

Search and Call Tools for Congregations

Advancing the Spirit's guidance into God's future

INTRODUCING THE NEW LOCAL CHURCH

Who
are
we

Who
is our
neighbor

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!

MINISTERIAL EXCELLENCE,
SUPPORT & AUTHORIZATION

**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF HOUSTON
HOUSTON, TEXAS

SENIOR MINISTER

HOUSTON ASSOCIATION OF THE SOUTH CENTRAL CONFERENCE

[Validation Date]

LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE CONTENTS

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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)*

We begin in prayer.

We encourage all those considering this profile to pause and join with us in a moment of stillness and silence as we open our prayerful hearts to the spirit.



Dear beloved God,

We raise in thanksgiving the opportunity to share the story of our congregation with all those called to minister as your hands and your voice in the world.

We raise in joy the time and talent each potential candidate will spend studying our efforts here.

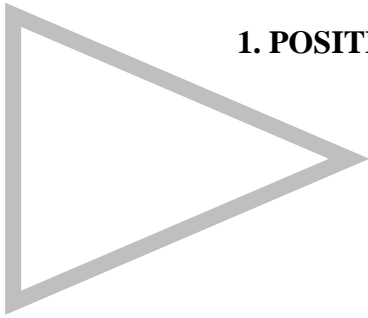
We call out to the spirit to guide us all as we seek to discern your will. Give us hearts to grow in fellowship no matter which form our journey together may take.

And bless our process with your love that all who engage in this effort may be enriched in learning, nurtured in your spirit, and comforted by your grace.

Thank you for these moments you have given us to share, connect, learn and grow together. May this effort lead to greater opportunities to reveal your love in the world for FCC and for all who seek to lead us.

We pray in the name of a living Christ who sustains and strengthens us always.

Amen.



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

Church name: First Congregational Church of Houston

Street address: 10840 Beinhorn Rd. Houston, Texas 77024

Supplemental web links: www.fcc-houston.org

Additional ecumenical affiliations (*e.g., denominations, communions, fellowships*):

None

Conference: South Central Conference

Association: Houston

UCC Conference or Association Staff Contact Person:

For the Conference: Reverend Phil Hodson, Conference Minister, (830) 625-2212, office@sccucc.org

For the Association: Reverend Leslie Jackson, Senior Minister, St. Peter United Church of Christ, (713) 465-1424, pastor@stpeterunited.com

SUMMARY MINISTRY DESCRIPTION:

First Congregational Church of Houston was founded in 1955 as an Open Church, boldly welcoming people of all races to worship together within the segregated South. Today, FCC embraces its identity as an Open Church by welcoming worshipers regardless of ethnicity, nationality, citizenship status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. We are an oasis of progressive Christianity located within a conservative Christian neighborhood. The thought-provoking and inspiring worship services we experience on Sundays sustain us in living the truths of Jesus' teachings and serving our community throughout the week. There is a tremendous need for our message of acceptance, love, peace, and justice here in the fourth largest city in the nation; our vision is for all who seek an inclusive, progressive Christian community within greater Houston to find their church home in us. To continue our mission, we will require a leader who is both passionate and compassionate, scholarly, energetic, and creative. Our next Senior Minister will possess a love for social justice and a talent for building community among our members and will enthusiastically explore ways of increasing FCC's visibility within the city. We seek a minister to walk with us in all activities both as a leader and as a member of our congregational community, joining with us in the full scope of our fellowship.

WHAT WE VALUE ABOUT LIVING IN OUR AREA:

When people find themselves in Houston for the first time, they are often surprised to find a global city in the middle of Texas (well, on the Southeast coast). We are the fourth largest city in the United States and we rank #1 in diversity,

<https://www.governing.com/community/houston-is-the-nations-most-diverse-city-report.html>.

Of the 7.2 million residents in the area, 1.7 million were born in other countries. You can wake up in the morning and eat Beignets while you watch the whimsical art car parade

<https://www.thehoustonartcarparade.com/>, enjoy a delicious *pupusa* while you explore one of our several local *pulgas* (flea markets), or bike one of our 163 miles of trails and then decide if you are feeling like Afghani or Nigerian for dinner. Our thriving arts and theater scene, world class universities, championship sports and near-coast location mean that whatever your interests may be, you can find most of them here.

First Congregational Church is centrally located on a beautiful campus in Hunter's Creek Village. This incorporated city within Houston provides us with a quiet oasis to restore our spirits before returning to our boisterous larger community. Our thriving Farmer's Market, Music in the Park, Music in the Meeting House, and numerous other community events provide us with the opportunity to reach out to the community and let them know that we are a welcoming home for progressive Christians in the area.

Below is a link to a promotional video that celebrates our beautiful city. And a video that takes you through the FCC campus.

https://www.google.com/search?q=video+promo+of+houston&rlz=1C1VDKB_enUS986US986&oq=video+promo+of+houston&aqs=chrome..69i57j33i160j33i299l2.5848j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:70cacb0d,vid:mjciLWS36fk



CURRENT SIZE OF MEMBERSHIP: 354 members

LANGUAGES USED IN MINISTRY: English

POSITION TITLE: Senior Minister

POSITION DURATION: Settled – a called position intended for longer-term ministry in which the minister moves church membership to the First Congregational Church of Houston and moves standing to related association.

COMPENSATION LEVEL: Full Time

Does the total support package meet conference compensation guidelines?

Yes.

1b. SCOPE OF WORK

The Senior Minister will lead the congregation through preaching, teaching, and offering spiritual support to the congregation. The Senior Minister will support the boards and committees of the church in acting upon the strategic plans laid forth by the congregation. Our vision at FCC as a faith community is to be a spiritual oasis for all that transforms lives through Christian worship, community, and service.

In addition, FCC fully expects the Senior Minister to be actively engaged in the wider Houston community and to be responsive to the needs of Texans as well as connected to the ongoing work of the UCC. These are fully accounted for in expectations of time and all such work should be incorporated into an appropriate and manageable schedule.

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF OUR PASTOR

We fully anticipate that our Senior Minister will develop a schedule based on their own priorities and needs. We have put a recent example here as a model of the flexibility and self-determination that govern our Senior Minister's days.

MONDAY: ½ day—Morning off. At noon, clean in-box, make to do lists and set up meetings (pastoral, visitors, etc.), begin sermon research. Occasionally evenings and weekends.

TUESDAY: Pastoral and administrative meetings, sermon outlined by EOD.

WEDNESDAY: Draft sermon. Staff meeting. Occasionally evenings and weekends.

THURSDAY: Morning: edit sermon, select prayers. Afternoon: pastoral meetings/prep growth group. Evening: Lead growth group.

FRIDAY: ½ day: Flex—Men's lunch. Admin/care team/board/community meetings.

SATURDAY: ½ day: Flex—community meetings, etc.

SUNDAY: 7:30-12:30 worship—periodic LGBTQ+ bible study, leading adult classes or teaching confirmands—off rest of day Sunday.

CORE COMPETENCIES:

Our Senior Minister should be **compassionate, intellectually curious, servant leader, who is a compelling and thought-provoking speaker.**

1c. COMPENSATION AND SUPPORT

SALARY BASIS: Meets conference compensation guidelines.

TYPICAL BENEFIT PACKAGE INCLUDES:

- Health Care and Dental (full premiums for minister and family)
- Pension/Retirement (14%)
- Paid vacation (4 weeks per 12 months).
- Further study/continuing education support.

The Senior Minister will be responsible for securing housing and necessary transport to and from the church. Reasonable residential choices would include both the downtown Houston metro area and near Houston suburbs. We recommend the Senior Minister consider this geographical range for housing.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/BENEFITS: Sabbatical Available—3 months after 7 years.

DESCRIBE PEER AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORTS AVAILABLE FOR MINISTERS IN YOUR ASSOCIATION/CONFERENCE:

FCC believes in and prioritizes leadership support; thus, we work with the Senior Minister to provide for capacity building. In the past these supports have included professional development coaches in leadership development, time management skills, organizational capacities, and conflict resolution. The Staff Church Relations Committee works with the Senior Minister to consider what capacities they would like to expand and then works to find the appropriate professional development resources to meet this need.

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

THE MINISTRY GOALS YOU ENVISION YOUR NEXT MINISTER CO-COLLABORATING WITH THE CONGREGATION TO ACHIEVE.

- ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY – FCC has a long history of involvement in the Houston community, and members see this as one of the most important roles of the church. This has taken many forms through the years, from direct service opportunities with local non-profit organizations and participation in interfaith groups to partnerships with local, regional, and national groups advocating for—or against—policies that impact people’s lives, especially those on the margins of society. While we have never been a large church, we are “specialists in generosity,” as one congregant recently put it. In recent years, we have launched a very successful farmer’s market that has allowed us to reach more residents in our immediate community, an affluent, largely white, and politically conservative neighborhood. But there is more we can do to be loving agents for change and attract new members from these nearby neighborhoods, as well as in the wider Houston region. We seek an incoming Senior Minister who will view it as an opportunity to build on FCC’s strong foundation of progressive Christian thought and action to expand the church’s reach—and multiply our impact—in the fourth-largest city in America.
- ENHANCE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION PROGRAM – FCC members also place great importance on a strong Christian education program. However, the full program—most especially the program for children and youth—has struggled over the past many years to find focus,

leadership, and engagement. These struggles have intensified in recent years due to the pandemic and staffing changes. A new minister must have a strong interest in and commitment to rebuilding this program so that existing young families remain engaged and potential new members are attracted to this opportunity. This commitment must be part of a holistic plan to reinvigorate the entire Christian education program for all ages.

