

## **Church Profile**

Lake Mills First Congregational—United Church of Christ

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### **Position Title: Pastor**

- This is a very small congregation (about 74 officially “active voting members” as of January 2022, with about 50 actually regular attenders). Therefore the role is also synonymous with “senior pastor” because he or she will be the only pastor.
- Our pastor from 1969 through 1998 was typically referred to as “the minister,” consistent with the Congregational tradition, or by his title, “Reverend.” Subsequent clergy have preferred the title “pastor”; we are flexible about a candidate’s title preferences.

### **MINISTRY DESCRIPTION / SCOPE OF WORK**

We are seeking a permanent, “called” or “settled,” pastor following the death of our last one in late 2021. In summary, you will be our only pastor. As discussed in more detail below and under “Worship Practices, Theology, and Governance,” the basic job description expressed in the church Bylaws is: “It shall be the duty of the Pastor to set a good example to the Members, to conduct all worship services on Sundays, holidays, and such other days as the [Council] may desire, to work for the advancement of the Church, to direct the work of religious education..., to administer the Holy Sacraments and Rites, visit and pray with the sick, visit the Members regularly, comfort the distressed, conduct [confirmation classes], to encourage, enlist, and train lay leadership and perform all such duties and responsibilities as are customary and required of a Pastor’s office in the UCC.”

Importantly, this church is congregationally led and governed. The pastor exercises a leadership role through advice and consultation with a church Council elected by the members. The pastor is a non-voting member of this Council and collaborates with its Chair and members and the Office Administrator (pastor’s assistant) in setting its agenda.

The church Council and the membership (through congregational meetings at least annually) determine the church’s budget and strategic priorities. This Council embodies all traditional responsibilities of both leadership bodies in the Congregational tradition: the Board of Trustees (for management of the church’s physical and financial assets) and Diaconate (for stewardship, congregational wellbeing, and pastoral or worship-support functions). However, the pastor is expected to be the direct, day-to-day supervisor of the church’s staff—currently just two part-time employees: An Office Administrator, and a Custodian. The pastor also works closely with two musicians who play the organ and electronic keyboard for services, and coordinates with church members who volunteer to assist in recording church services and decorating the sanctuary, preparing communion on the first Sunday of the month, taking collection, etc.

It is expected that the pastor has primary responsibility for the content and delivery of Sunday and other worship services. A strong tradition is a Christmas Eve candlelight service, and typically pastors would provide at least one special service during Holy Week before Easter, such as Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and/or Good Friday—however, until interrupted by the pandemic, Lake Mills churches collaborated to provide a community noon Good Friday service. Every pastor modifies the order of worship and style at least slightly based on his or her preferences, but should consider preferences of membership and the Council. An affinity for ecumenical collaboration would be an asset.

The position is considered full-time and paid accordingly, although workload is likely to be initially less than what a full-time pastor often sees in a number of areas: Consider that during the entirety of our last pastor's four-year tenure there were no weddings, no youth Sunday school, no confirmation classes, no youth group, minimal instruction of prospective new members, and only about two baptisms. The number of funerals required annually will vary from none to perhaps three or four, depending in part on the extent to which the pastor may wish to accommodate requests to conduct services for people in the community who do not have a recent church affiliation. In place of some of these traditional activities, a pastor should anticipate placing emphasis on preparing sermons and worship services, visiting members and friends of the church, follow-up with those who have indicated interest in finding a church home, and general community outreach that may help to build and maintain membership.

The congregation and regular attenders are primarily older people and place a strong importance on a pastor that is interested in, and willing to visit, those who may be experiencing temporary or long-term illness or disability limiting their ability to attend worship. At the same time, it is an expectation of a permanent pastor to maintain some regular office hours, which may occasionally be modified to accommodate the visiting schedule. Our last permanent pastor lived a small distance from Lake Mills (in Sun Prairie, to the east of Madison, Wisconsin) and initially maintained office hours four mornings a week; he received four weeks of paid vacation annually. For the last year of his tenure, he proposed (and received) a reduction in salary, office hours, and vacation but remained on-call other times (until interrupted by illness). We would expect a new pastor to similarly establish some regular weekday office hours to facilitate coordination with staff, and during which members or the community may call or drop by.

The pastor is also expected to provide Christian education; however, this role is likely to initially focus on adult education. In addition to Sunday sermons, some members have appreciated a pastor-led bible study, typically on Sunday mornings. This permits a deeper exploration and discussion of books of the bible or thematic topics. An interest in, and appreciation of, adult education principles would, therefore, also be an asset—such as understanding that participants may wish to discuss and compare their own views and interpretations rather than merely absorbing “received wisdom” in a lecture format.

We need a person of many skills—ideally an engaging but humble speaker, committed to getting to know members personally—interested in the old as well as the young—who plans well, follows through, and organizes the staff and congregation in a way that feels inclusive. But we are equally prepared to “grow with” a less-experienced pastor that is up for a challenge and wishes to become part of a caring church family and small community.

### **POTENTIAL COMPENSATION**

The \$75,900 stated as a “salary basis” includes some non-salary costs traditionally paid by the church, including reimbursement of work-related mileage and conferences, and a small allowance for books, publications, and continuing education. It excludes compensation traditionally paid to ministers by families for conducting funerals and weddings, which are to some degree at the pastor's discretion.

### ***Salary and Housing Allowance:***

We provide a salary and benefits package consistent with the Wisconsin Conference's 2021-23 Compensation Manual. Our congregation is in the smallest of the church-size compensation tiers in the manual, for which a guideline of \$44,800 - \$73,500 is given for the overall salary range including housing allowance. Placement within this range is to consider the candidate's education and prior experience. However, experienced candidates (such as our most recent pastor) who might merit higher pay at a larger congregation may still find the position attractive due to its flexibility, location, and the ability to focus on a small-congregation ministry.

That said, this church has since 1969 paid a housing allowance, which has risen over time (with increasing housing costs and recognition of the value of this tax-free benefit) from 27.5% to 41.7%. The proportion of total salary designated for housing can be changed based on your household's ability to use it. (One benchmark holds that, to be affordable, housing should not exceed 30% of household income, but given rising housing costs and the fact clergy housing allowances can also be used for utilities under IRS regulations, 40% of the clergy salary is possible, particularly if the household has other income covering other expenses).

### ***Pension, Health and Life Insurance:***

The other primary benefits traditionally provided are the employer's share of Social Security and Medicare taxes, a pension contribution (historically through the UCC Pension Boards), and health insurance or a significant contribution to it. Prior to our last pastor, we also provided life insurance. As a very small congregation and employer, we have no unique benefits-purchasing power, but will be as accommodating as possible (for example, if options exist regarding UCC clergy pension contribution levels).

### ***Paid Time Off:***

In recent years we have been very flexible about paid leave or flex-time for illness, family illness, or other family priorities (e.g., attending school events for children or grandchildren). Flex time is at the pastor's discretion as long as good communication is maintained about office hours.

We would want to discuss with you your experience and requirements, but would typically expect to provide 3 weeks of paid vacation to start—4 weeks of vacation upon successful completion of a year with us or to a highly experienced candidate. Vacation time may be used as individual days or blocks of days, but given the nature of pastors' work, sometimes implies the number of Sundays for which a pastor will be off work on Sunday and need to coordinate with the Council for substitute pastors or speakers. This could conceivably be separately negotiated (e.g., 4 weeks of vacation from weekday office hours, but only 3 Sundays off, as this seems about the maximum feasible when no other in-house clergy is available for a congregation).

The next page shows the 2022 adopted budget for pastoral compensation, and two example alternate packages. It was understood when adopted that 2022 is just a "placeholder" that may vary in particulars depending on the timing and requirements of a new pastor.

