

# INTRODUCING THE NEW LOCAL CHURCH

Who is  
God  
calling us  
to  
become ?

The new Local Church Profile is not just for congregations in search of a pastor. *All* congregations are encouraged to engage in its process of discovery every 3-5 years. The UCC Local Church Profile reflects valuable data, assesses ministry, clarifies change, and helps advance the calling of the congregation. Not just to be completed by a search committee – the more participation, the better!

Rachel Hackenberg

**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**



# UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE



Decorah Congregational United Church of Christ  
Decorah, IA

Position opening:

Settled Pastor

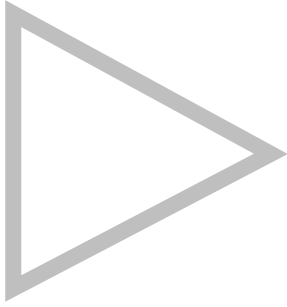
Iowa Conference, Northeast Association

[Validation Date]

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- Who Is God Calling Us To Become?
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  - Who Is Our Neighbor?
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*“God is able to provide you with every blessing, so that  
having all sufficiency in all things at all times,  
you may abound in every good work.”  
(2 Corinthians 9:8)*



## 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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Church name: [Decorah Congregational United Church of Christ](#)

Street address: [209 W. Broadway St. Decorah, IA 52101](#)

Supplemental web links: <http://decorahucc.org>

Conference: [Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota Conference:](#)  
[www.ucctcm.org](http://www.ucctcm.org)

Association Contact Person:

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Summary Ministry Description:

This church has undertaken a spiritual journey of discovery over the past several years that has led to a not unexpected but still surprising understanding of who we are as a church community. We are fiercely independent in our diversity of thought and belief, finding connection in shared reflection, discussion, and fellowship, and in our strong desire to serve as a beacon of light in our broader community for issues of social justice. Lay leadership is quick to assume responsibility in times of need and for the overall well-being of the church community, yet we are also energized by a pastor with vision and passion that inspires us to deeper reflection and broader mission. Our congregation may be small, but we are mighty in our radical welcome, our compassion for one another, and our talents and contributions as lay leaders and members. Decorah Congregational United Church of Christ is a congregation of the intellectually curious seeking deeper understanding while challenging the status quo, with emphasis on Jesus as teacher. We want to become more than we have been and all that we could be as a moving force for inclusion and justice.

Through the challenges of COVID-19, we have remained remarkably resilient as a congregation, adjusting first to online services, then back to in-person worship with careful lay-led protocols in place and new streaming capability for Sunday worship. Sunday and holiday services, social activities, and youth ministry continue even as we seek a pastoral replacement, and over recent years our involvement in local social justice work has expanded, not contracted, thanks to coordinated lay leadership and strong community support. While our pastoral opening is unanticipated, there is no ill will to mend. Our pastor felt called to a different career path, and we supported them in this decision. We look forward to welcoming a settled pastor into our church community with open and enthusiastic hearts and minds, excited about the renewed energy and vision a new pastor will bring.

We are seeking a pastor who will lead us through teaching and who communicates with compassion, dignity, humor, and grace. Our ideal pastor is not afraid to be honest and straightforward, challenges our assumptions, embraces important issues of faith and society with clarity and meaning, leads us to a deeper understanding, and moves us to action. We seek a pastor who is outgoing, dynamic, intellectually curious and stimulating, a skilled teacher, one who loves people, and one who walks with God. Long-term commitment, progressive and open thinking, and vitality to attract young and old alike are essential. In short, we seek a pastor with vision to recognize our successes and strengths, courage to challenge our complacencies, and energy to be a creative self-starting leader in our beloved church and community.



Worship. Love. Serve.





Welcome!



Church Float at Annual Decorah Pride Parade



Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant



Nurturing Nature - Creating Terrariums as Worship





Youth-led Pancake Fundraiser for Lavastida Center in Cuba

### What we value about living in our area:

Strikingly vibrant, progressive, and thriving, Decorah is the kind of small town that draws visitors from surrounding states, inspires people to move there, and retains families for generations. Individuals, families, children, and older adults are remarkably active in community events, service, and social groups. Except for on the coldest winter nights, downtown Decorah hums with college students, tourists, and residents enjoying coffee shops, restaurants, the community co-op, pizza places, bars, and microbreweries. The schools, medical facilities, beautiful public lands, and infrastructure are exceptional for a town of its size. Its stunning natural setting at the intersection of river, bluffs, and prairie provides abundant opportunity for outdoor recreation. The creativity and vision of proud Decorah citizens is embodied in highly respected institutions such as the Seed Savers Exchange, the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, and Luther College, and events such as Nordic Fest, Studio Art Tour, creative fundraisers and crowdfunding, an 11-mile paved hiking and biking trail, a Pride Parade, multiple community choral and instrumental groups, and many other unique activities and traditions. Take a peek at <http://www.visitdecorah.com>.

Current size of membership: 156

This is the “official” size; in reality, our weekly attendance fluctuates. In the several years before COVID, average attendance was 50-56. In 2021, when many were leery of in-person gatherings, Sunday attendance varied between 30-40. Over the past several months, attendance has been between 40-60. On Christmas Eve, 2022, we welcomed about 125 members and visitors.

We stream all of our Sunday services online through YouTube and Facebook, and live viewership is about 5-10 regular live viewers. Our weekly eNews has 140 subscribers, and there are about 5 members who prefer to receive a printed weekly newsletter in the mail.

Position Title: [Settled Pastor](#)

Position Duration: [Permanent](#)

Compensation Level: [Full Time](#)

Does the total support package meet conference compensation guidelines? [Yes](#)

## 1b. SCOPE OF WORK

As a pastor in a church experiencing renewal, work is expected in the following main areas:

- [Leading thoughtfully crafted worship services, including well-prepared sermons, appropriate and lively children’s time themes, and working alongside music staff to attain integrated music](#)
- [Creating unique spiritual development and faith formation opportunities for public, small group, and individual participants \(such as discussions, study, reflection, and prayer\)](#)
- [Promoting leadership development and collaborating with lay leaders and the congregation to live into the church’s mission and vision](#)
- [Building meaningful community partnerships and engaging with the local community, continuing our legacy as a theologically progressive voice committed to justice and service](#)
- [Identifying and communicating helpful community-based resources and opportunities for church participants](#)
- [Providing pastoral care on- and off-site as needed](#)
- [Engaging in strategic planning for current and new directions](#)
- [Supporting financial development and stewardship efforts](#)

Other routine duties include:

- [Administering week-to-week church operations](#)
- [Conducting weddings, baptisms, and funerals for participants in the worship community](#)
- [Attending meetings and collaborating with lay leadership](#)



- Participating in wider church activities such as conference meetings
- Supervising and coordinating staff duties
- Providing counseling, listening, and referral services
- Engaging in self-study and prayer to increase faith and improve skills
- Energizing and deepening spiritual connections and faith understandings of others

### Core Competencies:

We seek a well-rounded pastor with skills in many areas, including notable strengths in preaching, compassion and caring, leadership and vision, and commitment to justice and inclusion.