- **NURTURE SPIRITUAL GROWTH** – FCC is a congregation that values and encourages active engagement with our faith. We would like to be even more involved in the world around us and seek to deepen our personal connection to God’s call for us through sermons, education, and action. We seek an expansive and open-minded study of Christ in worship and Christian education, as well as expansive intellectual inquiry of Scripture. We believe in a still-speaking God. We want a minister who will challenge us to see this in our personal lives and in the world, both through an enlivened approach to our existing programs and creative thinking about what we might do differently. We seek a minister with a rigorous theological practice who inspires our growth and further educates us through theological exploration.
- **GROW IN SUSTAINABLE WAYS** – FCC has never been focused on growth for growth’s sake. Many members would say they are content with the congregation’s small-to-medium size. That said, we recognize incredible opportunities for growth in both our neighborhood and the wider city. We name that our unique position as one of the only progressive Christian churches in Houston uniquely positions us for growth. However, we do recognize the need for sustainable growth of the congregation, with an emphasis on drawing young families. A Senior Minister must be able to address this challenge in a strategic and thoughtful way, while also maintaining the tight-knit community feel of FCC that so many members prize.

DESCRIBE HOW YOUR VISION OF THE MINISTER YOU ARE NOW SEEKING WILL ASSIST THE CONGREGATION IN MAKING AN IMPACT BEYOND ITS WALLS.

At FCC, we believe that social justice is at the core of Jesus’ ministry, and that it likewise should guide our ministry—and work—as a church. That is why we place great emphasis on supporting and partnering with nonprofits like The Metropolitan Organization and Courts and Ports, which are focused on fighting oppression and marginalization and showing the radical inclusion of Jesus to those most in need. We have a standing Church in Society Board at FCC that regularly engages with these groups and is constantly scanning our community for other ways to help. Recently, for instance, a number of FCC members have assisted displaced Afghan refugee families in Houston and found this a meaningful and impactful way to give of their time, talent, and treasure. We will look to our new Senior Minister to help us keep this call to service alive in the hearts of our members and to expand it further into our Houston community.

SPECIFY LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS OR CULTURALLY-SPECIFIC CAPACITIES PREFERRED IN A NEXT MINISTERIAL LEADER, AND WHY THOSE MATTER TO THE CONGREGATION’S SENSE OF CALLING.

Since its founding, FCC has always been a church longing to be a force for justice in the world around us. Founded in 1955 in the Jim Crow South to be a church open to all races and ethnicities, committed in 1998 to warmly welcome all people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, we want to be an oasis of love in an aching world for all members of our community. We are a curious congregation, and

we thrive on the differences in our midst. We believe being a diverse community will make our understanding of the world deeper, our faith richer, and the social justice work that we do more impactful.

Culturally specific capacities such as an understanding of worship practices for the American South would be helpful. As well as an understanding of varied worship cultures, the church was founded by north-easterners and holds a particular culture all its own in the region because of this. Cultural practice such as overt evangelistic preaching has not been part of the fabric of FCC and is not expected to be in the future. Houston is the most culturally diverse city in America with many languages spoken. Though few members of the current congregation are Spanish speakers, a facility with Spanish would be a positive capacity for a Senior Minister to have for our region.

Sunday morning continues for us, as well as the rest of the United States, to be the most segregated day. We are mostly although not entirely white, well-educated, middle-to-upper class. About 11% of our membership identifies as LGBTQIA. Several years ago, during a CE class, this irony of our open but mostly monochromatic church came up and we began discussing potential solutions when one member made the insightful comment that all our solutions suggested bringing people of color to our church and that we were asking a lot of people to leave the safe space that a racially segregated space can provide for marginalized groups. Her point was that to have a congregation in which all types of people feel comfortable and welcome to join you, you must first have a congregation with all types of people. Achieving the true diversity that attracting more diversity requires has mostly eluded us as a congregation. We continue to long to be a genuinely inclusive church. We hope that our Senior Minister will help us find a path forward to becoming a truly diverse congregation.

THE SENIOR MINISTER WILL DISPLAY THE FOLLOWING MARKS OF FAITHFUL & EFFECTIVE AUTHORIZED MINISTRY AS DEFINED BY THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST:

(Note: *The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers* is a tool for discernment and assessment, created especially for use by Members in Discernment, Committees on Ministry, and authorized ministers. The Marks developed through conversations surrounding the [Ministry Issues Pronouncement of General Synod 25](#), which sought to expand UCC definitions of learnedness and leadership in authorized ministry and to emphasize excellence in ministerial formation. Further information about “The Marks...” can be found at [UCC.org](#))

While we hope a new Senior Minister of FCC would possess many of the traits and behaviors described in “The Marks . . .,” we have selected four areas that rise to the top of the list (in no particular order):

- **Exhibiting a Spiritual Foundation and Ongoing Spiritual Practice**
 - Loving God, following Jesus Christ, and being guided by the Holy Spirit; living a life of discipleship.
 - Praying actively and nurturing spiritual practices.
 - Being called to ordained ministry by God and the Church.
 - Continuing discernment of one’s call in community.
 - Understanding the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the elements of Christian worship to nurture faith.
 - Exhibiting a commitment to lifelong spiritual development and faithful personal stewardship.

- **Working Together for Justice and Mercy**
 - Drawing on the ministry of Jesus Christ to confront injustice and oppression.
 - Practicing the radical hospitality of God.
 - Identifying and working to overcome explicit and implicit bias in the life of the Church.
 - Understanding community context and navigating change with a community.
 - Engaging in mission and outreach.
 - Building relationships of mutual trust and interdependence.

- **Building Transformational Leadership Skills**
 - Empowering the Church to be faithful to God’s call, reflective of Christ’s mission, and open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit.
 - Strategically creating the future of God’s Church.
 - Witnessing in the public square to God’s redeeming power.
 - Performing necessary and appropriate administrative tasks.
 - Working collaboratively with intercultural awareness and sensitivity.
 - Encouraging leadership development of self and others through continuing education and lifelong learning.
 -
- **Participating in Theological Praxis**
 - Practicing theological reflection and engagement as part of one’s sense of ministerial identity.
 - Integrating theological reflection in teaching, preaching, and ecclesial and community leadership.
 - Articulating a theology and practice of ministry consistent with the UCC Manual on Ministry.
 - Demonstrating an appreciation for and participation in the ecumenical and interfaith partnerships of the UCC.
 - Experiencing and appreciating a variety of theological perspectives.
 - Embodying the UCC Ministerial Code.

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 OUR CONGREGATION TO BECOME?

First Congregational Church has always been a progressive voice in the Houston community. We offer a nurturing oasis of faith for those who seek to engage in a Christ-centered radical inclusion for Houston and Texas. Our missions and efforts over the years have included a wide range of work with the marginalized and oppressed peoples of our region. These efforts continue today, in focused, impactful projects responding to the needs around us.

Still, we are called to do more. We believe God is calling us to build up our covenant circle and grow our resources – both human and financial – to extend God’s work further into the world.

We believe our church is being called to engage more fully in the world through more proactive outreach, activism, social justice reform, with a greater and more intentional welcome for all. We believe we must expand our efforts in areas of immigrant justice, LGBTQIA equality, women's equality, and body autonomy. We must grow our work with those who live in poverty or on the margins as well as offer a message of God’s hope and love to those with privilege who seek to be in covenant with us. We must actively claim our position as anti-racist, anti-oppression ministers and we must do the necessary work, and seek the necessary training, to become a safe space for conversation, action, and inclusion of all.

We believe we are called to more fully live and operationalize our Mission Statement which calls us to WELCOME all into an inclusive community, SEEK to follow Jesus’ teachings, SEARCH for more truth and light, SUPPORT one another on our faith Journeys, STRIVE for peace and justice. We believe we must deepen our work in every action we have named for ourselves in this mission.

When we realize this call, we will be a more diverse population in all ways, we will be a more vibrant congregation in workflow and activity, we will be a brighter beacon for peace and justice, we will have a robust youth and children’s ministry, and we will be known as leaders in activating God’s message of grace and love for all.

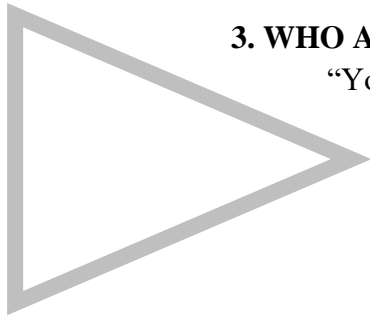
While FCC-Houston lies within a residential neighborhood, it is far from a neighborhood church. Our progressive Christian theology is uncommon in the greater Houston region, such that many of our members and visitors come from great distances to worship with us. This geographic scattering of members has made it difficult for many to physically attend meetings and events during the week, which has, in turn, posed challenges in reinforcing the sense of community and church engagement.

To increase the sense of belonging within the church, FCC established a small group ministry, Growth Groups , about five years ago. As part of the Christian Education program, these Growth Groups originally met in person on weeknights, often at a member’s house, with each individual group organized around a special topic or comprising a particular demographic.

When the Covid-19 pandemic shut down all in-person gatherings, FCC took the time to regroup and relaunch Growth Groups, which were moved to Zoom, where they flourished. Growth Groups quickly became popular among a good percentage of the congregation. The essential need for our members to feel connection amid the isolation of the pandemic brought many new participants – church visitors and members alike – to join in virtual groups with topics as varied as Henri Nouwen in Latin America, parenting young children, and wine tasting. A dozen or more Growth Groups are generally offered in the fall and spring semesters. With Covid restrictions now lifted, some Growth Groups have resumed meeting in person, while others continue on Zoom, which increases their availability to a greater number of diversely located people.

