



Southern New England Conference
United Church of Christ
Living the Love & Justice of Jesus

Local Church Profile for Churches Seeking an Interim Pastor

Church Information

Full Name: [First Church Congregational, Methuen, Massachusetts](#)

Address: [26 Pleasant St. Methuen, MA 01844-3119](#)

Phone: [\(978\) 687-1240](#)

Website: www.FirstChurchMethuen.com

Additional Denominational Affiliations: [None](#)

UCC Conference: [Southern New England](#)

Association: [Northeast Association](#)

Area Conference Minister Name: [Rev. Alex Shea Will](#)

ACM phone: [\(508\) 244-4769](#)

ACM email: sheawilla@sneucc.org

Position Details

In a paragraph or two for each item, please answer the following prompts.

1. Describe the ministry position for which you are seeking a pastor. *(This will be the first impression most candidates have of you. Highlight your gifts and graces as well as your needs so that candidates have the best sense of connection to and curiosity about your position. Include keywords that will help candidates search. It must be **no more than 2,000 characters, including punctuation and spaces, and in a single, unformatted paragraph**).*

[First Church Congregational of Methuen MA \(30 minutes north of Boston\)](#) seeks a focused Interim Minister and head of staff to shepherd us to our next settled ministry. After 8 years of service, our current minister is leaving in August, 2024 and we seek a dynamic and engaging pastor to lead our nearly 300 year old congregation. We look forward to discerning our past and envisioning our future with you, as we seek our next senior pastor.

The interim pastor will be responsible for preaching and leading worship, pastoral care, and working with our staff and volunteers to maintain and improve our spiritual life. You will work alongside our dedicated deacons, minister of music, and choir, to create meaningful and relevant services in a historic and sacred space in the center of Methuen. Our very capable office manager, staff, lay leaders and the congregation will gladly assist you to make our vision come to life in the ministry of our community and God. Additionally, our welcoming congregation is more than ready to work with you, guided by the Holy Spirit, to do all that is necessary to fulfill our mission: Seeking God, Caring for each other, and Improving our community.

Candidates should have experience in parish ministry, including leading worship and parishioner care. Head of staff experience and strong record of pastoral and administrative leadership are also a priority.

2. Name 3 core competencies that you feel you will need in your Interim Pastor.

- Dynamic worship delivery to engage the congregation's mind and spirituality. Our minister should be able to create services that nourish our souls and make us think, while being relevant to current events.
- Active care of our parishioners and their spiritual needs. Our congregation encounters issues of aging, family dynamics, and intergenerational interactions that may require faith-based counseling. Pastoral care is a high priority for our congregation, and our Deacons and parishioner care team will work hand-in-hand with you to ensure a high standard of care.
- Abilities to reflect and grow into the future. We need guidance to reflect on who we are and look forward to building up the church of Jesus Christ. Additionally, the minister should be able to help lead our search & call committee to find our next settled pastor.

3. What aspects of the 5 tasks of interim ministry (listed in the instructions sheet) do you anticipate being the focus of your interim time?

- Mission: The need for assistance has rarely been greater than today. With our weekly food pantry and all of our various outreach programs, we need spiritual help to coincide with material help.
- Leadership: While the church board has been strong, we have been lacking in ministerial leadership of our staff, missions, and growth initiatives. Whole church guidance will be a refreshing change.
- Connections: Our congregation is active and engaged. The interim pastor needs to seek an authentic connection with our parishioners. Candidates should be comfortable engaging with parishioners outside of worship services.
- Future: While numerous aspects are strong within our church, it is paramount that our interim help us secure a settled pastor who shares our vision of the future.

4. Position Scope: Fulltime _____ 3/4 time _____ 1/2 time _____ 1/4 time

5. Position Duration: _____ 12 months 18 months other _____

Who We Are

In a paragraph or two for each item, please provide the following.

1. Church's Mission Statement (*or name that one needs to be developed*):

Seeking God ~ Caring for Each Other ~ Improving our Community

2. Brief Church History:

First Church, Congregational, UCC was organized on October 28, 1729 and has enjoyed a continuous existence since then. First Church was literally the first church in Methuen. The original "meetinghouse" was erected by the town near the burial ground on Meeting House Hill, in Methuen. A second meetinghouse was built on the original site and dedicated for public worship in 1796. The town leaders saw the wisdom in moving commerce to where the new settlement was headed: to the waterways.