#### **Core competency #1: Strong preacher and worship leader**

- Communicates a clear, consistent, and relevant message through sermons that are carefully prepared and artfully delivered, relevant, provocative, and contribute to a deeper understanding of scripture and theology
- Delivers scholarly, insightful, inspirational, inclusive, creative, open, and intriguing content
- Designs and facilitates meaningful, unique, engaging, and interactive worship services
- Is a consistently effective and engaging preacher who inspires from the pulpit

#### **Core competency #2: Compassion and caring**

- Conveys approachability, kindness, and a genuine sense of care for the well-being of others
- Responds with empathy and support to the life circumstances of others
- Listens thoughtfully and attentively
- Possesses humility and the ability to laugh and smile easily

#### **Core competency #3: Leadership and vision**

- Motivates, empowers, inspires, collaborates with, and encourages others
- Acts to build trust, inspire enthusiasm, encourage others, resolve conflicts, and develop consensus
- Possesses excellent interpersonal skills to lead various types of groups and individuals
- Contributes significant strategic and visionary ideas to all aspects of church life

#### **Core competency #4: Commitment to ethics and values (social witness)**

- Demonstrates a personal conviction to truth and justice
- Partners with the congregation in articulation of a social witness
- Advocates on behalf of the marginalized and the disenfranchised
- Encourages the development of congregational programs and ministries that allow the congregation to live out its social witness

## 1c. COMPENSATION AND SUPPORT

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Salary Basis: Salary based on Conference guidelines + housing allowance @ \$12,000/yr.:  
<https://ucctcm.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/IA-2023-Compensation-Guidelines.pdf>.

Benefits: Salary plus Benefits

What is the expected living situation for your next minister?

Living nearby with a housing allowance.

Comment on the residential/commuting expectations for your next minister.

We would hope that our pastor will live within close proximity to the church/community they serve.

State any incentives:

Possible incentives, depending on candidate interest and need, could include gift membership in local food coop, recreational athletic facilities pass at Luther College, or community-supported agriculture share.

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

Our congregation has supported the pastor in engaging in a number of opportunities:

- **Covenant Communities for Pastoral Excellence (CCPE)**, offered through the Iowa Conference. These groups provide a safe context where colleagues hold each other accountable to high standards of commitment, participation, learning, and growth. The groups are facilitated to create a chance to share experience and wisdom in a trusting atmosphere
- **Clergy Cluster** gatherings are offered through the Northeast Association of the Iowa Conference. Clergy meet on a monthly basis for support, accountability, and study.
- **2030 Clergy** --This is a network to strengthen, sustain, and mobilize Authorized United Church of Christ Ministers in their 20s and 30s within the Iowa conference. There is an online community as well as annual retreats.
- **Next Generation Leadership Initiative.** Decorah UCC supported our previous pastor in applying for and engaging in this Pension Board program designed as a leadership development initiative that equips, energizes, and empowers younger UCC local church pastors to build vibrant congregations that change lives and further God's mission in the world. It is a six-year program that combines week-long educational intensives, experiences at General Synod, and continuing education.

If applicable, describe how your church will adopt part-time adjustments in the pastoral schedule to support a minister's bi-vocational employment: [N/A](#)

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

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

- Delivering high-quality, diverse worship experiences that engage people across cultural and generational lines
- Expanding children and youth spiritual formation programs
- Enhancing congregational support and community outreach through newly installed live-streaming audio and video equipment in our sanctuary
- Promoting advocacy and partnership with other churches to further build a network supporting immigrants and refugees settling in the area
- Building upon ONA commitments, pursuing an accessible to all (A2A) culture more fully within the church as well as in the Decorah community
- Diversifying adult ministry offerings, with an emphasis on intellectual exploration and mutual support and care
- Adding more entry points beyond regular Sunday worship (*e.g.*, weeknight dinner church, young adult-oriented programming), for folks new to church to connect in at various levels of commitment

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

Decorah UCC expects that the minister will spend at least 20% of their working hours participating and simply engaging in the local community to build connections aligned with church missions. In the recent past, examples include:

- attending and/or organizing casual individual or group discussions, frequently over coffee
- volunteering with Iowa Migrant Movement (Iowa MMJ) for Justice and Path to Citizenship for immigrant support
- doing intake for clients utilizing the Legal Aid Fund and Neighbors Helping Neighbors
- participating in the Decorah Area Faith Coalition
- making connections with programs at Luther College such as its Center for Ethics and Public Engagement and Center for Sustainable Communities
- seeking opportunities to engage with youth in the community

- supporting and helping to coordinate the church’s participation in local festivals, events, and human rights advocacy (e.g., Pride Parade)
- providing oversight for Kids Lunch Club, an initiative instigated by Decorah UCC to mobilize volunteers to pack and serve lunches to kids in our community without adequate access to meals during the summer months
- supporting and encouraging volunteerism and social justice work by church participants

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

Our pastor and church members have been actively involved in arranging and providing support for immigrants to our area, primarily in recent years for undocumented workers and families from Central America. Familiarity with or interest in developing skills in understanding the language, culture, or needs of these new neighbors would be an asset. The congregation would be willing to provide opportunities or funding to make that possible.

We also prefer that our pastor actively seeks opportunities in formal and informal communications to use progressive, respectful language sensitive to biases and assumptions of gender, age, culture, race, sexual orientation, family structure, economic status, beliefs, and other personal defining characteristics. The thoughtful use of language in these areas supports the church’s mission of extravagant welcome and inclusivity.

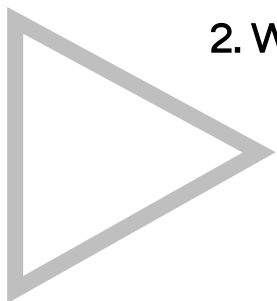
Based on what you have learned about who your church is, who your church’s neighbor is, and who God is calling the church to become, describe four areas of excellence from *The Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministry* that your next minister will display to further equip the congregation’s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

1. **Engaging sacred stories and traditions:** Bring knowledge, understanding, and interest in continuing study of the Hebrew scriptures and New Testament, bringing them to life in preaching, teaching, and leadership, and using them to foster theological reflection and spiritual growth.
2. **Working together for justice and mercy:** Draw on the life and ministry of Jesus to confront injustice and oppression, bring hope and healing to a hurting world, nurture care and compassion for all creation, and navigate community context and change with sensitivity and care.
3. **Strengthening individuals and community:** Strengthen individuals and community through promotion of and participation in continuing education and lifelong learning, the practicing of the radical hospitality of God, and the implementation of excellent communication and interpersonal skills to minister to church participants of all ages.
4. **Caring for all creation:** Possess spiritual maturity, strong moral character, and personal integrity to actively demonstrate appreciation for a variety of theological perspectives and ecumenical



partnerships, healthy attention to self-care and life balance, and a commitment to core values of the UCC: continuing witness, extravagant welcome, and changing lives.

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



“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37 NRSV)

Who is God calling you to become as a congregation?

Our current mission statement was adopted in 2012 and describes our mission well:

*“We are a growing congregation of creative and curious Christians that worship together and serve together. We seek to live out Jesus’s gospel of justice, mercy, love, and grace. We take seriously the calls to care for our neighbor, to be engaged in the building up of our community, and to be a place of extravagant welcome where everyone, everyone, everyone can encounter the Sacred.”*

As a congregation we desire to continue active efforts to address membership by attracting the spiritually disaffected and those seeking an intellectually stimulating and spiritually motivating, hopeful, and accepting environment.

Our ongoing annual visioning process seeks to identify specific areas of connection between our unique character as a congregation and the wider community in which we live. These connections shape what we do and become, as new members and participants bring their own passions and gifts. We welcome a new pastor to share in creating and implementing this vision.

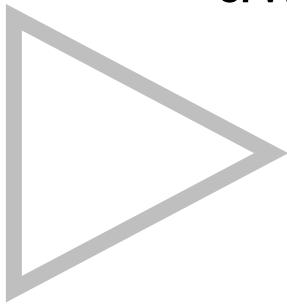
Describe how God is calling you to reach out to address the emerging challenges and opportunities of your community and congregation.

1. Serving a small but increasing population of immigrants and asylum seekers in our area who face economic exploitation and racial profiling. Additionally, after folks have been detained by ICE, there are long waiting periods before work visas arrive leading to economic hardships, as well as a lack of affordable immigration lawyers. Decorah UCC has been working with Path to Citizenship to provide legal services. We volunteer with Iowa MMJ (Migrant Movement for Justice), and members work as interpreters. Recent initiatives have included a Legal Aid Fund and a Neighbors Helping Neighbors (NHN) fund to provide longer term help for folks following

detention (Legal Aid) and more basic support. During COVID, we added a Guatemalan Basics fund as well, to deliver bulk supplies of food staples to families during pandemic restrictions that increased need. Community support has been tremendous.