Like many churches, our worship services moved online as well during the Covid-19 lockdown. We faced a technological learning curve to become proficient in stitching together individually recorded video segments into a whole service, including merging singularly recorded vocal parts into a “choir.” Calls to Offering were contributed by members recording them on their phones and submitting them for editing into the services. The congregation graciously overlooked glitches in the early YouTube broadcasts, finding comfort in the familiar faces and elements displayed on their screens during the time of isolation.

Even though we have since resumed in-person worship, our online broadcasts continue to have a strong viewership, especially among members with limited mobility and longtime members who have moved away from the area. The production value of our online services has improved dramatically with the employment of a professional videographer/editor. With this expansion into broadcasting our worship services, we have recognized the challenge in extending the sense of inclusion and community to our online viewers and are excited to explore new ways of engaging online visitors with our greater church family



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

DESCRIBE YOUR CONGREGATION’S LIFE OF FAITH

First Congregational Church is a seeker’s church. We do not embrace – and in fact eschew – creeds. We do not seek or express absolutes in our faith. We are a non-confessional church with an interfaith curiosity. We use the 1629 Salem covenant as our shared membership covenant when new members join our congregation. It is also tradition to sing *We Limit Not the Truth of God* (number one in our hymnal) to welcome all new members and at the end of all congregational meetings.

An oft-used phrase to describe us – Where Heart and Mind Meet – remains apt today. When we speak of God, we use all pronouns and actively shift them for context and connection. The Holy Spirit is known to us as a personal relationship and thus, many divergent answers will come when you ask our membership to describe the Spirit. Perhaps the best example of our congregation in action is revealed through the fact that in 1998 FCC elected to produce our own hymnal when the UCC’s newly created *New Century* hymnal did not meet our needs for inclusivity and breadth of hymnody. This action resulted in a hymnal, *The Hymns of Truth and Light*, that is used in 115 churches today.

We are a music-loving church and expressive in our singing. Our hymn singing is generally robust and many members connect and share through collective singing. We celebrate the Eucharist monthly and on special occasions with differing modes of delivery (sharing in pews, coming forward etc.) We believe that God is Still Speaking and most often does so in surprising and unexpected ways. We attempt to open ourselves up to these surprises. The following quote is an excellent window into the membership and beliefs of FCC – it would likely inspire a service, singing, and Sunday school classes for weeks!

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”— **Rainer Maria Rilke**

We also are very human and hold to patterns such as sitting in the same places week after week. While comforting us, we know and name that holding such patterns is not always a path forward. This is true of other practices – our services are one hour long and most members prefer it that way. Our pattern of worship is also quite consistent with opening, readings, children’s message, Pastoral message, anthem, offering and benediction – all punctuated with hymns spread throughout. This pattern has remained consistent for decades. There are occasions where this pattern is not followed but this is rare.

FCC members are deeply dedicated to care for others and to serve each other in need. We are very present and aware of the needs within our Congregation and actively work to serve those needs. We are a congregation that is most likely to respond in service to a need as we become aware. On the whole, we are very close and often seek to deepen our relationships with one another through fellowship opportunities or simply checking in each week with each other before or after service.

Today, FCC continues to be a leading institution in service and missions. Below are current examples of the many ways FCC members are working to reflect God's love in the world. While examining the list, we encourage you to consider that FCC's total membership is 354 – we are small but very active.

Back Bay Mission, Casa Juan Diego, East Spring Branch Food Pantry, ECHOS (Epiphany Community Health Outreach Services), Emerge, FCC Be A Good Samaritan (Bags), FCC Outreach to Houston Homeless, FCC Benevolence Fund, FCC Taste Of Heaven Soup Kitchen, Fruit Share Houston, Houston Food Bank, Houston Pride Festival, Kid's Meals, Literacy Advance, Memorial Assistance Ministries, Raise Up Families, Rebuilding Houston Together, Search. Settegast Heights Village, Spring Branch ISD Mentoring Program, UCC – Our Church's Wider Mission, United Campus Ministries of Greater Houston (UCM)

If we do meet in conversation, we encourage you to ask us about any of the above ministries; we look forward to revealing our passion about them with you.

DESCRIBE SEVERAL STRENGTHS OR POSITIVE QUALITIES OF YOUR CONGREGATION.

FCC is a welcoming space. Visitors often cite the “friendliness” and welcoming nature of all the people they meet. The members are intentional about our practices regarding welcome and a visitor to our church will be greeted with at least one personal interaction during their first visit. We believe this human connection is essential to our full call and even members who are more shy or reserved work to connect with their fellow congregants and with visitors weekly.

FCC is a congregation that loves music and loves to sing. Our music ministry is a central part of how we worship and how we, as individuals, express our connections to God and to each other. Thus, our hymn singing is robust and full, oftentimes with added harmonies from our choir, which allows all voices – even those not naturally inclined to music – to sing out. One of the other common comments from visitors is how enthusiastic the congregation is about their singing and the music program.

FCC is a caring congregation. Members are very intentional about providing for the health and well-being of their covenant family. Furthermore, a commitment to those in need threads all our ministries together with a recent focus on refugee families and immigrant populations in Texas.

FCC is decidedly Christian. And while we may well hold diverse–and divergent–positions on the nature of Christ and divinity itself, we follow a Christ-inspired and Christ-centered practice that affirms God's continued presence in the world as revealed to us through the ongoing study of the Gospels and the life of Christ.

OUR TYPICAL WORSHIP SERVICE:

We have one worship service on Sunday mornings, which begins at 10:00 with the ringing of a singing bowl inside our Meeting House. The choir is seated either in the organ loft or in the pews nearest our grand piano depending on the instrumentation accompanying that week's anthem, and the rest of the congregation settles into the pews as the prelude begins, usually as an organ solo or a handbell choir piece. Following the Senior Minister's words of welcome from the pulpit, the congregation sings the first of three hymns in the service, using our church's own hymnal, *Hymns of Truth and Light*.

A lay reader delivers the scripture, which is generally taken from the lectionary, followed by the children coming forward to sit on the floor in front of the pulpit for a Children's Sermon. The congregation then sings a response as the children leave the Meeting House to go to their Sunday School classrooms.

The Senior Minister offers a brief prayer before beginning the sermon. Our congregation has come to expect sermons that are both intellectually and theologically challenging and heartfelt, and a scan of the Meeting House pews will reveal several members taking notes to engage in future theological discussions.

The second hymn of the service follows the sermon, with pastoral prayers and the Lord's Prayer coming afterwards. The lay reader then returns to the pulpit to deliver a personal Call to Offering, and the Meeting House Choir sings an anthem while the offering is being taken. The Meeting House Choir is composed of professional musicians, hobbyists, and four paid choral interns from local University music programs; it sings a wide variety of challenging and engaging choral repertoire from classical standards to contemporary world music.

The Doxology is sung as the offering is brought forward before the pulpit, a prayer of dedication is given by the Senior Minister, and the final hymn of the service is sung. After brief announcements are made, we conclude our service by reciting our mission:

Welcome all into an inclusive community;
Seek to follow Jesus' teachings;
Search for more truth and light;
Support one another on our faith journeys;
Strive for peace and justice.

A benediction and organ postlude bring the worship service to a close.

And while not specifically a part of our "worship", our fellowship practice of Coffee, Tea and Conversation is an integral part of our weekly experience. This post-service time is often cited by new members as the key event that drew them closer to the life of FCC. During this time, members (a very large percentage of those in attendance), visit with each other, share updates on their life journeys, and uplift time for special celebrations (birthdays, anniversaries, graduations etc.) It is also a time for visitors to meet and interact with the membership and many members actively engage with visitors walking with them and staying with them through this fellowship time. We consider this short period after our worship service to be essential to our overall life of faith and our connection to God and to each other.

DESCRIBE THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM/FAITH FORMATION VISION OF YOUR CHURCH.

FCC has a history of being a vibrant community of learners, dedicated to expanding their understanding of God and faith. Over the years we have achieved well-attended learning communities for all age groups. This area has not remained consistent and the pandemic further challenged our work in educational

programs. At our peak function, we had nursery care for the under 2 crowd, during service there was a children's service after which the children would go to Sunday school. There was a Rainbow Room for children 3-5 and two classes for elementary school. After church services and our weekly ritual of "coffee, tea and conversation," we had a lively Adult CE on a wide array of topics, sometimes secular social justice topics and sometimes deep dives into theology or biblical texts. Youth went on mission trips, attended Slumber Falls Camp and confirmation was done in high school.

Just prior to the pandemic, we had begun the implementation of Growth Groups—small groups that run for a semester twice a year, organized around a single topic with the shared goals of enriching our faith formation while building connections in our community. These groups shifted online easily and have been a great success story of pandemic flexibility. With strong participation and diverse topics, these groups are a significant source of satisfaction among the congregation.

As the pandemic has moved to a phase wherein there is regular public gathering, there have been substantial efforts to rebuild our CE programs. But our programs are very much still in flux. Adult CE on Sundays is not as regularly attended as prior to the pandemic. Currently, speakers are invited to educate members on various topics with a special focus on social justice organizations. Moving forward there is a need to develop a clear vision of what our post-pandemic adult CE will be and implement it consistently until it becomes a new and robust practice.