### Example Compensation Packages:

|                                    | 2022 Budget     | Example A       | Example B       |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Total Salary                       | \$58,000        | \$58,000        | \$60,000        |
| Housing-Designated Portion         | 23,000 (39.7%)  | 14,400 (24.8%)  | 18,000 (30%)    |
| Pension contribution               | \$ 7,800        | \$ 7,800        | \$ 7,800        |
| Social Sec./FICA (7.65% of salary) | \$ 4,400        | \$ 4,400        | \$ 4,600        |
| Health-insurance, reimbursement    | \$ 3,250        | \$ 4,250        | \$ 2,200        |
| Life Insurance                     | \$ 1,000        | 0               | 0               |
| Mileage reimbursement              | \$ 1,200        | \$ 1,200        | \$ 1,200        |
| Books and Continuing educ.         | \$ 250          | \$ 250          | \$ 250          |
| <b>Grand Total</b>                 | <b>\$75,900</b> | <b>\$75,900</b> | <b>\$76,050</b> |

- All examples portray a total salary within the \$44,800 - \$73,500 suggested range for our size congregation. While our active membership is well below the 150 top end of this membership tier, we anticipate a candidate may have some prior experience and merit higher than the minimum.
- For simplicity, all examples assume the same contribution to the UCC Pension Boards or some other retirement plan if allowed.
- The 2022 budget assumes that a pastor's household has housing costs of \$23,000 annually (an average of \$1,916.67 a month), which may be high, particularly if renting in Lake Mills.
- Example A is the same in all respects except that the housing allowance is based on only \$1,200 per month, realistic but perhaps on the low-end for a larger household. Note that varying this percentage does not change the total salary.
- The other difference in Example A assumes that this pastor has other paid-up life insurance but would appreciate more help to buy health insurance, or pay copayments and out-of-pocket costs on insurance already in force, perhaps due to a spouse's work.
- Example B is the same in all respects but assumes a slightly more experienced candidate and higher overall salary (\$60,000). Due to the higher salary, the church's Social Security and Medicare contribution will be slightly higher, as this is a fixed percentage. The church could accommodate the relatively small change in the grand total.
- Example B further assumes that this pastor's household can use \$1,500 per month (30% of salary in this example) for housing-related expenses.

## **COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS**

The City of Lake Mills is situated “on the shores of Rock Lake,” but members of First Congregational live throughout the surrounding school district and as “far away” (approximately 10 miles) as the nearby communities of Waterloo, rural Cambridge, and Johnson Creek. According to the State’s Demographic Services Center, the City’s population grew nearly 10% between 2010 and 2021, from 5,708 in 2010 to an estimated 6,278 in 2021; the adjoining Town of Lake Mills grew more modestly, from 2,070 to an estimated 2,171 over the same period. This suggests that over the decade Lake Mills accounted for over 1/3 the population growth in the historically rural Jefferson County that surrounds it, which grew by about 1,501 people, or 1.79% (from 83,686 to 85,187) through 2021 according to official State estimates.

When the church was built, the area was heavily settled by German immigrants, evident in the surnames and food traditions (e.g., brats) of many longtime residents. However, the City itself reflected a somewhat greater concentration of earlier settlers that demographic historians call “Yankees,” the descendants of American colonial settlers such as the Pilgrims (the original Congregationalists) and other Protestants that had fled Europe (e.g., New York Dutch and French Huguenots), settled in “New England,” and later migrated across the northern tier of states to places like Ohio and Wisconsin. As the population of Lake Mills has grown, it has become more diverse but is still predominantly white/Caucasian—about 96% at the 2010 Census. The second-most common ethnic identity at the 2010 Census was Latino/Hispanic, estimated to be at least 2.3%. All others were less than 1%: (African-American, 0.7%), Asian (0.5%), and Native American (0.2%); however, 1.3% identified with at least two races (multiracial).

Reflecting the Yankee/New-England founders (in 1837), the focal point of the City of Lake Mills is a “commons” (now “Commons Park”) in its downtown business district, with a charming bandstand still used for Memorial Day ceremonies and summer concerts by a City-sponsored band. A noteworthy feature of one side of this central park is the impressive field-stone L.D. Fargo Public Library. The library opened the same year as the First Congregational sanctuary (1902) and these are generally considered the most beautiful and architecturally noteworthy still-used structures in town, while the layout of the commons—surrounded by small shops, the library, and a short walk to a relatively new brick city hall, has been cited by city planners elsewhere as an example of an ideal “walkable” city center.

The Commons Park is regularly used in the summer for farmer’s markets and craft “makers” fairs, as well as an art fair in the early autumn. July and August feature locally grown and inexpensive sweet corn and other produce, and a highlight of summer is “Town and Country Days,” celebrated with a parade and carnival. On Friday nights, and especially during Town and Country Days, locals line up for famous “sliders” from the American Legion hamburger stand. In recent years, a hot dog business has also developed a reputation as one of the best in the state.

In the winter, the City provides an ice rink in the park, and recorded Christmas music sounds from the bandstand. On a frosty February weekend, the season is celebrated with the “Knickerbocker Ice Festival” (named after a business that once carved ice blocks from Rock Lake to supply cities as far away as Chicago in the days before electric refrigeration). This

winter carnival features ice-sculpture carving and ice fishing on the lake, among other activities. Of course, fishing and other outdoor sports are year-round possibilities.

The families of Lake Mills are extremely fortunate to have a community that values education. Its current facilities (high school, middle school, and elementary school) are all state-of-the-art, with the elementary school named “the greenest school in the world” for its energy efficiency when opened in 2014, and an expanded and energy-efficient middle school (serving grades 5-8). The middle school is heated and cooled by a geothermal system and both schools were among the first of the now more than 100,000 schools to earn the U.S. Green Building Council’s prestigious LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification—the Lake Mills schools at the Platinum level, the highest rating available.

Most recently (following the approval of two referenda in November 2018) the high school was expanded and updated, and a brand-new artificial-turf track and athletic field opened. However, with the community “bucking the trend” of declining enrollment in much of the state outside Dane County, the Lake Mills School District is currently proposing the construction of a new “middle-grades” (3-5) or second elementary facility to address overcrowding at the elementary school and to consolidate at a single site the community’s Head Start and 4K programs.

Of less direct interest to a prospective UCC minister, but relevant to understanding the religious tenor and diversity of the community, the educational picture in Lake Mills also includes Saint Paul’s Lutheran elementary school and Lakeside Lutheran high school. The high-school in particular has a regional reputation, with students traveling from communities as far away as Madison, McFarland, and Oconomowoc to attend, and its sports teams and marching band are friendly rivals with the Lake Mills L-Cats.

One can find the children of Lake Mills involved in a variety of activities, with youth sports increasingly important. The swing of a bat, kick of a soccer ball, clattering of shoulder pads, and swoosh of a basketball falling through the net are commonplace. Traditionally, children also participate in Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and 4H. In the summer, children of all ages enjoy swimming at the City’s two public beaches (one free to residents and non-residents alike). Others enjoy boating and waterskiing. The City boasts a picturesque 18-hole golf course. The area has become known for “motor sports” year-round, such as moto-cross in the summer and snowmobiling in the winter. The City has a bowling center (which most still call “the bowling alley”) and the Rock Lake Activity Center offers lessons in karate, dance, music, and art, and both it and private gyms offer fitness opportunities.

A civic-minded community, Lake Mills hosts several philanthropic groups, such as the Rotary, Lions Club, Optimist Club, Tyranena Ladies Club, and the Lake Mills Community Foundation, all of which raise money for community projects and academic scholarships. To date, the area has been served by both a volunteer Fire Department and Emergency Medical Service (EMS), though both are evolving to partially paid, part-time staff. The Lake Mills-Aztalan Historical Society maintains a visitor center and museum in an historic early church next to Aztalan State Park. Aztalan State Park is known as “Wisconsin’s premier archeological site,” because periodic excavations explore an unusually large, stockaded (walled), pre-Columbian Native American

settlement characterized by unique pyramid mounds, which have been re-built, making the park a favorite stop for tourists and local residents alike to hike and picnic.

