

# UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

## LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

**The Congregational Church  
North Bennington, VT**

**Ordained or Licensed Minister or Pastor**

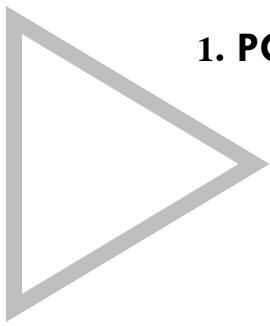
**The Vermont Conference of UCC**

[April 13, 2023]

### 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)*



## 1. POSITION POSTING

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

### 1a. LISTING INFORMATION

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Church name: The Congregational Church

Street address: 8 Bank Street, North Bennington, VT 05257

Supplemental web links:

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

Conference: The Vermont Conference of UCC

Association: The Southwest Association

UCC Conference or Association Staff Contact Person (Name, Title, Phone, Email):

The Reverend Paul Sangree, Associate Conference Minister

#### *Summary Ministry Description:*

We look forward to the continued love and care of our congregation and the wider community. As we walk through the doors for worship, we feel warmth and friendliness. We greet each other with smiles, and hugs. We seek a pastor who is friendly and welcoming to newcomers and encourages us to care for one another. We look for a pastor whose message is always uplifting and inspiring and a positive word we can take home with us for the week and days ahead, to have it feel personable.

Photographs:



THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF NORTH BENNINGTON, VERMONT  
(UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST)



Outside Worship



Outside Worship





Baptism of a Teenager and Small Child



Decorating the Sanctuary Christmas Tree

*What we value about living in our area:*

We are a small friendly community. (A village within the town) With neighbors helping one another. We are a historical area with covered bridges, The Bennington Monument, Bennington Battlefield along with the Park-McCullough House, the Bennington Museum, Lake Paran, The North Bennington Arts Exchange, Bennington Potters, Bennington College, Shaftsbury State Park, Woodford State Park, the Vermont Veterans Home, Rail Trail and our Hospital is a Magnet Hospital with a Cancer Center. There are various schools in the area. The Southwest Supervisory Union is the system in the area; which includes the Mount Anthony Union High School, and Mount Anthony Union Middle School. 3 public elementary schools, and various private schools in the area. There are 2 religious schools as well.

*Current size of membership: 55*

*Position Title:* Ordained or Licensed Minister or Pastor

*Position Duration :*

Settled – a called position intended for longer-term ministry in which the minister moves church membership to the congregation and moves standing to related association

*Compensation Level:*

½ Time

*Does the total support package meet conference compensation guidelines? Yes*

## **1b. SCOPE OF WORK**

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We are seeking a Pastor who is caring, sensitive, approachable, sociable, feels called to visit people in their homes, care facilities, and workplaces. We are seeking a pastor who is excited to share the good news with positive preaching of faith and love and with guidance from scripture. We rely on promptings and inspiration from God's Spirit and are open and accepting of all people. "We are Open and Affirming."

## 1c. COMPENSATION AND SUPPORT

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Salary \$ We will follow the Vermont Ministerial Compensation Guidelines.

*Benefits (choose one):*

*Salary plus Benefits*

*Salary includes Optional Benefits*

*No Benefits*

*What is the expected living situation for your next minister (e.g. parsonage, living nearby with a housing allowance, living elsewhere to commute as needed)?*

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

*State any incentives (e.g. school debt reduction or retention bonus after a certain number of years in position):*

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

*If applicable, describe how your church will adopt part-time adjustments in the pastoral schedule to support a minister's bi-vocational employment:*

We shared our Pastor with the Williamstown Second Congregational Church for 23 years. We are experienced with sharing a Pastor with another Church.

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

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

Bible asks us to help neighbors in need; assist the congregation in ministry. To be embracing of **ALL** people. Preaching to people with a heart and love in their everyday lives.

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

Reaching out to those in need. Visiting those people in hospital or in their homes to comfort them with love and care. Inspiring – empowering the people in their faith.

Easily approachable – to be non-judgmental. Caring for those whose faith has left them and reassuring them that God and Jesus are there for them. Someone who is excited about teaching the word of God.

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

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

Teaching the love of Jesus through living our lives and bringing it to the world by using scripture with love and caring. Showing love in action. Communication with the community, and beyond. Connecting and supporting those in need. Empowering the Church to be faithful to God's call and to reflect on Christ's mission. Exhibiting knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. Praying actively and nurturing spiritual practices. Nurturing care and compassion for ALL God's creations. Preaching self-care and life balance.



