

# First Congregational Church Profile

## **Big Timber, Montana**

Open Position: Full-Time Pastor



# 1. POSITION POSTING

- a. LISTING INFORMATION
- b. SCOPE OF WORK
- c. COMPENSATION & SUPPORT
- d. WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?

## 1a. LISTING INFORMATION

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### **First Congregational Church - Big Timber**

402 Anderson St, Big Timber, MT 59011

<https://www.facebook.com/bigtimebercongregationalchurch/>

<b>Search Committee Chair:</b>	<b>UCC Conference Contact:</b>
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### Summary Ministry Description:

We are a community church based in small town Montana looking for a minister who will be an active member of our community, connect with members, and provide thoughtful, spiritually-focused messages for the congregation. Big Timber First Congregational has a long history as an active member in the community, established over 125 years ago. We have approximately 50 active members today, which is down from previous years, and are looking to grow membership over the coming years.

### What we value about living in Big Timber:

Big Timber is a small town located along the Yellowstone and Boulder rivers, at the foot of the Crazy Mountains. In addition to being a destination for outdoor activities such as hiking, fishing and hunting, the region has a rugged, western appeal and a tradition of grit and hard work. It is also a very tight-knit community, where everyone knows each other and is willing to lend a hand to someone in need. Big Timber is a wonderful community for someone looking to raise a family, or be a connected part of a close community with a rural, small-town feel.

Current size of active membership: Approximately 50

*English is primary language of congregation*

Position Duration: **Settled, Full-Time** however willing to consider ¾ time with the right candidate

## 1b. SCOPE OF WORK

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### Core Competencies:

We are looking for a pastor who will complement what we believe to be our church's greatest strengths, as well as to supplement areas in which we would like to grow. We are looking for a minister that is:

**An active and visible member of the community:** The First Congregational Church has a long history of being a church that is active and supportive of our local region, leading events and programs foundational for the community. For over 100 years the church has hosted an annual Chicken Dinner on election day - coming from the days when rural ranchers made the long trip into town to make their vote. Additionally, the church membership provides a scholarship program for local students, takes an active role in the local food bank and senior center, hospice care, and actively fundraises for the church's Homeland Circle club. While the expectation is not that the minister participate or lead all of these activities, the church is seeking a minister that will complement this existing strength of service-based fellowship, and find their role within the community.

**Approachable and in-tune with the life of the church:** The church is seeking a minister who will provide availability and approachability to members. This could include maintaining regular, advertised office hours, maintaining active communication and updates with the Deacons committee, outreach to elderly and/or sick members unable to attend services, and being available for member's significant life events such as a family death.

**Spiritually and Service focused messaging:** Sunday morning remains the primary time of connection and gathering. The church looks for a minister who provides thoughtful sermons that predominantly tie messages of the Bible to everyday life in a modern time.

## 1c. COMPENSATION & SUPPORT

Salary and benefits to be discussed in interview process. Candidates are expected to live in the Big Timber community. Housing is not directly provided by the church.

## 1d. WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?

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

**Grow membership:** the church looks for a minister who will support outreach to new members, as well as re-building relationships with those who have left. This is in partnership with the Deacon Committee.

**Raise and re-fresh the church's local profile:** While the church has always been the open and welcoming church for community members of all backgrounds and beliefs, the

church believes there is an opportunity in the coming years to lean into this as an option for community members searching for a church that is welcoming to their diverse beliefs, and provides a community-focused option for them and their families. In concert with the members and described church governance bodies, the church looks for a minister willing to support these efforts and be a vocal member of the community welcoming people to the church.

**Be a trusted resource for members:** The church looks for a minister who will work closely with Deacons and other active church members to ensure the congregation sees the church as a spiritual resource for meaningful connection and care. Particularly over the past two years of COVID-19 pandemic, this active outreach and connection has taken a backseat in the life of the church, and membership is requesting this return back to the day-to-day life of the church.