One of the State's many bike trails ("The Glacial Drumlin") offers the opportunity to bike toward Milwaukee or toward Madison, an even bigger biking community. Additionally, Jefferson County has some 17 parks of its own, including two on the shores of Rock Lake, which in recent years have been used by First Congregational-UCC for a summer outdoor service and church picnic.

Whatever Lake Mills doesn't offer is usually not far away. While it has a jeweler and several specialty shops that are fun to browse for things like scented candles, soap, and bath supplies (some locally made), routine shopping is limited to one medium-size grocery store, a Walgreens, a Dollar General, and a Kwik Trip—which for those unfamiliar are ubiquitous throughout Wisconsin and beloved for their unpretentious selection of grab-and-go hot food, and low-cost beer, donuts, milk, eggs, and bananas. However, an easy drive west on I-94 to Madison is the state capital and location of the "flagship" school in the University of Wisconsin (UW) System (25 minutes to the East Side, and 40ish to the downtown and University).

Even Lake Mills residents who don't work in Madison (as many do) regularly go there (or a suburb, Sun Prairie, where our last pastor lived) for popular retailers like Target and Costco and chains like Chili's, Olive Garden, and Panera, as well as for scores of world-class restaurants, UW Badger sports, and the nearly as well-known UW Badgers Marching Band. Only 8 miles the other direction, going east toward Milwaukee, is Johnson Creek, which has a Kohls, a movie theater, and a Menards (Wisconsin's answer to Home Depot and Lowes)—and an outlet mall full of popular clothing retailers like The Gap, Banana Republic, and Old Navy.

Both Madison and Milwaukee (as well as other nearby communities, such as Whitewater—another UW branch—and Fort Atkinson, with its Fireside Dinner Theater) offer premiere concert and cultural venues, such as Madison's Overture Hall (a world-class venue for symphony, opera, ballet, and stage musicals) and the Alliant Energy Center (hosting diverse events, such as rock concerts and the World Dairy Expo). The family-friendly Vilas Zoo in Madison is free.

Milwaukee's lakefront hosts both its art museum and, in the summer, Summerfest, or "the Big Gig," the largest summer music festival in the Midwest. Madison typically hosts the largest fireworks display in the Midwest the weekend before Independence Day, though many also enjoy the up-close Lake Mills fireworks—always on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, no matter what day of the week it may fall. Milwaukee also hosts Brewers baseball and the world-champion Milwaukee Bucks, while Packer football in Green Bay is not too far if one is treated to tickets.

Just as Lake Mills is situated in Jefferson County, between what are generally considered the most politically "liberal" and "conservative" counties in the state (Dane and Waukesha, respectively), Lake Mills seems to occupy a middle-ground, breaking with other communities in generally more conservative Jefferson County in some recent elections, and becoming somewhat more of a "suburban" community with numerous residents who did not grow up in the town. Many two-career couples choose to locate here or in also-booming nearby Johnson Creek



(midway between Milwaukee and Madison on I-94) because one commutes to Madison or Janesville while the other commutes to a Milwaukee suburb, or can work from home/anywhere.

Housing costs are generally lower in Lake Mills, whether renting or buying, than in either neighboring county—Waukesha County or Madison and its Dane County suburbs—which appears to be a factor in recent city growth (along with quality schools). And, according to the Lake Mills School District, the school property tax rate is the lowest in the county and has fallen by over 20% in the past 5 years. However, to be fair, whether housing costs are “high” depends on one’s point of reference. The Mayor of nearby Watertown jokingly says she tells people to choose her community because, “You’ll pay more in Lake Mills just because it has ‘Lake’ in the name,” and it is true that homes nearer the lake are more costly than many others for sale downtown or in new subdivisions, as is typically the case. Either way, First Congregational--UCC is happy to provide a clergy housing allowance—which may allow a pastor to substantially cover rental or mortgage costs and utilities from tax-free income.

Occupationally, some church members and many in the surrounding community still work in agriculture (often dairy) or related fields, such as egg production (Jefferson County led the nation in eggs at one time) and cheese packaging and distribution. However, according to the local community college (Madison Area Technical College, or “Madison College”), as many as 25% of the jobs in the county are related to metal fabrication: Waukesha-based S & P 500 member Generac has a production facility in nearby Jefferson, and Lake Mills hosts Toro’s Hammerhead Trenchless division, as well as locally-grown precision manufacturer Aztalan Engineering, Chapter 2 Manufacturing, and tool-and-die makers Seljan and Devor. Other common employers for local residents are construction, schools and government, and medical-related. But of course some are self-employed professionals or work in various retail and sales settings.

Lake Mills is blessed to have the advantages of Wisconsin’s largest cities close by, while enjoying the things that small towns are known for: quiet evenings, friendly and neighborly people, and no violent crime. A “6:00 whistle” still sounds, usually at 6:00, to mark the end of the day, and church bells still ring (often including First Congregational’s as worship begins on Sunday mornings).

## **CHURCH HISTORY AND MEMBERSHIP**

In 1847, a year before Wisconsin statehood, Lake Mills area residents established the Lake Mills First Congregational Church. There were four men and five women at the organizing meeting who became charter members. Women were voting members in the church before they were able to vote in national elections. In 1850 the church went on record favoring the national abolition of slavery. It dedicated its first building in 1852, and within a few decades built the current sanctuary, which was erected in 1901 and dedicated in 1902. (Some windows were evidently added as late as 1912-13). In 1959 the basement meeting hall was expanded, along with adding a modern kitchen and a wing of Christian-education classrooms. However, the congregation continues to this day to worship in the same sanctuary. It has been updated over the years (most recently with new wainscoting in 2020), but still boasts a grand collection of stained-glass windows; three large ones are particularly impressive on sunny Sunday mornings. This historic church is now in need of a pastor committed to the challenge of ministering to

longtime members while engaging with the community to inspire the next generation. (The church presently has no other ordained clergy).

Church membership (particularly active/voting membership) and Sunday worship attendance has steadily declined over the last two decades. The following table will give an indication:

|                          | <b>2022</b> | <b>2019</b> | <b>2014</b> | <b>2010</b> | <b>2005</b> |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Active Church Members*   | 74          | 83 (est.)   | 117         | 148         | 203         |
| Avg. Sunday attendance   | 29 (est.)   | 35          | 47          | 82          | 83          |
| Avg. Youth participation | 1           | 1           | 1+          | 22          | 54          |
| Avg. Adult education     | 0           | 4-5         | 5           | 48          | 18          |

\*Members can be determined to be “inactive” (non-voting) members if they have not specifically resigned but have not participated in any church activities for a period determined by the Church Council.

Average weekly Sunday attendance was reported as 26 in 2021, the last complete year. However, 2020 and 2021 are not comparable to prior years due to extended periods when worship was not held in the sanctuary (primarily as a Covid-19 safety precaution, with construction and pastoral illness other factors). Some outdoor services and remote-broadcast services (via Facebook Live, or prerecorded) were held. In early 2022 a few members continued to rely primarily on those broadcasts, while a few others appear to have fallen away. In-person attendance at Sunday worship in 2022 was between 24 and 28 people until the last Sunday in March, when it began to approach pre-pandemic levels of 29-35.

In both 2018 and 2019 the highest average attendance occurred in April (46 and 47 respectively), Easter no doubt contributing. Some members spend a portion of the winter in warmer climates. However, others vacation in the summer or visit family some Sundays, so the number in worship each Sunday is small, but relatively consistent. Peak worship attendance in recent years was the 2019 Christmas-Eve candlelight service (a longtime tradition of the church), when 50 people of all ages attended. The sanctuary can hold about 200.

Most regular attenders of First Congregational-UCC are over the age of 45—many in their 50s, 60s, and 70s—and several over 80. Nearly all are white, though they reflect significant diversity in their life experiences and vocations. Several are lifelong members, from families going back to the early years of the church. Many regular attenders are retired, recently retired, or nearing retirement, though still active and eager volunteers for the church and larger community.