In 1832 this second wooden building was dismantled and moved to the church's present location on Pleasant Street. In 1855 the wooden church was replaced by the present stone church, which is built of Pelham granite and incorporates the hand-hewn timbers from the 1796 building as floor supports.

The First Church sanctuary is awe-inspiring. The Resurrection Window, considered John LaFarge's opalescent glass masterpiece, is well known for its special beauty and magnificence. The "Window" and the limestone and marble Apse that encase it, given by Mrs. Henry C. Nevins in memory of her husband, were completed in 1895.

The 1886 James E. Treat (opus 2) pipe organ was built for Edward Searle's Great Barrington, MA residence and relocated to the church in 1924. The case and console are constructed of solid, carved English oak. The organ contains 40 ranks of pipes distributed over three manuals (keyboards) and pedal. Our Parish Hall, erected by the parishioners grateful of their heritage, was dedicated on May 24, 1964.

The "stone church" or "church on the hill" as it is has often been referred to throughout the years, has reached out to the Merrimack Valley and beyond as a beacon of light, welcoming everyone, no matter where they are on their faith journey, and responding to the call for assistance through hundreds of mission projects.

3. 2-3 Significant Events:

- COVID pandemic: Like all houses of worship, the COVID-19 pandemic was a major disruption to our church life. However, as we always have, we rallied to help our community while maintaining our financial strength. We established a virtual presence during this time and were able to maintain our weekly worship services, without missing a single Sunday. We also continued our weekly food pantry, serving more than 400+ families per week during the height of the pandemic. However, like many churches, our weekly attendance declined and we have been working hard to increase our attendance back to pre-pandemic levels.
- Capital campaign & renovations: In the past few years, we have raised more than \$250,000 from our parishioners to repair our 150+ year old church tower, narthex, sanctuary roof, and heating systems. Also, a modern audio/visual system was included to allow live broadcast of

all worship services and sanctuary events. Additionally, thanks to Massachusetts state grants, we completely renovated our pre-school classrooms and office space.

- 142nd Annual George Washington Birthday dinner: As a renewed and beloved community event, we held our 142nd birthday dinner, which served as a healing catalyst following a difficult pandemic era. Our church family, state & city leaders, and the community came together to enjoy a great dinner, remember past events, and look forward to many events to come.

4. Church Strengths:

- Finances: Through the diligence of our finance committee and treasurers, our spending is carefully watched and endowment wisely invested. Additionally, through our stewardship team and all our dedicated parishioners, our pledge income, endowment and reserves continues to increase despite the challenges we have faced.
- Music Program: We have a very talented and dedicated Minister of Music who conducts a Chancel Choir of 10 to 12 members while playing our century old glorious pipe organ and our beautiful grand piano. We have a Funeral Choir consisting of anyone who wants to sing at the funeral of a congregant. Grieving families have expressed how much it means to them to have a funeral choir present to lead the music and provide special anthems and favorite songs. We also have a Children's choir and a 3 octave bell choir. Additionally, we have guest instrumentalists (trumpet, cellist, flute, and recorder) join us for special services, such as Christmas and Easter.
- Outreach: Improving our community is a core of our church's mission, with numerous activities completed and continuing. Examples include:
 - Weekly food pantry at the church that is currently providing food for 400+ families.
 - Preparing a meal for a soup kitchen monthly.
 - "Back to School" project for low-income families.
 - Book drive to give to a local grammar school.
 - Clothing and shoes for the Merrimack Valley YMCA's My Kids Closet.
 - ...and much, much more.
- Diaconate: The deacons ensure the spiritual life of our church, by assisting with the service, helping the pastor, and performing parishioner care when possible.

5. Church Challenges:

- Growth: We have struggled for many years to grow our membership. While spreading the good news of Jesus Christ is paramount, our other purpose in growing is to have more people and funds to show God's love through our mission work and parishioner care.
- Christian education: Over the years, our number of available teachers (volunteers from the congregation) for youth programs has dwindled due to other family pressures, our Christian Education

director retired, and we need guidance to reverse this trend. For adult education, it has been lacking throughout our past settled pastor's term, and we would like to see it return.

- Open and Affirming (ONA): Internal to the church, we are open and affirming in every way to all LGBTQIA+ persons, and we have a number of representative members. We have very detailed membership, wedding, and baptismal policies which are inclusive to all of God's children. Where we have struggled is letting all those external to the church know this. As of the publishing of this profile, we are currently working through the UCC process, carefully discerning the steps, and hope to have a congregational vote by the end of the year.

6. Experience of Conflict:

1. Every church has conflict, some minor, some larger. On a scale of 1-5, where would you rank your church's level of conflict? 1
 (1. Problem to solve 2. Disagreement 3. Contest 4. Fight or Flight 5. Intractable)
2. Please explain why you chose this level.

There have been very few moments in the last decade where we *might* have risen to level 2 (disagreement), but through our congregation's faith and love of God and each other we resolve conflict relatively quickly.

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

Our priority at First Church Congregational, Methuen is to listen to each other first to gain an understanding of our parishioners' opinions and values. Through this listening and scripture, we can all gain insight and come to a consensus on how to resolve the problems and move on to the mission of the church.

Additionally, as a body of Christ, we all strive to live the mission of our church – Seeking God, Caring for each other, and Improving our community. That is the core of who we are, how we interact with each other, and why we push egos aside to accomplish what is best for ourselves and our neighbors.

As a final note, as a Congregational church in the UCC, we have very detailed bylaws and procedures that help move issues to closure. These are rarely cited, though, as most conflict is resolved through honest discussion and prayerful discernment.

Basic Church Statistics
Yearly average

	Church Membership	Weekly Worship Attendance	Children & Youth Participation	Adult Ed Participation
Pre-pandemic	251	77	21	0
Current year	237	63	8	0

	Income	Overall Budget	Mission Giving	Reserves& Endowment Principals
Pre-pandemic	\$379,032	\$386,505	\$28,001	\$704,889
Current year	\$360,866	\$369,262	\$23,183	\$1,434,842

One important element in viewing the church income is that First Church Congregational has a permanent preschool for more than 50 years, called The Chapel Preschool, that operates as a part of the outreach mission. Throughout the normal school year, there are several classrooms being used as a learning environment for local children before they enter the city's school system. This program originally started as a program to families that did not have access to any form of preschool child developments, before Methuen instituted public kindergarten. Over the years, it has grown in its enrollment and contributed to the community. In 2023-2024, the Chapel Preschool had a total income \$366,659 and a total expense of \$251,343. Part of that expense was \$75,000 that went to the operating budget of the church.

Another important element to consider is that much of the mission giving goes directly to the needy without financially going through the church. For example, our church runs the only evening food pantry in the area, providing over 20,000 bundles of groceries a year. However, most of the food items are coordinated and delivered through a program called Neighbors In Need or parishioners dropping off items they purchased individually. Additionally, in the past year we distributed 600+ articles of clothing and 456 new & used books to children, 1,107 cans of soup, 3,500 diapers and 4,100 wipes, and numerous other acts of community charity.

Compensation

Total Compensation Package Amount or Range: \$115,000-\$135,000

Package offered: Total Package, no additional monetary benefits offered
(choose only one) Total Package includes optional benefits to be negotiated (if you wish, list here what those optional benefits may be)

- Salary: \$75,000-\$95,000
- Health insurance
- Dental & vision insurance
- Life and disability insurance
- Annuity
- Reimbursed professional expenses

Housing:

- Housing allowance only
 Parsonage only
 Either Parsonage or Housing Allowance Provided

Our parsonage is a lovely 3 bedroom, 1 ½ bathroom, 2 story home on the church grounds.

Please explain briefly your process in discerning your compensation.

Generally, we review the “Clergy Compensation Guidelines” published by the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ as well as guidance from our Associate Conference Minister to get a baseline. Additionally, compensation may be adjusted due to regional issues

(housing, inflation, etc.) and pastoral performance. Other aspects may be negotiated, depending on the candidate's experience and/or situation.

If the candidate would prefer housing other than the parsonage, we would be willing to discuss a salary at the higher end of the salary range.

Church body responsible for hiring the Interim Pastor is: [Church Board](#)

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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 document 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 a suitable leader for the interim time 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.

Josh Ferry

Signature of Search Committee Chairperson
(typed or Jpeg is sufficient)

May 20, 2024

Date