2. Becoming host site for Kids Lunch Club, a program launched in 2015 out of the passion and vision of this church. This program provides lunches over the summer months to kids in need. Organizers quickly realized that the program would benefit from having one central location where food was stored and lunches were assembled. To become the host site for this program, we needed to become a licensed kitchen, which meant major renovation to our Congregational Center. Renovations were completed in summer 2018, providing a beautiful, inviting, and safe place to prepare meals. We now have a restaurant license and can house the program. The transformation of this space has brought new opportunities. The Center is a hub for our congregation, where we gather over meals and receptions, learn, play, organize, and serve together. It is also a hub for the wider community, where speakers teach, activists organize, community singers gather, ping pong players play, and girl scouts bake cookies. What other needs in our community can we serve with this safe, welcoming, accessible space to gather? We're excited by the possibilities.

### 3. WHO ARE WE NOW?



“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39 NRSV)

- a. CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS
- b. 11-YEAR REPORT
- c. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS
- d. PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING
- e. CHURCH FINANCES
- f. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

#### 3a. CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS

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Describe your congregation's life of faith.

Our mission statement summarizes well what faith means to us and illustrates the theological language and perspective we prefer, focusing on deeper understanding of and reflection on the teachings of the Bible and Jesus as a guide for living into our commitments of love for one another and applying that love to increase justice and mercy in a broken world.

Included below as illustrations of our congregation's life of faith are two liturgies, our self-created description of our congregation, and some comments on the language we use to describe God and Spirit:

### **Words of Welcome** (that the pastor gives at the opening of every worship service)

*Each time we gather, we greet one another, reminding ourselves and proclaiming anew the extravagant welcome of God that invites us here.*

*In the name of Jesus who welcomed children and adults, the popular and the overlooked, the homeless and the privileged, YOU, indeed ALL, are welcome to the worship and fellowship of Congregational UCC. Whether you are young or old, or in between, whatever your history or background, whether your faith is an old friend or you are filled with doubts and questions or both, whatever your gender or sexual orientation, whatever the shape and size of your family, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!*

*As beloved people of God, we gather for worship and to share in life together. Welcome to this place.*

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### **Celebration of New Members**

*Pastor to new members: As members of the church, we are held in covenant with one another. These are the sacred promises that hold us accountable to one another but more than that these are the touchstones that help us to BE the church, to live our faith, and to share in life with one another. (Respond with "I will")*

- *Will you covenant with this congregation and all of its people to be attentive to God, to learn from and live after the example of Jesus, and to be open to the movements of the Holy Spirit?*
- *Will you share in the full life of this congregation and its people, giving of your prayers, presence, gifts, and service?*
- *Will you help make this church a place where truth is spoken, justice lived out, peace made reality, love known, and extravagant welcome extended?*
- *Will you help carry the love and grace of God celebrated within these walls, outside these walls? Will you help carry the Light of Love into the world?*

*Pastor to the congregation: (Respond with "We will")*

- *Will you share in joys and sorrows, celebrations and life transitions, potlucks and community, alongside these folks who are coming to call this church their home?*
- *Will you do all in your power to support these people in their life and faith?*

- *Will you welcome them into this family of Decorah Congregational UCC, embrace their gifts, their needs, and their dreams? Will you recognize that their presence and participation will change the shape of the body and help it grow in new ways? Will you support them in their journeys, pray for them, and join with them in the days to come?*

*Closing prayer: Loving God, send your Holy Spirit to be among us, knitting us one to another. Help us to grow with each other, to love each other, to support each other. That by our common life in this community we may come to know and to reach out in love. We ask your blessings, this day and always, amen and amen.*

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On the back of the **Worship Bulletin** each Sunday, here is how we define ourselves as a church to all who enter:

*We are a growing congregation of creative and curious Christians that worship and serve together. We seek to live our Jesus's gospel of justice, mercy, love, and grace. We take seriously the calls to care for our neighbor, to be engaged in the building up of our community, and to be a place of extravagant welcome where everyone, everyone, everyone can encounter the Sacred.*

*As a United Church of Christ (UCC) congregation, we strive to serve God in the co-creation of a just and sustainable world as shown by Jesus's life and ministry. UCC congregations are committed to being churches ...*

*Where God's love is proclaimed and shown  
Where all are welcomed and accepted as they are.  
Where our minds are nourished as much as our hearts and spirits.  
Where Jesus the healer meets Jesus the revolutionary.  
Where together we grow a just and peaceful world.*

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#### **Language we use to describe God and Spirit:**

- We prefer language that is inclusive and meaningful to believers and non-believers alike.
- We have a greater interest in Jesus the teacher than Jesus the Christ.
- We are comfortable with many images of and names for God, in both preaching and hymnody. Love, justice, spirit, compassion, kindness, grace, good, and hope, stand in for 'God' or serve as adjectives to address God in prayer.



In general, liturgy and prayer are interactive, animated by the spirit in the joys, concerns, and common life of the congregation. We invite everyone into the life of this church without asking them to affirm any set doctrinal beliefs, and we range from traditional to progressive to doubter to non-believer.

**Describe several strengths or positive qualities of your congregation.**

We are a church that takes its Congregational denominational heritage seriously. As noted in our church constitution, each member has the right to follow the Word of God according to the dictates of her/his/their conscience, under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. This tradition allows us to embrace a wide variety of theological stances within our membership without much conflict. We respect each other's right of conscience, and appreciate the richness and creativity this variety brings.

We are a church that responds to people in need regardless of politics. We provided immediate and ongoing assistance to aid those in the Latinx community who were affected by the huge INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) raid in nearby Postville, Iowa, in 2008-09. We opened our church to shelter flood evacuees. We now partner with others in the area faith coalition to provide support for new refugees and asylum-seekers. We provide food to kids in need through the backpack and kids' lunch programs.

We have a lovely historic church building that is located in the center of town.

We are seen as warm, friendly, open, welcoming, unpretentious, authentic, caring--that place where very quickly 'everybody knows your name' and misses you when you're away. As one member wrote in his survey response, "This church loves." And, we have fun!

We have many well-educated, active thinkers in our congregation who want to learn and be challenged. All are welcome, and people with differing backgrounds and abilities have found a church home here. We are accepting of people as they are and value their gifts and talents. We have a stable core membership that is capable of providing lay leadership. We love music in our worship.

**Describe what worship is like when your congregation gathers.**

Worship takes place in our beautiful sanctuary, welcoming community center, or occasionally outside. Our style is low church, relatively informal, low christology, progressive in liturgy, empowered lay leadership, some lay preaching and storytelling, and sometimes responsive sermons that invite reflection from the congregation. We encourage active participation, beginning with greeting, sharing joys and concerns, and turning to one another to sing us out as we close. We hold communion the first Sunday of each month. Jubilee worship for special holidays (pentecost gets fire!) or our unrehearsed Christmas pageant (with costumes for everyone and one time visiting goats!) creates lots of room for laughter and surprise. Currently, clergy don't robe outside of Easter, Christmas, funerals when requested, and big formal Sundays, tending more to simple collar and stole.

Our preference is for progressive theology, Jesus as teacher and moral guide, holy spirit as God's movement in the world.

Music is central to worship, with a small but skilled choir and talented music director, occasional guest artists in a variety of styles, and congregational singing interspersed throughout. We have an electric organ that is used on occasion, but the congregation has moved to piano accompaniment, now enhanced by a professional collaborative pianist who brings gifted artistry to our worship.