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

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

*Who is God calling you to become as a congregation?*

God has called us to be caring and helpful, teaching the love and word of God. learning together. With Covid, we were not able to meet in person, so our pastor emailed sermons to those who had email. For those who did not have email, our pastor mailed the sermons. Thereby, keeping us in touch and not abandoning us to the loneliness of our situation. As time progressed, we were able to social distance in the sanctuary, wearing masks. We were unable to sing our hymns for a while, but as the virus subsided, that was restored as well. The church members stayed in touch with each other for comfort during this stressful time. We are now able to have coffee hour after services; this keeps our faith and fellowship alive.



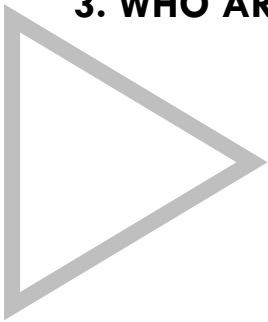
*Describe how God is calling you to reach out to address the emerging challenges and opportunities of your community and congregation.*

In the past, we had a Women's Fellowship, we had Gingerbread House making. Our door is open to The North Bennington School (which is across the street) as a safe place in case of emergency or disaster. We had Easter breakfast, and many other meetings and potlucks to invite the community to participate in. We are always brainstorming creative ideas to have the community involved.

The United Counseling Service (UCS), a local mental health agency, uses our Fellowship Hall for training workshops throughout the year. This organization works hard in our area for solving mental health issues and housing. They reach out all needs in the community.

Greater Bennington Interfaith Counseling Services (GBICS) They have a food pantry, they offer medical services, dental programs, feeding assistance, and housing assistance. This organization is one we support mostly through food pantry, Souper Bowl and mission giving. Our Christmas Eve offering goes directly to this service.

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



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

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

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

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*Describe your congregation's life of faith. statement or membership vows? How is God most often described in worship liturgy? In what ways would you describe the Holy Spirit in your midst?*

We are a faithful group. We are all involved in the community in various ways. We are people who love and are called to action. The Holy Spirit is alive and thriving, moving us and guiding us.

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

Everyone pitches in when something needs to be done. We all participate. We promise love and support. Loving GOD, light and healing. We are friendly and welcoming to newcomers and caring of one another. We celebrate joys together and support one another in times of concern or grieving. We are all inclusive and welcoming of everyone. We believe in the power of prayer and rely on God's Spirit for comfort and healing.

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

As we walk through the doors for worship, we feel warmth and friendliness. We greet each other with smiles, and hugs. The message is always uplifting and inspiring and a positive word we can take home with us for the week and days ahead, it feels personable. The message comes from a place of love, uses the Bible as a guide and relates to everyday life. We include world and national events. We feel joyful fellowship that helps us all, especially those who are lonely. Worship fills our hearts with faith and love. We enjoy all the "young at heart" times, which used to be "children's time" when we have young people. Our youngsters enjoy the curriculum we present.

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

Our young people enjoy participating in worship and Christmas pageants. We have beautiful Sunday School rooms and teachers.

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

- *When it comes to decision-making, how many hours are spent in meetings per month?*  
4 - 5 hours for meetings in the month.

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

Our Pastor, Chair of Trustees and Treasurer sprang into action when we had a leak in the roof over the Social Hall and water came in the ceiling and through a light fixture. A call was immediately made to our electrician and the roofers. Both responded right away and the problem was fixed very quickly.

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

### 3c. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

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Describe those who participate in your church.

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Number of active members:	18	
Number of active non-members:	37	
Total of church participants (sum of the numbers above):	55	

Percentage of total participants who have been in the church:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
More than 10 years:	80%	
Less than 10, more than 5 years:	10%	
Less than 5 years:	10%	

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>
		1				5	5	7	YES

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

Bankers, Mill Workers, Teachers, UCS, Hospital, Musicians. Most are self-employed. The majority of adults are now retired.

*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?*

We celebrate diversity. We had numerous nationalities and backgrounds in our congregation. Even though we are basically a white community, we welcome people of all nationalities and languages. Our community has many issues with addiction, and homelessness. We work closely with both UCS and GBICS to alleviate the issues.

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

In the area we have a diverse population. Our hospital, arts center and Bennington College all have a numerous ethnic backgrounds.