Nowhere is this need felt more keenly than with our children and youth faith formation program. We want to build it back to its former strength to attract and keep younger families. Currently, we continue to have a nursery service. Our tradition of the "Children's service" in the middle of adult service continues to delight young and old but we no longer have our age 3-5 Rainbow Room and our elementary school kids are in one class. Currently, middle school and high school meet once per month online and once in person. In Spring of 2022, for the first time since the pandemic, we had a confirmation class led by our Senior Minister.

Unfortunately, the CE coordinator hired to rebuild our program was forced by circumstances to leave Houston. Our wonderful long-time member Kelly Stevens has stepped in as acting CE Coordinator, and we are actively seeking a new CE coordinator. Our new Senior Minister will prioritize working with the CE coordinator and the congregation to rebuild the CE program.

DESCRIBE HOW YOUR CONGREGATION IS ORGANIZED FOR MINISTRY AND MISSION.

FCC strongly believes in and uplifts congregationalism. We believe in the shared power structure of congregationalism. We call our ministers and lay leaders and empower these leaders to determine the course for the church working alongside volunteer members who serve on both boards and committees.

We use our annual congregational meeting as the central governing meeting each year. Our congregational meetings include many voices and can last several hours to accomplish the necessary goals.

We empower seven boards with the operations of the church. Our council consists of the heads of each board and three additional ad hoc members. In addition, our council is led by a Moderator who serves a two-year term. The incoming Moderator is also identified two years ahead of their scheduled leadership and serves on council in an ad hoc capacity until such time as they take the lay leadership position. It is the council's charge to organize, support and focus the board strategies on alignment with the larger vision and strategy for the church.

The boards of FCC are as follows: the Board of Deacons, the Board of Trustees, the Board of Communications, the Board of Education, the Board of Missions, the Board of Church in Society, the Board of Hospitality. Each board has a chair and membership can vary from 5 – 10+ members depending on the board. All congregational members are encouraged to serve on boards including youth members (following confirmation). There are also committees which report to specific boards; these include Staff Church (reporting to the council) and Nominating and Stewardship (each reporting to the council).

Activity on each board is reported in several ways: through the weekly bulletin, the monthly newsletter, and through public access of meeting minutes available to the entire congregation. At times, boards or committees report directly to the congregation during worship if there is a special project or need.

Membership on committees is determined on an annual basis. The Nominating Committee reports on opportunities and the Stewardship Committee also offers opportunities for members to express their interests. Also, all congregational members and visitors have a weekly opportunity to express their desires for ministry in the weekly “connection cards” which ask about affinities and areas of interest for all members. Those who wish to connect in this fashion, fill out the connection card and put it in an offering plate.

Because each team is shifting on an annual basis (some members remain, some leave and new members join), the teams take time to adjust and activate. This can be true of leadership for boards as well. This turnover often leads to slow progress on strategies and vision. The council holds the commitment to long-term vision and is responsible to keep this work moving forward. One core challenge is the differing leadership styles which can lead to highly effective boards or to boards that lack focus, drive or purpose depending on the level of leadership or the leadership practices employed by each group. For example, a skilled leader who runs a clear and cogent agenda each meeting is more likely to inspire engagement and action from the team than a leader who does not follow clear meeting protocols. The outcomes are that boards become more or less effective based on how meetings, agendas and goals are set and operationalized. Thus, one year can host a dynamic communications team with lots of content and deliverables to be followed by a less active year. This is true across many boards. The outcome is a “fits and starts” forward motion process that can be challenging to the overall forward motion of the congregation.

Board and committee meetings generally last 60 minutes per month. Council meetings last about 60 minutes per month depending on the agenda. Decision making is often by consensus or through agreement reached by active discussion. In the case of the congregational meeting, a decision is made through majority vote. Boards and the full congregation follow Roberts Rule of Orders for decision making protocols. FCC is a congregation of many varied opinions and strong perspectives. Conversations and discussions are rigorous. FCC has become skilled in allowing fact and reason to drive conversation and keeping emotional responses or emotional perspectives in proper position to issues and outcomes. This is not to say we are free of heated conversations with passionate and emotional positions. We are much more aware of the nature of our conversation and have become stronger in discerning when our emotions are driving us away from clear and practically reasoned outcomes.

We believe in democratic solutions and accept the will of the majority with proper hearing offered to all perspectives.

As for quick decisions, the best example comes from the start of the pandemic and the national shutdown of March 2020. In Houston, The Livestock and Rodeo show shut down on Wednesday, March 12, signaling that the city would soon follow. The Senior Minister reached out to the Moderator, Minister of Music, and director of Christian Education to discuss an immediate response. The team discussed the issue and then agreed that service should be held on line (with an in-person option). The Senior Minister called the chair of Deacons who wholeheartedly agreed and communicated with the Deacons. Funds were drawn from the Senior Minister's discretionary account and the Minister of Music purchased all necessary sound/video equipment. We had optional in person services for two Sundays and then went 100% online after further talk with the church leaders. Because of this quick and complete response, FCC never missed a worship service during the pandemic. Ongoing conversations about how to proceed continued and services were eventually held outdoors along with our streaming services. The decisions about *how* to connect the congregation to worship were ever-changing and often decisions were made quickly via zoom with responsive team leaders from council and the necessary boards.

2022 ANNUAL MEETING REPORT – <http://bit.ly/3jwlbwu>

2021 ANNUAL MEETING REPORT - <http://bit.ly/3juKtLr>

FCC CONSTITUTION – <https://bit.ly/3jrVHQX>

FCC BYLAWS - <http://bit.ly/3wRIK5W>

2023 FCC STRATEGIC PLAN – <http://bit.ly/3JzvpXA>

FCC ORGANIZATIONAL CHART - <http://bit.ly/3HAVliO>

3b. 11-YEAR REPORT

(Add here the 11-Year Report developed with the help of your conference staff, UCC Data Hub, and MissionInsite)

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
ELEVEN YEAR CHURCH PROFILE BASED ON DATA REPORTED IN UCC YEARBOOKS



Church#: 700620

Assoc: 704

Schedule: 0

First Congregational Church of Houston

Houston

TX

77024

YEAR	MEMBERS	AVG WEEKLY ATTENDANCE	CHR ED/ FAITH FORM	CONFIRMATION	CONFESSION	TRANSFER OR REAFFIRM	DEATHS OR TRANS OUT	OTHER LOSSES	NET MEMBS ADDS-REMOVED
2011	403	137	86	0	0	0	0	0	0
2012	280	126	54	0	12	1	9	127	-123
2013	282	118	55	0	0	8	5	1	2
2014	290	118	55	0	0	5	6	3	-4
2015	261	120	66	0	0	5	6	28	-29
2016	272	144	94	0	0	32	21	0	11
2017	287	140	76	0	0	22	5	2	15
2018	296	145	85	0	0	24	6	9	9
2019	313	149	121	0	0	33	16	0	17
2020	322	158	160	0	19	0	2	0	17
2021	322	158	160	0	0	0	0	0	0

YEAR	CURRENT EXPENSES	CAPITAL PAYMENTS	BASIC SUPPORT	TOT OTHER UCC GIVING	TOTAL OCWM	OTHER GIFTS	WIDER MISSION	BASIC SUPP% CURR LOCAL	TOTAL EXPEND	PLEDGES AND OFFERINGS
2011	\$323,905	\$0	\$20,500	\$12,851	\$33,351	\$0	\$33,351	6.33	\$357,256	\$0
2012	\$358,968	\$0	\$20,000	\$12,910	\$32,910	\$25,329	\$58,239	5.57	\$417,207	\$441,138
2013	\$379,879	\$16,639	\$17,003	\$16,654	\$33,657	\$41,393	\$75,050	4.48	\$471,568	\$353,954
2014	\$322,808	\$0	\$17,000	\$12,337	\$29,337	\$42,088	\$71,425	5.27	\$394,233	\$366,323
2015	\$354,500	\$0	\$17,000	\$12,306	\$29,306	\$10,004	\$39,310	4.80	\$393,810	\$374,408
2016	\$384,808	\$0	\$14,075	\$15,616	\$29,691	\$22,205	\$51,896	3.66	\$436,704	\$436,475
2017	\$619,017	\$0	\$16,575	\$15,423	\$31,998	\$73,270	\$105,268	2.68	\$724,285	\$427,035
2018	\$544,502	\$0	\$16,075	\$25,010	\$41,085	\$59,253	\$100,338	2.95	\$644,840	\$519,291
2019	\$594,963	\$771,576	\$17,320	\$20,093	\$37,413	\$82,188	\$119,601	2.91	\$714,564	\$652,391
2020	\$537,486	\$117,591	\$18,000	\$40,647	\$58,647	\$29,283	\$87,930	3.35	\$625,416	\$486,600
2021	\$537,486	\$0	\$18,000	\$4,015	\$22,015	\$0	\$22,015	3.35	\$559,501	\$0

% CHANGE	MEMBERS	AVG WEEKLY ATTENDANCE	CHR ED/ FAITH FORM	TOTAL ADDITIONS	TOTAL REMOVALS	CURR LOCAL EXPENSES	TOTAL OCWM	TOTAL EXPENDITURE
2016-2021	18.38	9.72	70.21	-100.00	-100.00	39.68	-25.85	28.12
2011-2021	-20.10	15.33	86.05	0.00	0.00	65.94	-33.99	56.61

FCC MISSIONINSITE REPORT - <http://bit.ly/3E1Rpa7>

3c. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Describe those who participate in your church.