For us, good preaching is thoughtful, engaging, creative, based in story (both biblical and contemporary), a dialogue with the congregation, open-ended, inviting reflection rather than imposing belief, challenging (intellectually and ethically), and globally minded. The sermon should be well prepared, well spoken, and well delivered. A strong message should be the focal point of the service. Based on the lectionary, it should be theologically based, well researched, with historical interpretation yet related to issues of the day. It should challenge, encourage change, apply to daily life, help us to question, learn, and grow, and help meet the demands of our lives, our community, and our world. Creative approaches like extended scripture paraphrases or first-person character narrative are also welcome and encouraged.

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

- With our kids, we often use the UCC's "Holy Moly" curriculum, along with creative curriculum and activities created by the children's minister.
- For confirmation and youth activities, we have used a combination of the "Sparkhouse" curriculum, Bible study, and service opportunities.
- Our youth have been an integral part of intergenerational, intercultural service mission trips, actively engaged in planning, fund-raising, and sharing their experiences with the congregation. We also delight in inviting our youth to help lead worship.
- We have recently hired a part-time coordinator of youth ministry. She is a Luther college student who prepares and leads children's activities in our kid's space during the second half of the worship service.
- Recent adult programming includes Lenten Circles discussion groups, lay-led Bible studies, summer sessions on UCC history and polity, study groups on books such as Amy Jill Levine's *Short Stories by Jesus* and Gregory Ellison's *Fearless Dialogues: A New Movement for Justice*, and issue-oriented workshops and discussions on issues of sexuality, gender identity, disability, and race.
- "Popcorn Theology" was one previous example of an opportunity to view a film (or excerpts) together with our Unitarian-Universalist friends and discuss theological ethical questions it raises. Held following worship over popcorn and snacks, lay-led and open to both adults and youth.

- We feel that our educational offerings have led to deeper engagement with each other, a clearer sense of who we are as a congregation, enhanced sense of mission, and advocacy for justice in our broader community.

Describe how your congregation is organized for ministry and mission.

The Church Council solicits candidates for committees and presents a slate of candidates for election at the Annual Meeting. Committees elect their own chairs. Decisions are communicated in various ways, depending on the topic, timing, and importance: during worship, in the monthly church newsletter, by email announcement, or at a special meeting of the congregation. We are working on more regular communication of committee decisions. What has been helpful to us in terms of vision has been the regular practice of engaging in goal setting and visioning at the annual meeting. We continue to seek new ways to implement our vision of being a beacon of hope and support for those around us, mindful that our size limits our capacity and risks overburdening those who volunteer.

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

- Currently, we have a governance structure with three distinct committees of Trustees, Deacons, and Church Council.
- We are working on streamlining our governance system to propose a model with one single governing board.
- The Pastor Parish Relations Committee (PPRC) meets bi-monthly, or more often as requested by pastor.
- Meetings typically are kept to an hour, and are usually offered both in person and via Zoom for those who would prefer to attend virtually

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

A few years ago, a building inspection revealed that the truss supporting the sanctuary ceiling was unsafe, and the sanctuary was deemed unusable until it was repaired. Worship was moved to the congregational center, with no fuss, and embraced with a spirit of creativity. The trustees did electronic communication, called a special meeting of their committee, divided up work and phone calls to be made, solicited bids, supported moving worship to different location, accepted bids and began work—all within about a week and half. A special congregational meeting was called to inform the congregation, develop a plan for fundraising, and approve using money from investments if needed up to a certain amount. This congregational action empowered the trustees to make decisions as the project proceeded without having to call another congregational meeting. Repair was completed and the congregation resumed worship in the sanctuary in just 8 weeks.

Another example: when COVID hit, we moved to Zoom, and kept things going. Sure, there have been bumps along the way, but we also learned a lot about ourselves and about how technology may enhance our support and outreach. So, now we've invested in new sound and video equipment, with the adventure continuing.

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

### 3b. 11-YEAR REPORT

#### Membership:

YEAR	MEMBERS	AVG WEEKLY ATTENDANCE	CHR ED/ FAITH FORM	CONFIRMED	CONFESSION	TRANSFER OR REAFFIRM	DEATHS OR TRANS OUT	OTHER LOSSES	NET MEMBS ADDS-REMOVED
2011	128	40	30	0	0	0	0	0	0
2012	128	26	30	0	0	0	0	0	0
2013	128	43	30	0	0	0	0	0	0
2014	140	55	50	0	1	12	1	0	12
2016	153	56	55	1	0	8	4	0	4
2017	166	56	42	0	2	12	2	0	13
2018	162	52	33	0	3	6	3	10	-4
2019	162	52	33	0	0	0	0	0	0
2020	158	50	22	0	0	1	5	0	-4
2021	156	36	23	0	0	0	2	0	-2

#### Finances:

YEAR	CURRENT EXPENSES	CAPITAL PAYMENTS	BASIC SUPPORT	TOTAL OTHER UCC GIVING	TOTAL OCWM	OTHER GIFTS	WIDER MISSION	BASIC SUPP% CURR LOCAL	TOTAL EXPEND	PLEDGES AND OFFERINGS
2011	\$144,003	\$0	\$1,820	\$936	\$2,756	\$0	\$2,756	1.26	\$146,759	\$0
2012	\$144,003	\$0	\$3,735	\$1,488	\$5,223	\$0	\$5,223	2.59	\$149,226	\$83,132
2013	\$144,003	\$0	\$5,392	\$2,272	\$7,664	\$0	\$7,664	3.74	\$151,667	\$87,028
2014	\$156,709	\$24,877	\$5,492	\$871	\$6,363	\$14,139	\$20,502	3.50	\$202,088	\$94,165
2015	\$106,779	\$13,302	\$6,707	\$1,603	\$8,310	\$8,229	\$16,539	6.28	\$136,620	\$107,388
2016	\$166,562	\$0	\$6,962	\$8,322	\$15,284	\$16,537	\$31,821	4.18	\$198,373	\$101,307
2017	\$149,441	\$70,029	\$7,990	\$1,555	\$9,545	\$0	\$9,545	5.35	\$158,986	\$101,662
2018	\$140,318	\$39,106	\$8,800	\$2,275	\$11,075	\$33,028	\$44,103	6.27	\$184,421	\$102,960
2019	\$136,122	\$0	\$8,520	\$1,707	\$10,227	\$0	\$10,227	6.79	\$150,545	\$100,207
2020	\$155,853	\$224,820	\$8,362	\$1,065	\$9,427	\$40,046	\$49,473	4.59	\$205,168	\$100,377
2021	\$149,732	\$5,218	\$10,450	\$2,260	\$12,710	\$28,954	\$41,664	6.64	\$191,360	\$119,479



### 3c. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Describe those who participate in your church.

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Number of active members:	102	✓
Number of active non-members:	16	✓
Total of church participants (sum of the numbers above):	118	✓

Percentage of total participants who have been in the church:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
More than 10 years:	52	✓
Less than 10, more than 5 years:	26	✓
Less than 5 years:	24	✓

Number of total participants by age:

0-11	12-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	<i>Are these numbers an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
8	5	6	12	12	15	12	20	12	✓

Percentage of adults in various household types:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Single adults under 35:	10	✓

Households with minors:	15	✓
Single adults age 35-65:	15	✓
Joint households with no minors:	45	✓
Single adults over 65:	15	✓

Education level of adult participants by percentage:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
High school:	15	✓
College:	40	✓
Graduate School:	30	✓
Specialty Training:	15	✓

Percentage of adults in various employment types:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Adults who are employed:	55	✓
Adults who are retired:	30	✓
Adults who are not fully employed:	15	✓

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

Our congregation is rich with talent:

- Education: teacher, administrator, college professor, librarian, writer, editor, museum curator

- Health care: nursing, physical therapy, psychologist/counseling, medical doctor, dentist, chiropractor, home health care
- Social services, law, public service: social work, disabilities services, elder care, attorney, mayor
- Technology: computer science, statistician, audio/video technician, environmentalist
- Business: everything from large business owner to small-business entrepreneur to retail sales to manager to carpentry, construction, banking, trucking
- Farming: traditional, organic, hobby, agricultural business
- Arts and culture: music, fiber arts, photography, painting

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

Our congregation reflects the demographics of our town, which is predominantly monocultural, white Americans. There is very little racial and ethnic diversity in our town or membership. However, our congregation is diverse in terms of socio-economic status, educational backgrounds, physical and mental abilities, and theological beliefs. The reality of low racial and ethnic diversity led us to reflect on our responsibility, really an opportunity, to take the lead in efforts to overcome inherent biases and talk openly about race and privilege. It’s a start.