In February of 2019 we officially became an Open and Affirming Church, after the congregation voted unanimously to declare our warm acceptance and welcome to all>

### **3d. PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING**

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*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		
Baptisms ( <i>number last year</i> )		
Children's Groups or Classes		
Christmas Eve and Easter Worship	25-30	We do both as worship
Church-wide Meals		
Choirs and Music Groups		
Church-based Bible Study		
Communion ( <i>served how often?</i> )		Once a month
Community Meals		
Confirmation ( <i>number confirmed last year</i> )		
Drama or Dance Program		
Funerals ( <i>number last year</i> )		We did 5 or 6 in the past year



Intergenerational Groups		
Outdoor Worship		One time a year
Prayer or Meditation Groups		Weekly prayer list, Prayer Chains
Public Advocacy Work		
Retreats		
Theology or Bible Programs in the Community		
Weddings ( <i>number last year</i> )		
Worship (time slot: 11:00 am – noon)		
Worship (time slot: _____)		
Young Adult Groups or Classes		
Youth Groups or Classes		
Other		

Additional comments:

Sadly, our Sunday School has no participants.

*List all members or regular participants in your congregation who are ordained, licensed, or commissioned ministers. Indicate those with current United Church of Christ Three-Way Covenants (i.e. serving in a congregation) or Four-Way Covenants (i.e. serving in a ministry beyond a congregation).*

Name	Three- or Four-Way Covenant? (3 or 4 or No)	Ministry Setting	Type of Ministry Role	Retired? (Y or N)
Rev. Penny Rich-Smith			Teacher/Pastor	Almost

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:

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
Treasurer	Joyce DiGennaro	Part-Time	Pastor	
Assistant Treasurer	Mary Hazelton	Part-Time	Pastor	
Clerk	Jeannette Cancellieri	Part-Time	Pastor	
Moderator	Sandy Smith	Part-Time	Pastor	
Organist	Lindsay Dyett	Part-Time	Pastor	

## REFLECTION

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

## 3e. CHURCH FINANCES

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

Source	Amount
Annual Offerings and Pledged Giving	\$18,000.00
Endowment Proceeds ( <i>as permitted within spending policy, such as a cap of typically 4.5%-5% on total return</i> )	\$
Endowment Draw ( <i>beyond what is permitted by spending policy, "drawing down the principal"</i> )	\$50,000.00
Fundraising Events	\$
Gifts Designated for a Specific Purpose	\$
Grants	\$
Rentals of Church Building	\$>1,000.00

Rentals of Church Parsonage	\$ .00
Support from Related Organizations (e.g. Women's Group)	\$
Transfers from Special Accounts	\$4,000.00
Other (specify): Lighthouse Fund (Savings)	\$5,000.00
Other (specify):	\$
TOTAL	\$

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

*Attach most recent church budget, spending plan, operating statement, or annual treasurer's report as shared publicly with the congregation, or – if your church does not pass an annual budget – list current budgeted expenses here.*

*Considering total budgeted expenses for the year, compare total ministerial support. What is the percentage? 40%*

*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)*

X  Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM – Basic Support)

X  One Great Hour of Sharing     X  Blanket Sunday

   Strengthen the Church     X  Tools of Hope

X  Neighbors in Need     X  Souper Bowl

   Christmas Fund     X  Local Food Pantry

*In what way is OCWM (Basic Support) gathered? If calculated as a percentage of operating budget, what is that percentage? (recommended 10%)*

*What is the church's current indebtedness?*

*Total amount of loan debt:*

*Reason for debt:*

*Are capital and other payments current?*

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

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

Year(s)	Purpose	Goal	Result	Impact
		\$	\$	
		\$	\$	

If a capital campaign is underway or anticipated, describe:

Year(s)	Purpose	Goal	Result	Impact
		\$	\$	
		\$	\$	

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

*Does your church have an endowment?*

Yes

*What is the market value of the assets?*

\$200,000.

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

\$50,000.00 Per Year

Other Assets

*Reserves (savings):* \$

*Investments (other than endowment):* \$

*Does your church have a parsonage?*

*Fair market value of the parsonage:* \$250,000.

*How is the parsonage used?* Not used at this time.