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (Check if yes)</i>
Number of active members:	208	
Number of active non-members:	141	
Total of church participants (sum of the numbers above):	354	

Percentage of total participants who have been in the church:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (Check if yes)</i>
More than 10 years:	54%	
Less than 10, more than 5 years:	11%	
Less than 5 years:	34%	

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>
19	22	16	32	33	31	32	59	50	

Percentage of adults in various household types:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (Check if yes)</i>
Single adults under 35:	4%	
Households with minors:	9%	
Single adults age 35-65:	4%	
Joint households with no minors:	17%	
Single adults over 65:	14%	

Education level of adult participants by percentage:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (Check if yes)</i>
High school:	10%	Yes
College:	65%	Yes
Graduate School:	23%	Yes
Specialty Training:	2%	Yes
Other (please specify):		

Percentage of adults in various employment types:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (Check if yes)</i>
Adults who are employed:	42%	Yes
Adults who are retired:	36%	Yes

Adults who are not fully employed:	22%	Yes
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DESCRIBE THE RANGE OF WORKING OCCUPATIONS IN YOUR CONGREGATION:

FCC members are employed in a wide range of business sectors including Oil and Gas, Higher Education, Secondary Education, Primary Education, Non-Profit Arts, Non-Profit Social Services, Health Care, Building industries, Criminal Law, Hospitality, Human Resources, Aeronautics and Engineering. A portion of our congregation is also retired – many from the industries listed above.

DESCRIBE THE MIX OF ETHNIC HERITAGES IN YOUR CONGREGATION, AND THE OVERALL RACIAL MAKE-UP. 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?

FCC membership is predominantly white. Most members are from European backgrounds; German, Irish, English, and French being dominant represented ancestries. There are Hispanic members, Asian and South Asian, Pacific Islanders, and African American members as well. We are diverse in age with adults over 40 being the dominant demographic represented. Diversity in our context is most represented by age and income levels rather than ethnic diversity. Frankly, the word diversity is most often used at FCC in the context of thinking—we often acknowledge a wide diversity of thought on many issues.

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:

As stated in other sections of our profile, FCC seeks to be a more welcoming church and wishes to engage a broader range of diversity in all forms in our communal life. We are interested in increasing ethnic diversity among our congregational membership. To date, we have not had conversations dedicated specifically to this goal. We are open to this conversation.

3d. PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING

Complete the following chart. Please leave blank any fields that are not applicable to your congregation.

Ways of Gathering	Estimated number of people involved in attendance	Who plans each of the listed gatherings? <i>(List any and all worship planners, such as various lay leaders, pastors, musicians, other staff)</i>
Adult Groups or Classes	208	Spring and Fall Growth Groups – planned by Education Committee, with input from

		Senior Minister, Minister of Music and lay leaders.
Baptisms (<i>number last year</i>)	2	Board of Deacons and Senior Minister
Children's Groups or Classes	14	Infant to 5th grade – Board of Education
Christmas Eve and Easter Worship	438	Board of Deacons, Senior Minister, Minister of Music, Director of Membership and Administration
Church-wide Meals	345	Church Picnic, Rally Sunday, Stewardship Lunch Stewardship Sunday Senior Minister and Various Lay leadership (Board of Hospitality, Board of Deacons etc.)
Choirs and Music Groups	30	Choir and handbells–Minister of Music
Church-based Bible Study	0	
Communion (<i>served how often?</i>)	1730	Once a month; Christmas and Easter–Senior Minister, Board of Deacons
Community Meals	0	
Confirmation (<i>number confirmed last year</i>)	7	Board of Deacons, Senior Minister
Drama or Dance Program	0	
Funerals (<i>number last year</i>)	5	Board of Deacons, Senior Minister
Intergenerational Groups	0	
Outdoor Worship	0	
Prayer or Meditation Groups	25	Diversity in Mindfulness growth group–Lay Leadership (various)
Public Advocacy Work	50+	Board of Missions, Senior Minister,
Retreats	15	Slumber Falls Committee (Sue Earl, Karen Gleason SCC delegates)

Theology or Bible Programs in the Community	0	
Weddings (<i>number last year</i>)	3	Senior Minister, Board of Deacons, Director of Membership and Admin. Wedding planner
Worship (time slot: _10:00 a.m._)	5,522	106.6 average attendance–Board of Deacons, Senior Minister, Minister of Music
Worship (time slot: _____)	0	
Young Adult Groups or Classes	0	
Youth Groups or Classes	17	Middle and high school–Board of Education
Other		

Additional comments:

List all members or regular participants in your congregation who are ordained, licensed, or commissioned ministers.

Name	Three- or Four-Way Covenant? (3 or 4 or No)	Ministry Setting	Type of Ministry Role	Retired? (Y or N)
Deborah Whisnand	4	Hospital	St. Luke's Hospital Chaplin	N
Teddy Kissel				Y
Phil Konz				Y
Les Switzer				Y

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:

These ministers will be guest preachers on occasion. They will at times, support the Senior Minister during communion and congregational prayers. Most serve on boards and committees.

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
Senior Minister	Yes	Full Time	Congregation	6
Director of Membership and Administration	Some supervision	Full Time	Senior Minister	18 months
Interim Minister of Music	No	Part Time	Senior Minister	3 months
Administrative Assistant	No	Part Time	Director or Membership/Administration	New
Christian Education Coordinator	No	Part Time	Director of Membership/Administration	3 weeks
Sexton	No	Part Time	Board of Trustees/Staff Church	10 years

3e. CHURCH FINANCES

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

Source	Amount
Annual Offerings and Pledged Giving	\$533,970
Endowment Proceeds (<i>as permitted within spending policy, such as a cap of typically 4.5%-5% on total return</i>)	\$40,603
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	\$51,261
Grants	\$0
Rentals of Church Building	\$89,313
Rentals of Church Parsonage	N/A
Support from Related Organizations (e.g., Women's Group)	\$0
Transfers from Special Accounts	\$0
Other (specify):	\$0
Other (specify):	\$0
TOTAL	\$715,147

Current annual expenses (dollars budgeted for most recent fiscal year): \$602,077

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Considering total budgeted expenses for the year, compare total ministerial support. What is the percentage? 22%

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) – Yes

- ☒ 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? (Recommended 10%) Line item in the budget, currently \$20,000 annually.

What is the church's current indebtedness?

Total amount of loan debt: \$2,000 to the FCC Endowment.

Reason for debt: Install new A/C unit for the Meeting House 10 years ago.

Are capital and other payments current? Yes

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.

The church has ongoing maintenance, but no building projects are currently underway.

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

Year(s)	Purpose	Goal	Result	Impact
2018	Campus Improvement	\$525,000	\$654,303	New air conditioning unit for CE building. remodeled kitchen, education building safety and cosmetic upgrades. Meeting House painted and air system cleaned. Campus wide signage.

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

The campaign focus was on upgrading the campus to create more safe, attractive and identifiable spaces. This served us to upgrade our radical welcome and to support one another on our faith journeys through care of our physical plant.

Does your church have an endowment?

Yes – The Endowment is a charitable adjunct to the church. The corpus of the Endowment has grown through bequests and gifts to about 1.5 million dollars. A separate Endowment Board, drawn from the FCC membership, determines the total amount of giving each year and the recipients of each of the dozen or so grants. Roughly half of the grants fund activities in the church not covered by the annual budget. The other half are given to charitable organizations in the greater community after a discernment process.

What is the market value of the assets? \$1,576,839

Are funds drawn as needed, regularly, or under certain circumstances? Yes. as stated above.

Describe draw on endowment, if any, to meet operating budget expenses for the most recent year and the past five years: There is no draw on endowment to meet budget needs. The endowment can offer loans to support specific programs (as in the above-mentioned campus improvement).

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

Other Assets

Reserves (savings): \$47,472

Investments (other than endowment): \$ 10,133

Does your church have a parsonage? No

Fair market rental value of the parsonage: N/A

How is the parsonage used? N/A

Street / City / State / Zip: N/A

Finished square footage: N/A

Number of Bedrooms, Number of Bathrooms: N/A

Assessed real estate value: N/A

Available for minister residence: N/A

Expected minister residence: N/A

Condition of structure, systems, and appliances N/A

Entity in the church responsible for review and needed repairs N/A

DESCRIBE ALL BUILDINGS OWNED BY THE CHURCH:

There are three buildings on the FCC campus—the Meeting House (sanctuary), the Christian Education (CE) building and the Office. The Meeting House was built in 1961 in the tradition of New England style Congregational churches. It was designed by one of the original founding members of FCC, Thomas Greason, who was an architect. The CE building was built circa 1964 and the Office was constructed in 1986, along with an extension to the CE building (new kitchen and enlarged main Children's Room). Also of note are the Mayflower mosaic on the Office west gable wall, the Heritage Walkway which commemorates the history of the UCC, the Memorial Garden which is a sacred place where loved ones are interred, and Heustess Park which is the focal point of the FCC Farmers Market. There is also a large playground in the area between the three buildings. FCC allows members to use the facilities free of charge for events (e.g., weddings, funerals) and meetings sponsored by members. The facilities are available for rent by non-members for a nominal fee.

DESCRIBE ALL NON-OWNED BUILDINGS OR SPACE USED FOR RENTAL BY THE CHURCH:

All three buildings are owned by FCC and are mortgage-free. No other buildings are used by the church.

Which spaces are accessible to wheelchairs? (*Worship space, pulpit, fellowship space, facilities, etc.*)

All buildings are accessible by wheelchair, however the pulpit and choir loft in the Meeting House are not wheelchair accessible.

REFLECTION: AFTER REVIEWING THE CHURCH'S FINANCES AND ASSETS DESCRIBED ABOVE, WHAT DOES THIS INFORMATION REFLECT ABOUT YOUR CONGREGATION'S MISSION AND MINISTRY?