Has your congregation recently had a conversation about welcoming diversity, or do you plan to hold one in the near future (perhaps using, for example, the Welcoming Diversity Inventory)? Please note the date. Comment after the exercise:

**White Privilege: Let’s Talk.** This is a resource for transformational dialogue from the United Church of Christ that is designed to invite church members to engage in safe, meaningful, substantive, and bold conversations on race. Decorah UCC piloted the use of the curriculum in the Fall of 2016 with intentional small group discussions held during the winter of 2017 at various locations with a group of trained facilitators throughout the Decorah community:

- [https://www.ucc.org/white\\_privilege\\_curriculum\\_sparks\\_awareness\\_change\\_in\\_small\\_iowa\\_community/](https://www.ucc.org/white_privilege_curriculum_sparks_awareness_change_in_small_iowa_community/)
- [https://www.ucc.org/white\\_privilege\\_curriculum\\_spurs\\_community\\_wide\\_conversation\\_in\\_iowa/](https://www.ucc.org/white_privilege_curriculum_spurs_community_wide_conversation_in_iowa/)

We hope that additional sessions of this curriculum will be offered in the future.

**ONA 2.0:** Seeking to deepen our commitments and our understanding on issues of diversity and inclusion, we held a series of workshop conversations last fall on gender identity and sexuality, with guest speakers including a Luther College biblical studies professor with expertise in queer theory.

### 3d. PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING

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Ways of Gathering	Estimated attendance (av. per event)	Who plans each of the listed gatherings?
Adult Groups or Classes	8-15	Lay chair of education
Baptisms ( <i>number last year</i> )	1	Pastor, deacons, and family
Christmas Eve and Easter Worship	130/90	Pastor, music minister
Church-wide Meals	40-45	Pastor and lay leaders
Choirs and Music Groups	8-12	Music minister, pastor, musicians in congregation
Church-based Bible Study	8-10	Women's fellowship committee
Communion ( <i>served how often?</i> )	monthly	Pastor, deacons
Community Meals	6-10	Pastor, deacons-- see note
Confirmation ( <i>number last year</i> )	0	Pastor, deacons
Drama or Dance Program		
Funerals ( <i>number last year</i> )	3	Pastor and families involved
Intergenerational Groups	6-12	Pastor, deacons, children's minister
Outdoor Worship	35-45	Pastor, deacons, music minister
Prayer or Meditation Groups	8-12	Pastor, Women's circle, deacons
Public Advocacy Work	varies by event	Pastor, various lay leaders
Retreats	varies	Lay-led working week-end retreats at Pilgrim Heights

Theology or Bible Programs in the Community		
Weddings ( <i>number last year</i> )	0	Pastor, music minister, families
Worship (time slot: 10:30 am)	40-45 (average)	Pastor, music minister, children's minister, deacons
Young Adult Groups or Classes		
Youth Groups or Classes		Pastor
Other: Community Trivia Night, Canoeing/kayaking group	varies by event	Members

Additional comments:

- The pastor has organized youth groups and confirmation classes on and off over the years as needed. Currently we do not have an active high school youth group.
- The pastor also has met informally with a small group of Luther College students.
- There is interest among young adult members in developing programming for their age group.
- We do not host any community-oriented meals, but many of our members volunteer for bi-monthly ecumenical community meals that serve 100-200 people.
- We have held several series of "Around the Table" meals organized at different homes for food and conversation. (8-10 congregation members at each dinner)
- We also partner with the Decorah Faith Coalition for special events and fundraising dinners for immigrant support and with the Methodist church for Iftar meals

List all members or regular participants in your congregation who are ordained, licensed, or commissioned ministers. Indicate those with current United Church of Christ Three-Way Covenants (i.e., serving in a congregation) or Four-Way Covenants (i.e., serving in a ministry beyond a congregation). *None.*

If one or more previous pastors or retired ministers currently hold membership in the church, describe their role(s) in the life of the congregation: *None.*

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

Staff Position	Head of Staff?	Compensation (full time, part time, volunteer)	Supervised by	Length of Tenure for current person in this position
Administrative assistant		half time	Pastor	Sept 2022-
Director of music		part-time	Pastor	Feb 2022-
Collaborative pianist		part-time	Pastor	Aug 2021-
Coordinator for children's ministry		part time	Pastor	Oct 2022-
Custodian		part time	Pastor	Nov 2021-

## REFLECTION

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

We are an older congregation that is moving in the right direction, drawing an increasing number of younger individuals and families in recent years. We have committed resources to continue this growth by strengthening our music ministry, expanding intergenerational service and learning opportunities, and hiring a children's minister to serve and draw more young people. Our focus on creative and interactive worship and progressive theology has proven attractive to individuals and families who have felt unwelcome in previous churches, have long been unchurched, or who are seeking a safe and welcoming community in which they can build relationships, nurture their intellectual and spiritual life, and that they can call home. In our case, the combination of long-term dedication and new energy has generated an exciting creativity and openness--a life-giving and life-sustaining power on which to build.

## 3e. CHURCH FINANCES

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



Source	Amount
Annual Offerings and Pledged Giving	\$119,479
Endowment Proceeds ( <i>as permitted within spending policy, such as a cap of typically 4.5%-5% on total return</i> )	\$40,956
Endowment Draw ( <i>beyond what is permitted by spending policy, “drawing down the principal”</i> )	\$0
Fundraising Events	\$0
Gifts Designated for a Specific Purpose (Missions, worship, memorials)	\$41,686
Grants	\$0
Rentals of Church Building	\$825
Rentals of Church Parsonage	\$ N/A
Support from Related Organizations ( <i>e.g., Women’s Group</i> )	\$1075
Transfers from Special Accounts	\$15,000
Other (specify): Capital donations	\$22,865
Other (specify): Miscellaneous income	\$0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$241,886</b>

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

2021 Budget vs Actual report is available in a separate document. Total 2021 expenses were \$197,253. Excluding missions (which are pass-through funds) and capital, 2021 expenses were \$149,732.

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

Total ministerial support (salary, housing, social security offset, annuity, pension, and health/life/disability insurance): \$86,076.75. This is 44% of the total budget (expenses).

Has the church ever failed to pay its financial obligations to a minister of the church? **No.**

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

- Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM – Basic Support)
- One Great Hour of Sharing
- Strengthen the Church
- Neighbors in Need
- Christmas Fund

In what way is OCWM (Basic Support) gathered? If calculated as a percentage of operating budget, what is that percentage?

Our OCWM giving was 9.5% of annual offering/pledge income in 2021, 10% in 2022. In 2022, we reached our target pledge of 10%.

What is the church’s current indebtedness?

Total amount of loan debt: \$0

Reason for debt:

Are capital and other payments current?

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

In 2019, when we wrote our most recent profile, we were planning to replace the roof of the main building, with an estimated budget around \$165,000—higher than we’d originally anticipated but using a more eco-friendly/sustainable and durable shingle. We are delighted to report that the project was completed in 2020-2021, including additional work on some brick and flashing, and fully funded with a total cost of \$216,000.