*Number of Bedrooms, Number of Bathrooms:* 5 bedrooms and 1 ½ Baths

*Assessed real estate value:* \$250,000

*Available for minister residence:* Y/N

*Expected minister residence:* Y/N

*Condition of structure:* systems and appliances Good

*Entity in the church responsible for review and needed repairs:*



*Describe all buildings owned by the church:*

Church building, a beautiful large brick building in the center of town, very near the grade school, a gas station, a restaurant and a couple of stores. It was built around 1873. Parsonage a two-story colonial house directly adjacent to the church. It has 10 rooms, 5 bedrooms 1 ½ baths, large kitchen and dining room, living room, den, front porch, 2-car garage and small yard. **We are currently in the process of selling it, so it is not available for minister's residence.**

*Which spaces are accessible to wheelchairs?*

We have a ramp at the back door that comes into the kitchen and then is easy access to fellowship hall and sanctuary for worship.

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

We do exceptionally well reaching out in our mission, both local and global, considering our financial challenges, trying to balance expenses and income. Our buildings are big, so maintenance of them is big and difficult. However, we consider mission outreach a high priority. The committees submit a budget proposal to the trustees at budget planning time in November/December. The trustees make the final decision on budget proposal to be presented and voted on at Annual Meeting in February.

### **3f. HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

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*Name one to three significant happenings in the history of your church that have shaped the identity of your congregation. Add the most important event in the life of your church in the past 10 years.*

In 1866, Deacon Henry D. Hall was an organizer of the Congregational Sunday School in Bennington. The school increased rapidly until it numbered over 100. The school continued for nearly two years. It then transferred to the North Bennington Congregational Church.

The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in 1968 of the North Bennington Congregational Church was a fitting time to recall the mission which informs the life and meaning of our congregation, and of the whole people of God, of which we are a small, but real, part.

The church overflowed with the funeral of Lindy Lynch in 2019. She was a leader in our community and a great friend to our church and church family. Please see insert for more information on this powerhouse of a lady. (For more detailed history please see insert.)

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

With Covid, we were not able to meet in person, so our pastor emailed sermons to those who had email. For those who did not have email, our pastor mailed the sermons. Thereby, keeping us in touch and not abandoning us to the loneliness of our situation. As time progressed, we were able to social distance in the sanctuary, wearing masks. We were unable to sing our hymns for a while, but as the virus subsided, that was restored as well. The church members stayed in touch with each other for comfort during this stressful time. We are now able to have coffee hour after services; this keeps our faith and fellowship alive.

*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.*

Any member can bring questions and/or concerns to the Pastoral Relations Committee, who meet a couple of times a year with the Pastor, when needed Any issues or concerns are resolved within that committee. Our Pastor is approachable and is open and willing to deal upfront with any issue and would communicate directly with any troubled or disgruntled member.

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

Staff member’s name	Years of service	UCC Standing (Y/N)

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

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

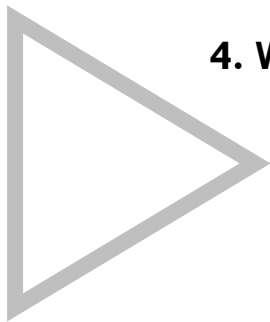
Y/N/Ask us

Has your church been involved in a Situational Support Consultation?

Y/N/Ask us

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

Y/N/Ask us



## 4. WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?

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

- a. COMMUNITY VISION
- b. MISSION InSite

### 4a. COMMUNITY VISION

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

Our church regularly takes donated non-perishable items to a local service agency called BROC (Bennington, Rutland Opportunity Council) who help many in our area year-round. Several of our members either work or volunteer at local service agencies (UCS, Elder Care, Senior Center, knitting for the hospital).

*Describe your congregation's participation in meetings, relationships and activities connecting the wider United Church of Christ (association / conference / national setting).*

Our pastor attends Southwest Association meetings and, in the past, attended Interfaith Council Meetings, which GBICS now has part of their mission work. Our Pastor has written articles for the “Religion” page in our local newspaper. Our Pastor has in some Interfaith Activities, such as annual Martin Luther King Jr, day activities.

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

*Check any statements below that apply to your UCC faith community.*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accessible to All (A2A) | <input type="checkbox"/> Global Mission Church   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creation Justice                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open and Affirming (ONA)                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economic Justice                   | <input type="checkbox"/> WISE Congregation for Mental Health                               |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faithful and Welcoming  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other UCC designations:   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> God Is Still Speaking (GISS)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Designations from other denominations                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Border and Immigrant Justice       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GBICS (Greater Bennington Interfaith Council Services) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inter-cultural/Multi-racial (I'M)  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UCS (United Counseling Service)                        |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Just Peace              |  |

*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?*

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

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

Our Congregation lives out our "Mission Statement" in a variety of ways. We believe worship is the center of our life together. We spend a good share of our time and energy going out and being with people who need a friend or a helping hand, and we extend our love and care to all. We are open to helping strangers. We spend less time in governance.



