere to UCC guidelines for compensation. The church is willing to adjust the compensation specifics in a manner mutually agreeable to the minister and First Congregational Church; and/or a manner that takes maximum advantage of tax liability questions. The package includes up

to one week of vacation for every three months of service (4 weeks) and one week of continuing education leave for every six months of service (2 weeks).

6. *Volunteer Ministries of the Church (including music, fellowship, service):*

Non-pandemic

- Confirmation Class
- Family Ministry volunteers
- Coffee hour
- Fundraisers including Harvest Fair and Tag Sale
- Offering counters
- Flowers and Decorations
- Friday Night Live Events each month
- Church bazaar at Christmas time
- Craft group
- Faith formation for young families
  - Bunny Brunch
  - Parents' Day out for Christmas shopping

Ongoing

- Deacons
- Sponsor for Boy Scouts
- Small group leadership (book studies, bible studies)
- Stephen Ministers
- Choir
- Meal site Teams (Shoreline Soup Kitchen)
- Literacy Volunteers
- Virtual Coffee Hour
- Lenten Devotionals at Easter – written by Congregation and shared via email
- Drive-by ashes at Easter during Pandemic
- Blessings at community events
  - Annual Tree lighting ceremony and Parade
  - Memorial Day Parade
- Prayer Shawl Ministry
- Helping Hands Ministry (Collations for Funerals, meals for congregation members, rides to church, rides to appointments, etc.)
- Ladies Society
- Church cleanup
- Blessing Box: Leave or take non-perishable food items

Mission

- Giving Tree at Christmas
- Crop Walk
- Housing for 2 families at below market value
- One Great Hour of Sharing
- Unicef at Halloween
- Heifer Project
- Bag It Sunday (collects food)

- Back Packs for students
- Community Outreach
  - Narcotics anonymous meets in our church
  - Alanon group meets in our church
  - Alcoholics Anonymous meets in our church
- Youth Group
  - Youth group meetings
  - Yearly Mission trip
  - SYNC (Shoreline Youth Now Connected) collaboration with other local churches
  - Sunday school
  - Vacation Bible School with a neighboring town

7. *Staff Positions (indicate full time vs. part time, members vs. non-members):*

- **Minister of Faith Formation:** Vacant. Being covered by volunteers
- **Office Administrator:** Karen Amendola has managed our Church Office for 6 years. She is the pleasant voice of First Congregational Church when someone calls, and is responsible for maintaining the office, compiling and printing the weekly bulletins, offering reports, and producing the monthly newsletter, *The Bell Buoy*. Part time, member
- **Housekeeper:** Patty Ward works as the Church Housekeeper. She is responsible for cleaning and maintenance of the church, Fellowship Hall and the Sunday school classrooms. Part time, member
- **Organist/Choir Director:** Open position
- **Bell Choir Director:** David Carey leads our Handbell Choir. He conducts practices after worship on Sundays. Part time, member
- **Faith Community Nurse:** Lyn Posner is our staff nurse. She conducts visits with congregation members dealing with medical issues as well as meditation meetings. She communicates with the congregation via email and personalized telephone calls. Part time, member
- **Technical Support:** Jake Lindy runs technical aspects of the Sunday worship and Zoom worship. Part time, non-member
- **Other paid staff** include the Pratt House Manager. Part time, member

8. *Describe the ongoing pastoral responsibilities of the interim pastor you are seeking:*

1. Lead 9:45 Sunday Worship Service (with monthly Communion both virtual and in person).

\*Worship is also broadcast via Zoom and posted to Facebook, with the pastor responsible for sending to the congregation the weekly links to the service and virtual coffee hour (as applicable).

\*Recorded service is delivered to Comcast to be broadcast on local cable TV later in the week.

2. Additional Services expected:

- \* Monthly healing service (currently on hold due to Covid)
- \* Maundy Thursday
- \* Ash Wednesday
- \* Two Easter Services (sunrise at beach with youth group, 9:45 sanctuary)
- \* Christmas Eve service(s) (5pm and/or 7:30pm and/or 11pm)

3. Provide pastoral services for weddings, funerals and baptisms.
4. Provide counseling and/or referral in crisis situations.
5. Visit hospitalized and home bound members, as well as make other pastoral calls.
6. Deliver communion to home bound members as requested.
7. Provide leadership for Church staff.
8. Attend all standing committee meetings (Deacons, Trustees, Cabinet, Mission).
9. Conduct twice monthly confirmation class.
10. Provide Weekly Blast communication to the congregation.
11. Provide Prayer Chain communication and updates.
12. Coordinate/ lead small groups through the year.
13. Participate with the laity in representing the congregation in Association and Conference matters.
14. Confer with the newly called Pastor to arrange for a smooth transition.
15. Newsletter communications
16. Possibly Facebook communications

9. *Describe what objectives you are hoping to accomplish during the interim period:*

We had our All-Church Interim Meeting on Sunday, March 21, 2021. The Holy Spirit met us there! Attendance was high; conversation was focused and thoughtful. The Congregation decided:

- a) We will be a community-focused, Mission driven church, with growing Sunday school and youth programs.
- b) We've allowed our attention to be diverted by other internal issues and events. It's time to re-focus. All of us must remain diligent to maintain a mission focus.
- c) WCC will be reintroducing ourselves to the Westbrook community as a mission driven church that welcomes everyone. "We're still open..."

- d) Instead of mission and outreach being led and handled by a handful of people in the church, social outreach will now be a full church undertaking! Initial focus will be on specific community service projects.

We have mounted a marketing campaign using local newspapers for visibility of our Mission. We plan to continuously invite all members (active and inactive) and potential members to all of our activities, neighbor to neighbor, on Facebook, etc. It is incumbent on all members to invite and encourage their neighbors to join us. While we are trying to determine the “how” to carry out our mission we need the unselfish support of all members.

*10. Describe how you expect your interim pastor to work with you on the five focus points of transition:*

- **HERITAGE** – The church wishes to see itself as a beacon of light in the community – we are an integral part of Westbrook and that desire continues; however, we need to help the congregation understand that adaptation to more current community needs and “concept of church” are necessary to maintain our history of community service and commitment. We are at a plateau in the life of our church and without “new birth” we will decline.
- **LEADERSHIP** – Collaborative leadership is essential – evolving from a highly paternalistic model under a long serving pastor to a current model that requires more volunteer participation. We have had some success but lay leadership still needs support and guidance in this effort. The congregation needs to feel a sense of strong, dynamic, team leadership from pastoral, faith formation and music leaders. There is a need to encourage frequent and regular communication forums (i.e. home meetings, feedback sessions.) More frequent assessment of goals and willingness to adapt these goals are needed.
- **MISSION** – The church mission resonates with the congregation but it needs “operational” assessment. Are we clear on how to fulfill the mission? Example: many see community outreach as service to others such as Mission trip, meal site, ride assistance to homebound, Habitat, etc. At this time, the congregation seems less interested in community outreach defined as social activism. Many see this as divisive and overtly political. As noted, the congregation is diverse in its theology and politics and social activism creates an appearance of favoring one viewpoint over another.
- **CONNECTIONS** – Our members strongly support the concept of being a welcoming community to all seeking Jesus Christ and church affiliation. They are less comfortable with statements and/or positions that may unintentionally communicate preference. Long-term members may lack perspective of different churches and denominational philosophy. Historically WCC has had more of an independent focus. Congregation needs to be fully informed and encouraged to openly discuss the tenets of the national UCC.
- **FUTURE** – Church leadership, both pastoral and lay, recognize the major challenges faced by churches today: loss of membership and waning financial

commitment, the loss of influence and impact the church held in previous generations, etc. Leadership understands the need for adaptation, willingness to change and consider new strategies for growth and impact. There is a need to find a “sweet spot” in which urgency is understood by all while not promoting a “take it or leave it” impression. As a whole, the congregation recognizes loss of membership and is concerned that we stabilize to avoid more losses. This requires the ability to both reassure the congregation that WCC is a place of spiritual renewal, safety and familiarity, and to encourage members to openly discuss their spiritual journeys and become part of the Mission-driven church ideal.

For more information:

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