If the church has had capital campaigns in the last ten years, describe:

Year(s)	Purpose	Goal	Result	Impact
2011-2012	Energy efficiency projects	\$15,000	\$14,782	Following an energy audit, we added insulation to both

				buildings, and installed more efficient lighting.
2013	Narthex remodel and Sunday school room	\$18,000	\$18,764	Made key spaces more welcoming
2014	Remove chimney and replace boiler in main building	\$20,000	\$23,132	Improved utility bills and comfort in the sanctuary
2017	Center kitchen remodel + future needs	\$75,000	\$60,338	Enabled certification to be the sole site for Kids Lunch Club
2018	Roof truss repair	\$15,000	\$16,110	Repaired a bowed roof truss
2019-2021	Replace main roof	\$125,000	\$200,179	Roof was completely replaced
2022	Online streaming equipment	\$26,000	\$28,731	Provides live streaming of worship with updated video and audio capacities.

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

The main mission component of the 2017 kitchen remodel was to support the Kids' Lunch Club program, which provides lunches in the summer for any area children who face food scarcity. It enables us to think about how else we can serve community needs with this space. The streaming equipment supports and expands our outreach to members, friends, and the broader community.

Does your church have an endowment?

Yes, although technically it's not an endowment, since we sometimes withdraw more than the gain. It is better referred to as the Investment Funds.

What is the market value of the assets? \$409,000, as of 07/31/2022

Are funds drawn as needed, regularly, or under certain circumstances?

We draw regularly on investment income for the budget. In recent years, we have also drawn on investment capital to supplement campaigns for building renovation and repair.

What is the percentage rate of draw (last year, compared to 5 years ago)? Describe draw on endowment, if any, to meet operating budget expenses for the most recent year and the past five years:

This table shows the annual gain, withdrawals, and end of year balance in the Investment Funds:

Year	Gain	Withdrawal	Balance	% Withdrawal
2017	\$57,531	\$22,000	\$501,224	3.9%
2018	-\$21,542	\$40,000	\$439,682	9.6%
2019	\$72,863	\$30,000	\$482,454	5.4%
2020	\$22,406	\$55,000	\$449,950	11.6%
2021	\$40,956	\$14,000	\$476,906	2.7%

Notes:

- % Withdrawal = Withdrawal / (Balance + Gain)
- 2018 withdrawals included \$10,000 for an urgent roof truss repair. Without that amount, the withdrawals would have been 7.2%.
- The 2020 withdrawal was higher to help fund the new roof.

At the current rate of draw, how long might the endowment last?

This is hard to predict. Our average annual withdrawal since 2012 is \$21,475, and the average gain is \$28,000. But this has been a period of strong gains in the financial markets. We have already recovered some of the investment losses that occurred at the end of 2018. The February 2021 balance was \$468,000. If we take a very conservative approach and assume a net loss of \$20,000 per year, the Investment Funds would last 21 more years. Our annual offering income has been increasing. Our goal is to rely less on the investment funds to support our annual operating budget in the future. We also anticipate future increases from planned giving (estates) by some of our current members. Thus, we would predict that the Investment Funds will last much longer than 20 years.

Other Assets, as of Aug 31, 2022:

Reserves (savings): \$ N/A

General checking: \$4,000  
Capital fund: \$18,443  
Special gifts fund: \$52,898  
Mission funds: \$13,142  
Memorial funds: \$10,083  
Kids Lunch Club: \$19,530  
Discretionary Fund: \$500  
Women's Fellowship: \$20,000

Investments (other than endowment):

Scholarship CDs (only interest is spent)  
Schwender CD: \$55,215  
Ringdahl CD: \$ 7,500

Does your church have a parsonage? No.

Describe all buildings owned by the church:

- Main church building - yellow/tan brick and stone - built 1895. Houses sanctuary, narthex, offices, fellowship/coffee area, accessible restrooms.
- Brick connector with stairs and lift.
- Congregational Center - brick and concrete block - built 1957. Houses main kitchen, fellowship hall, classroom, restrooms.

Describe non-owned buildings or space used or rented by the church: None

Which spaces are accessible to wheelchairs?

The sanctuary, fellowship space, office, congregational center and children's room, restrooms are wheelchair-accessible. There are several steps up to the pulpit and lectern in the sanctuary, but our pastor typically preaches from the main floor; communion is offered on the main floor, children gather for their special time around the base of the stair; readers may lead from lectern or floor. Accessibility to the main church building is by means of a lift in the adjoining congregational center to bring folks up to the church without any steps. (Front door of the church has 8 steps from the sidewalk up to the door.)

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

What it reflects is that new initiatives are not dependent on how much we currently have in the bank. When we have a good idea for an initiative, we can raise the funds: intergenerational intercultural mission, kid's lunch club, legal aid and living assistance for asylum-seekers. Our members are committed to sustaining and expanding ministry to community and world, and our endowment and recent capital campaigns have helped us in addressing building maintenance and repair, enhancing paid professional staffing to ensure quality (e.g., music), and upgrading our congregational center (e.g., kitchen) to invite more community activity. Our lay leaders all play a part in developing, leading, and funding these projects.

### 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. Add the most important event in the life of your church in the past 10 years.

- Reframing youth ministry to include intergenerational cultural-immersion mission trips (2013 - 2018 )
- Outreach to displaced persons (Vietnamese refugee family 1995 , ICE raid 2008)
- Lead up to and celebration of our 150th anniversary (2004), recalling pivotal moments in our history as foundation for continued identity and mission
- Most important recent event: Became an Open and Affirming Congregation (ONA, 2012)

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

We've experimented with a variety of non-traditional worship experiences, bringing out our more playful and creative side with laughter, energy, and spirit of community. Baking bread for world communion, building terrariums while telling the story of creation, making kites (while talking theology of the holy spirit) have connected us more to each other and to the world around us.

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

- We have multi-color 'rainbow' doors on display out on our front lawn as a public statement of our radical welcome--doors that we made after becoming an ONA congregation, put on a float for the summer Nordic Fest parade, then parked out front for a while. Following an incident of slashing of some rainbow flags across town, there was a public campaign for rainbow flags to be hung all over town, and so the church put up the doors again in solidarity and as a theological statement. One couple in the congregation objected to the doors and wanted them to be taken down after a few weeks--they thought they were advocating for LGBTQ folks



over and above straight folks. Church council discussed it, and affirmed that the doors are an important witness for us, advocating radical welcome and support for a group of folks who historically don't fare well in church communities. The pastor and a few members met with the couple to address the issue, and they remain active members. This public sign of radical welcome also has helped identify us as a theologically progressive church and drawn visitors and new members.

- There is ongoing, mild, and civil conflict around practices about using our investments. Some people are comfortable with using some of the principal, arguing that people before us gave to the endowment so that it could be used freely as need arises. Others are more comfortable with using only the interest on the investments to ensure longevity. No one balks at using the interest to balance the budget; no one objects to stewardship drives and capital campaigns for specific needs. The issue is balancing investment in mission and long-term sustainability, and it will be an ongoing debate.