## **THE SHARED MISSION OF THE NORTH BENNINGTON CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

As a faith community who claim Christ as the center of its life and ministry, in the congregational tradition, and in faithfulness to our calling to be the visible presence of the body of Christ, we strive to:

- be a church that welcomes and embraces all God's children and provides a sacred and safe place which nourishes one's faith and challenges each one to live in harmony and joy, and into greater faith, hope and love.
- be a people who love God and one another and put our gifts to work to help those in need.
- respond to the Word of God as we walk together in fellowship and allow God's Spirit to empower us to be creative expressions of the Gospel.
- embrace God's gift of Jesus' life and ministry as our example and the Holy Spirit as our guide, and encourage the use of our diverse gifts of faith and life.
- teach and encourage young people and show our love by example
- be a people committed to enacting God's ways of justice and peace in the world.



All hands together to change the world.  
All hands together to till the land.  
All hands together to pull up weeds.  
All hands together to share our joy.

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

We expect our Pastor to make the best decision for her/him about participating in community events.

#### **4b. MISSION InSite**

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

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

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

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

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

They say someone told them how good it is to come here for worship, and how friendly we are. They say they heard we are so open and accepting and non-judgmental. They say they tried a few other churches in the area and found ours to be so welcoming and friendly and they got so much out of the service that was helpful.



## 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

Ernest L. Lafontaine  
80 Knoll Crest Lane  
Bennington, VT 05201

I have had the pleasure of leading worship for the North Bennington Congregational Church on several occasions. As a retired professional educator, I feel that it would be appropriate to give this congregation letter grades that reflect who they truly are.

The first grade I would assign them would be a “W”. They are a warm and welcoming group, greeting with smiles and a strong sense of gratitude that you are joining them for worship. They interact with you in a most pleasing fashion, and you quickly feel at home with everyone.

The second letter grade would be “C.” They care and support their Pastor, community and each other. This church building has served as a safe haven for the local grade school throughout the years. Even to the extent of providing a space for use as a classroom for most of an entire school year!

It is readily evident that they are committed to this church and its mission. One can feel the sense of caring and commitment emanating from every member of the congregation. I have enjoyed every Sunday that I have been present with them. This is a little gem of a Church.

## REFERENCE 2 / Setting

Kendy Skidmore  
19 Coleville Road  
Bennington, VT 05201

I am writing this letter of recommendation for the North Bennington Congregational Church for their search for a new Pastor. I was the director of the Bennington Coalition for the Homeless for 12 ½ years, during which time the church graciously provided their parsonage to serve as the short-term transitional shelter for homeless families. The shelter occupied the parsonage for several years prior to my tenure and for a short time after. During this time, the Church and its parishioners were supportive and encouraging to me and my staff. The provided financial support, maintained the property to meet all code requirements and were always open to conversations regarding the operations of the shelter, our needs, our concerns, our issues, they were always completely supportive.

Starting a shelter for homeless families was a new and controversial project. During a time when nobody wanted a homeless shelter and its stigmas “in their backyard”, the North Bennington Congregational Church stepped up and made sure that this much needed project had a home! They stood by the Coalition for the Homeless during many, many trials and tribulations. It was because of this dedication and commitment to the homeless and hungry that the Bennington Coalition was able to expand its service, erase many of those stigmas, grow and serve many more people. The Coalition moved their services and shelter to a more central location over the past few years, but I will never forget where it started, and that it would not be where it is, or serving who it serves now, if it wasn’t for the commitment and faith of the North Bennington Congregational Church!

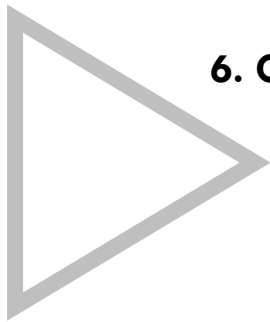
### REFERENCE 3

Christopher Oldham  
Park McCullough Historic Governor's Mansion  
Executive Director  
802-491-7677

The role of the modern church in a community is critical because it fills a void that only the church can. Regardless of church size, each congregation can provide effective ministries and outreach with a momentum that can spread beyond the church walls and be incorporated into the community. While I worked with the Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless as a Board Member and an administrator, I was privileged to have seen firsthand North Bennington Congregational Church's devotion to enhancing and improving our community, particularly for those in need. I firmly believe that the Bennington Coalition for the Homeless would not have been established without the generosity, commitment, and support of N.B.C.C.