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

**Be visible:** As previously mentioned, the church has a robust network of members that are highly engaged in the community. We are looking for a minister who will complement this engagement and be an active participant. Additionally, we look to a minister that is excited and energized by being a visible member of the local community. Examples could include: attending high school sports events, visiting the senior center and assisted living, visiting local businesses, etc.

**Be available and approachable:** With the support of the deacons, we look for a minister who will take an interest in the member's lives and be present during both significant life events (death of a family member, sickness, etc) and day-to-day struggles.

**Work with members:** Take an active role in outreach and coordination with established governance bodies, such as the Trustees and Deacons. We are looking for a minister who is unafraid to ask for help and support as they become members of the church and community. We ask that they understand where their strengths and weaknesses lie in order for the church body to complement them..

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

We look for a minister who is self-aware, professional, and politically sensitive. Our church represents a broad and diverse spectrum of political views, which reflects our community. Unfortunately, the church has experienced turmoil in recent years as ministers have utilized the pulpit to express personal political views, which membership is now highly sensitive to. We expect a minister to utilize ministry for encouraging the message of justice, love and service-based expression of faith and ask the membership to challenge their views of the world in a respectful and open manner.

Describe four areas of excellence from *The Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministry* that your next minister will display to further equip the congregation's ministry in these areas.

After polling 10 members, all felt that **Strengthening Inter- and Intra- Personal Assets** were most important as to what we are seeking in an effective minister. Within that category, several underlined demonstrating excellent communication skills as critical. **Engaging Sacred Stories and Traditions** received the next most votes as members believe effective preaching should be based on Biblical teachings and how it relates to our lives today. **Building Leadership Skills** was another category that many felt was very important. Finally, both **Caring for All Creation** and **Working Together for Justice and Mercy** were discussed as equally important.

## **2. WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME?**

Who is God calling you to become as a congregation?

As the church emerges from a year of internal turmoil and minister turn-over, the congregation is ready to move from healing into actively re-building and move into a growing and active church.

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

Throughout the pandemic, the community has seen changes as Big Timber offers a welcoming location to work remotely, raise a family, and enjoy the outdoors. Additionally, like many communities around the country, the last two years of political division have impacted and divided parts of the community. The church believes we can provide a unique value proposition for community members seeking a place of worship that is welcoming to people of all backgrounds and beliefs, including political views, and provides a supportive community for families. The church believes that by providing this foundation of active community, the church will be able to be a source of numerous positive outcomes for Big Timber and surrounding areas.

### **3. WHO ARE WE NOW?**

CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS  
CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS  
PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING  
CHURCH FINANCES  
HISTORICAL INFORMATION

#### **3a. CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS**

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##### Describe your congregation's life of faith.

We are best described as “as you do unto the least of these, so you have done unto me”. The Big Timber UCC congregation is a diverse group of generous, caring, community minded people who value each other and the community in which they live. Some meet for thoughtful study, some sew, some serve on boards and committees and donate generously of time, food and money.

When we get together, the care and interest we see in each other is palpable. We share, greet and talk to one other before and after worship. We listen with interest to the interpretations and intent of well crafted sermons and discuss them often.

When fewer of us gather for book or Bible study, perhaps for Lent or Advent, the same dynamic is present. All are welcome, heard and included. Worship for us is a Holy time of both thoughtfulness and fellowship.

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

Today, there is an active Sunday School program led by an active member of the church. There are approximately 8-10 young people that regularly attend. As this group of young people enter teenage years, we look for a minister who will be able to provide support and activity for students. Historically, the church has had a very active youth program, and the church looks to return to that type of programming as a welcoming option for families in the community.

For adults, the church has recently explored returning to book-club type education, including a book reading led by interim pastors during the Christmas season. There is a desire to provide more of these types of opportunities for adults outside of the Sunday service.