The ability to talk with each other across differences is important to us, and our experience has been good and open dialogue and debate. Members adjust to change at a varied pace, but we move forward together. We're a remarkably faction-free church, with strong lay leadership who step up gladly yet respect the pastor's role--collaborating well together without crossing boundaries. In 2015, we added the following covenant to our bylaws to help sculpt behavior and commitments when/if there is conflict:

### **COVENANT WITH ONE ANOTHER**

*We covenant with one another to create a safe environment and to uphold the dignity of each person in our congregation.*

*We will consider the impact of our words and actions on others as we seek to make our church a safe place for all.*

*Our communication with others will be timely, direct, honest, open, and sensitive although we may disagree with another's assumptions, opinions, and decisions.*

*We understand that conflict is a healthy part of life, including life in the church. We will accept and affirm differences. While we may have strong opinions, we acknowledge that others do also. We will embrace the diversity in our spiritual family, imagine other perspectives, and be enriched by these differences. We will be respectful of one another as we direct our attention to the issues and challenges at hand.*

*We understand that our church stays strong as each person is heard, and we seek the participation of all our congregants.*

*We will engage in self-reflection and prayer, seeking ways that our presence will build up our church and its people, as well as our community and our world. We will seek God's guidance and grace to listen attentively as we live into our future.*

*As a part of this faith community, we will work responsibly for the benefit of the whole and endeavor that all we do and say will be grounded in love.*

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

Staff member's name	Years of service	UCC Standing (Y/N)
Seth Robinson	2020-2022	Yes
L. Ellis Arnold	2013-2019	Yes
Matt Perkins	2000-2011	Yes
Sue Hamly	1991-1999	Yes
Jim Schaefer	1978-1990	Yes

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

Our church thrives when pastoral leadership is scholarly, dynamic, and collaborative, and is resilient in the face of transition and change. We have a strong core membership and are energized by focus on mission and building relationships and community.

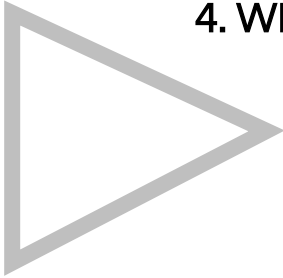
Has any past leader left under pressure or by involuntary termination?

There is vague memory among some long-time members of a pastor in the 1960s who was hired before the UCC search process was put in place, and about whom the church knew little before he showed up. There was a clear and immediate mismatch between his 'hellfire' preaching and the congregation, and within a year he was asked to leave.

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

Has a past pastor been the subject of a Fitness Review while at your church? No.

## 4. WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?



“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39 NRSV)

- a. COMMUNITY VISION
- b. MISSION InSite

### 4a. COMMUNITY VISION

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

Ongoing participation and partnerships with:

- The Depot Outlet (community church-owned non-profit thrift store)
- Decorah Community Food Pantry
- Decorah Free Clinic
- Local nursing and assisted living facilities
- School backpack program and Kids Lunch Club
- Decorah Faith Coalition
- Collaboration with Decorah Methodist Church for Sister Parish initiative in El Salvador
- Support of Northeast Iowa Peace and Justice Center
- Neighbors Helping Neighbors and Guatemalan Basics were both created to support local immigrant families (cooperation with local churches to provide and distribute these funds)
- Participation in Adopt-a-Family Christmas giving program through NE IA Community Action

Intergenerational service and cultural immersion trips have included:

- St. Louis, to lend a hand in home repairs to prevent fines (which create cycles of economic hardships), learn about homelessness and community organizing
- Chicago, to learn about inner city dynamics and continuing learning about community organizing
- Des Moines, to learn about transitional centers
- Pine Ridge, South Dakota, to lend a hand in repairs and learn about history of Native American experiences and the lasting effects of white colonialism on what’s continued to happen today
- Atlanta, to learn about the wider UCC contexts and urban communities

- Cuba. After traveling to rebuild a community center in Santiago, Cuba, our youth planned and led a fundraiser to send money back to help.
- These service trips are eye opening for both those who participate and the rest of us who hear their experiences, helping us to be able to see what's happening in our community and our world, around poverty, race and privilege, community organizing, etc.

One recent lay-led effort: an anti-bullying campaign inspired by the Scarf Project organized for the UCC's 2013 General Synod in Long Beach and led by lay members who wanted to do something to prevent and end bullying in the community. The response was tremendous. Long time knitters met to teach first timers. Kids as well as adults worked to create over 110 scarves.

Currently transformational: helping to coordinate support for new and undocumented immigrants in our area. These efforts have led to deeper engagement with neighboring churches, raised our public profile, and generated deeper reflection about 'who is our neighbor' and how we can serve ongoing and emerging needs in our community.

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

- Participation in conference annual meetings--current Moderator of the Conference is a member of our congregation
- 5 for 5 congregation
- Invitation/participation of national staff and conference staff to preach/lead in worship
- Supported previous pastor's participation in Authorizing Ministry for the 21st Century (AM21) and on the planning team
- Supported Pension Board Next Generation Leadership Initiative (NGLI) participation for our pastor
- In addition to piloting the white privilege curriculum, we were the beta testing congregation for "Exploring UCC History, Polity, and Theology" curriculum written by the pastor for the MESA team at the national setting: [http://www.ucc.org/exploring\\_ucc\\_polity](http://www.ucc.org/exploring_ucc_polity).

Many local churches love to tell the story of what they are doing in the community to transform lives. Some have identified certain aspects of their witness into the wider community using language shared with other UCC congregations. (Find more information as desired at [ucc.org](http://ucc.org).) Check any statements below that apply to your UCC faith community.

- Accessible to All (A2A)
- Creation Justice
- Economic Justice
- Faithful and Welcoming

- God Is Still Speaking (GISS)
- Border and Immigrant Justice
- Inter-cultural/Multi-racial (I'M)
- Just Peace
- Global Mission Church
- Open and Affirming (ONA)
- WISE Congregation for Mental Health
- Other UCC designations:
- Designations from other denominations

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

ONA: Our church spent two years in exploration and approval of an open and affirming position and statement that enabled us to determine our common values and beliefs regarding social justice. The vote to approve was overwhelming, over 90%, and we wear it proudly. A few years ago we continued that discussion, ONA 2.0, to explore more fully gender identity and expression. The success of providing this in-depth, honest conversation about challenging questions has led us to consider similar series on mental health and accessibility.

We are working on becoming an A2A church, but not there yet. We are interested in learning more about other designation categories to expand our witness for justice and welcome.

We frequently use the “God Is Still Speaking” theme and materials, including a poster proclaiming its message placed prominently above the stairs leading to the main church building. This creative, progressive messaging captures our spirit perfectly. (We don’t really know whether we meet the criteria for designation.)

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

- Participation in the Decorah Area Faith Coalition--network of churches and leaders that mostly focus on fundraising right now (for immigration related needs)
- We replaced traditional worship service to participate in a walk of solidarity one Sunday following the shooting of Michael Brown and combined with other churches to march to Luther College as a public witness, ultimately joining in Gospel Sunday worship at Luther
- Blessing of the Animals--annual service at local park
- Blessing of the Backpacks--annual service at the beginning of the school year
- Blessing of the Bikes-- annual trail ride open to community members

- Thanksgiving Eve Service--now an ecumenical service with Methodist Church
- Lenten studies with Methodist congregation
- Ash Wednesday Services with the Methodists and Episcopalians
- Book study with local Buddhist center; ongoing conversation about joint meditation group
- World Religion Study--book study, lectures, combined with trips to a synagogue, Zen center, and a mosque
- Basic administrative support for the annual local Pride Parade
- Offer volunteers to Luther College to provide meals to Muslim students during Ramadan

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

Our current mission statement was adopted relatively recently, in 2012, and reflects our focus well--extravagant welcome to all, creative and curious, emphasis on building up of community and active service and engagement. "Worship. Love. Serve."--this is what we hear in Jesus' gospel, and our call to be in community with each other and work toward justice, mercy, and love in the world around us.

The majority of our folks connect into worship and to governance and/or service opportunities. Governance committees advocated moving to a unified meeting night to create time efficiencies and have been very effective in recent years in reducing the amount of time needed to accomplish church business, both by recognizing organizational tasks that can easily be handled by staff and by increased use of project management software and digital communication between meetings. There is ongoing discussion of streamlining committee structures to reflect changing needs and possibilities in service of mission.