Working with Rev. Penny Rich Smith has been a positive and inspiring experience, both personally and professionally. She led the Congregation with grace and compassion by setting an example using her gifts in a manner that allowed others to use theirs. Luke 4:18 best describes my attempt at effectively articulating what I believe Rev. Smith and N.B.C.C. represents: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised."

As a resident of North Bennington and someone privileged to have worked with N.B.C.C., I am honored to submit this reference letter. We are blessed to have this incredible Congregation in our community, as their mission has impacted so many. Please feel free to contact me to discuss this further



## 6. CLOSING THOUGHTS

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

### 6a. CLOSING PRAYER

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Gracious God, Creator of goodness and beauty, Source of Peace, we come to you with humble hearts, grateful for the opportunity to be part of the process in search of a new Pastor for our church and thankful for all that we have shared together with our current Pastor. And we give thanks for the family of faith that gathers in this church. May you continue to touch our hearts with your steadfast care and your guiding light. Stay with us in our efforts and deliberations going forward as we seek to find a Pastor who will be a good fit for leading this congregation.

Bless the hard work of this committee and may we remain open to the promptings of your Spirit throughout our search for the treasure awaiting us as we trust this process with our hearts – as found in the Beatitudes of Matthew’s gospel, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” We celebrate our life together in the NBCC and all that you have done for us in the past and present and ask that you empower us and equip us to move forward into the future with great faithfulness and hope, always keeping your love at the center of all that we do.

O God, we believe we are a very special church and that there is someone out there who will be excited to come and serve you in this beautiful church that sits in the center of the village of N. Bennington in the foothills of the Green Mountains where we always yearn to be your love at work in the world. The words of one of our favorite Hymns, “Here I Am, Lord” comes to mind: “Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?...Here I am, Lord...I have heard you calling in the night. I will go Lord, if you lead me.” It is our prayer that you will lead the right person on the path that comes to us.

In the confidence of our faith and with renewed hope, we pray that we will live into new possibilities for this church, for surely the Lord is in this place, touching hearts with your creative energy and wisdom so we can be all that we can be together as your faithful flock.

In closing, God of truth and light, the Prophet Micah helps us to know what is required of us, “to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with you.” That is always before us in our ministry and mission and we hope to find a Pastor who will lead us and guide us as we seek to do just that as we love one another and our neighbor as ourselves.

Thank you, Compassionate, Holy God. Amen.

## 6b. STATEMENT OF CONSENT

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

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

- 1. Which individuals and groups in the church contributed to the contents of this Local Church Profile? (for example, church council or consistory, transition team, etc.)*
- 2. Additional comments for interpreting the profile:*

Signed: Mary Hazelton, Chair Search Committee 4/13/2023

## 6c. VALIDATION BY CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION

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

Staff Comment:

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

Staff Comment:

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

Staff Comment:

My e-signature below attests to the above three items.

Name / Title: Rev. Paul Sangree, Associate Conference Minister

Email: sangreepucc@gmail.com

Phone: 802-728-4999 ext. 5#

Date: 4/13/2023

**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**



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

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



## In Memory of Lindy Lynch



The heart and soul of Chamber events for the past decade was Lindy Lynch.

Every year we marveled at how she would pull it all together, galvanizing the massive team of volunteers, and creating Winterfests, Restaurant Weeks, Annual Membership Meetings, getting a Vermont Christmas tree to Washington and, of course, Garlicfest!

We celebrated with Lindy Lynch her 10(ish) year last year of Garlicfest as chair of Garlicfest. Lindy later corrected us with a wink and said it was probably more like 12 years. But that's just it, right? You start doing something you love, with the people you love, for the community you love and you tend to forget time. It becomes an absolute joy. If you watched Lindy, you can see this festival was an absolute love of hers. Lindy with her lists, and SOPs, and maps, and her golf carts. And those glasses! She loved doing this!

Going back through the numbers, under Lindy's leadership, Garlicfest has grown by 262% (based on net fundraising revenue) over the last 11 years! That's simply amazing and humbling.