With only one youth of confirmation age (traditionally 8<sup>th</sup> grade), no youth Sunday school has been offered in the last decade. However, the church facility could easily support re-establishing it. The congregation would love to see it, though it is a “chicken-and-egg” proposition, with younger churchgoing residents of the community more commonly choosing churches that have existing youth programs.

The community hosts a large number and variety of churches for its size. But the only two whose congregations have grown enough to justify constructing new buildings in the last 15 years also offer robust youth programming, including day care: St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran, and the nondenominational, evangelical Real Hope Community Church, favored by the adult

children of several First Congregational members. For many years, First Congregational provided summer vacation bible school in partnership with the larger Moravian Church across the street, and with a new pastor, a similar approach might be an interim step in serving youth.

## **CONGREGATIONAL LIFE**

Talking about congregational life in First Congregational-UCC requires some separation of how things used to be from today. There is a lot of nostalgia about, and wish to someday see again, things that once were—either when members were themselves youth or as recently as two years ago (before the pandemic). An example from the now distant past was the “Advent Workshop” that was conducted annually during the tenure of Reverend Richard Frasier (1969-1998). People of all ages had the opportunity to produce all manner of Christmas decorations, ranging from fresh wreaths to plaster and wood ornaments that the pastor prepared and participants hand painted. Children also enjoyed the punch and big selection of Christmas cookies—and this was *in addition to* similar refreshments after the children’s Christmas pageant.

Other highlights of the church in those days were regular potlucks with the aroma of percolated coffee filling the air, an annual men’s pancake supper (where the Boy Scouts that then met in the church acted as servers), and an annual summer vacation bible school, conducted in partnership with the larger, neighboring (and fairly philosophically aligned) Moravian Church across the street. In some years the pastor somehow found time to lead a youth group as well confirmation classes, and to visit the elderly, hospitalized (sometimes before and after surgery), those imprisoned at Fox Lake, and anyone who invited him. Of course, the larger membership also supported a lay pastor and diaconate, who assisted in pastoral care and stewardship appeals.

In more recent memory, several members of the congregation recall service trips to help the Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi between 2010 and 2014 as a highlight of those years. Volunteers from First Congregational-UCC helped repair homes still in need of repair from Hurricane Katrina. In roughly the same timeframe, a mission trip was also made to an impoverished area of Pittsburgh, and some members volunteered to assist the homeless in Milwaukee. (More common in Lake Mills generally, given its more convenient proximity, has been serving a monthly meal at the Madison men’s drop-in homeless shelter—another potential partnership opportunity with the Moravian church which does this regularly, and perhaps others, such as the United Methodist Church).

The relatively small community of Lake Mills has a longtime ecumenical tradition, with Good-Friday and Thanksgiving community services rotating among churches, and in which clergy of the Roman Catholic and most protestant churches historically participate. These, as well as very limited local charity, were historically coordinated by the Lake Mills Ministerial Association, so an ability and willingness to reach out to other churches and community institutions would be a useful attribute in a settled pastor.

During Lent, First Congregational had a tradition of a Maundy Thursday reenactment of the Last Supper, but as longtime participants passed away or left the congregation, recent pastors have tried to establish new traditions: Interim Pastor Carol Barth (2012-2017) tried a “Tenebrae service of shadows and light” at least once, and our most recent called pastor, Rev. Larry Treece,

conducted Ash Wednesday services (at least in 2019) administering ashes from the previous year's Palm Sunday branches. However, this did not have a strong tradition in the church and was lightly attended. Much more successful was his introduction in 2019 of an unorthodox lasagna dinner followed by a Maundy Thursday service, both in Seward Hall.

The lasagna service was a nod to the pot-luck tradition, which Pastor Larry agreed should be re-established, as well as reflecting his opinion that everyone likes lasagna. He wasn't wrong. The intimate evening meal and worship service was attended by nearly all who were at that time regular Sunday attenders. Pastor Larry had every intention of making it a tradition, but the pandemic precluded it. We're open to a new pastor's new ideas to promote fellowship.

Presently, First Congregational-UCC has two of what might be termed auxiliary organizations: The Half Circle and the Peanut Project. The Half Circle (so named because, "It is never complete; there is always room for one more") is the women's group, which for many years has hosted a Chicken-a-la-King meal as a fundraiser, as well as occasionally raising money through bake sales and the sale of brooms. (Traditionally most churches and non-profit groups in Lake Mills host an annual fundraiser meal, and local residents enjoy attending each other's events).

The Half Circle has also coordinated the production of things like baby bundles and sent them overseas through organizations like Church World Service, or donated them (and birthday-party kits) to the local food pantry. Members of the Half Circle also traditionally serve the "lunch" in Seward Hall after weddings and funerals of church members. Unfortunately, neither the Chicken-a-la-King dinner nor any wedding or funeral receptions were held during 2020 or 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

A unique and popular activity hosted by the church is the Peanut Project. In 1954 a group of church women wanted to find a source of income to help meet some of the financial needs of the church—for example, construction of the Sunday school addition to serve the children of the Post-War Baby Boom. They discovered and copied a project of another Congregational church to prepare raw peanuts by blanching, peeling, and salting them, creating a value-added snack-nut for sale in the local grocery store. This "project" continues to this day, and functions as a community-outreach and fellowship opportunity two or three Wednesday mornings a month (and occasionally on an evening to broaden participation beyond the mainly retired Wednesday-morning participants).

Popularly known as "church peanuts," they are highly prized and any bags not purchased by the volunteers sell out immediately when they appear in the local grocery store. Although also interrupted by the pandemic in 2020, normally this effort brings in about \$10,000 a year. Even with work interrupted in 2020, the Peanut project contributed to the church's operational costs to ensure staff could be paid while worship was cancelled, as well as making major contributions to facility upkeep, including brickwork tuckpointing and roof repairs. In the last decades, it also helped with installation of an elevator, parking-lot resurfacing, restoration of the stained-glass sanctuary windows, and previous roof repairs. (In a building over 100 years old, there is always something to be done, but it is hoped most major work for a while will be completed in 2022).

Much of the work of the church is done on a volunteer basis, notably including bookkeeping, seasonal decorating (including coordinating with the pastor the appropriate theological colors for altar and pulpit decorations), preparing communion monthly (traditionally we use white bread cubes and grape juice—a result of the “mainline protestant” temperance tradition—alcohol is not allowed at church-sponsored events, or by policy, in the building), and mowing the lawn (though this may not be viable indefinitely). Many of the same members of the small, but active congregation are also volunteers outside the church, providing rides for other seniors, preparing a periodic community meal, delivering “Meals on Wheels,” and providing respite care for caretakers of the disabled (“Reaching Out Respite”).

## **WORSHIP PRACTICES, THEOLOGY, AND GOVERNANCE**

Until 1988, consistent with its Congregational roots, Lake Mills First Congregational-UCC followed a written constitution that provided for a board of trustees (six members as late as 2003) and a diaconate (12 deacons and deaconesses, or six of each gender plus two youth junior deacons), with a unifying “moderator” as overall leader of the congregation in partnership with the minister. Officially, the Congregation of active, voting members is still the body from which church governing authority derives, and a quorum of 25% must participate “In all more important matters in the life of the Church [including calling a pastor] and whenever there is known to be a decided difference of opinion.” The Annual Business meeting, to adopt a budget and choose representatives on the current Church Council, normally occurs in January.

In the 1970s (and likely the 50s and 60s as well) confirmands were presented with the Revised Standard translation of the Bible, though the pastor used the King James for the Christmas story—and by the late 1970s other translations, notably the Good News for Modern Man, were used in Sunday school (for high schoolers and adults). Both prospective adult members and confirmands were instructed in the history of Christianity and Protestantism generally, and a “Statement of Faith,” based on historical creeds was regularly read in worship at such times as new-member receptions. (Parts remain in the “Authority and Faith” and “Covenant” portions of our current constitution, but have been rarely read in worship in the last decade).