FCC is a fiscally conservative church. We have maintained a balanced budget, ending in the black, for decades. We have built an Endowment and leverage those funds for mission and ministry. We also

slowly and carefully build our budgets each year to support our efforts in responsible and sustainable ways. If anything, we have been more conservative in our thinking at times and have missed opportunities to grow because of our careful budgeting. The remarkable fact is that we have maintained a consistent budget level despite the natural ebbs and flows of membership. We have certainly seen some key pledge units pass in the past few years but these larger gifts have been replaced consistently with new or expanded giving. And special offerings are often met with generosity from the congregation. Leveraging our stewardship for a more robust investment in the vision of the church can help us grow. The fiscally conservative nature of the church can and should be challenged as we consider strategic growth. The Endowment resources and annual disbursements will be key to this conversation. Oftentimes, new mission ideas are funded through special drives (if they are not identified at the time of the annual meeting/annual budget).

3f. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

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.

There are three seminal events of the past few decades that have defined First Congregational Church. These events are those which members continue to uplift as defining in the recent history of the church.

1.) The congregation voted to become Open and Affirming in 1998. This act remains a standout for many members who recall the rigor of the conversation and the fullness of varied perspectives shared. The vote was not unanimous, but all current stories identify this vote as one of the actions the congregants are most proud of in the history of the church. FCC remains an open church and our weekly uplift of this value is often cited as a reason new members find their path to the church. LGBTQIA identifying members make up about 11% of the active congregation.

2.) In 1998, FCC created its own hymnal, *Hymns of Truth and Light*, after determining that the currently available options did not suit the specific needs of the congregation. This year, the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Hymns of Truth and Light*, will see its sixteenth printing and 115th congregation singing from it. The act of making a hymnal, which included years of work by more than forty congregation members, stands as an example of FCC's commitment to autonomy and the congregation's fierce commitment to support the needs of its people in relief against the offerings of the wider church body. FCC is intensely proud of its music program and the expression of worship through music. The hymnal is one of the clearest examples of FCC being FCC.

3.) In 2015, FCC entered into an agreement to host a weekly Farmer's Market for our neighborhood and the Memorial area of Houston. The market, featuring a diverse group of local food sellers and artisans, is committed to sustainable practices in farming and food service. The market, held in FCC's parking lot, has become a staple of the neighborhood, and draws a weekly engagement of more than 500 customers. Food, arts, music, and local goods of all kinds are sold. The market has increased the profile of FCC for our neighborhood and for our city. FCC has, at times, attracted new members from those attending the market. Mostly the benefit is in the good will for our large neighborhood that the market has engendered.

These three key examples reveal core practices of FCC in clear action: inclusion, outreach, and our fierce sense of autonomy.

DESCRIBE A SPECIFIC CHANGE YOUR CHURCH HAS MANAGED IN THE RECENT PAST.

The greatest change of the recent period has been the addition of online streaming for worship services. Established during the pandemic, the practice of offering online services has grown significantly since 2020 and now as many as an additional 60-100 viewers join us with our weekly worship service. In addition, services are posted online and can be accessed for weeks following the initial worship expression and thus, members who have moved away or who cannot make our weekly service have alternatives to access our worship that were not previously available. The process to develop this program included the Boards of Deacons, the Board of Trustees and the Church Council and was widely embraced by the full congregation. The system began with a single camera and now includes a three-camera set up, and a paid operator weekly running the service. Another significant change is the alteration of many membership functions through the adopting of the REALM platform for church administration allowing boards and committees to post notices to groups, online reservations for events and online membership directory.

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.

An example of a recent conflict within the congregation came in 2016, early in the tenure of our last Senior Minister. In this case, the minister fired a staff member for cause working with the Staff Church Relations Committee and addressing ongoing issues with said staff member. This action spurred conflict between those loyal to the employee who were not privy to confidential personnel details, and those in leadership who supported this decision.

The core issue of conflict revolved around process and the data that could—and could not—be made public. This conflict led to negative behaviors that manifested themselves in the congregation. A special congregational meeting was called to address these behaviors and to discuss in an open forum the issues of this set of events. This conversation addressed three core themes—process, accountability, and transparency.

During the conversation the membership called each other to account for a lack of frank and direct communication among the larger body. While no formal facilitator led the conversation, the Moderator and Senior Minister set terms of the conversation so that the full congregation had a safe space to address their concerns and to call back into relationship those who had exhibited harmful behaviors. Each member who spoke, was asked to speak of their own experiences without embellishment and all were asked to deeply listen to each other. Space was held for silence and reflection as the conversation progressed. Some members who spoke took responsibility for their actions which was healing for and uplifted by the whole body. Our Senior Minister took responsibility for his own mistakes in the process and asked for forgiveness from the congregation for those failings. A culture of transparency around these issues and around our future together was begun through this process and the congregational meeting stands to many as a seminal moment in handling and resolving conflict. As a result, new practices were established for the Staff Church Relations Committee, new levels of information sharing across the boards was put in place, and a spirit of grace and understanding became much stronger. Subsequent congregational meetings have been more inclusive of ideas, more respectful in tone, and fuller in conversation.

Prior conflicts—most especially the conflict following the removal of a past Senior Minister—were not resolved clearly and negative impressions of that experience lingered throughout the congregation for

some time. The issue in this case was the lack of terms for an open and fair conversation regarding the actions of the council. Negative behaviors including triangulating staff and board members to adopt a particular position grew in this period. Factions with opposing perspectives also grew at this time. The drive for transparency and clearer communication began during the subsequent search process and continued into the above-mentioned congregational meeting. The large lesson tied to both events is the need for direct, clear, and honest communication at all times among all members.

FCC has come a long way in handling conflict and in conflict resolution and is a far more transparent and open space of communication.

MINISTERIAL HISTORY *(Include all previous ministerial staff for the past 30 years)*

Staff member's name	Years of service	UCC Standing (Y/N)
Bob Tucker (Senior Minister)	28	N
Rita Wilbur (Associate Minister)	2	Y
Jack Cook (Senior Minister)	8	Y
S. Michael Pater (Associate Minister)	3	Y
Kevin McLemore (Associate Minister)	2	Y
Jennifer Wagley (Associate Minister)	2	Y
Michael Richter (Associate Minister)	1	Y
Ken Richter (Senior Minister)	4	Y
Jonathan Page (Senior Minister)	7	Y

COMMENT ON WHAT YOUR CHURCH HAS LEARNED ABOUT ITSELF AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH PERSONS WHO PROVIDED MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP:

First Congregational Church has learned that active, transparent, and ongoing feedback and communication are key to supporting the called ministers of the church. The Staff Church Relations

Committee has been key to improving employment practices and standards of communication and care. FCC has intentionally committed to ongoing professional development opportunities for called ministers and will continue to do so in the future. We recognize that this central relationship needs care, space for open communication, and ongoing support to grow and to thrive.

We seek ongoing dialogue and feedback from the called ministers as well so that they can engage and if necessary, challenge congregational practice and the actions of boards and council. We recognize this relationship goes both ways and encourage honest, open, and clear communication about needs, expectations, roles and responsibilities, and strategic plans for the future. We do not expect perfect alignment or consensus in all things, we aspire to a shared journey of understanding and support with our ministers. We believe there should always be a shared understanding of the relationship with our called ministers; so that expectations are clear, job performance is evaluated and supported, areas for growth and support are identified and uplifted, and areas of excellence are also noted and affirmed.

HAS ANY PAST LEADER LEFT UNDER PRESSURE OR BY INVOLUNTARY TERMINATION?

Yes.

In 2014, FCC asked the Senior Minister to step down. This action was eventually supported by the congregation; however, the process to achieve this outcome was vigorously debated and questioned as some of the membership felt the decision was not reached in a transparent or clear manner. We believe it was fair to both the individual minister and the council leadership that specific details around this action remain private. It is fair to say that the needs of the congregation and the vision for the future were not clearly articulated at that time. Nor were the levels of support and care for and communication with the Senior Minister properly identified to him at the time of his hire or during his subsequent tenure. Thus, the connection between the Senior Minister and the congregation was deemed unsustainable for the church's larger ministry.

HAS YOUR CHURCH BEEN INVOLVED IN A SITUATIONAL SUPPORT CONSULTATION?

Yes.

During a previous conflict in the early 2000's (a disagreement over leadership practice and power dynamics), FCC called upon various resources to learn and grow in conflict resolution. During this period, Dr. Silvia Richards, along with Associate Minister Kevin McClemore, led congregation training regarding conflict and the creation of safe space. Field expert Reverend Dr. Peter Steinke was brought in through support of the South Central Conference to deepen these efforts. Specifically, Systems Theory pedagogy was taught and explored in several meetings of the full church body. These meetings resulted in excellent outcomes with members adopting healthy practices for meaningful conversations. These practices continue to this day.

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

HOW DO THE RELATIONSHIPS AND ACTIVITIES OF YOUR CONGREGATION EXTEND OUTWARD IN SERVICE AND ADVOCACY?

FCC is active with many community organizations and initiatives focused on advocacy and service. FCC’s service and advocacy endeavors include:

THE METROPOLITAN ORGANIZATION (TMO): The Metropolitan Organization (TMO, tmohouston.org) brings together people of various faith backgrounds from across our diverse city to work with candidates / politicians on local issues such as education, immigration, health, workforce development, safety and police reform. TMO is part of the Texas IAF Network, with its focus on grassroots organizing around community issues; as an example, we recently worked with TMO to address the lack of minority representation on the local school board. Through TMO, FCC has developed meaningful relationships with other involved congregations and groups throughout the state, which has greatly increased our church’s visibility and impact in the community. Our involvement with TMO has led to FCC members serving on local and state focus groups addressing education funding, tax reform, police reform and gun safety, Medicaid expansion, and mental health issues.