They say it takes a community, well I think it takes more. It takes a leader. It takes courage. It takes vision. It takes heart. It takes Lindy Lynch.

She knew the arch of Bennington's greatness always leaned towards a positive, vibrant future. She also knew you had to fight for it through civic service.

In the final months, when we would visit weekly to go over Garlicfest plans, she would start off soft-spoken, weaker than we all remember her, but it didn't take long for the "red tornado" to come forth and she would get animated about this aspect of Garlicfest or needing more volunteers or which vendor needed to go where. She had true passion for events, organizing them and the community that was impacted by them.

Lindy, we so wish you could see one more Garlicfest. We can hear your great, big laugh and smile echoing into the night after a day of Garlicfest would wrap up. We will miss you leadership, your direction and your inspiration.

This Garlicfest team that you've built will do everything in our power to make you proud of an organized, fun Garlicfest this year and beyond. We will continue your legacy of well-done community-based events, active and civic volunteerism and an ever-ferocious pursuit of excellence in all that we do.

Lindy, thank you for the many, many years you've mentored scores of volunteers and put Bennington on the map!

*Rest in Peace,*

*Your Stinkin' Garlicfest Captains,  
Volunteers and Chamber Staff*



## BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR CHURCH – SUMMARY

### 1-3 Significant Happenings in the History of Our Church That Have Shaped Our Identity:

1} Organizing a faith community in the beginning as a Sunday School for the mill-working families in town in the year 1868. It started out in a factory office in town, and then the church building was erected in 1873. The initial enthusiasm was to provide a safe and effective environment for the religious education of young people. Sunday School excursions were a big hit as trips were organized for the youth to travel by railroad to lakes within 50 miles for fun and fellowship.

2} Projects that benefitted those in need have always been a strong part of our church's mission. Hospital sewing has been an ongoing activity. Early on, sending workers out for mission work around the world was a focus – to Turkey, Korea, China, So. America, Spain and India – up until 1964.

HOME Inc. (Housing Opportunity Mission, Ecumenical) was a project of 1968 which impacted many lives in the Bennington area. Affordable housing was built and sponsored by this organization, which was founded by members of our congregation and the Pastor, Rev. Bill Abernethy. That housing is still in existence on Beech St. in Bennington. There were both spiritual and material aspects involved to help solve some housing problems for the elderly and those of low income.

3} Our church's ongoing Mission Outreach is remarkable for the size of our congregation – we are small in numbers, but have a big heart for helping people. We support many local service organizations such as BROOC (Benn. Rutland Opportunity Council), PAVE (Projects Against Violent Encounters), the VT Veterans Home in Benn., Open Arms (Support for Afghanistans relocated in our area), Meals on Wheels, Turning Point (Addiction Recovery Program), GBICS (Greater Benn. Interfaith Community Services), the Kitchen Cupboard, and we have Wal-Mart Gift Cards available for those in need. We provide global outreach to Doctors Without Borders.

### Important Event in the Last Ten Years:

We held informational sessions/forums to discuss the topic of “Open and Affirming” Then at our Annual Meeting in February of 2019, we voted unanimously to become an “Open and Affirming” congregation, officially declaring our warm acceptance and welcome to all.

### History Summary:

Deacon Henry D. Hall was the organizer of the Congregational Sunday School in North Bennington. It began in a factory office and soon increased to a number over 100. Many thought a Congregational Church should be organized in the village. In 1868, the first meeting of 21 members was held in “Bank Hall” and Rev. Leavitt Bartlett was called as the first Pastor. The Sunday School at the mill was discontinued and it became the Sunday School of the North Bennington Congregational Church with 195 members



enrolled that year. The Boot and Shoe Co. and the H.C. White Co. were prosperous businesses in town which brought many families and devoted Christian workers. Meetings were held in Bank Hall until a church was built in 1873 at the cost of \$15,000. Through the years, the properties were expanded and improved attesting to the interest and support of the leaders and members of the congregation.

Our congregation voted to join The United Church of Christ in 1961, four years after the formation of the UCC in 1957 which was the bringing together of the Congregational – Christian Church and the Evangelical – Reformed Church.

Over the years, Sunday School was a highlight of our ministry and Music was a strong aspect of our inspiring and meaningful worship services. Members have been very generous, too, in supporting the Lord's work in this place.