Importantly, however, until the retirement of Rev. Frasier in 1998, adult members were received primarily with a public assurance they confessed Jesus Christ as their savior and agreed “to attend as oft as ye are able” and “to use the Holy Scriptures as your rule of faith and practice.” The denomination was known for tolerance and a broad latitude of individual interpretations of scripture. In fact, the constitution in effect until 1988 explicitly contained an “individual conscience clause” that in principle superseded any rigid central doctrine.

In 1988, the historical constitution and its conscience clause were repealed—the first of at least six amendments and “restatements” of the constitution between late 1988 and 2012. Some revisions through 2006 seem to have formalized a committee structure and/or reflected the preferences of Rev. Jane Allerton, who pastored the church from 2000 to 2004. In 2004, in addition to the Diaconate and a six-member Board of Trustees, official standing committees included Christian Education, The Church’s Wider Mission Board, and Parish Relations.

In 2005, Pastor Neil Partington was called from Pennsylvania. He seems to have had some familiarity with the Reformed branch of the UCC and favored a model where the Pastor was the church's primary leader, with an emphasis akin to practices in nondenominational evangelical churches--trying to inspire highly committed Christians—as evidenced by things like missions work, encouraging tithing, and a “TED-Talk” preaching style based on close reading of the Scriptures together during worship—favoring the New International Version (NIV). The NIV remains our church's pew Bible, though recent pastors Barth and Treece drew scripture readings primarily from the New Revised Standard translation.

In 2009 the church amended its governing documents to provide for a “Leadership Team” consisting of four members who served two-year terms and the pastor, who was a fifth, voting member. After Pastor Neil's tenure, in 2012 the church moved some elements of governance from its Constitution to “Bylaws,” retaining the small governing body but changing it to provide for five voting members with a “Chairperson” selected by the five, and with the pastor being a sixth, *non-voting* member.

A change to the Constitution and Bylaws, when proposed, is normally voted on by the congregation at the Annual Meeting, but the only one in the last decade was handled somewhat informally: The 2014 Leadership Team considered other changes but reported at the Annual Meeting that the no changes were immediately needed except changing the name of the governing group from “Leadership Team” to “Church Council.”

When Pastor Larry arrived in December, 2017 (installed in 2018) some members of the congregation told him to refer to the governing committee as “The Church Council,” or “The Board,” though the written Constitution and Bylaws still used the term “Leadership Team.” When reviewed by the 2019 Council, it was agreed that the acceptance of the 2014 report by the congregation at the January 2015 Annual Meeting (to use the term “Church Council”) was equivalent to a vote on amending the Constitution and Bylaws. However, due to the possibility of discussing other potential updates, no new copies were distributed; then the Council's attention turned primarily to building-repair issues and, in 2020, the additional concern over closing and opening the church based on ever-changing Covid-19 prevalence and guidelines.

Although other changes were not recommended at the time, it appears the 2014-15 governance review conceded that the 2009-11 consolidation in a small term-limited Council of all the traditional responsibilities of a Board of Trustees (managing the building and Endowment Fund) and all the pastoral and worship-support duties of the diaconate proved to have both strengths and weaknesses. It's clear who is responsible for church governance, as the same people are responsible for everything. However, prospective Council members sometimes have more interest in one area or another. For example, they may be interested in helping the pastor with service projects, but feel unqualified to pick a roofing contractor.

The Council has become not only a policy-setting group, but more than anything, a service corps, sometimes becoming the default greeters and ushers, responsible for opening and closing the church, counting the collection, and even personally shoveling the sidewalks when it is snowing on a winter Sunday but the contractor has not yet appeared. Traditionally, various volunteers

would have been readily available, but the diminished group of regular attenders includes many who have mobility or other physical limitations, resulting in everyone able needing to “pitch in.”

A small church does have some inherent strengths: Members know each other fairly well through years of familiarity. Some have expressed that they feel other members are their “church family.” Just as many are less concerned about the nuances of governance than they once were, trusting the Council members to take care of anything important, interest in doctrine and theology varies, with many attenders much more concerned about fellowship, even friendship, with each other, or things like maintaining the beloved building and hearing familiar hymns.

Some involved at the time thought a 2013 “Appreciative Inquiry” and “strategic-planning” process was an important faith experience by identifying “core values,” (one of which was being small but welcoming). However, it is also true that those have turned out to be less useful as a regularly present guide than the “Dream Statement,” which is typically printed in every Sunday’s bulletin, and seems to speak to most members more vividly and succinctly:

*Through the love of Christ and the support of our church family, we are committed to welcoming and serving others, continuing our faith journey and spiritual growth while valuing our history and traditions.*

For most, that “Dream Statement” is more meaningful or inspirational to “live into” than the official “Mission” of the church in the 2012 (present) Constitution:

*Receiving strength from a heritage extending over 165 years in this place, and trusting that we are called to an even more promise-filled future, First Congregational United Church of Christ of Lake Mills is living God’s word in offering a caring and accepting family of faith to our community and by advancing the kingdom of God by all available means, both at home and abroad.*

The Bylaws reflect some elements retained from the Rev. Partington years, and some later amendments in reaction, notably making the pastor an “ex-officio” (non-voting) member of the Council and all committees. (Currently the only official committee is the Pastoral Search and Call Committee). One feature of the Bylaws is an attempt to specifically define certain roles: “The role of the Pastor is to lead the Church to accomplish its mission.” “The role of the Congregation is to serve as the primary ministers of the Church” (a Rev. Partington emphasis), but “The role of the [Council] is to establish and maintain mutual accountability between the Pastor and the Congregation” (perhaps an emphasis with his departure).

Officially (per the Bylaws, Section 7) the “Pastoral Role” is unsurprising: “It shall be the duty of the Pastor to set a good example to the Members, to conduct all worship services on Sundays, holidays, and such other days as the [Council] may desire, to work for the advancement of the Church, to direct the work of religious education..., to administer the Holy Sacraments and Rites, visit and pray with the sick, visit the Members regularly, comfort the distressed, conduct [confirmation classes], to encourage, enlist, and train lay leadership and perform all such duties and responsibilities as are customary and required of a Pastor’s office in the UCC.”

The Church Council is also to “Guide the day-to-day operation and administration of the church,” but the pastor is to be the immediate supervisor of the staff. Realistically, Council members have little interest in the truly “day-to-day” operations, and the church currently has paid staff limited to two part-time positions: A custodian, and an office administrator—who helps in numerous expected and unexpected ways, ranging from preparing the weekly bulletin and announcements, answering the phone, arranging for ushers and greeters (or regularly filling in herself, saying she has “an ecumenical spirit” even though she is Catholic), and providing staff assistance to the Council for its monthly meetings.

The pastor also directs and works with two keyboardists who are paid \$100 each time they play; both are well-liked members of the church family, though technically neither employees nor presently members. The church has a full electronic organ, with which one of the keyboardists has become familiar, originally not considering herself an “organist.” Additionally, the church has an electronic piano or “clavinova” that can be set to sound like a piano or more like an organ. The choir and its anthems are popular in the congregation, with the choir representing ¼ to 1/3 of regular Sunday attenders. Since our last music director began a phased retirement, finally moving out-of-state for family reasons in 2019, the choir has been self-directed.

Although the congregational hymns accompanied by organ or piano are “traditional,” rather than modern “praise and worship songs,” and many members are strongly in favor of these—if for no other reason, the more familiar the hymns, the better the small congregation is able to sing them—the choir anthems frequently present somewhat newer compositions. The church had a tradition of a wider variety of special music during the choir’s summer vacation (ranging from talented local high-school students to a gospel choir of prison inmates), and in recent years has been treated on Christmas Eve to much-appreciated piano and vocal performances by talented college-age members. Many members would welcome a mix of traditional hymns and newer music by a talented guest performer, as quality live music seems to be one of the larger factors in attracting people to services.

Since there has been no Sunday school in the last decade, we have had Sunday worship consistently at 10:00 a.m. year-round. This permits choir practice and adult bible study at 8:30 or 9:00, but a pastor could consider offering adult classes at other times. Early arrivers can also socialize prior to worship over coffee in the “Warm Room,” or greet each other in the sanctuary.

Our current hymnal is Worship and Rejoice, copywrite 2001 by Hope Publishing Company. When adopted, this was viewed as a moderate choice with many familiar old-time hymns and a few newer selections. The immediately preceding UCC New Century Hymnal replaced two traditional hymnals (including the Pilgrim Hymnal) and was not well received, as it self-consciously replaced the lyrics of well-known hymns with terms avoiding masculine pronouns, or references to God and Jesus as “Lord.”

Even our feminist members do not object to thinking of Jesus in historical terms as “He” or “His,” although interim Pastor Carol Barth suggested, “God might be a She,” and used a newer version of the Doxology that substituted “Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit,” for “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” Though some who memorized them as youth prefer the traditional lyrics, most don’t seem to object. In further evidence of the flexibility of the congregation in pastoral choices



for the worship service, Pastor Larry kept this new Doxology with its gender-neutral language, but without explanation added *in addition* the “Gloria Patri” with the traditional “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” terminology—either something for everyone or ensuring that both traditionalists and modernists are challenged. The Lord’s Prayer is still said weekly, using the traditional “Our Father...” and “debts,” instead of “trespasses” or “sins.”

Members are used to each new pastor “tweaking” the order of worship and, it’s fair to say they expect him or her to be primarily responsible for worship services, religious education, and pastoral services. An illustration of this is the varying approaches to prayers of confession and communion. In the nearly 30 years of Rev. Frasier’s tenure, a traditional Protestant order of worship was strictly followed. To the theologically observant, one of the more striking changes since has been omission of the silent prayer of confession and assurance of pardon. Pastor Larry made sure to include a unison prayer of confession on the first Sunday of the month (which he never explained, but clergy will recognize some believe important in preparation for Communion, which we historically share on the month’s first Sunday).

We have always practiced an “open communion” but each pastor has uniquely communicated an interpretation of its meaning. Reverend Frasier always said it was “open to any communicant Christian,” by which he meant “confirmed,” whenever that was normal in one’s home church. Unconfirmed youth did not partake. Longtime interim Pastor Carol Barth said, it was “open to everyone who seeks to live at peace with their neighbor,” so inclusive it potentially covered non-Christians if any visiting were so inclined. Most recently, Pastor Larry said, it was “open to all baptized Christians,” implying of any age, whether or not confirmed.

Originally raised a Baptist, Pastor Larry felt much more at home in the UCC, but baptism retained a special significance to him: Per his influence, our website states it is what unites us with other Christians, and he preached a special sermon inviting those who wished to come to the baptismal font to dip their fingers in the water and renew their personal baptism. He rejoiced in the approximately two infant baptisms he was able to perform in his four-year tenure.

Many members like to think of themselves as “moderate” in temperament, as well as theologically and politically, but of course, this doesn’t fully capture the diversity of opinion in the church. Despite the presence of a covenant “that all members accept” in the Constitution, and despite the repeal of the conscience clause, members still generally operate in a spirit of open discussion and respect for each other’s opinions, when stated. While occasional attenders may not even notice, the above examples of just three of our more memorable pastors illustrate the variety of interpretations that still exist within the UCC, and the relative flexibility of First Congregational-UCC regarding them, particularly if the pastor explains his or her reasoning.

The church has a long history of avoiding controversial topics from the pulpit. Because regular attenders include several political and social conservatives, as well as others who identify as liberals and progressives, most prefer avoiding “politics,” though this is understandably difficult when discussing social concerns of the day. Typically, sermons are best received when they acknowledge different viewpoints, come from the heart relating personal experience, or focus on traditions that should unite all Christians, such as concern for the poor and those suffering in natural or man-made disasters. Some topics might be best explored in an adult current-issues

discussion group or Bible study. A small (4-5) but dedicated group of members and non-members appreciated Pastor Larry's bible-study classes prior to Sunday worship, for example; among the last were studies of the Book of Luke and the Ten Commandments.

Some feel that neither Rev. Partington, nor longtime intentional interim Pastor Carol Barth placed enough emphasis on visiting, though Rev. Partington was active in the community in other ways, notably volunteering for the EMS. And Rev. Barth did take her turn in the rotation of community clergy offering services at area nursing homes and assisted-living facilities.

Pastor Larry Treece was called on December 17, 2017 and installed on April 22, 2018. He did prioritize visiting the homebound, particularly during Lent, to provide them with Communion, though four of the approximately six he was regularly visiting in 2019 have passed away, and this emphasis was greatly interrupted by the pandemic in 2020 and the pastor's health by the end of 2021. Nevertheless, visiting remains something the aging congregation expresses as important in a new pastor.

## **CHURCH FINANCES & GIVING**

Financially, the church is "holding its own," despite the loss of membership. The members it still has have been among the most committed to the church through the challenges of the last two decades. Most have enjoyed stable employment and successful careers and are generous in their giving to the church. Our most recent pastor, Rev. Larry Treece, frequently remarked on how impressed he was at their giving throughout the pandemic, even while the church was closed for in-person worship, and while it simultaneously conducted special appeals for significant structural and maintenance work.

The 2022 adopted church budget totals \$141,774, approximately the same as the \$142,075 approved for 2021. Actual expenditures in 2021 for those budgeted costs were approximately \$137,600, primarily covered by member giving; however, total general-fund expenditures were nearly \$165,800 including over \$27,400 for roof repairs and over \$6,000 for a new system to create video broadcasts of services in the sanctuary. Those extra costs related to the facility were supported by special gifts (e.g., for the sound system) and offerings designated for "God's House," which exceeded \$41,300 in 2021, up from nearly \$10,400 in 2020—and all the more remarkable because it was the fourth successive year of special appeals to address maintenance and repair issues that could no longer be postponed. However, the larger repair costs, in addition to those included in the \$165,800, were financed through a hopefully temporary draw-down of Endowment Fund reserves (described further below).

The adopted budget is a better indicator of First Congregational-UCC's revenues and expenditures than pledges for several reasons. One is that the church has been blessed with some sources of revenue to supplement member giving. Others are practical and philosophical and have been in in transition. As previously noted, Pastor Neil seemed to favor tithing and "sacrificial" giving. While there was a longstanding tradition of giving appeals and pledge drives, in some ways his emphasis went against that during Rev. Frasier's tenure, when every Sunday for 30 years he would introduce the offering time of the service by quoting the scripture,

“Let everyone give as he [or she] has purposed in the heart—not grudgingly or under compulsion, for the Lord loves a cheerful giver.”

During the nearly six years of Interim Pastor Carol Barth’s tenure, she would report an annual pledge tally in the Annual Report. For example, in her last Annual Report, she reported \$75,980 pledged for 2018, about half the budget. However, the budget was prepared and presented by the Church Council, largely based on prior-year expenditures rather than pledges.

In 2018 and 2019, Pastor Larry sent fall stewardship letters and UCC-provided pledge cards, but in late 2019 as the Council was preparing the budget, new Council members were surprised to learn that the treasurers had no use for the pledges (they assumed the Council used them), and both pastor Larry and some members of the Council thought they were not reliable for budgeting because people might change their minds; besides no heavy-handed inducements for giving were desired. When a longtime member of the congregation inquired at the January 2020 Annual Meeting how pledges were looking, Council representatives were unsure what to say, and Pastor Larry replied, “Pledges are between you and God; we just facilitate the conversation.”

Pledging was dropped entirely in 2021, though the pastor’s declining health was also a factor. A new pastor would want to discuss with the Church Council whether pledging has value as a personal commitment and, for the Council, a budget-planning tool (if not the actual amount, evaluating whether up or down from the year before). However, it also appears that aggregate member giving is somewhat consistent, so pledges may, indeed, have outlived their usefulness.