TEXAS IMPACT: Texas Impact is a legislative advocacy and public policy-influencing interfaith group. Through Texas Impact, our members have attended events, rallies, and educational sessions focused on bringing about justice for marginalized groups in our state. Groups of FCC members have participated in Courts and Ports, a program of Texas Impact which provides a two-day immersion experience on the Texas-Mexico border that is meant to bring better understanding of the complex challenges being faced by both asylum seekers and public servants, and to inspire action for bringing about change.

HOUSTON PEACE AND JUSTICE CENTER: The Houston Peace and Justice Center is an organization dedicated to non-violence in society by both hosting and providing scholarships for their Peace Camp for children.

REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP: FCC made an initial six-month commitment this year to support the Rahmatzada family, newly arrived refugees from Afghanistan; not only has our relationship and support of their family continued well beyond the six months, but through them we came to support eleven other families. Church members continue to provide our refugee families with furniture and household essentials, rental assistance, job search assistance, babysitting, and ESL classes.

We have a Church in Society Board (CIS), whose stated mission is “to raise awareness, educate, and engage FCC members in matters of peace and social justice in our community.” We also have a Growth Group dedicated to social justice action, which has been engaged with multiple collaborations with both

secular and interfaith organizations within the community. FCC is a Polling Site and has been asked to host Deputy Voter Registrar Training in 2023. The CIS Board's recent Get Out the Vote efforts in our local community touched thousands of people. Various Growth Groups, church committees, and CIS Board groups continue to meet with local and state elected officials to discuss proposed legislation targeting issues involving the LGBTQ community, Medicaid expansion, and voting rights.

DESCRIBE YOUR CONGREGATION'S PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS, RELATIONSHIPS AND ACTIVITIES CONNECTING THE WIDER UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST (ASSOCIATION / CONFERENCE / NATIONAL SETTING).

FCC has a long history of participating in the Houston Association, the South Central Conference, and the National Setting. Specifically in the last 10-15 years they have been as active and supportive as any congregation in the Houston Association. The following are examples of this engagement:

- FCC is a proud Five for Five Congregation.
- FCC supports the Senior Minister attending the UCC General Synod.
- FCC gives annually to Slumber Falls Camp which is owned by the SCC, United Campus Ministries, and Back Bay Mission located in Biloxi, MS.
- FCC in their Annual Meeting affirms the names of the Delegates, selected by the Nominating Committee, who will represent FCC at the Association and Conference level. FCC is present and represented at all levels. Currently FCC member Kryisia Lynes is treasurer of the South Central Conference, Member Karen Gleason serves on the Slumber Falls Camp Council, member Sue Earl is on the Back Bay Mission Board, and member Mariah Berner is on the United Campus Ministries Board.
- Members of FCC have served for extended periods of time on the Houston Association Council, the SCC Board of Directors, Slumber Falls Camp Council, and the Back Bay Mission Board.
- Whenever possible FCC supports the Mission activities of the HA and the SCC.
- For a number of years, the monthly Clergy Cluster gathering of the HA and the periodic HA Council meeting were held at FCC.

CHECK ANY STATEMENTS BELOW THAT APPLY TO YOUR UCC FAITH COMMUNITY.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessible to All (A2A) | <input type="checkbox"/> Just Peace |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creation Justice | <input type="checkbox"/> Global Mission Church |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economic Justice | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open and Affirming (ONA) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faithful and Welcoming | <input type="checkbox"/> WISE Congregation for Mental Health |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> God Is Still Speaking (GISS) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other UCC designations: |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Border and Immigrant Justice | <input type="checkbox"/> Designations from other denominations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inter-cultural/Multi-racial (I'M) | <input type="checkbox"/> None |

(NOTE: the above are specific programs identified by the UCC with training and specific pathways for a congregation to fully identify with each title.)

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?

Yes. As stated in our reflection on God's calling. FCC is interested in growing our witness and expanding

upon our ministries. We embrace larger Church programs thoughtfully and with deep consideration of how to operationalize such programs. This means we consider what we are honestly capable of doing and take action when the needs and wishes of the congregation are aligned with the desires and expectations of the wider church. We are open to exploring more connections to these programs. We have begun conversations with the conference to become a WISE congregation.

DESCRIBE YOUR CONGREGATION’S PARTICIPATION IN ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH ACTIVITIES (WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS, LOCAL AND REGIONAL).

FCC participates in a host of groups including participation in the local Pride service which centers diverse faith traditions and speakers. Reverend Jon Page helped to start the Faith Leaders Coalition of Greater Houston in 2016. FCC participates in Interfaith Ministry Refugee work. And FCC helped found The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) which inspires civic engagement for faith communities. FCC is also a member of Texas Impact – an interfaith legislative network representing more than 5 million Texans. FCC is also one of the founding congregations of Memorial Assistance Ministries (MAM, <https://www.mamhouston.org>) which provides a variety of services to those in need in the Memorial area, including basic needs, disaster, employment, and health assistance, a resale shop and ESL classes. FCC is also a part of the Raise Up Families program.

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.

The mission of FCC is meant to be a set of life practices that influence daily behaviors and manifest in all things and at all times. It is aspirational and robust. Still, in a very practical sense, one could consider the mission of FCC—and the expectations of a Senior Minister—in the following manner:

A Senior Minister will spend a minimum of 20 hours per month Welcoming all into an inclusive Community both in and around our campus and community. A Senior Minister will spend 40 hours per month in preparation and preaching inspiring the congregation to seek and follow Jesus’ teachings. A Senior Minister will spend 30 hours a month in learning and growing and as well as committee meetings and board meetings thus searching for more truth and light through a process of active discernment and congregational engagement. A Senior Minister will spend 40 hours a month in care of and connection to congregational members thus supporting each another on our faith journeys. And finally, a Senior Minister will spend 40 hours per month in the community engaging in civic and social justice works which will support the congregation as they strive for Peace and Justice.

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?

As stated earlier, FCC fully expects the Senior Minister to be actively engaged in the wider Houston community and to be responsive to the needs of Texans as well as connected to the ongoing work of the

UCC. These are fully accounted for in expectations of time and all such work should be incorporated into an appropriate and manageable schedule.

4b. MISSIONInSite

The MissionInSite report clearly shows opportunities for growth with singles and starters who actively engage through social media and contemporary communication platforms. The mission alignment with these groups – especially a commitment to social justice – is in direct alignment with the desires of FCC. The space for the “Boomers with Confidence” (IE – Philanthropic Sophisticates) is also noteworthy as this demographic is present in our congregation and provides for authentic connections and relationships to grow and flourish. Social issues in our neighborhoods – most especially in the Spring Branch School District – will inspire both groups. Thus, there is enormous opportunity in providing leadership and a spiritual dimension to these conversations.

Using the lifestyle segments identified in the MissionInSite report, FCC has a large contingent made up of Thriving Boomers, Boomers with Confidence, Golden Year Guardians mixed with Singles and Starters (and Family Troopers), and Family Union. The neighborhood around us is very clearly–and aggressively–Power Elite/American Royalty. FCC is in one of the wealthiest suburbs in America and it is predominately–nearly exclusively–white. Our congregation is also nearly all white and so our racial affinity to the neighborhood is strong. Our social, cultural, and spiritual identities are much more diverse than our direct neighborhood.

Our neighborhood appears to take a position of tolerance for us and has been gracious and supportive on many issues. However, there have been growing issues regarding FCC’s visual presence that have created tension. Specifically, over inclusive signage–our rainbow flag banners were called into question by the City Council and generated debate with the city. On the other hand, the farmers market is widely embraced by the city and uplifted as an outstanding partnership with the church. Both issues have impacted our ministry and allowed us to clarify our intentions and goals while maintaining our relationship with a conservative leaning city body.

Currently, FCC is most known in our local community for our farmer’s market and local leaders uplift this effort in many conversations. We are known for a strong and clear position on issues of social justice. We are known for being progressive in our approach to Christianity. And we are known for our caring engagement with the community through programs such as Memorial Assistance Ministry and Settegast Heights.

The number one answer to what got new members involved is FCC’s stance on issues of social justice.

FCC MISSIONINSITE REPORT - <http://bit.ly/3E1Rpa7>



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.”

Make sure they are not members of your church but are persons who know your church well enough to be helpful to candidates seeking more information. Request a letter from each reference in answer to the four prompts below. Attach the letters (up to three) as desired.

REFERENCE 1

JULIE NORTON, former Moderator FCC

Thursday, January 26, 2023

Dear Candidate,

First Congregational Church (FCC) of Houston is an exceptional community with countless opportunities to worship, grow, fellowship, advocate, and grapple with faith and life. My husband and I experienced all of this and more during the eleven years we attended FCC.

After a couple of years of searching for a new faith community, my husband and I were drawn to visit FCC after hearing the tagline, “Where faith is a journey and thinking is required,” on the local NPR station. It only took a few weeks of attending services, listening to the sermons, the choir, and visiting with folks during coffee tea and conversation for us to decide that FCC was home. We joined the church on June 17, 2007, and remained active members until we relocated to Austin, TX in the fall of 2018. Since our departure from Houston and FCC, I have had ample time to reflect upon how this church impacted my life, and how it continues to be a beacon of hope and light for the congregants, neighborhood, and for many in the Houston community. And along with all the good, I have had time to reflect on opportunities for growth. I would like to share my perspective on the strengths, opportunities, and close us out with a few significant experiences, highlighting one that is still with me to this day.