##### Describe how your congregation is organized for ministry and mission.

Church operational decisions are primarily managed by the church Trustees. This group consists of members of the church and meets approximately once a month. Quarterly, the full membership gathers to meet to discuss current operational and financial decisions.

The Diaconate committee (Deacons) meets approximately once a month. They coordinate with the pastor in the spiritual interests of the church and community. Both Trustees and Deacons are elected by the church members and the Annual Meeting.

Additional committees exist across the church to meeting congregational and community needs. The Search Committee will be happy to share more information about church operational structures during the interview process.

### 3c. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

		Estimate
Number of Active Members	34 +6 kids	X
Number of Active Non Members	12	X
Total Church Participants (Sum of the numbers above)	52	X
Percentage of total members who have been in the church		
More than 10 years	75%	X
Less that 10, more that 5 years	5%	X
Less than 5 years	20%	X
Number of total participants by age		
0-11	7	X
12-17	2	X
18-24	0	X
25-34	2	X
35-44	3	X
45-64	15	X
65-74	18	X
75+	16	X
Percentage of adults in various house hold types (participants)		
Single adults under 35	0%	X
Households with minors	10%	X
Single adults age 35-65	0%	X
Joint households with minors	40%	X
Single adults over 65	40%	X
Education levels of participants by percentage		
High School	37%	X
College/Some College	43%	X
Graduate School	4%	X
Veterans/Military	16%	X

*Demographics estimated based on 2019 regular attendance. Participation fluctuated during COVID-19 pandemic.*

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

		Estimate
Percentage of adults in various employment types		
Adults who are employed	43%	X
Adults who are retired	57%	X

*Employment in the congregation is very diverse including professionals, farmers & ranchers, manufacturing, students and trades persons. There are also a number of retired persons who remain very active in the community through volunteer work.*

Diversity & Inclusion:

Reflective of the broader Big Timber community, the church membership is predominately white. However, the church membership has a clear value of welcoming and openness to people of all categories of diversity, whether racial, socio-economic, disability, or otherwise.

**3d. PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING**

Ways of Gathering	Estimated number of people involved in attendance	Who plans each of the listed gatherings?		
Adult Groups or Classes	10-15	Womens Morning Bible study women of church led		
Baptisms	2	Pastor		
Childrens Groups or classes	6-8	Christian Education		
Church Meals	30+	Potlucks after service, every Sunday coffee and treats		
Choirs and Music Groups	0			
Church Based Bible Study	8	Deacons and pastor		
Communion (served how often)	Monthly	Deacons and Pastor		
Community Meals	1	Chicken Pie Supper but canceled due to COVID		
Confirmation	0			
Drama or Dance Program	0			
Funerals (number last year)	1	Pastor		
Intergenerational Groups	0			
Outdoor Worship	2	Deacons and Pator		
Prayer or Meditation Groups	0			
Public Advocacy Work	Senior Pantry for Community run by church members			
Retreats	0			
Theology or bible programs in Community	0			
Weddings (number last year)	0			
Worship time slot	10am-11am	followed by fellowship after		
Young Adult Groups or Classes	0			

*No ordained, licensed or commissioned ministers are members of the congregation.*



### 3e. CHURCH FINANCES

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Please see attached 2021 P&L Report for supporting documentation. Further financial information can be provided upon request.

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

~\$60K in 2021, however minister salary/benefits not typical year. The church currently maintains no debt. Any recent capital expenses have been routine maintenance in nature.

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

No

### 3f. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

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Name one to three significant happenings in the history of your church that have shaped the identity of your congregation.

While there is no specific event to point to, the church has experienced a series of minister turn-over in past years. Many of these changes have resulted in frustration, resentment and a feeling of abandonment in the membership - which has reflected in a significant drop in membership over the past 10 years.

We are a diverse congregation, with a diverse set of opinions and political views. This open and welcome diversity is something we highly value, and our members are accepting of each other's views. Unfortunately, in several cases, ministers have utilized the pulpit to amplify personal political views in an antagonizing way. We look to a minister that will help us move past these experiences and come back together in our united love for the church.