Beyond its operational costs, First Congregational-UCC Lake Mills has consistently supported all five special UCC offerings with one exception: In 2020, One Great Hour of Sharing was missed due to extended Covid-related church shut-downs. And the church’s generosity hasn’t stopped there: Between 2016 and 2020 the church completed payment on a pledge of \$7,800—a “stretch goal” given the church’s financial challenges at the time between pastors when the pledge was made—to the Wisconsin Conference’s “Campital Campaign.” This appeal was intended to repair, rebuild, and endow for the future two Conference-owned campgrounds in Wisconsin, where many members and their children and grandchildren attended church summer camp. (First Congregational has a special endowment fund to enable its youth and grandchildren to attend the camps, and the Wisconsin Conference also has scholarships available).

The church always commits a specific amount for “Our Church’s Wider Mission” (OCWM), in recent years \$1,500 annually, primarily supported by the operating budget (general offering) and given to the Conference regardless of member-designated giving (always less, though up significantly in 2021 due to more explicit ongoing appeals in announcements and placement of envelopes in pews). In 2020, the church similarly budgeted for ongoing charitable work in the local community, initially \$500—which, in recognition of the impacts of the pandemic, was divided between the local food pantry associated with St. Vincent De Paul and the Lake Mills Community Foundation’s small-business-focused Covid-19 Relief Fund. Church donations to the other four special UCC appeals are dependent on the amount given by members.

The church has no debt except to itself. It is blessed to be benefitting today from the thoughtful gifts of past members to a permanent Endowment Fund, mostly as a result of planned giving in

their estates. The inaugural gift in the mid-1980s was invested in bank C.D.s; then, in the late 1990s the growing Endowment was invested in the UCC-affiliated United Church Foundation (now “United Church Funds”). Following a large gift of stock in 2005 which was invested with an Edward Jones financial advisor, the Endowment was consolidated with Edward Jones in 2007 and invested in mutual funds and individual company stocks. The stock-market gains of the 2000s were so significant that this Endowment had grown to about \$600,000 by the summer of 2019 when the congregation voted to borrow \$190,000 from the principal to effectuate costly roof-leak diagnosis, tuckpointing of brickwork, and exterior window-trim painting.

While proceeding with that work in 2020, the need for more substantial structural repairs was discovered and the congregation approved borrowing another \$110,000 from the Endowment. Finally, in 2021 the congregation approved borrowing up to another \$100,000 from the Endowment to settle the remaining costs from the 2020 work and to replace the roof on the newer addition to the church. However, due to the substantial God’s-House giving in 2021, as of early 2022 it had not been necessary to use all of this last \$100,000. Thankfully, the stock market had back-to-back banner years in 2020 and 2021 and the Endowment Fund investment account (principal and capital gains) still exceeded \$372,000 at the close of 2021.

The significance of the Endowment to church finances goes beyond the amount of the principal or capital gains recently used: For over a decade the church has relied on the dividends from the stocks and mutual funds to make up for any shortfalls in monthly giving—ensuring a stable payroll for the pastor and support staff (one part-time office administrator and one part-time custodian), which are the primary operational costs of the church (followed by seasonal snowplowing and heat). The church’s governing documents allow the Church Council to use the dividend income from the Endowment as it considers in the best interest of the church, in recent years primarily to cover seasonal irregularities in giving. Borrowing significantly (a total of up to \$400,000 over four years) from the principal has reduced the dividend income from the Endowment on an ongoing basis, but a reserve of over \$17,000 of this income was available at the end of 2021 (one year’s average use, see next page) with quarterly dividends expected to replenish the more typical \$25,000 reserve, perhaps by the end of 2022.

Additional sources of resiliency and flexibility in First Congregational-UCC’s finances are memorial funds and funds earned by the Half Circle and the Peanut Project. Memorial funds are typically small gifts given at a funeral or visitation in memory of a person who has passed away, frequently earmarked for something meaningful to the deceased. (The Endowment Fund is intended to receive gifts to the church that are not designated for a specific “realizable purpose,” but new contributions have not been emphasized in recent years).

The table on the next page provides important financial trends for the four years of Pastor Larry’s tenure and the last full year before (2017). It shows that an average of nearly \$17,000 of Endowment Income (dividends) has been used annually to supplement member giving; however, member giving has also been responsive to special appeals by the pastor and Church Council.

### Select Recent Financials (operational income and giving):

|   | 2021       | 2020       | 2019       | 2018       | 2017       |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Giving for General Expenses /1/   | \$ 100,431 | \$ 112,344 | \$ 111,728 | \$ 127,454 | \$ 119,154 |
| Giving for God's House /1/  | \$ 41,323  | \$ 10,352  | \$ 15,081  | \$ 979     | \$ 906     |
| Giving earmarked for the Campital Campaign                                      | \$ 0       | \$ 1,480   | \$ 0       | \$ 0       | \$ 462     |
| Endowment Income used for the operating budget, including building maintenance. | \$ 20,000  | \$ 9,200   | \$ 6,000   | \$ 32,500  | \$ 17,258  |
| Other income /1/  | \$ 1,011   | \$ 6       | \$ 2,011   | \$ 46      | \$ 106     |
| Misc. Special Collections (hurricane relief, Casa Alitas)                       | \$ /2/     | \$ N/A     | \$ 300     | \$ N/A     | \$ 1,003   |
|   |            |            |            |            |            |
| <b><i>Special UCC Offerings</i></b>   |            |            |            |            |            |
| One Great Hour of Sharing   | \$ 480     | \$ 0       | \$ 609     | \$ 568     | \$ 697     |
| Neighbors In Need offering  | \$ 166     | \$ 342     | \$ 257     | \$ 445     | \$ 839     |
| Strengthen the Church   | \$ 505     | \$ 255     | \$ 187     | \$ 415     | \$ 276     |
| OCWM—member designated  | \$ 250     | \$ 20      | \$ 44      | \$ 38      | \$ 532     |
| OCWM—total given by church including above                                      | \$ 1,500   | \$ 1,500   | \$ 1,500   | \$ 1,500   | \$ 1,500   |
| Christmas/Emergency Fund /3/  | \$ 458     | \$ 55      | \$ 229     | \$ 359     | \$ 247     |

/1/ In some years, e.g., 2020, giving for General Expenses and/or God's House includes special contributions from the Peanut Project and Half Circle, although some of those were also deposited in a separate account to supplement or defray borrowing from the Endowment Fund principal. Similarly, "Other income" includes general account interest and in 2019 includes rent from "Club-55," a partnership with a local recreational program; it began in 2018 but the income was not separately tracked that year. The partnership ended in 2019 to co-locate with other community recreational activities. Other income in 2021 includes \$1,000 from the Conference to help with supply-pastor costs. Ongoing God's-House appeals began in 2019 prior to asking the congregation to borrow from the Endowment Fund principal.

/2/ In 2021 Pastor Larry encouraged members to give individually to charities providing relief in Haiti after the severe August, 2021 earthquake compounded the destruction from the preceding year's hurricane Laura. However, a specific collection was not taken in church.

/3/ Traditionally, the Christmas-Fund/Emergency-Fund/Veterans-of-the-Cross offering was received during the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service. In recent years it is received during the entire month of December, but in 2020 the church was closed, and no in-person service was held in the entire month. In December, 2021, supply pastor Rev. Dr. Mark Yurs highlighted it as a cause dear to his heart.

### **MINISTERIAL COMPENSATION**

Rev. Richard Frasier served from 1969 to 1998. While records were not available about his initial compensation, he was Yale educated and the church's parsonage was sold and relocated when he arrived in favor of a housing allowance (and also accommodating a memorial garden at the church). Thus, figures for our permanent, called pastors over the last 30 years are

comparable in the sense that all were considered full time and were provided a housing allowance. While not inflation-adjusted (the older amounts would be much higher today to equate to the same level of compensation), as one benchmark, Rev. Frasier's total salary of \$36,361 would be worth \$63,627 in March 2022 if adjusted by the Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Considering this was at the end of a 30-year tenure by a Yale-educated pastor, and a congregation about five times its current size, the \$60,000 starting salary for our last settled pastor was still comparable.