Strengths within the FCC Community:

Truly a place for ALL people, regardless of social class, race, gender, age, sexual orientation.

The FCC community remains anchored in the tenants of social justice and equality.

The music ministry is anchored by a deep tradition of attracting talented musicians from around the city. Most of the worship music is anchored in Hymns of Truth and Light, the hymnal, which was created under the direction of Maggie Tucker, minister of music emeritus, featuring songs that are affirming, uplifting, with thoughtfully addressing social justice and the environment.

People are genuinely welcome regardless of where they reside on the faith spectrum. It's okay to question.

Areas of opportunity for the FCC Community:

In my experience, at times projects were hindered by a presence of too many rock stars and not enough roadies.

The church has struggled over the years with attracting and retaining families with young children.

Some of the seasoned church members had difficulties moving into more contemporary ways of operating.

During my eleven years of being an active member, there were many experiences that I would consider significant. A few of these include: Serving as the church Moderator with an amazing team of dedicated, passionate, intelligent, thoughtful individuals, and a thriving congregation led by Jon Page.

In 2017, days after Hurricane Harvey devastated Houston, the Church Council Members gathered at the church to determine how to best support effected members of the congregation. We divided the roster of members and called every member in the congregation to check-in. As calls were made, we began tracking individual needs, ranging from food, shelter, transportation, temporary housing, mucking homes, support with laundry, providing clothes, etc. In the days that followed, monetary donations poured in from around the country. Needs were assessed, prioritized, and each effected member of the congregation was provided some level of financial support. Members volunteered by cooking meals, mucking out homes, repairing damages, providing transportation, hosting families in their homes, legal support, and much more. The sense of community, love, support, and camaraderie was at its best.

On a very personal note, in 2014 we were faced with a shift in our family. Our adult child, whom we had raised as Tyler, was transitioning to Gwyniver. As we grappled with how to best support her and come to terms with this change, we received unconditional support from the FCC community. Folks lovingly listened as we tried to process the change, and many shared their personal stories and resources. One couple lovingly took us under their wings and accompanied us to our first PFLAG meeting. The love and support were a lifeline as each member of our family settled in to our new identity.

It is my hope that this quick sampling of my experience at FCC provides you with some insight into what you might expect to find at FCC. But really the best way to find out is to attend a service, sit and have coffee with the people, visit the farmers market – just take some time to be with the people and see the place in action.

Feel free to reach out to me with any questions.
Onward with peace and hope,

-Julie Norton
Julienorton15@gmail.com
713.417.0667

REFERENCE 2

REVEREND LESLIE JACKSON, Senior Minister, St. Peters Church, Head of Houston Association of the UCC

(713) 465-1424, pastor@stpeterunited.com

REFERENCE 3

TIM CARLSON, Lead Manager, Memorial Villages Farmers' Market,

January 16, 2023

To whom it may concern, I have been aware of the presence and ministry of First Congregational Church for close to twenty years, when my wife and I brought our children to the Annual Pilgrim Festival. It was a fantastic experience for our children, melding history and the expression of the faithful who came to this country in search of religious liberties. In more recent years I have been associated with FCC as I have served as the manager for the weekly farmers market hosted by the church. In these and numerous other ministries I've seen FCC look beyond the walls of the church to the city beyond, seeking to develop means of serving the community at large, from ministry to the refugee communities in Houston, mentoring, Memorial Assistance Ministry, AA meetings, and, of course, the farmers market.

One weakness I've seen at FCC is unfortunately that which is common to organizations which seek to have an impact on their community—the challenge seen when one attempts to move from inspiration to action. FCC has a strong desire to move from the concept of social justice to acting on it to effect positive change in the community. FCC is a body of highly educated and activism-oriented members; yet, as in so many entities, it seems that much of the force carrying the ministries is comprised of the same faces—being able to more deeply motivate across the breadth of the congregation would multiply the impact of the church many times over.

One area where the church shines is in the weekly farmers market. It is not easy to sustain an activity every week for a year—yet FCC has sponsored the farmers market for more than seven years. Each and every week a core group of volunteers show up on Saturday morning to help the market succeed. They bring together the community to support local farmers and small food businesses—over 50% of which are woman or minority owned. They provide a meeting place for thousands of Houstonians to come together to build relationships in the timeless manner of a market in the town square. There is nowhere else in Houston that a church serves their community in such a successful manner, week in and week out, year in and year out.

Sincerely,

Tim Carlson

swedefarm@gmail.com (832) 659-7070



6. CLOSING THOUGHTS

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

6a. CLOSING PRAYER

We invite our candidates to journey with us. We lift and honor every step we take together wherever the journey leads, however long or short, and come what may, we ask that God walk with us and that the Holy Spirit lead us in love and joy as we learn and grow.

The following prayer is a poem created by the entire congregation during a worship service and compiled as a collective voice.

We close our profile with an anthem from our choir. These are our voices as a congregation following the movement of the spirit in our efforts to share more love with the world.

THE POEM THAT IS FCC

I. A room

In this room I feel Open and welcoming

I feel the Spacious freedom of acoustic beauty

Serenity, Sanctuary.

I see windows of nature and Legacy and Space

And I feel the presence of God.

Comfort

Sunshine

Openness

Softness

Light

Glorious Peace

A room.

I feel Peace like a river into our community

Pure Light

Contentment

I see the Unpretentious of a Simple Embrace

I feel Every Momentous Occasion alive in Natural Light

A room.

A Peaceful home

Peace.
I feel Relief of Soul and Mind
Becalmed, Calm and Serene, Calm
Home.
I feel Openness and Eternal Light
Don't ignore simplicity

The simplicity

Hope at Home in Natural Light
Light
and Shadows
Light and Truth, Truth and Light
God's Beauty
Light all around
Connection with God and others
Joy
I'm at rest – I'm at peace
Refuge.
God's love is real
God cares, God Loves you, God Loves peace. That's why God put peace in us, we people.
Thanks Jesus Christ for hope

Outside coming in, inside going out

Kindness Light Free Community of faith
Seeing nature from the inside
Open to the world in a Celebration of life
Eternal Life.
I feel a continuum of faith
A gathering oasis in the Light of tranquility
Coming home – I cried
The wind in my face
Nature/Nurture
Light
Nature
Beauty
A room.

II. Our Unique Road

Where will our road lead?

To Independent thought
To the Unknown
I don't know
Enlightenment
Hold on to our beliefs
Acceptance
Disruption
A New dimension of being
Where will we go? Imagine
Solidarity
Community
Truth
A new awareness of love
Peace and Justice - a pursuit of peace
To peace
To where God directs us.
Recognition as an example of acceptance - we are pursuers of change
Welcome to all
To Unity!
To More service of less fortunate
To God's hands
To transformation
To a positive future
Forward

On a journey to salvation
Justice for all
Toward peace beyond the horizon
Welcome!
Our path is still a mystery
Reclaiming Christianity
With Peace and Love
Understanding of Others
The road to justice
Social Justice
Tolerance
Activism
Working together
Leadership in liberal Christianity
We will Bring joy to others

The road will bring us home.

Just imagine, anywhere
Unknown
Our own place of belonging
Further than we think
At the fork – take it.
Perseverance
Embrace others
Into our community
The future
Within, without
We will be lead to Freedom in Christ
Into the world to take courageous action
Takes us into peace, advocacy
Free us to be a beacon for all
Opportunities
Acceptance
Into the world
Meaningful peace.
Our road will take us to Freedom
Understanding
More diversity – a rainbow congregation
At the end.

III. The Face of Peace

I see peace and it looks like
Loving and Sharing

No Pain
Harmony.
Respect for all
Calm and Beautiful
Full of understanding and curiosity
Diversity intertwined
Kind and accepting of difference
Alternatives and examples
Tolerant, compassionate
Unified
Harmony and creating
Beauty and Harmony abound
Peaceful...Duh.

All are welcome and free to be Open
Empathy
Make it happen – don't just let it happen
Unknown
Long childhoods, Laughter
God realized by all
The confidence of will to unite in healing
Trusting
Lack of conflict where all can live productively
A world where everyone is loving towards one another
Absence of selfishness
I don't know.
Happiness of working together
We Embrace everyone equally
Forgiveness forgiving
Putting the needs of others before our own
Harmonious music
Positive possibilities realized
Different people holding hands
Living in harmony
Harmonious

Silent.

Smiling faces no more tears from lack of food too many killing because of anger because of lack of education and on and on.

Union with God

Joy

Understanding

Embody peace here and outward

Hopeful, Full of love, laughter and happiness

Pursuit of peace, inward and outward

Hope and harmony

Warbling birdsong

Mysterious, sadly unattainable.

Agree to disagree

Listening among all

The reaching out of a hand of Compassion

Joy and laughter

One that embraces differences

Harmony.
Not bloody
Equity
Brotherly love
Peace.

Canticle of the Turning – FCC Choir

<https://youtu.be/AALzLbR7fTY>



6b. STATEMENT OF CONSENT

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? *(for example, church council or consistory, transition team, etc.)*
2. Additional comments for interpreting the profile:

Signed:

Name / Title / Date:

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:

This document is created
Church's Wider Mission
through the covenantal
the United Church of Christ.

UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST



through support to Our
(OCWM) and is only possible
relationships of all settings of

“Jesus answered them, ‘Have faith in God!’” – Mark 11:22