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

Most recent change included the retirement of our last minister, which was followed by a Fitness Review by the conference. This was a painful experience for the church, resulting in discontent both internally and with our relationship to the conference. After many months, the church is moving from "surviving" following this event, to "re-building". We look for a minister to take us to the next level of "thriving" - internally and with our community and relationship to the conference.

Describe your congregation's values and practices when it comes to conflict.

Our church generally utilizes our previously described governance and operational proceedings to express frustrations or requested changes via the appropriate governance body. For example, if there is a conflict or frustration with the minister, in which a member does not feel comfortable discussing directly with the minister, the Deacons Committee is utilized as a mediating body. For more operational items, such as finances, investment and quarterly meetings, the Trustee Committee is utilized. Additionally, we

have found membership in general to be quite open in raising topics early and in appropriate settings as they transpire.

Ministerial History

Staff member's name	Years of service	UCC Standing (Y/N)
Martin Siebert	1982-1996	Yes
Larry Pray	1997-2003	Yes
Dee Lundberg	2003-2005	Yes
Nell Lindorff	2005-2008	Yes
Tim Shirley	2009-2014	Yes
Jill Bierwirth	2015-2017	Yes
Duane Bartz	2018-2021	Yes

Has any past leader left under pressure or by involuntary termination? No

Has a past pastor been the subject of a Fitness Review while at your church? Yes

**4. WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?**

a. COMMUNITY VISION

**4a. COMMUNITY VISION**

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

We are proud of our church's relationship with others in the Big Timber community. Hearts and Hands Hospice was started by members of our church as well as the Big Timber Food Bank and the Senior Pantry.. We have a local need fund to help individuals and families that are down on their luck, and we have a quilting group that makes quilts for the children at Shodair. Our church hosts an inter-denominational study and support group for community members. Currently we have 15 participants from various churches in Big Timber. Our Homeland Circle is very active and hosts an annual Christmas tea at which the community is invited. Our annual election day dinner is enjoyed by all. In addition, our church has been the meeting place for the After-School Program since its inception in 2003, and each year we offer a scholarship to a deserving graduating senior.

Describe your congregation's participation in meetings, relationships and activities connecting the wider United Church of Christ .

Over the years we have sent delegates to conference meetings and workshops, even hosting several, but since the COVID pandemic, there has been little activity. We maintain a cabin at the former Camp Mimanagish and are working on a contract with the new owners to preserve rights to it. Outreach contributions go to One Great Hour of Sharing, Neighbors in Need and the Christmas Fund for retired ministers.

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

The church is active in participating with other congregations in the Big Timber community, particularly when it comes to the support of our youth and elderly. There are often cross-denomination events and supportive outreach when various churches request support. (As example, churches have been known co-host book clubs for youth groups to share resources.)

## **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

The First Congregational Church of Big Timber desires a servant leader, relationship and community focused, who can lead the way in sharing our message and purpose in a modern world. We believe our community is a wonderful location for a pastor wishing to raise a family, experience the Montana outdoors, or find shared community across our congregation and broader Big Timber. Our community is small, yet tight knit. Collaboration, an open mind, and visibility will be key aspects of success for a candidate's arrival in Big Timber. We look for a leader who can lead on our strong historical background, while also lead us into a post-pandemic future in a growing community with ever-changing local and global challenges.

Our Search Committee looks forward to meeting you and discussing the church and community we love.

## STATEMENT OF CONSENT

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

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

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

First Congregational Church Search Committee: Austin Alexander (Chair), Gail Neal, Joan Hanson, Bonnie Conner, Missy Roe

2. Additional comments for interpreting the profile:

Signed:

Name / Title / Date:

## 6c. VALIDATION BY CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION

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

Staff Comment:

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

Staff Comment:

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

Staff Comment:

My signature below attests to the above three items.

Signature:

Name / Title:

Email:

Phone:

Date: