



**Union Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ
Elk River, MN**

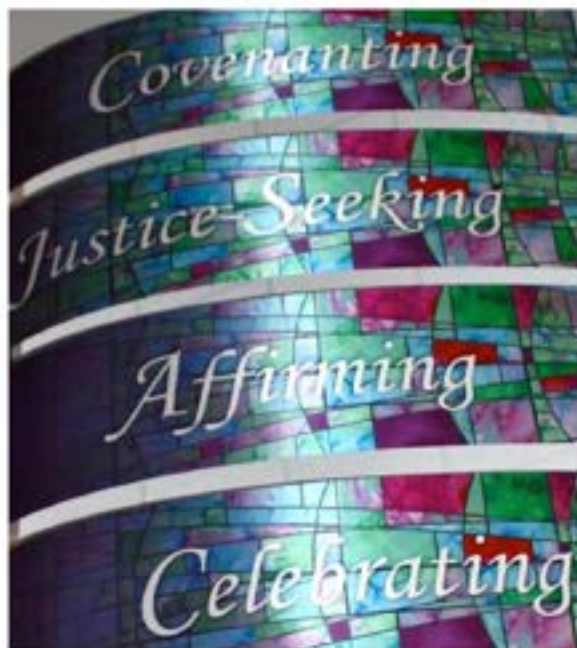
United Church of Christ - Local Church Profile

Seeking 3/4 Time Settled Pastor

Minnesota Conference UCC

Contents

POSITION POSTING	
▪ LISTING INFORMATION	3
▪ SCOPE OF WORK.....	5
▪ COMPENSATION & SUPPORT.....	7
▪ WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?.....	9
WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME?	15
WHO ARE WE NOW?	18
▪ CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS	19
▪ 11-YEAR REPORT.....	27
▪ CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS	28
▪ PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING	29
▪ CHURCH FINANCES	32
▪ HISTORICAL INFORMATION	39
WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?	
• COMMUNITY VISION	42
• MISSION INSITE	49
REFERENCES	54
CLOSING THOUGHTS	
▪ CLOSING PRAYER	65
▪ STATEMENT OF CONSENT	66
▪ CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION VALIDATION	67



Listing Information

Ministry Description

Union Congregational Church is a beacon of progressive theology in a conservative area. We are an older congregation (celebrating 150 years) looking to grow in membership. We are warm, welcoming, open and affirming, Earthwise, and socially justice oriented. We are seeking a collaborative pastor to partner with lay leadership and the congregation.



Union Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

Address: 1118 Fourth Street NW,
Elk River, MN

Website: www.elkriverucc.org

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/
elkriverunioncongregationalucc](https://www.facebook.com/elkriverunioncongregationalucc)

Additional ecumenical affiliations: None
Conference: Minnesota Conference UCC

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At a Glance

Size of Membership

The current size of membership is estimated to be 136 active members and regular attendees.

Position Title

3/4 Time Settled Pastor

Duration

Settled – a called position intended for longer-term ministry in which the minister moves church membership to the congregation and transfers their standing to the MN Conference UCC.

Compensation

Base salary based on experience consistent with 2024 MN Conference UCC Compensation Guidelines and adjusted by 0.75 due to 0.75 position. Total compensation package includes Base salary, Pension, Social Security Offset, Life/Disability Insurance, as well as Health, Dental, and Vision Insurance through the Pension Boards of United Church of Christ Incorporated, a \$28,000 housing allowance (negotiable), and \$1,500 annually for business expenses or continuing education.

Languages Used in Ministry

English.

About Elk River

Elk River's central location makes travel into the countryside, as well as travel to the Twin Cities quite easy. As a third ring suburb, the Elk River Area retains some rural nature, but it also exhibits some urban elements as well.

With many youth activities and good schools, it is a great place to raise children.

Even though there are strong political differences in the area, when it comes down to personal interactions, the people of Elk River are good neighbors.





Scope of Work

3/4 Time Pastoral Position

- Preparation and leadership of Sunday worship including scripture study, crafting of liturgy and bulletin, sermon preparation, guiding and sometimes finding lay liturgists, planning of music in coordination with musical staff or volunteers, preaching, offering of prayers, etc.
- Faith formation and vitality through prayer, Bible study, service, identifying helpful resources and opportunities and helping lay persons take advantage of them.
- Leadership development by working with people in the church to create ministry and programs and empowering them to apply social justice in the world.
- Pastoral care in collaboration with lay people (at least those who are sick, elderly or grieving).
- Community engagement and leading the way for the church to be an ambassador of God's love.
- Weddings and funerals for participants in the worshiping community.
- Strategic planning for current and new directions in ministry
- Participate in wider church activities such as conference as time permits.
- Maintain communication with Church governing boards and attend when necessary
- Support lay leadership in stewardship
- Attend and provide leadership at Staff meetings as needed. (This does not include day to day staff supervision.)
- Study and prayer to increase faith and to improve skills so as to lead, teach, preach better
- Energizing and deepening the spiritual connections and faith understandings of others in all they do.

Scope of Work

Core Competencies

To come to agreement on the core competencies, we utilized the Hartford Survey and the words of many group visioning sessions. The three competencies we believe would be the best fit with our congregation are **collaborative, sensitive and relatable.**

By collaborative we mean, a transformational leader who relies on lay leadership and is passionately inspiring and encouraging. That candidate must be a positive communicator, unswayed by difficulties, looking for answers, even when they are difficult. Our new minister must be sensitive to the needs of a congregation of diverse ages and needs. They should be warm and welcoming and an engaging, empathetic listener and responder. We wish a minister who is relatable. We would love it if they were an approachable and sociable partner. An ability to see the humor in little and large things would be an asset as well.





Compensation

3/4 Time Position

Union Congregational Church, United Church of Christ is committed to entering into a mutually agreeable schedule with any ministerial candidate and has a demonstrated history of flexibility. We are cognizant that with a 3/4-time position any ministerial candidate may seek additional employment and we pledge to be respectful of that time and those obligations.

Salary Basis and Benefits

Base salary based on experience consistent with 2024 MN Conference UCC Compensation Guidelines and adjusted by 0.75 due to 0.75 position. Total compensation package includes Base salary, Pension, Social Security Offset, Life/Disability Insurance, as well as Health, Dental, and Vision Insurance, as calculated based on 2024 MN Conference UCC Compensation Guidelines and 2024 Insurance Rates through the Pension Boards of United Church of Christ Incorporated. The total compensation package includes a \$28,000 housing allowance (negotiable) and \$1,500 annually for business expenses or continuing education. The one-time cost of a background check will be reimbursed. Total Compensation Range: \$85,000 – \$113,000

Living Situation & Commute

We prefer that the minister live within an hour of the church. We are open to having a conversation about commuting expectations as needed. We will provide a housing allowance.



Peer & Professional Supports

The Minnesota Conference (UCC) offers many opportunities to gather and serve.

- Authorized Ministers and lay leadership are encouraged to participate in the Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference (UCC) at The College of St. Benedict north of St. Cloud on the second weekend of June.
- Ministers in the Minnesota Conference are invited to participate in the annual Fall Retreat at a central location.
- Outdoor ministry opportunities are offered for youth and adults throughout the state. Some of these are for refreshment, fellowship and enrichment.
- Faith Formation (Fourth Thursday) monthly events throughout the program year are offered in a hybrid format (in person at United Theological Seminary or via Zoom) for up-to-date information and resourcing in the ministry of faith formation – open to laity and clergy. With a free lunch!
- Excellent resources to Clergy in Minnesota are the seminaries in the Twin Cities – United Theological Seminary, St. Paul (a closely related UCC seminary), Luther Seminary (ELCA).
- Courses, webinars are provided by the conference and national setting of the UCC.
- Covenant Days are held throughout the conference to gather regional clergy for a time of fellowship, worship and learning with the MN Conference staff.
- A lay & ordained program for continuing education – The Damascus Project – offers courses throughout the year.
- If there is a local ministerium in Elk River that may be another form of support
- UCC clergy who share a particular area meet monthly for cluster meetings.
- Support of conference staff and committee on ministry.

Who Is God Calling to Minister with Us?



We are a church that is truly at a crossroads of our history. We are an old and stable congregation. On our recent survey, two thirds of the responders were over the age of 65, and over half of the responders had been regular members for over 20 years. Truly, we are a church that needs to get younger in order to thrive in the future. Though those over 65 years of age and 20 years of membership form a tremendous heritage and a great presence, their future will, unfortunately diminish.

The good news is that, even during this time of transition, we have gained some great young families. So, there is a dichotomy of goals that seem to make sense as a core. There is a desire to increase in membership and an earnest necessity to turn those new members into the 20-year members of the future. To give those new parishioners a reason to stay, we need, as a congregation, to work hand in hand with the new minister. We are seeking new ways to draw young families and children to be excited about going to church on Sunday, and other times during the week as well.



There is much activity in this area afoot right now. Our Bridge Pastor, Sheri Nelson has a very nice routine with the children. She has them come up front, puts her stole around them, and has them do readings and the kids love it. Plus, us older folks love it too. The words Faith Formation are being used again, and we have a much stronger Faith Formation team than we have had in a long time. In truth, we were already struggling a bit in this area, and then COVID happened and really threw a wrench in the gears. We are excited about our Faith Formation Team and the good work they are starting to do with our youth. Participation in the service, Sunday School, Confirmation, Youth Group and Adult Education are almost all a must if we want to be successful in the years to come.




Of course, this needs to work hand in hand with inviting others we know to come in and try us out on Sunday. That is the way the adults can help increase our flock. Then, if the kids are having a good enough time, they may share with their friends and our youth activities can really grow.

Pastoral care is very important to us. With an aging congregation and a congregation that is getting younger, pastoral care is important on both ends of the continuum. That said, it's important for the few folks in the middle as well. The good news is that, by our own admission, we are a caring church. We reach out with visits, cards and prayers. The importance of the pastor in this realm is that of leader and shepherd of the cause. Establishing a lay care team is a priority so that we can work closely with our next settled pastor on this important ministry. We are happy, as a congregation, to do much of the heavy lifting with a little focus and encouragement.

Ideally our minister will be one who is grounded in faith, while standing on the ground. Though we have our formalities I would not say we are of a formal nature. We appreciate a service that is light, with a sermon that is applicable to everyday life.





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

We are seeking a minister who will develop meaningful relationships and partnerships to raise awareness within the congregation about the needs of the community. We are looking for a minister who has a relaxed interpersonal style, will be patient but firm, and is an open communicator with the congregation.

We are looking for a minister who will lead us to new congregants in a younger age group and make community inroads to support our true church identity. While we embrace being different, open, affirming and Earthwise there is room for us to reach out and better show the community who we are.

Through the Hartford Survey, many members expressed their hopes and aspirations for how our church can make a bigger impact outside our walls.

"I would like to see us reaching out to and making a difference in the community by identifying the needs of the community and putting programs in place to help improve them."

"I would like to see greater interaction with other churches in the area by finding areas we agree on and going from there".

"I hope to see this Church become a vibrant member and leader in the local community."

"My hope is that this church continues to represent an inclusive, intelligent, welcoming presence in this community. It is important that Union UCC provide a powerful, progressive option for religious seekers in this community."



The Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministry

We had a lengthy and lively discussion of the Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministry. We settled on these four, with no order of importance.

First, **DEMONSTRATING EXCELLENT COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS**. We believe communications are a two-way street. Both congregation members and the minister (or ministry team) need to be positive and respectful. Communication will never be successful if conversations are had about people, instead of with people. We all need to be seekers of the way, as opposed to setters of obstacles. Social media can be a tremendous tool, if used properly. Positive intent and information can be an asset, but it must always be used carefully. We hope for a leader who engages in “holy listening and speaking.” We are trying to achieve positive results and this can only be done with open and straightforward discussion.

Second, **UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND NAVIGATING CHANGE WITH A COMMUNITY**. One of our greatest challenges is to attract younger individuals and families, while nurturing the needs across ages. When you look at the community our church resides in, we are far more liberal than most of the rest. It would be great if we looked at this as a challenge, rather than a stumbling block. There are inroads we have not made, but can make, if we work together. Our community needs to know we have much to offer. Our leader must echo this, followed by their congregation.

Third, LEADING FAITH FORMATION ACROSS GENERATIONS. We have reactivated Faith Formation, after a couple of difficult years. Obviously, one of the culprits has been Covid. We believe that nothing will build our church more than cultivating relationships, growing in our spirituality, learning together, and having fun. If parishioners, young, old and in between, like the goings on at church, we spend more time there and take more ownership, and enjoyment follows. Our leader knowing the best current practices of Faith Formation and leading the way are so important.

Fourth, EXHIBITING A COMMITMENT TO THE CORE VALUES OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONTINUING TESTAMENT, EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME, AND CHANGING LIVES. Our leader should understand the core values of the United Church of Christ and should also incorporate these values into their ministry. They would also wish to assist our congregants in understanding and living those values as well. One of our congregation's strengths is that extravagant welcome in the above statement. Our hope is that our new leader will embrace what we already embrace.




Who Is God Calling Us to Become?



Who is God calling you to become as a congregation?

Externally, we stand out in our community. We are different from most of the churches in our area. We have a liberal stance that is not shared by many, and would love others to move in our direction and join us. The Pride Flag in our yard tells our neighbors that all are welcome here. We continue to reach out in the community with acts of social justice and opportunities to share (market) our church in the community. If there are seekers out there, we want them to find us, and for us to find them.

Internally, as we reflect upon our history, there are times we wish we would have had different outcomes. We feel called to become a more courageous and open-hearted people. We desire to learn from our mistakes. We can forgive and be forgiven. We can learn to work together in unity, by being more direct and honest within our church community. We can build stronger relationships through improved communication, openness and trust.



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

We want to talk about two experiments we have embarked upon and where those experiments are taking us. They are the process of the disposition of our parsonage and increasing our outreach beyond our doors.

The first is the parsonage problem and possible solutions. Our parsonage is old and most likely would not be a first choice as a place for a new minister to reside. So, we appointed a task force to figure out what to do with the building. At first, we thought our possibilities were: A) to do nothing with it; B) demolition; C) rent it out; D) use it as a parsonage; or E) sell it as is. We were determined to do two things. First, to gather as much information as possible, and second, do so with as little bias as possible. This should be a decision made by the congregation, with as much knowledge as we could give them. Funny, after most of our due diligence was completed, a new option was put forth in an informational meeting about the parsonage after church. The question was, can the parsonage be used for a social justice initiative? The Parsonage Task Force swiveled to look at that potentiality. We found there was a need and have identified two or three viable possible options. So, here is where we are. We voted not to demolish this good old residence. We voted not to use it as a parsonage. There is no love for renting it permanently. We voted to continue down the road of social justice, and in the interim will explore renting temporarily. We are not certain how we will make it work, but considering who we are as a congregation, it was a decision we felt good about. More to come.



Second, we are working on community engagement. For the first time this year, we had a table at Elk River Fest and adopted a park in the city. We had our Second Annual Shrimp Boil in the parking lot. We had participants in the Wright-Sherburne Pride Festival and plan to have a table there next year. Through these acts of engagement, we have attracted attention and a few more folks in the pews.

Both of these ongoing experiments exemplify the work we do in support of our mission.





Our Life of Faith

At Union Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Elk River, Minnesota, we acknowledge as our head, Jesus Christ, Son of God. We are an All Welcoming, Open and Affirming, Earth Friendly church community. We are a cozy church that has at its core, a desire to make a better world around us. We believe in being extremely welcoming and comforting to all. We embrace differences, believing they make us a more rounded church community. To that point, we have been adopting more inclusive language. We try not to limit our descriptions of God to human characteristics. Examples would be calling God “Holy one”, or “the Creator”, as opposed to the Father. We frequently read different versions of the Lord’s Prayer and include non-sacred text in our worship. God is not just “up there,” but all around us. As a church of seekers, we believe there are many paths to the sacred. We have congregants who have taken up various social justice causes and work to make our community and area a better place to reside. We try to follow the example set for us by Jesus, by doing for others, as we would have them do for us.



Positive Attributes

We are a close knit and friendly congregation. Generally, our parishioners are very cooperative with each other. We listen to each other's joys and concerns and work to help others when we can. We are uplifting and supportive of one another. Our congregants actively support one another through physical acts, mail correspondence and prayer. In our recent survey, 92% responded that they willingly help other parishioners in time of need.

Our congregation is blessed with so many talented individuals; a senior choir, a handbell choir and several very accomplished pianists. An artistic member who creates meaningful exhibits and teaches Art Bright, a program for those with memory loss and other health issues. The Worship and Arts Ministry Team creates a meaningful sanctuary space for each liturgical season.



Worship at Union

A very important part of Sunday worship is fellowship. People are welcomed at the front door by a greeter. Many people come early to talk to each other before the service begins. This occurs in the central area inside the front door called the narthex.

After a musical prelude, the Sunday service starts with a welcome and announcements from the pulpit, this is followed by a Gathering Song and an Opening Prayer. The minister then gives a prayer of peace and invites the congregation to share a sign of peace (handshake, fist-bump, wave, etc.) with each other. Congregation members will then share their wish of peace and good morning with each other. The service continues with a Centering Song, the Scriptural Reading(s), a Special Musical Piece, a Time for Children after which church school begins, followed by the Pastoral Message. Qualities of a good sermon as identified in the Hartford Pastoral Survey include the following.

- Makes me reflect on issues and events that go beyond my personal life and local community,
- Is challenging and thought-provoking,
- Sets forth a clear faith position as a guide for making decisions and living a faithful life,
- Touches directly on my everyday life.

The final part of the Service starts with Prayers of the People, the Offertory, the Offertory Hymn and a Prayer of Gratitude. Some version of the Lord's Prayer is recited next. The service ends with a Sending Song and a Final blessing. On many Sundays either the Choir will sing, or the Handbell Choir will play. Communion is offered on the first Sunday of the month.



After the service, all attendees are invited to fellowship hall to share in conversation while enjoying a beverage and treats. This fellowship lasts for up to an hour, and sometimes continues longer back into the narthex.

Baptisms begin with placing the baptismal font in the center of the altar near the top of the steps and lighting a baptismal candle the family takes home. The parents with the baby stand on one side of the font. The godparents stand on the other side, and the minister stands behind the font. The parent(s) holds the child over the font and the minister baptizes the baby. The parents take their vows, the godparents take their vows, and the congregation then takes their vows. The minister carries the baby up and down the main aisle to mutually introduce the congregation and baby to each other. While the introduction walk is occurring the congregation sings 'This Little Light of Mine'. Some rituals and practices have varied across ministers, such as gathering baptismal water from different sources.



Faith Formation

The Faith Formation Ministry Team is dedicated to the faith education and spiritual growth of children and youth who will spread God's love and inclusivity in their daily lives. Lessons help the children and youth understand and live into the meaning of "All Are Welcome", which encapsulates who we are and what we believe here at Union.

The Faith Formation Team consists of several lead members along with a team of Sunday School Teachers and group volunteers, led as a whole by the Pastor.

Faith Formation groups include: Sunday School Pre-K through grade 2, Sunday School grade 3 through grade 6, Confirmation starting age grade 6 or above, and Youth Group for grades 6-12

The 2022-2023 Sunday School season ran twelve months instead of taking a break for the summer of 2023. Year-round Sunday School was adopted with the goal of keeping our kids engaged, especially while on a break from school. While classes were noticeably smaller, Faith Formation will continue to offer year-round Sunday School. The summer months offer the opportunity to grow a garden, share time together outside, and participate in social justice activities that occur during the summer.

The curriculum for 2022-2023 was a "Trip Around the World". The kids learned about cultures, religions, climate issues, and social justice challenges from around the globe, modeling what it means to be a good steward of the earth and its many diverse people.





The values instilled as children shine brightly in our youth within the church and the community. One of our youths and Eagle Scout, built a community Little Pantry stationed outside of the church to assist those experiencing food insecurity. This youth went through the planning stages, advocated for the necessity of the project's completion, and executed the plan as promised. Another youth was one of 50 from across the conference who attended a week-long trip to Washington, D.C. with Outdoor Ministry, to advocate for change and action on current social issues. They not only learned advocacy, but also began to learn how their faith can have a positive impact in their communities and beyond.

Our 2023-2024 curriculum this year is "Living the Word of God" which follows the Narrative Lectionary. This lectionary flows through important stories of the Bible for children, youth, and adults to understand the human conditions that connect us with the ancient people who were trying to be in good relationship with God. This curriculum offers the same story from the pulpit to the classrooms so that everyone in the congregation hears the same message.

The Faith Formation Team looks forward to teaching and learning alongside our children and youth and supporting them and their families as they travel their own personal faith journeys.





Organization

This past spring, a Bylaws Task Force was formed by Council and the bylaws were thoroughly reviewed and revised by a group of four members. The task force carefully evaluated where we were living our bylaws fully, and where there were opportunities to modify the bylaws closer to our actual current practice as well as where changes might be necessary to live into our current theology and progressive thinking. Some of these changes required little discussion and some required further discussion and delineation from the congregation. The bulk of the bylaws revisions were passed at our Annual Life of the Church congregational meeting in June. The task force elected to gather further information and opinions from the wider congregation regarding Membership and Voting prior to revising these sections. Further discussion and consensus were gathered in the form of a Listening Circle as well as Ministry Teams discussing these subjects at their meetings and bringing that back to Council and the Task Force. The Task Force then revised these sections and brought them forth to the congregation on October 1st where they were voted on, accepted and the task force disbanded. Though we recognize that the bylaws are a fluid document and subject to revision, we are proud that such care and thought went into making sure they are as close as possible to how we mean to practice as a faith community and that we are ready, willing and excited to welcome a new minister with clear understanding of where we are right now.

The Union Ministry Teams are as follows: Included in parentheses are the number of positions needed to fill each team.

- Church Council (10): includes the Moderator, Minister (Ex-Officio), Clerk (non-voting), a representative of each of the four ministry teams, and three elected at-large members of the congregation.
- Worship and Arts Ministry Team
 - Diaconate (6)
 - Liturgical Arts (4)
- Trustees Ministry Team (6) includes Financial Secretary, Treasurer, Property Manager, a representative from Personnel, a representative from Memorial and up to four at-large members.
 - Memorial Committee (5)
 - Personnel Committee (3)
 - Stewardship Committee
- Faith Formation Ministry Team (4)
- Congregational Life Ministry Team (6)
 - Growth and Membership Committee (2)
 - Congregational Care Committee (1)
 - Hospitality and Fellowship Committee (3)
 - Prophetic Witness Committee (previously Outreach and Justice Ministry Team) (4)
- Pastoral Relations Committee (currently vacant)
- Centennial Society of Union Church is an independent, but closely related fellowship that serves the church and wider community. The society is responsible for its own organization and the management of its own projects and finances. The members of the Centennial Society are not elected by the Congregation.

We can provide a copy of the organizational bylaws and annual report.



Each of the Ministry Teams has its own set of duties to perform. Many Teams meet monthly, and others meet on an as-needed basis. All Teams make monthly activities reports to the Church Council. Ministry Teams are comprised of volunteers that are voted in at the Annual Spring Church Business Meeting. Committees meet on an as-needed basis to complete their work and report back to the associated Ministry Team. Committee members are elected by the congregation.

The Church Council is directly in charge of all lay activities of the Church, and they work in conjunction with the minister to ensure the successful operation of Union Church.

The Church Council meets on a monthly basis. As necessary, the Church Council will appoint special task force teams, including a 3-member Stewardship Team, for specific projects (i.e., kitchen remodeling, bylaw update, parsonage project).

Team and Council decisions are communicated to the Congregation through the weekly E-news, and also by special emails. When necessary, snail mail letters can and will be utilized for congregational communications.



Church#: 360400

Assoc: 434

Schedule: 0 Union Congregational UCC

Elk River

MN

55330

YEAR	MEMBERS	AVG WEEKLY ATTENDANCE	CHR ED/ FAITH FORM	CONFIRMATION	CONFESSION	TRANSFER OR REAFFIRM	DEATHS OR TRANS OUT	OTHER LOSSES	NET MEMBS ADDS-REMOVED
2012	404	125	85	0	0	0	0	0	0
2013	404	125	85	0	0	0	0	0	0
2014	404	125	85	0	0	0	0	0	0
2015	404	125	85	0	0	0	0	0	0
2016	401	80	48	3	6	1	13	0	-3
2017	405	90	61	4	0	0	0	0	4
2018	314	75	78	1	0	0	4	88	-91
2019	314	75	78	0	0	0	0	0	0
2020	270	34	0	2	0	2	14	34	-44
2021	130	35	23	1	0	2	7	2	-6
2022	137	48	22	3	6	6	8	0	7

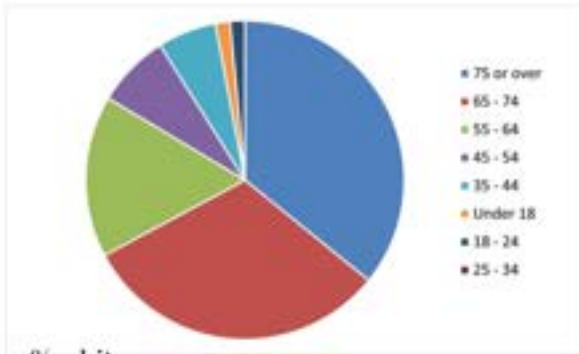
YEAR	CURRENT EXPENSES	CAPITAL PAYMENTS	BASIC SUPPORT	TOT OTHER UCC GIVING	TOTAL OCWM	OTHER GIFTS	WIDER MISSION	BASIC SUPP% CURR LOCAL	TOTAL EXPEND	PLEDGES AND OFFERINGS
2012	\$253,655	\$0	\$15,175	\$6,629	\$21,804	\$0	\$21,804	5.98	\$275,459	\$0
2013	\$253,655	\$0	\$15,182	\$3,587	\$18,769	\$0	\$18,769	5.99	\$272,424	\$0
2014	\$253,655	\$0	\$15,396	\$4,963	\$20,359	\$0	\$20,359	6.07	\$274,014	\$0
2015	\$253,655	\$0	\$17,396	\$5,435	\$22,831	\$0	\$22,831	6.86	\$276,486	\$0
2016	\$212,829	\$0	\$12,600	\$1,941	\$14,541	\$2,329	\$16,870	5.92	\$229,699	\$227,960
2017	\$226,428	\$0	\$14,630	\$2,210	\$16,840	\$1,338	\$18,178	6.46	\$244,606	\$239,551
2018	\$230,619	\$27,122	\$10,995	\$19,839	\$30,834	\$0	\$30,834	4.77	\$261,453	\$204,756
2019	\$230,619	\$0	\$18,310	\$1,989	\$20,299	\$0	\$20,299	7.94	\$250,918	\$0
2020	\$230,619	\$0	\$11,247	\$260	\$11,507	\$0	\$11,507	4.88	\$242,126	\$0
2021	\$230,287	\$26,633	\$16,092	\$2,385	\$18,477	\$5,613	\$24,090	6.99	\$254,377	\$276,970
2022	\$234,144	\$104,530	\$9,399	\$1,622	\$11,021	\$815	\$11,836	4.01	\$245,980	\$202,957

% CHANGE	MEMBERS	AVG WEEKLY ATTENDANCE	CHRED/ FAITH FORM	TOTAL ADDITIONS	TOTAL REMOVALS	CURR LOCAL EXPENSES	TOTAL OCWM	TOTAL EXPENDITURE
2017-2022	-66.17	-46.67	-63.93	275.00	0.00	3.41	-34.55	0.56
2012-2022	-66.09	-61.60	-74.12	0.00	0.00	-7.69	-49.45	-10.70

AGE AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS

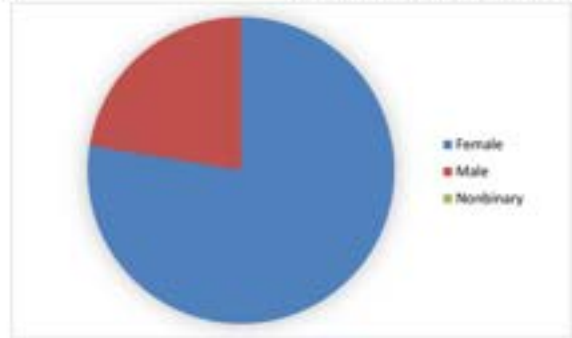
Ages 65+ 45 (67%); Ages 45-64 16 (24%); Ages 35 and younger 6 (9%)

Of those who responded to our survey 64% are retired, 22% are employed full-time, and 11% are employed part-time.



GENDER

78% female; 22% male.



ETHNICITY

Participants were 100% white.

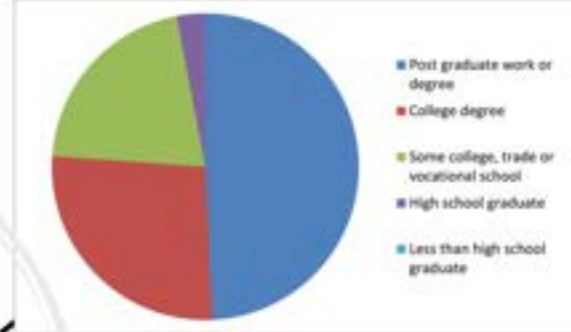
We plan to complete the Welcoming Diversity Inventory in early 2024 and discuss the results as a congregation. Ask us about what we have learned.



ELK RIVER UCC

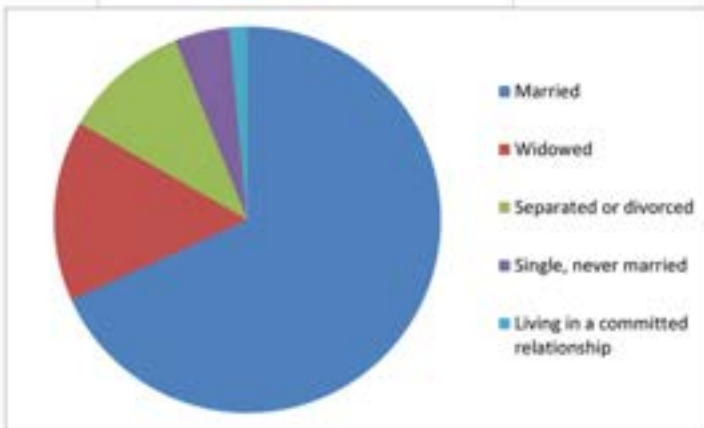
Demographics

Based on responses from 83 participants for the Hartford Institute Pastoral Search Inventory conducted in June 2023.



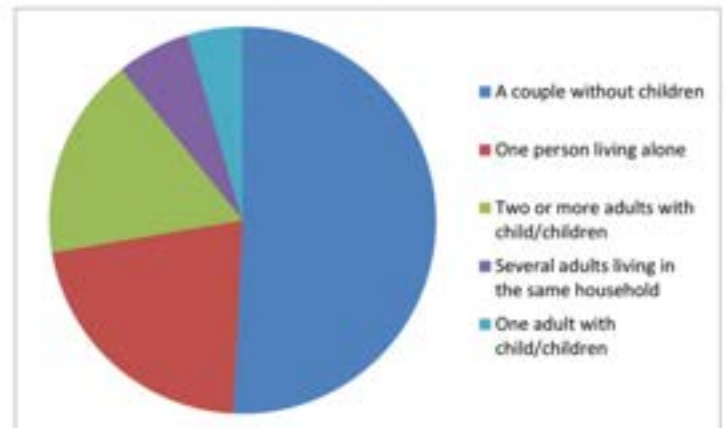
EDUCATION

Our congregation is composed of educated professionals including many teachers from the local community. Over 75% have a college or post graduate level degree. 21% have some college, trade or vocational training while 3% are high school graduates.



RELATIONSHIP STATUS

Married 68.18%; Widowed 15.15%; Separated or divorced 10.61%; Single (never married) 4.55%; Living in a committed relationship 1.52%



HOUSEHOLD

Couple without children 51%; one person living alone 22%, two or more adults with children 17%; several adults living in the same household 6%; one adult with children 4%.

Participation & Staffing

These numbers on the next page represent ways of gathering from June 2022 through June 2023. In the past year, the adult groups and classes have include book studies on climate justice, racial justice and celtic mysticism. There are (33) members who participate in (4) 7-8-9 intergenerational fellowship groups that meet monthly. Centennial Society offers monthly meetings and an annual outing with attendance of fifteen people. Ministry teams host a Hanging of the Greens and a Christmas Make & Take during Advent and a soup crawl during Lent. We have held a Shrimp Boil advertised to the community the past two summers. Since June 2023, we have had four additional funerals and one baptism.

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

The Hartford Survey was a good exercise for us. It confirmed many things we believed and accentuated others. We are a very welcoming and inquisitive group of congregants. We like it when new people come to visit us. We like it even like better when they find a new home with us, and we try to get them as involved as they might like to be. We are an older, well educated congregation. We know that for our future viability, we need to get younger. We are hoping that in calling a new minister, it would be a goal of theirs as well. We believe our little church has much to offer, as well as many challenges. The good news is we know we need to transition to a younger base and will be active partners with our new minister in getting there.



Ways of Gathering	Estimated number of people involved in attendance	Who plans each of the listed gatherings? (list any and all worship planners, such as various lay leaders, pastors, musicians, other staff)
Adult Groups or Classes	6-10	Pastor and Lay Leaders
Baptisms (number last year)	0	Pastors
Children's Groups or Classes	Sunday School	Pastor and Faith Formation Ministry Team
Christmas Eve and Easter Worship	80-90 each	Pastor, Worship & Arts Ministry Team which includes Diaconate and Liturgical Arts
Church-wide Meals	40	Hospitality and Ministry Teams
Choirs and Music Groups	25	Music Director
Church-based Bible Study	6-10	Lay Leader
Communion (served how often?)	1st Sunday	Pastor and Diaconate (Worship and Arts Ministry Teams)
Confirmation (number confirmed last year)	3	Pastor
Funerals (number last year)	2	Pastor and Liturgical Arts (Worship and Arts Ministry Team)
Intergenerational Groups	7-8	Pastor, Lay Leaders and Congregational Life Ministry Team
Outdoor Worship	0	Pastor
Prayer or Meditation Groups	0	Pastor
Public Advocacy Work	30	Pastor and Lay persons
Retreats	14	Lay leaders
Weddings (number last year)	0	Pastor
Worship (time slot: 10:00 am)	50 average	Pastor and lay persons
Young Adult Groups or Classes	0	
Youth Groups or Classes	0	Pastor, lay leaders and Faith Formation Ministry Team
Transition Work/Visioning	40-50	Interim Consultant and Transition Team

All current staff

Staff Position	Head of Staff?	Compensation (full time, part time, volunteer)	Supervised by	Length of Tenure for current person in this position
Bridge Pastor	Yes	PT/Salary	Council	Began Oct. 2022
Administrator	No	PT/Hourly	Pastor	2 years
Choir Director	No	PT/Hourly	Pastor	1 year
Facilities	No	PT/Hourly	Trustees	2 years
Interim Consultant	No	PT/Hourly	Council	Began Jan. 2023

Members or regular participants 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?
Ron Benfer	NA	NA	Ordained	Yes.
Don Britt	NA	NA	Ordained	Yes.

*Neither is a former minister at Union Congregational Church.





Church Finances

We have an excellent Trustees Committee, an active Church Council, led by a very capable Moderator, and a hard-working congregation. We started this financial year with a projected income of about 30K less than our projected expenses. We are doing extra income projects such as a shrimp boil and a garage sale. We also plan to do appropriate cost cutting whenever possible.

We have remained good fiscal stewards by continuing the upkeep of the church. We replaced and paid for the parsonage roof in 2018, remodeled and paid for the church kitchen in 2020, and recently we replaced the church boiler

This fiscal year we are going with a “leap of faith” budget. With all these positives in place, we feel that this experiment will be successful, and we will come out in the black.



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

Source	Amount
Annual Offerings and Pledged Giving	\$192,789
Endowment Proceeds (as permitted within spending policy, such as a cap of typically 4.5%-5% on total return)	\$0
Endowment Draw (beyond what is permitted by spending policy, "drawing down the principal")	\$0
Fundraising Events	\$3,000
Gifts Designated for a Specific Purpose	\$10,500
Grants	\$0
Rentals of Church Building	\$10,500
Rentals of Church Parsonage	\$0
Support from Related Organizations (e.g. Women's Group) included in pledged giving	\$0
Transfers from Special Accounts	\$0
Other (specify):	\$0
Other (specify):	\$0
TOTAL	\$218,289

Our 2023 budget is included on the next page. A 2024 budget can be provided when available. Total ministerial support for the past two years has been approximately 35% of the total budgeted expenses.

Current 2023 Operational Financial Summary**\$ 1,239**

October 2023 Operating Income	\$15,802
October 2023 Operating Expenses	<u>\$14,564</u>
	\$ 1,239

MONETARY SITUATION AS OF OCTOBER 31, 2023**AVAILABLE MONEY**

Checking	\$37,104
Savings	<u>\$81,238</u>
Total Available	\$118,342

MONEY OWED**\$80,601**

Commitments	
Boiler Loan	<u>\$80,601</u>
Total Committed	\$80,601

NET CASH POSITION ON OCTOBER 31, 2023**37,741**

\$118,342 - \$80,601 = 34,818

Operating Expense	2023 YTD (October)	2023 Budget
Worship	22,113	28,539
Faith Formation	382	813
Congregational Care	1,027	3,500
Ministerial Leadership / Administration	68,850	124,410
Our Church Facility	94,851	103,220
Total Operating Expense	187,223	260,482
Total Operating Income	211,942	224,775
Surplus / Deficit	24,719	(35,707)
Designated Payments		
Outreach and Justice	10,188	12,998
Total Designated Expense	10,188	12,998
Designated Giving	9,450	12,498



*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?

- 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?

It is included in the pledge card and each family determines how much to pledge to OCWM.

What is the church's current indebtedness?

Total amount of loan debt: \$83,179.33

Reason for debt: boiler replacement

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 total project budget. We plan to waterproof building walls, improve site drainage, and encourage water flow away from the north side of the church by applying waterproofing material to existing walls, installing drain tile, a sump pump, new gutters, new downspouts, and a rain garden and swale.

The estimated project dates are June through September 2024.

Estimated costs are between \$70,000-\$80,000.

*Does your church have an endowment? - **No.***



Capital Campaigns

Year(s)	Purpose	Goal	Result	Impact
2017 to 2020	Remodel the kitchen to allow for more use	\$	\$98,275	Kitchen remodel completed just prior to Covid

Year(s)	Purpose	Goal	Result	Impact
2022 to 2023	Replace boiler since old one was failing	\$	\$27,115	Boiler replaced, but capital fund stopped and paying loan from general fund

The most recent capital campaign was necessary due to the prior boiler failing and it was causing heat issues within the church with frozen pipes.

The kitchen remodel was undertaken to upgrade the kitchen with modern appliances, cupboards, counters and a true dish room so we could expand the use of the kitchen outside of the church and make it more welcoming for the members of the church. However, it was completed just prior to Covid and we have not expanded the use outside of the church yet. It is appreciated by all of the current members when it is needed for hospitality events.



Other Assets

Reserves (savings): ***\$81,212.76***

Investments (other than endowment): ***\$0***

Does your church have a parsonage? ***Yes.***

1126 4th Street NW Elk River, MN 55330

Finished square footage: ***1,791 finished square feet.***

Number of Bedrooms and Bathrooms: ***4 bedrooms, one full and one half bath.***



Fair market rental value of the parsonage: ***Between \$1,500 and \$2,000 per month, dependent on whether the garage is included in the rental agreement.***

Assessed real estate value: ***Two realtors assessed as is between \$100,000 & \$150,000.***

Condition of structure, systems and appliances: ***Please request a list of parsonage facts for an itemized status of structure, systems, and appliances if interested.***

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

How is the parsonage used? ***Though currently unoccupied, the parsonage has housed pastors and their families on and off since it was built in 1912.***

Available for minister residence: ***No. We are currently planning to rent the parsonage.***

Expected minister residence: ***No. On October 1st the congregation voted to not keep the parsonage as a minister's residence. The congregation voted to have Council explore renting the parsonage, while exploring a long-term social justice partnership with a local organization.***

Describe all buildings owned by the church: ***The church owns two properties in Elk River, Minnesota - the church building at 1118 4th Street NW and the adjacent parsonage at 1126 4th Street NW. Neither building is encumbered by a mortgage loan or line of credit.***

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

Which spaces are accessible to wheelchairs? ***The church's front entrance, narthex, vestry, sanctuary, Fellowship Hall, and facilities are all wheelchair accessible. The chancel, pulpit, and choir stands are currently not wheelchair accessible.***

What does this information reflect about your congregation's mission and ministry?

Budgets are determined on an annual basis beginning with a stewardship drive in the Fall of the prior year. Once projected income has been determined the Trustees draft a proposed budget. After accounting for staff and property expenses, the Trustees allocate funding to support the Church's ministry teams and the activities or initiatives they wish to pursue in the coming year. This regularly includes expenses related to faith formation, congregational life, and outreach and justice. Unfortunately, funding is often limited due to increasing overhead costs and needed building maintenance. In these situations, the church looks to increase funding through activities like a Shrimp Boil which raises funds while increasing community awareness of the church and thereby increasing awareness of the principles the Church stands for.



Historical Information

We are a very old church and we feel good about that. We are the second oldest church in our area and we are the longest continuously operating church in Elk River. Our church was founded in the mid 1870's, with 23 founding members. One of those members, W.H. Houlton, deeded the land for the church for one dollar. He said "This will be a non-denominational church." Even then, our congregation wanted to be a home to any who sought us out. Over time the church transitioned into the United Church of Christ, with a formal vote in 1962.

Union has gone through a few major additions and remodels in the last 50 years. In 1968 we built an annex for Sunday School rooms. This now houses a Montessori School, music room, community room, library, and a meditation room. The Sunday school rooms are on the lower level of the original fellowship hall. In 2000 a new narthex, office area, and youth room was completed. The sanctuary underwent a major remodel in 2008 by request of an anonymous donor. Our kitchen was the next remodel project. With the encouragement of our moderator and Centennial Society that remodel came to fruition in 2017.

During the last 20 years, we have continued to move forward. In 2012, our church voted to become open and affirming after having been so for many years. We also formed the Discovery Group (2004 - 2005), held a vote to become Earthwise (2009), and celebrated the 145th Church anniversary in 2020. We are currently working toward the 150th Church anniversary in 2025.





Challenges & Conflict

We are not without challenges. In two instances, conflicts arose in the congregation over the leadership provided by settled pastors. Specifically, some congregation members were unhappy with the direction of their ministry. Both ministers chose to resign from the church. In both cases, this resulted in a congregational rift. We are determined to not let this happen again. With the help of Reverend Sheri, and consultant Sarah Lehman, we are working to mend the hurts and close the rift.

Through these experiences, we have determined that conflict resolution and communication are areas where we need to grow as a congregation. Over the past year, we have practiced healthier communication habits by engaging in listening circles and visioning sessions to talk with one another about critical issues in the life of the church. The membership agrees that policies, protocols and structures for dealing with communication and conflict resolution must be determined and written in the near future. During the fall and winter, Sarah Lehman will be offering the congregation training on healthy communication and conflict strategies and will be leading a process to explore a behavioral covenant and establish a grievance and concerns process.

While the loss of congregation members is concerning, it is important to note that throughout this period, the remaining members stepped up to keep this church viable and a beacon of more liberal Christian thought in the community.



Ministerial History

Staff member's name	Years of service	UCC Standing (Y/N)
Reverend Trish Grieves, Settled Pastor	August 1990 – June 2006	Y
Reverend JoBeth Marshall, Interim Pastor	July 2006 – September 2007	Y
Reverend Dana Mann, Settled Pastor	September 2007 – November 2013	Y
Reverend Sandra Hanna, Interim Pastor	April 2014 – August 2015	N
Reverend Robin Raudabaugh, Revitalizing Pastor	January 2016 – November 2018	Y
Reverend Robin Raudabaugh, Settled Pastor	November 2018 – June 2022	Y
Reverend Sheri Nelson, Bridge Pastor	October 2022 – Present	Y

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

*Has any past leader left under pressure or by involuntary termination? **No, though endings have presented challenges in the past. Ask us about it***

*Has your church been involved in a Situational Support Consultation? **Yes, ask us about it.***

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



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

Union Congregational is a community leader in addressing social justice issues. For years, our church members have supported neighbors in need by volunteering with local agencies like Community Aid of Elk River (CAER) by donating food and clothing, delivering meals to clients with Meals on Wheels, and supporting Open Doors for Youth (ODFY), a resource center for homeless youth. A small group of Union members had the vision for ODFY and in 10 short years it has become an important partner in the community, providing resources to help young people with employment, education, housing, and well-being.

Our church has also developed outreach to immigrants. For several years, Union has been a supporter of undocumented immigrants through an organization founded by Union called Sanctuary And Resistance to Injustice (SARI). In addition to advocating for families of immigrants in detention, SARI has weekly public displays at the Sherburne County Jail in support of those in detention at the jail. SARI is a founding member of an alliance working with the state Legislature to make MN a sanctuary state.

Union has also partnered with Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Elk River to help an Afghan family settled in Elk River. We helped provide the family of eight with furniture, linens, kitchen items, and even floor pillows, a common household item in Afghanistan. The family lives very close to Union, and they can contact us as needed for assistance.

Being an Earthwise church, Union received a grant for, and created, rain gardens. We also avoid chemicals toxic to wildlife in caring for our property. We work to build awareness in the community about the impact of climate change. Union has hosted several speakers on the topic, including J Drake Hamilton, a scientist with the non-profit Fresh Energy, who attended the Paris Climate Accord. Union co-sponsored an event with Elk River Lutheran Church, ELCA, to host renowned meteorologist Paul Douglas to talk about his book on climate change, *Caring for Creation*.



Union also participates in outward service and advocacy in the following ways:

- Participate in the annual NAMI walk (National Alliance on Mental Illness).
- Participate in annual Sherburne County United Way Polar Plunge to raise money for non-profit organizations.
- Participate in Elk River Fest with a promotional booth.
- Participate in the City of Elk River's Adopt-a-Park program. Adopted and clean Orono Park along the shores of Lake Orono in Elk River. Congregation-wide project.
- Support Anoka Family Promise that assists families that are experiencing housing insecurity. Support includes gift cards, food, and household items.
- Conduct annual drives for school supplies and winter clothing for local charities.
- Participate in the annual Gifts Anonymous program collecting toys and gifts for the holiday season.
- Art Bright, a program for those with memory loss and other disabilities.





Union works collaboratively with other groups to utilize our space and to support their endeavors. A Montessori school rents space in our building. Union has provided space for a local Girl Scout Troop and music lessons for homeschooled students. Union has partnered with Scouts BSA troops to support Eagle Scout projects.



Participation in meetings, relationships and activities connecting the wider United Church of Christ

- Attend and publicize meetings and participate actively in programming of the Minnesota Conference. For example, Mayflower Earth Day Summit
- Contribute to UCC funds: Our Church's Wider Mission, One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, Christmas Fund.
- In the past, youth attended the MN Conference Outdoor Ministry programs, camps, and mission trips, but this has not been a priority in recent years.

The following apply to Union:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessible to All (A2A) | <input type="checkbox"/> Just Peace |
| <input checked="" 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 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 |



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?

- While we are not A2A certified, we have access to all floors via an elevator, a ramp to the sanctuary, wheel-chair accessible pew seating, assistive listening devices, large-print bulletins
- The congregation lives into its Open and Affirming status through continued discussions, support of local organizations who also support LGBTQIA+ values, promote this status both externally and through social media, and participate in the newly formed Wright/Sherburne Counties Pride Festival.
- The church continues to find ways to live into its Creation Justice status through recycling and composting initiatives, butterfly and rain gardens, and participating in discussions with county, MN Conference, and National UCC environmental specialists.

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

- The church has partnered with other churches in the past to have joint Blue Christmas services. Partnering in other ways is something we would be interested in pursuing.
- Our youth have participated in interfaith education with local Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu organizations.



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?

In calling a three-quarters pastoral position we recognize that priorities within the church will need to be discussed and reevaluated regularly. We welcome those discussions. We view community ministry and engagement as being an important role for our minister, but not the primary role. We would like our minister to participate in community, conference, and interfaith events as their schedule allows. We would like our minister to cultivate relationships within the community and with other church leaders to develop an understanding of the needs within the community and communicate those needs to the congregation. We would like our minister to collaborate with lay leadership to set priorities and direction for community ministry and engage the congregation in participating in community, conference, and interfaith activities.



Our Mission Statement

Union Congregational Church seeks to create a celebrating, covenanting, affirming and justice seeking faith community that inspires people to unite and create a peaceful, loving world.

Through this mission statement we have the privilege to love one another and to support one another as we work in our own ways to bring Jesus Christ's example in both our community, including our congregation, and the wider community we can serve. If you asked five of our members, "How do you dispense social justice?" you may get five different answers. There are so many needs and we discuss them and become knowledgeable of progress or stumbling blocks through honest sharing within the congregation. Not that we each wish to pick up each of those opportunities, but we can support those who do. Our congregants are not shy about asking for help, and usually there is someone to be there to enhance those missions.



Mission InSite

Union Congregational Church is located in Elk River, Minnesota, a growing city located about 35 miles Northwest of Minneapolis. Here the Mississippi and Elk River's meet and provide abundant beauty and outdoor recreation for the population of nearly 27,000 residents. Major employers in the area represent the manufacturing, healthcare/social assistance, and retail including Metal Craft, Rinker Materials, Sportech Inc, Guardian Angels, Walmart, Coborns, Menards, Home Depot and Cub Foods. In addition to the NorthStar commuter rail, many major highways lead to Elk River resulting in ease of access and commuting to and from the city.



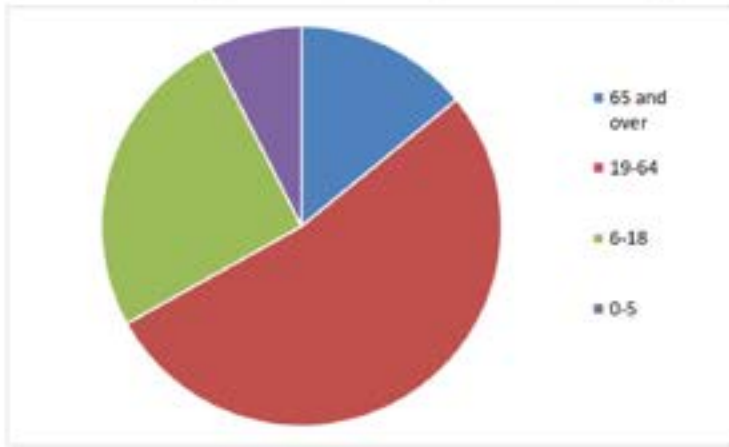
How do your congregation's internal demographics compare or contrast to a) the neighborhoods adjacent to your church, and b) other neighborhoods with which your church connects?

The following demographic comparison is based upon the responses captured from the 83 participants engaged with the June 2023 Hartford Institute Pastoral Search Inventory and 2022 census data from [census.gov](https://www.census.gov) for the city of Elk River, Minnesota.

From a population perspective, the general population of Elk River differs from our congregation which trends older with 67% age 65+ versus 14%. Diversity between the two groups are consistent in that the population is largely white. Education levels differ with the general population earning a bachelor's degree or higher at 25.7% and 75% within our congregation. Although manufacturing, healthcare and retail are the largest employment categories for Elk River residents, our congregation (prior to retirement) were predominantly professionals within the educational, legal, and business sectors.

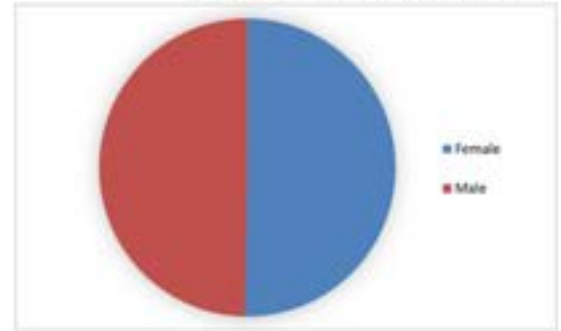
AGE

Ages 65+ 14.1%; Ages 19-64 52.8%; Ages 6-18 25.6%; Ages 0-5 7.5%.



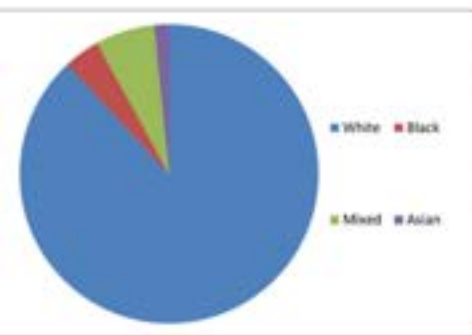
GENDER

70.26% female; 49.74% male.



ETHNICITY

White 87.97%; Black 3.91%; Asian 1.61%; Mixed 6.4%



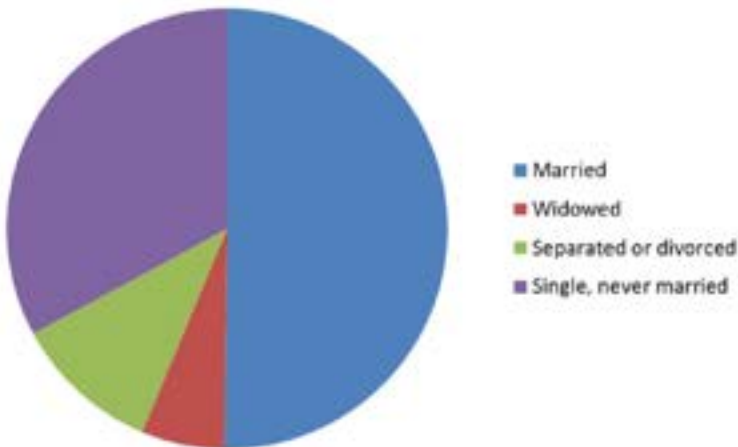
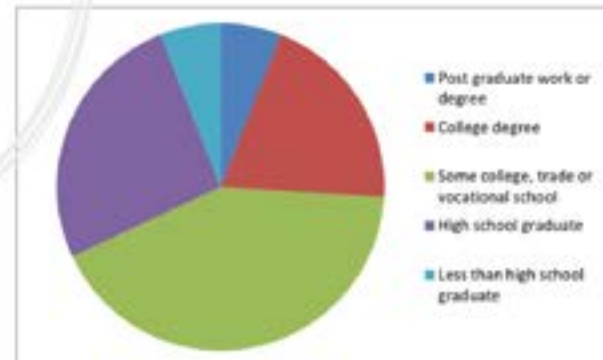
ELK RIVER

Demographics

The community around us.

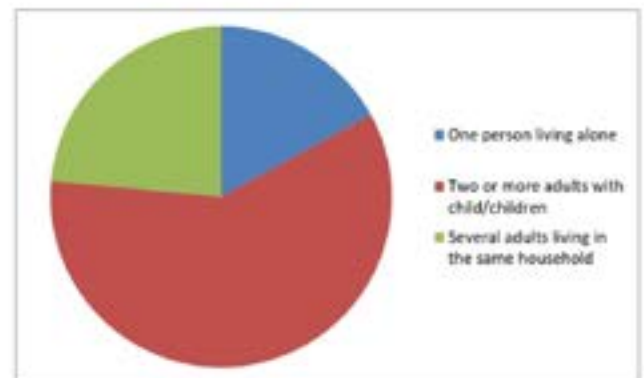
EDUCATION

6% have a post graduate level degree. 20% have a college degree. 42% have some college, trade or vocational training while 26% are high school graduates. 6% have less than a high school diploma.



RELATIONSHIP STATUS

Married 50.20%; Widowed 6.1%; Separated or divorced 10.8%; Single (never married) 32.9%;



HOUSEHOLD

One person living alone 17%, two or more adults with children 59.5%; several adults living in the same household 23.5%.



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

The people of Union Congregational Church practice a progressive theology that is often not matched by the conservatism present in the Elk River area. Sometimes this presents challenges in connecting with those who could find safety, community and perspective with us. This challenge may actually make us show up a little louder and warmer when representing the church in the community – understanding that we are a beacon that needs to be seen and explored. Regardless, our congregation participates in a number of ways to provide assistance to the members of the community through the variety of programs mentioned throughout this local church profile.

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

We have been blessed with several new additions to our congregation. In asking a few of them “Why here?” , interestingly their answers were quite similar. First, the baseline is that we live in a very conservative area, both politically and religiously. But their main answers included that they were looking for a more progressive place to worship, and that once they worshiped with us, we were extremely welcoming. After a short time, they just found that Union was the place they wanted to be.



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

If you come to town for the first time and ask someone on the street about Union Church, the first answer that you will get will probably be, “Oh, that’s the pretty, old white Church a couple of blocks up from the Dairy Queen. You can’t miss it. It has a tall steeple, a big stained-glass window, and a rainbow flag on its lawn.

If you ask them about our religious views, they might say, “they’re very liberal” or “many teachers go there,” or “they protest a lot”. For many people in our community that is the extent of their knowledge about Union. At this time, Union does not have a very big footprint in this community. Our congregation would like to see that change.

If you talked to the leaders at CAER, Meals on Wheels, Open Doors for Youth, and Guardian Angels, where we contribute, and volunteer, the comments would be positive. If you talk to the people at the Sheriff’s office (where we have protested for immigration reform) the comments would probably be less positive. Carol Meyher, coordinator of Meals on Wheels of Elk River, shared that she can always count on Union to be there when scheduled and work extra shifts when needed. She said, “You are very generous with your time.”

“Union Church has a long history in Elk River and has been an influential church over the years. I think it’s viewed as one of the city’s more progressive churches. Also, people appreciate the care that has been taken to preserve and maintain the historic church building.” - Joni Astrup, Asst. Editor of The Star News



References

Peta Barrett

Women's Wilderness Discovery/Owner

Phone: (218) 235-1994

Email: petabarrettinely@gmail.com

Previous member of Union, and has led wilderness adventures and retreats.

Dr. Carson Rose Schneider

Professional Pianist/Music Director and Pianist

Phone: (215) 837-0913

Email: carson.r.schneider@gmail.com

Music Director & Pianist

Sarah Lehman

Sarah Lehman Consulting LLC

Phone: (612) 437-0563

Email: sarah@slehmanconsulting.com

Interim Consultant at Union

Letter of Reference – Peta Barrett

November 29, 2023

I want to begin by stating that I was a member of Union Congregational UCC church in Elk River, MN for about 50 years, experiencing 4 different, uniquely wonderful ministers...from the age of 5, when my family moved to Elk River from Princeton, until age 56 when Dean and I moved to Ely, MN in 2014. We joined the Ely First Presbyterian Church (in the absence of any UCC church within reasonable proximity to Ely). I now serve as an Elder in our Presbyterian church.

1. Describe some areas of strength in this church's ministry.

Union Church is a faith community that truly believes in the 'extravagant welcome' for all God's children. I will always fondly refer to Union as my 'home church.' As I married and we started a family, I became more involved in serving the church on various boards, by giving of my time and talents. This church has always seemed to grow with the times. The sense of stewardship is strong throughout this faith community. Union is open & affirming, works for social justice & outreach, and is environmentally conscious & progressive as climate change is affecting our world. Union Church has historically been an ecumenical leader in the greater community, even during some rough times (in the 1990's?) as the Elk River, MN area made a hard conservative right turn. In earlier decades during my membership, Union Church was known as a 'teaching church,' thanks to our incredible ministers. Seminary students sought our church to further mentor their education. Music is a huge part of the worship experience at Union; seems it's always been that way, crossing all generations. What a gift!

2. Describe some areas for improvement in this church's ministry.

Open communication always...between members of the faith community, and those members and their minister/minister of Christian Educ/etc. It's also very important for a church to have an effective, supportive, compassionate system of Pastoral care. I feel these areas may have waned in more recent years...toward the end of my membership. Ministering to our shut-in members is so important, too. I don't know where that stands right now at Union Church, but it was always at the forefront of conversations for decades.

Letter of Reference – Peta Barrett continued

My own reflections concerning the close of Rev. Dana Mann's & Rev. Robin Raudabaugh's ministries at Union Church (the most recent 2 ministers to serve Union) is that there grew to be some form of power-struggle (ownership perhaps?) issues among some well-intended congregation members that created uncomfortable rifts in that congregation and with the minister. I don't know how to better word that. I was present for the end of Rev. Mann's service to our church. I was sad to see her move on. I served on a search committee for a limited time then, as I was also transitioning with our move to Ely, MN, and was then gone from Elk River. I was not present as a Union member for Rev. Raudabaugh's day to day ministry, but I visited, and streamed worship services at times, and truly loved her style and sermons.

I believe it's a crucial element in every minister who is called to lead the church, to be able to find the strengths/gifts/talents in each member of the congregation, to encourage service and delegate according to those abilities. (We are all ministers in a congregation.) But to also recognize any perceived power struggles thoughtfully, or overt ownership issues, that may be developing in a well-meaning 'take charge' type of member or section of the membership. To address and work through those small rifts before they organically grow into bigger problems.

3. Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry.

My 50 years of membership at Union Church include SO MANY significant experiences. Wow...my own confirmation, my wedding (coming up on 47 yrs with my husband, Dean!), our children's baptisms & confirmations, and numerous family funerals. Union church IS my home church, my long-time faith family. Even though I now live 4 hours north, I'm still connected to this congregation through friends old & new. If I were to choose just a couple of experiences to highlight as especially significant: When Rev. Dana Mann was our minister at Union, our adult daughter suffered a mental breakdown & threatened suicide in '09. Dana was a phenomenal counselor for my husband & I during such a horrible time.

Letter of Reference - Peta Barrett continued

Rev. Mann was also present as my mother was nearing the end her life, deep in dementia. Dana immediately connected with her through their shared experiences in dance & the arts, even though Mom couldn't form words. Rev. Mann was there for Mom at the end, beside her, comforting her when I was out of the country, and as my siblings raced to be there, too. Dana & I worked together to create a memorable Celebration of Life for Mom.

I served Union Church in many different capacities over the years: Sunday school teacher, youth leader, Diaconate, Altar Guild, Service & Mission, Moderator, Search Committee, and Handbell choir. Union Church, in total, has been a significant experience in my faith journey all these years!

4. Anything else you wish to share?

Union Congregational UCC is, and has always been, a very special church, with a dedicated, gifted, compassionate faith community!

Peace,

Peta Barrett

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Letter of Reference – Carson Schneider

Describe Some Areas of Strength In This Church's Ministry

As music staff, I am not actively involved in other areas of the church's ministry but I can feel how the congregation cares for each other and shows up for each other and the community every Sunday. One of its biggest strengths is the congregation. Many churches say they are open and affirming, but you don't really believe it. At Union it's different. I have felt this personally, and I also see members live it in the community. There is real care shown during prayers not just for congregation members, but the community around them. Several members in the community have started organizations in Elk River that actively help a variety of people who are overlooked: for instance, Art Bright for people with Alzheimer's and Open Doors for Youth for homeless youth. You also really feel that people know each other. New people are always noticed and welcomed with introductions. During the time of prayers, people always comment on cards, calls, and visitors received during hard times. People are intentional with how they show up for each other, and I love seeing this especially in our more digital oriented age. During our search for a new Pastor, the congregation have been needing to have hard discussion and talk more directly and openly with each other. It seems as though this is bringing people closer together. Instead of losing members, we have been gaining new ones, including younger families and more children. Our community is vibrant, strong, and creative.

During the pandemic, we found creative ways to stay in touch with the congregation via online services, virtual Christmas caroling, and made attempts to stay creative with special services online. We brought the keyboard into the parking lot and had services outside during the summer. Because of all this, we have a large community of folks who watch online as well and care is taken to include them in the service. The creativity in general in this community is amazing and members use it to help keep people excited about being active in church life. In a world where it can seem as if technology is in some ways making us lose touch with each other and busy schedules make it hard to stay connected, one of Union's biggest strengths is its congregation and the ways in which they care for each other. I came in 2015 not knowing anyone, not a member, and not knowing what to expect, but I have felt welcomed ever since. I am lucky to count many of the choir members as friends and also know most of the congregation by name. They genuinely practice what they preach and are active participants in the Elk River community as well.

Letter of Reference – Carson Schneider continued

Describe Some Areas for Improvement In This Church's Ministry

As music staff, I am relatively unaware of inner struggles or other difficulties in the church's ministry. I enjoy this because if there are any disagreements, it doesn't affect my job and my ability to lead music in any way and this has remained true even during this uncertain transition time.

However, I can speak about the music perspective and actually think the church could improve and grow its music ministry. Most churches have a stipend for a cantor to lead hymns. I cannot do this effectively from the piano as I am not a trained singer, but if we had a regular cantor there would be much more flexibility in picking hymns. I think this is important if we want to insert more modern music in with our traditional pieces, and we would not have to worry about the choirs being there to help the congregation through an unfamiliar piece. I would also love to start a concert series where I could play, but I would also like to invite more guest groups to do concerts at Union. I think this would be not only a great way to bring in more music, but something like this would enhance the music scene in Elk River and would help let more people in the community know about Union. We could have some concerts paired with fundraisers, for needs specific to Union or the community. I have heard people say that we had something like this awhile ago, much before I came in 2015. I would love to bring it back.

Before the pandemic, I would have also said I would love to see more involvement from children and different people in the service. I see a lot of the same people helping out as greeters and readers. Lately however, this has been changing as the Pastor has made more direct efforts to get a greater variety of people involved, including the children. We used to actually have a children's chorus (Choristers), but had a hard time with attendance leading into the pandemic. However, it has been wonderful to see so many new youth in the children's time over the last few months. I think a more vibrant music program could not only enhance the overall ministry at Union, and a public concert series could help bring in more visitors who might be inspired to become members. This is also something I would love to be involved in growing over the next few years!

Letter of Reference – Carson Schneider continued

Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry

I have been working at Union Congregational Church United Church of Christ in Elk River as the pianist since 2015. Working at Union has been one of the great joys in my musical career. The position originally came highly recommended to me because the pianist before me was a good friend. This last year I was asked if I would be interested in stepping in to fill the spot as Music Director of the Senior Choir and Handbells, and I said yes without hesitation.

Before Union, I didn't even really know what a UCC was, and as an agnostic the community is a perfect fit. I love their history of female pastors. The liberal ministry left an immediate impact on me, and I quickly started to enjoy the entire service. Not only did I enjoy my ability to choose all my music, but I found a place where I felt at home in terms of faith. I could never keep a church job that was out of alignment with my religious beliefs, and I truly feel they mean that everyone is welcome.

The congregation and ministry at Union have made such an impact on me that I have really come to feel that it is more than a job. I've subbed for many different denominations throughout my career, and this is the first time I've felt this way about a church. I felt welcomed from day one, and I continue to be impressed with this congregation's commitment to showing up. Not only to rehearsal and events in their community, but they are committed to showing up for each other! They also support my work outside of church and have been coming to my concerts and shows since 2015. That is not something I take for granted. I feel cared for and supported beyond my position, just as I see the congregation exhibit for members every Sunday and beyond.

I have been given many opportunities to grow musically as well as in faith. All the members of both choirs are all volunteers and have been making music at Union well before I came, which shows not only their love of music but the strength of their fellowship. I might never have considered leading handbells in another congregation. I'd had no prior experience, but during the pandemic they needed some extra ringers and I stepped in.

Letter of Reference – Carson Schneider continued

I don't have many chances to make other kinds of music away from the piano, and I enjoy the colors, the story, and the community. I love the focus on inclusivity in the music ministry in the language of the choir anthems, and I enjoy choosing pieces that enhance the service. I get to wear many hats, and it is a safe space to try new things.

Union has had a significant impact on me not only as a musician, but it has been a part of my own faith journey. The only reason I haven't become a member is that we used to live a little too far, but recently that's changed. I honestly can't imagine making music in another congregation, and I never expected to feel this way about a church job. I highly recommend Union to any pastor who feels the community is a good fit, and feel confident that you will fall in love with the congregation just as I have.

Anything Else You Would Like to Add

I would simply like to add that working at Union is more than a job! It is wonderful to make music in a church where I have also felt as though I've grown spiritually. The work gives so much back to me in return, and I know that the right Pastor would find the same.

I have been extremely impressed with the ways in which the whole congregation has come together on their journey in this search for a settled Pastor. Our terrific interim Pastor Sheri has been doing all kinds of work to help us find ways to honor traditions while moving forward: from changing the flow of the bulletin, calling upon others to be involved in the service, having group sessions for a more open flow of conversation, and more. During all this, the congregation has come together in fellowship and shown a willingness to try new things and be excited about change.

We have done more in the community over the last few years and have brought in several new members over the last year alone. It is a vibrant group of people who not only care about each other, but do so actively and with intention. The right Pastor will find a loving, intentional, and proactive community at Union and a beautiful place to serve. I am happy to talk with you and answer any questions you might have.

Letter of Reference – Sarah Lehman

December 8, 2023

I have had the privilege of working with Union Congregational Church for over a year as the church has moved through a season of reflection and discernment about what is most needed right now in the life of the congregation. I was first hired as a facilitator in the fall of 2022, to lead listening circles, and a few large group sessions. In January 2023, I was brought on to partner with bridge minister Rev Sheri Nelson as an Interim Consultant to support the church through the interim period. I worked closely with the Transition Team and the Church Council to guide the congregation through a visioning process and to write the local church profile.

Describe some areas of strength in this church's ministry.

Union Congregational Church is grounded in the knowledge of who they have been, who they are now, and what they have to offer the community.

1. They are committed to meeting people wherever they are on their journey. They are a community of seekers.
2. The congregation is clear and unified in their commitment to being welcoming, inclusive, and Open and Affirming. They see themselves as a beacon of progressive theology and action, in a politically conservative community.
3. The congregation is committed to one another and to the mission of the church. I have seen them continue to show up for one another, the church, and the world with generosity, a heart open to justice, and a belief that in community more is possible.
4. The congregation is open, receptive, and collaborative. They are seeking a minister who will walk beside and discern with them how the church is feeling called to serve.

Describe some areas for improvement in this church's ministry.

Two interrelated areas that I see room for improvement in Union's ministry are learning to be better able to meet the present moment as it is, and to manage fear and anxiety about the future.

Letter of Reference – Sarah Lehman continued

Union will be celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2025. There is grief and nostalgia present for the peak seasons in the church's life. It can be easy to wish to return to practices and programs that served the church well in the past. Yet, these are very different times in the life of the church world and society and require new approaches. Union will need continued support to find ways to honor its history, discern what from the past to move forward, and to release that which is no longer serving the congregation well today.

It will be important for the congregation to continue to develop and practice healthy communication and conflict resolutions skills, so that when fear and anxiety arise, they can address those concerns directly and with compassion. We've talked about how development is spiral, not linear. These skills that they have worked with for the past year are new muscles that require continued modeling, practice, and encouragement.

Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry.

When I first came to Union, there was a lot of fresh pain and hurt present in the congregation around how past ministers were treated by members of the congregation, how members were treated by past ministers, and how members treated each other. While ongoing personal and communal healing is still happening, I have noticed a significant shift in the congregation. I have experienced members become more reflective, open, and curious about both the past and the possibilities of the future, while paying attention to what is happening right here in the present.

Within the congregation, I have observed members during visioning session, listening sessions and in meetings lean into the healthy communication practices even though they have felt uncomfortable, or unfamiliar. They have practiced listening to one another to understand, rather than to persuade or correct. They have shared vulnerably the impact specific events and relationships had on their lives. I noticed people slowing down, appreciating each other's perspectives, and allowing their own opinions to shift or broaden. They have considered how their individual needs might be different from other members, from the congregation, or even the mission of the church, widening the circles of concern and care.

Letter of Reference – Sarah Lehman continued

Within elected leadership, I observed the Trustees and Council operate from a place of grounded awareness and hopefulness as they discerned the scope of work and position for the next settled pastor. I observed transition team members set aside their own impressions, opinions and wants to listen carefully and deeply to what the members of the congregation were expressing. On the Parsonage Task Force, I observed task force members intentionally suspend their own judgments so that they could identify, explore, and present as many options as possible back to the congregation. And from that place of open, wondering a new idea emerged from within the congregation for a social justice partnership for the parsonage that feels exciting and in alignment with the church's values.

Anything else you wish to share?

A theme around reconciliation emerged during the interim time. Members have collectively named and owned that they have not always handled conflict and disagreements skillfully with one another or with past pastors. When asked what members wish for the congregation, people named forgiveness, not making assumptions, more skillful and sensitive communication during good and bad times, and unity in working together despite differences. The congregation's willingness to reflect on past situations, to identify habits that haven't served them well, and be open to acquiring new skills makes me feel excited and hopeful for Union's future.

Warmly,

Sarah Lehman
Sarah Lehman Consulting, LLC



A Closing Prayer

Holy One, who knows the answers
before we ask the questions,
please abide with us and our future candidates,
so that the best selection of a new Shepherd for
our Flock can be made and made to the benefit
of all. Please bring us a candidate who sees our
flaws and wishes to work through them with us,
as we do the same for them. Bring patience and
understanding, along with joy and celebration to
all of us. Thank you for the process of transition
and for the coming process of selection. May
your will be done.

Amen.

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.

The contents of this Local Church Profile were written by members of the Transition Team, Church Council, Trustees, Ministry Teams, Bylaws Task Force, and the Parsonage Task Force.

Signed on behalf of the Transition Team: *Jennifer R. Lewis Kannegieter*



Validation by Conference

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

Staff Comment: Yes

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

Staff Comment: Yes

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

Staff Comment: Yes

My signature below attests to the above three items.

Signature: *Cindy Mueller*

Name / Title: Minister for Congregations in Transition

Email: cindym@uccmn.org

Phone: 612.871.0359 ext. 5 (office) 763.439.3952 (cell)

Date: 12.18.23

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