Even though in recent decades, our congregation has decreased in size, our history is rich and our faith and commitment is a strong witness for the work and mission of this congregation. We have been blessed by the Pastoral Leadership of many wonderful Pastors from the beginning (there have been 23 settled Pastors) and our current Pastor, Rev. Penny Rich Smith, has served the longest – she has served our church for 27+ years. There have been wonderful celebrations along the way as well as challenging times, but we have persevered and remained a warm, friendly, caring congregation.

We hope to move forward with great faithfulness and hope for decades to come!

#### Important Event in the Last Ten Years:

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# North Bennington artist captures everyday moment

By MICHAEL ALBANS  
*Vermont News & Media*

**NORTH BENNINGTON** — The primary colors blend and deepen, blues and purples set off by a vivid yellow or maybe deep red, revealing the flattened perspective of childhood, simplicity moments of everyday life, joy and intimacy captured and witnessed under the artist's tender hand.

"I paint ordinary things that I've discovered aren't so ordinary at all," artist Mark Barry says. "In a world that often seems to be twisting, turning and chaotic, to capture just a second in time or a fleeting glimpse of motion in a painting allows for a semblance of stability. Figures in a landscape, working in a garden, sailing a boat, or an interior scene of a family at dinner. In each painting, I try to make the connections between the human forms and the environment, whether it be through emphatic use of color or line, the exaggeration of an arm, a facial expression or a gently curving road, guiding a cyclist through a country landscape, each element of a painting is pared to its simplest form, everyday events and ordinary people.

"These themes are at the heart of what makes us human: connecting, sharing, companionship, family, loss and love."

Mark Barry grew up in Worcester, Mass., with vivid childhood memories of watching his father pass the time sketching airplanes next to the window of their home and then copying those drawings for himself.

"I was in my head a lot, all the time. I still am," Barry says from his home outside Baltimore. "Cartoons from the Sunday papers was like my museum. I was a terrible student. I didn't go to a normal, regular high school. I went to a boys' trade school but was terrible at math. I guess I always had that sense that it wasn't for me. Towards the end, I didn't want to be in school."



LEFT: MICHAEL ALBANS — VERMONT NEWS & MEDIA  
ABOVE, BELOW: PROVIDED IMAGE

**"Vinyl Hour," above, and "Prewash," below, by North Bennington artist Mark Barry, left.**

where she's from. At the time, you could buy a house for nothing. The city had a program where they were offering dollar houses. We bought a house down there for hardly anything, renovated it, and lived in it, eventually moving out of the city towards the county when the kids came."

Barry's ties to Vermont, specifically North Bennington, come from his friendship with Matthew Perry, who started the Vermont Art Exchange, who he met at art school, and his daughter, Hannah's desire to go to Bennington College.

"We were coming up here quite a bit, and when Hannah got into Bennington College, we moved here, bought part of the farmhouse next to the Bennington College campus."

might work, and then it just ki pops out at that moment. ... Once going, I have a long period where I can do many paintings that are on at one time. One thing to another to another."

Barry says there are these moments when he won't say he's actually done, but everyone else like a recent painting of a sneaking a squirt of whipped cream from the can at the refrigerator with a handful of raspberries in mouth, or a sweet curl of feet under a table between two people.

"Whatever that image might be at that time, it's gonna go for a while on whatever it is that I'm experiencing at that moment."

I ask him about the flattened, multiple perspective in most of his vases and what it means to him. "The world is topsy-turvy and certain in many ways, so I just go. The figures aren't going to be totally realistic, so why should the environment be perfect? You can with all of that."

Barry is now working on a sculpture as well as his canvases. He uses the same steel pieces that use the same sort of whimsy and humor as the paintings. It's all part of the evolution of his work.

"I couldn't do anything. There's really nothing else that I want to do or could do. I have a relationship with local people in the town, like Nick at Pangea, down the coffee shop. He's got that side and asked me to put some work in and switch them out every other month just to keep it fresh. But it's just really fun to put them in there. And I get a lot of responses from people. It's been beautiful."

Barry has appeared in multi prominent galleries nationwide, large corporate headquarters, in exclusive art publications in his long career. His work has been shown in such diverse venues as the Fogg Museum, the Limner (



call myself a seasonal painter right now. Whenever the seasons change, the art starts. I'll do snow scenes, or I'll do summer scenes. I use that as an impetus to get going on whatever I want to paint. Once I get a theme