

WHO ARE WE NOW?

We are a thoughtful and intentional group of believers who hope to embody the truth of our covenant:

As Mountain Rise United Church of Christ we covenant to honor and support our church's mission, to share in the life and work of the church, to seek justice and peace, to care for one another and the Earth, and to walk humbly together, listening for the voice of a still-speaking God.

We do this by sharing our time, talent, and “treasure” as we are able, realizing that each member or friend gives according to his/her/their ability; hence, the knitter of mittens, the vocalist in the choir, and the writer of checks matter equally.

We do this by participating constructively in ministry opportunities, local and global, while bearing in mind the advantages we have been given; hence, we choose to be cognizant of the effects of white privilege, racial inequities, and gender differences. We always choose inclusiveness.

We recognize the organic nature of organizational structures; hence, the rewriting of our church bylaws in 2021 to better reflect our most current thinking about the church's intentions.

We take responsibility for being informed about evidence of social injustices: we read together, pray together, and act together in ways that address the injustices peacefully and constructively.

We recognize and train those who are called to care for others in times of crisis; hence, the establishment of our Care Ministry Committee that works to offer emotional, spiritual, and material support for our most vulnerable members. It also oversees the work of our Stephen Ministry.

We trust the leaders of our church to work on our behalf and to inform us when they need our help; hence, recent meetings when the Council has asked members to stay after church to discuss an issue about which the Council needs additional input. Or when ministry teams simply want to share the results of their investigations into issues that impact the larger circle...as when the men's group opened their meeting to all when they asked our congressional representative to speak about immigration.

We also acknowledge our limitations and know when to look to others for help; hence, the recruitment of a children and youth ministry coordinator to help us help our children. We do not expect that new hire to do our work for us, but we have failed to resolve this need on our own.

We believe in the value of strengthening ecumenical ties, as well as maintaining our relationship to the larger UCC community; hence, we send representatives to regularly scheduled meetings and participate in ecumenical events that strengthen the unity of the larger religious community.

We understand that the purpose of worship is to strengthen our faith so that we might become better servants of that faith, and that we are only asked to bring our most authentic selves to that setting; hence, the sounds of babies crying, people laughing, or the church's House Band moving us to clap our hands in time to their music are all signs of God's presence among us.

Do we do all of the above perfectly? No! Is there room for growth and change? Absolutely! We are an independent and free-thinking people who are looking for someone to join this very human tribe and lead us forward.

WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?

Mountain Rise United Church of Christ is located in the town of Perinton which includes the Village of Fairport. Many residents conflate the two, largely because they share a school system, post office, and other governmental agencies. Due to its location on the Erie Canal, the village hosts a variety of recreational opportunities, and the town of Perinton was recognized in 2008 as one of the nation's 100 best places to live (RelocateAmerica.com). Also named "Trail Town USA," Perinton features many miles of hiking trails, as well as numerous parks and outdoor festivals.

Approximately 10 miles away is the city of Rochester, and as with most urban areas, its demographic differs from that of the surrounding suburbs. According to ACT Rochester, an organization that devotes itself to providing current and credible data concerning the quality of life in Rochester, there are many needs that require the assistance of its neighbors. There are large gaps in "educational and economic outcomes among persons of different racial and ethnic backgrounds" (www.actrochester.org). For instance, though the child poverty rate in our *region* is on par with NY State and the nation, there is an alarming disparity in the City of Rochester "where 52% of African American and 49% of Hispanic children lived in poverty in 2015-19" (Ibid.). Rochester remains third on the list of the 10 poorest U.S. metropolitan areas. Additionally, according to the New York State Education Department, the High School Cohort Graduation Rate reveals that Monroe County performs worse than all other counties and regions.

Perhaps our Mission Statement best captures the true spirit of what we feel called to do:

Mountain Rise United Church of Christ strives to be an open and affirming gathering of Christ's followers welcoming all to the journey of faith with creative worship, caring community, learning, and service to God, one another, and the world.

Printed as a reminder in the Sunday bulletin and articulated by our pastor at the end of worship, we are sent out to serve. "As worship ends, let our service begin." Period. This progressive, justice-seeking, and service-minded community takes that charge very seriously. Many Mountain Risers serve on multiple committees, not because there are too few to do the work, but because they feel called to help in a myriad of ways. There are five ministry committees: Faith Formation, Fellowship, Service and Advocacy, Spiritual Life and Worship, and Care. Currently, our Faith Formation committee is inactive, which is not to say that we are neglecting our children, but that we are in the midst of hiring a children and youth coordinator to help us reestablish the primacy of that ministry.

Examples of our responses to the call to serve: Habitat for Humanity, the Salem Nutrition Center, Rochester City School #2, Learning Links (a tutoring service for children who live in low-income housing), and Advent House (hospice care). We also assist Foodlink, Teen Empowerment, Isaiah House, and the YWCA. We have traveled to our sister church in Honduras (Viviendo en Amor Y Fe) and have hosted them when they traveled to the States. Several Mountain Risers have traveled to

Palestine to witness the Occupation and to help replant olive trees. We value personal connections. We also prepare Christmas gifts and food baskets for those living in Habitat homes, provide meals to teens and young men living in shelters, and respond to national emergencies by participating in mission trips to assist with rebuilding communities devastated by natural disasters.

We share our building with Etz Chaim (a Reform Jewish community), Perinton Nursery School, and Alcoholics Anonymous. Other organizations that use our facility are the Federation of Monroe County Environmentalists and Audubon Executive meetings. Our building serves as a polling site and is available to many other local groups needing an hospitable space in which to meet.

In conclusion, “neighbor” means to take care of each other, foster healthy relationships with local friends, and travel to serve as best we can. “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME?

God is calling us to become relevant to a more diverse population; diverse in race, age, world view, and religious experience. We are viewed by many in the Rochester community as an hospitable church, welcoming and affirming, but we tend to draw from a predictable demographic. Most of our long-term members are over fifty, as are many of the members and friends who have joined us recently. Most of us are of a liberal and progressive mind-set, as are many of the new members we have welcomed. Both populations are fairly well educated, cultured, and financially comfortable. We would like to appeal to others who might come from different backgrounds and with needs we haven't yet anticipated. This goal would also require increased community involvement, with the goal of meeting new friends where they live, without expecting to be the generous benefactor or host. We are called to learn and benefit from the company and lives of others.

God is calling us to provide our children with a vibrant and relevant youth program, one that offers instruction in biblical literacy, application of that literacy to their actual lives, and intergenerational events so that they realize their importance to our faith community. We are called to view the “curriculum” of this program in the broadest and most holistic sense. Such curriculum would activate our children's minds, bodies, and spirits. It would engage their imaginations, and they would explore how to apply what they've learned to service in the world.

In reference to both points mentioned above, God is calling us to even greater flexibility in determining what it means to be a church, a community of the faithful, and shepherds in ministry. In our ever-changing world, we do not want to default immediately to that which is familiar and/or comfortable.

God is calling us to greater participation in local and national ecumenical and interreligious endeavors. Though we have our “regulars” who volunteer consistently to participate in such efforts, we need to reach out and invite others to join the work. We are called to the work of recruiting new perspectives and personal histories.

God is calling us to recognize the difficulties of change and to be patient with this transition we are about to experience. We need to exercise our powers of discernment and imagination if we are to proceed intentionally and prayerfully. We need to celebrate our history as a congregation under Greg's leadership and offer an equally spirited welcome to our interim pastor.