While Rev. Frasier sometimes declined proposed raises, the chart shows increases over time until Pastor Larry Treece. He, not the church, proposed the reduction his last year, and it reflects only salary—his total compensation (including health and pension benefits) was higher.

| Minister/Pastor | Years | Salary   |                   | Total Salary |
|-----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|--------------|
|                 |       | "Cash"   | Housing Allowance |              |
| Richard Frasier | 1990  | \$19,807 | \$ 7,515          | \$27,322     |
|                 | 1998  | \$25,556 | \$ 9,805          | \$36,361     |
| Jane Allerton   | 2000  | \$27,900 | \$12,000          | \$39,900     |
|                 | 2004  | \$29,500 | \$13,245          | \$42,745     |
| Neil Partington | 2005  | \$29,500 | \$13,245          | \$42,745     |
|                 | 2011  | \$37,000 | \$22,000          | \$59,000     |
| Larry Treece    | 2018  |          |                   | \$60,000*    |
|                 | 2021  | \$32,083 | \$22,917          | \$55,000*    |
|                 |       |          |                   |              |
| 2022 Budgeted   |       | \$35,000 | \$23,000          | \$58,000     |

\*Pastor Larry was called in December of 2017, so 2018 reflects the first year intentionally budgeted for him. In 2017 a decision by U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb ruled tax-exempt clergy housing allowances were unconstitutional, so Pastor Larry said it was fine to assume a combined salary amount (even though it would be lower as entirely taxable income). The church's expenditure reporting assumed 20% was for housing, a lower percentage than in the Allerton and Partington years. In 2019, a 3-judge Appeals Court panel overruled the Crabb decision, retaining the traditional non-taxable status of housing allowances (up to a pastor's actual housing and utility costs, per IRS guidance).

While Pastor Larry was our most recent settled pastor, in some ways he represents a unique case. In other ways, he illustrates that—as advised by the Wisconsin Conference—we will negotiate a custom package of salary and benefits that aligns with a prospective pastor's personal situation.

In December 2020, the Church Council was prepared to consider an inflationary raise for Pastor Larry (as he'd been here 2 years). He proposed, instead, that he take a \$5,000 pay cut in the non-housing portion of his salary for 2021 and assume full responsibility for his insurance and medical costs. As a retired GM worker, he had what he considered good medical insurance for himself and his wife, but when hired, the church had agreed to cover any co-payments or out-of-pocket medical and dental expenses, which had turned out to be significant in 2020 (\$4,080) due to heart-related medical needs. He also had his own life insurance. However, late in 2021, he fell ill due to complications of Covid-19 and passed away. On a compassionate basis, the church paid his full budgeted salary for the year, and unbudgeted medical costs of \$5,144.

The church is seeking a full-time pastor, but recognizes this is a matter of definition. Pastor Larry proposed the pay cut for 2021 in recognition that the size of the congregation and workload was not what a full-time pastor normally sees. Additionally, he proposed reducing his paid vacation from four weeks to three and his regular workdays to four days a week, but seven days a week “on-call.” Prior to that, he typically held office hours in Lake Mills four mornings a week, which he planned to reduce to three, with other time spent visiting, preparing the sermon, and attending church-related meetings (the once-a-month Church Council in Lake Mills, a UCC “community of practice” pastoral support group, and occasional meetings of the Lake Mills Ministerial Assn.). The church would like a new pastor to cover at least similar office hours.

In Pastor Larry’s entire four-year tenure in Lake Mills, he’d had no confirmation classes, no weddings, only a couple of baptisms, and an average of two-three funerals per year. He received approximately seven new members over the course of four years (one of whom died shortly thereafter). However, all of these new members had at least some prior connection to the church, at least four being prior members and longtime regular attenders. As a result, he received them informally without extensive instruction. The congregation hopes a new settled pastor might begin to attract a greater number of new members, with marginally more attendant workload.

Pastor Larry said he felt “guilty” taking advantage of our generosity coming out of the pandemic when he had not been able to do all the visiting of shut-ins he would have liked, and he did not want to financially burden the smaller congregation. Five members (most of his regular visitation list) had passed away in 2020, and, due to the pandemic, he had only been able to provide a few graveside services limited to families. Pastor Larry stated that the reduced compensation he proposed was “well within” the Wisconsin Conference guidelines and what other similarly-situated pastors were making. However, arguably, his prior experience in other churches likely merited more, notwithstanding the fact First-Congregational-UCC is in the smallest-size, “under 150 membership” compensation group. We do expect to offer our next pastor pay consistent with the guidelines.

First Congregational Lake Mills has budgeted \$75,900 for pastoral services in 2022, including the employer’s share of Social Security and Medicare (7.65% ), pastoral mileage reimbursement and a small amount (\$250 for books and continuing education for a pastor). We’d also cover the cost for attending UCC conferences. We would expect to provide 3-4 weeks of paid vacation the first year, UCC pension contributions, and a combined housing and “cash” (non-housing, as in reality both are cash) salary within the 2022-23 Wisconsin Conference guidelines for the smallest churches: \$44,800 to \$73,500 depending on your education and experience. We will be as flexible as reasonably possible to adjust the compensation package based on your situation—such as more in salary or the housing-designated portion of it, (if that’s your preference because you have access to other health insurance or other income through a spouse, for example).

The congregation appreciates well-delivered sermons and views pastoral visitation as a priority, but we would also appreciate a pastor that can use any spare time within a full-time schedule for community-outreach that may help us grow our membership! Our goal for this church is to find someone enthused with the revitalizing potential of our faith to better serve our community and God.

## Reference Letter to Potential Candidates for First Congregational UCC in Lake Mills, Wisconsin

Greetings.

I served as the interim pastor of First Congregational UCC in Lake Mills, WI from April, 2012 to January, 2018, when a settled pastor was called. It was a longer than usual interim because the church had been traumatized after the relationship with the previous pastor had ended badly. After some healing, and an appreciative inquiry process the congregation was in a healthy enough place to begin a search process two years into my time with them.

My experience with this congregation was very positive. I found them to be a loving and caring group of people. They welcomed me warmly and were generous in their appreciation of my ministry with them. I would describe them as a congregation that is open to exploring new ways of being church, that has a strong sense of mission, that values good worship leadership, and that is supportive of pastoral leadership. Although they are a small membership congregation, they have a strong commitment to be a faithful presence in the community. While I did not live in the community of Lake Mills, (however, it would be a delightful community in which to live) members of the congregation served actively in many ways, making the congregation a significant presence of outreach and mission there. There are many members who have a long history with this congregation, and while they honor the past, they are open to moving forward into the future to which God is calling them.

First Congregational Church was the last church I served before retiring from active ministry, and it was a wonderful way to conclude my ministry. These are good people, welcoming and warm, faithful to their church, willing to share their gifts of leadership and love in the church and the world, and it was a joy and an honor to serve with them.

I would be glad to answer any questions you may have in a personal conversation. You are welcome to contact me by phone at 608-655-8228, or via email at [carolbarth@yahoo.com](mailto:carolbarth@yahoo.com).

With hope,  
Rev. Carol Barth



## Reference Letter – Rev. Mark Yurs

I filled in at First Congregational Church of Lake Mills for four months, serving as the church's pulpit supply pastor first during the sickness and then following the death of their pastor. My role had me present only on Sunday mornings, and I did none of the work outside of preaching and worship leadership. I found much to appreciate about this people. I discovered them to be cheerful, pleasant, and kind. Their worship attendance was consistently loyal. The folks seem to know and to like one another. The congregation is not inwardly focused but outward looking with an eye on service to the wider community. Given what I was able to discern in my brief time with them, I would assess the church tends to be centrist on questions of theology and to the left of center on social questions. In any case, they are neither extreme nor stubborn, but quite open and welcoming of differing points of view. This is a very fine congregation; they are a people easy to love with a pastoral heart.

I enjoyed working with this congregation and coming to know its people, if only on a limited basis. I wish for them all the best in their pastoral search.

Mark  
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