The intergenerational, intercultural service trips have been very popular, and the congregation in general has been very supportive in giving both time and resources to make them possible. Many members are eager to give their time to ensure a visible congregational presence in community events to advocate for and support our neighbors. Most volunteer in some regular church-related service, either with an organized project such as Kids Lunch Club or the backpack program or through visitation or working with the local food pantry, free clinic, disabilities services, backpack program, senior facilities, immigration support services, and more. Perhaps more importantly, our members tend to be committed to and actively engaged in service and advocacy in their lives beyond the church; our orientation to mission, both local and global, is part of what draws them.

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



We tend to think of the pastor's role as roughly balancing five inter-connected categories: preaching and worship, leadership and teaching, pastoral care and support, outreach and community engagement, and administration and denominational connection. We encourage and support our pastor's participation in wider church activities and community ministry as part of their scope of work.

## 4b. MISSION InSite

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Comment on your congregation's MissionInsite report with data for your neighborhood(s) or area. What trends and opportunities are shown?

Our small town has a burgeoning reputation as a destination for recreational tourism. A beautiful trail system is attractive for bicyclists in good weather and used by cross-country skiers in winter months. Camping, canoeing, and fishing are also popular summer activities in this area. The presence of the Oneota Food Co-op and emphasis on health and wellness is attractive to an active population, especially with access to world-class care at the Mayo and Gundersen clinics. With two award-winning breweries (Toppling Goliath and Pulpit Rock), the internationally renowned Seed Savers Exchange, and the popular Decorah Eagle.cam, Decorah has become a place that draws visitors--and sometimes visitors who stay--from all demographic groups.

Decorah also has a strong and vibrant retirement age population. They contribute a lot to the area through volunteer services and civic involvement. Some people in this age group have retired from other parts of the country, and our church has proven attractive to this population as well. The area has a lot to offer older folks, and they are appreciated by the community.

How do your congregation's internal demographics compare or contrast to a) the neighborhoods adjacent to your church, and b) other neighborhoods with which your church connects?

Our congregation skews older and probably more educated than the immediate neighborhood, but reflects the town's predominantly white, northern European heritage and economic range.

How are the demographics of the community currently shaping ministry, or not?

Poverty is a problem in every community and should always be a concern of the church. Our church has a long history of addressing needs, most recently with the local community food pantry, Depot Outlet, schools' backpack program, and the recent kids lunch program. We are interested in exploring new ways to provide support for struggling children and families.

Our church has a history of outreach to immigrants and refugees in need of assistance. Our church currently administers funds to provide temporary financial support for immigrant families and legal

assistance for asylum-seekers, and helps to connect new immigrants with social services. We want to continue to provide help to those who need it.

And while overwhelmingly white, Decorah is also home to people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and that diversity is growing (if slowly). Our church provided leadership for community conversations about white privilege as an initial step in ensuring that all are welcome and valued here, and we are interested in continuing to provide leadership in this area. We joined with our Methodist friends in sharing Iftar meals with Muslim students at Luther College. Our advocacy and support for the LGBTQ community has led to a second round of conversations on gender identity and trans issues. We are open to new initiatives to create deeper understanding and appreciation for all.

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

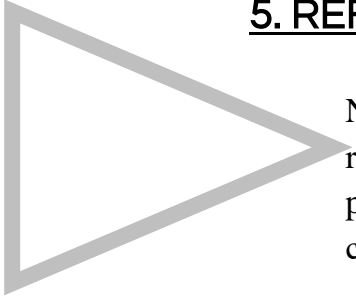
- you're the church with the rainbow doors!
- progressive theology (you're the liberal church, right?)
- active volunteers serving community needs
- engaged in community
- active concern for school kids in need of food security
- the ones who organize volunteers and money to help immigrants with basics
- it's small, isn't it? (compared to the Lutherans and Catholics, at least)
- open and affirming

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

- feeling of being very welcome
- hearing personal prayer concerns about both individuals and local and global needs
- sincerity in greetings from members
- commitment to local social justice work
- getting to know people immediately through their shared prayer requests
- the shared sense of community, personal connections
- the personable pastor drew them in
- they were invited to stay for coffee after worship and had welcoming conversations
- seeing the open doors on the UCC parade float
- good music
- warm, genuine people
- true to traditions and teachings of the wider UCC--that's what I want for my kids
- light-hearted, informal style, with humor and creativity

- new members felt religious dogma was not “forced upon them” but the ideology and vocabulary were delivered in an open way, the scripture interpretation was an open-ended questioning and dialogue with members of the congregation.

## 5. REFERENCES



Name up to three people who have agreed to serve as phone and written references. Advise the three references: “The contact information you provide may be shared publicly. Please use contact information that you feel comfortable giving to candidates so they can reach you with their questions.”

### REFERENCE 1

Name / Position / Phone / Email / Relationship to the Congregation:

Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

Pastor / Good Shepherd Lutheran Church / Decorah, IA

563-419-0140 / [pastoramy@goodshepherddecorah.org](mailto:pastoramy@goodshepherddecorah.org)

Fellow member of Decorah Area Faith Coalition, partner in community mission activities

### REFERENCE 2

Name / Position / Phone / Email / Relationship to the Congregation:

Ruth Palmer / Retired school administrator

Volunteer leader of local immigration working group in NE Iowa

563-379-6777 / [rjp1407@gmail.com](mailto:rjp1407@gmail.com)

Works with immigration support services such as Justice for our Neighbors legal clinic, and “Neighbors helping Neighbors” fund for families needing immediate assistance

### REFERENCE 3

Name / Position / Phone / Email / Relationship to the Congregation:

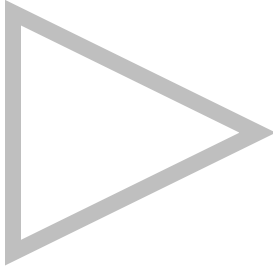
Erick Kephart

Trust Office at Decorah Bank & Trust / Decorah, IA

563-382-1556 / [ekephart@decorah.bank](mailto:ekephart@decorah.bank)

Financial advisor for Decorah UCC investment accounts

## 6. CLOSING THOUGHTS



- a. CLOSING PRAYER
- b. STATEMENT OF CONSENT
- c. CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION VALIDATION

### 6a. CLOSING PRAYER

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*Include here any prayer or dream for the minister you imagine journeying toward you... a poem, for example, or a Scripture passage or a piece of music that is meaningful to your Search Committee: [a favorite anthem; music by Mark Miller, text by Gordon Light](#)*

*["Draw the Circle Wide"](#)*

*[Draw the circle,  
Draw the circle wide,  
Draw the circle,  
Draw the circle wide.  
No one stands alone,  
We'll stand side by side.  
Draw the circle,  
Draw the circle wide.](#)*

*[Draw the circle wide,  
Draw it wider still.  
Let this be our song,  
No one stands alone.  
Standing side by side,  
Draw the circle,  
Draw the circle wide.](#)*

## 6b. STATEMENT OF CONSENT

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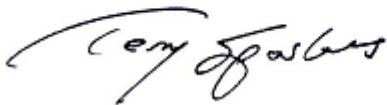
The covenantal relationship between a church and those called by that church to serve as pastors and teachers and in other ministerial positions is strengthened when vital information is openly shared by covenantal partners. To that end, we attest that, to the best of our abilities, we have provided 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?

- Pastoral search committee
- Chair of Trustees
- Church Council
- Past co-chairs, 2019 search committee
- More than 40 congregation members through survey of hopes and vision

Signed:



Name / Title / Date:

Margaret Betteridge: Moderator, Church Council Chair/Co-Chair Search Committee 2-27-23

Terry Sparkes: Trustee/Co-chair Search Committee 2-27-23

## 6c. VALIDATION BY CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION

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

Staff Comment:

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

Staff Comment:

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

Staff Comment:

My signature below attests to the above three items.

Signature:

Name / Title:

Email:

Phone:

Date:

**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**



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

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