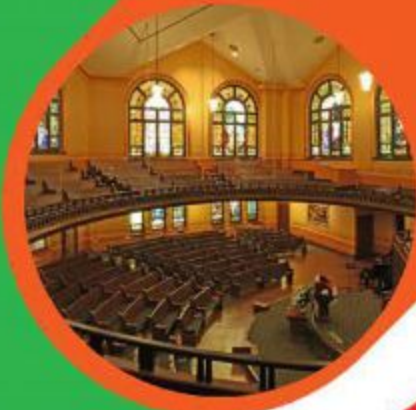




Akron FCC

First Congregational  
Church of Akron

292 E Market St  
Akron, OH 44308



# Position Posting

First Congregational Church of Akron  
292 East Market Street Akron, OH 44308

<http://www.akronfcc.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/AkronFCC>

<https://twitter.com/AkronFCC>

<https://www.instagram.com/AkronFCC>

<https://www.linkedin.com/AkronFCC>

<https://www.youtube.com/@AkronFCC>



United Church of Christ

National Association of Congregational Christian Churches

UCC Association: Living Water  
Brian Burke, Transitional Consultant

440-225-4458

[pastordburke@gmail.com](mailto:pastordburke@gmail.com)

Living Water Association

960 Portage Trail

Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44221-3048

UCC Conference: Heartland Conference

800.282.0740 Ext. 1

Heartland Conference

PO Box 1230, Worthington, OH 43085

## Summary Ministry Description:

First Congregational Church of Akron continually seeks to be a church **rooted in Christ, fostering justice,** and **celebrating diversity.** We have a bright future ahead as we continue to grow our congregation and expand our ministries, plus an exciting opportunity with the purchase of new adjacent property that will be used to further these goals. We are seeking someone talented in balancing congregational care with community justice work. Our members express a desire both for pastoral care and personal spiritual growth, so that we may better engage in the ministries we currently offer, and to expand our programming to effectively reach more people.

## Where is our church headed?

First Congregational Church of Akron is headed towards becoming a more inclusive and engaged community that emphasizes social justice, spiritual growth, and collaborative leadership. With a strong commitment to social justice initiatives, the church aims to amplify its impact beyond its walls by advocating for marginalized groups and expanding its outreach ministries. Additionally, the congregation aspires to become more representatively intergenerational and engage more with its surrounding neighborhoods, reflecting the demographic diversity of Akron while ensuring that all individuals feel welcomed and valued. The congregation is moving towards a vision of inclusivity and community impact, focusing on spiritual growth and collective action that embody the values of love, justice, and service.



## What we value about living in our area:

We value the diverse population and the small-town feel of the Akron area. It's conveniently close to large cities with professional sports teams, and offers a great park system at the county, state, and federal levels. The weather is moderate, with four distinct seasons, never too hot or too cold. Akron has an abundance of large state and local universities, business opportunities in all fields, and excellent access to modern airports, world class medical systems, and a well-maintained state and federal road system. Northeast Ohio provides opportunities for everyone to live a good life both physically and spiritually.



### About

Akron is a city in Ohio. It's home to Stan Hywet Hall and Gardens, with a Tudor Revival manor house, a conservatory and landscaped grounds. The Akron Art Museum displays modern pieces, including pop art and photos, in an 1899 building with a dramatic glass and steel addition. To the north, Hale Farm and Village offers a glimpse of life in the 19th century, with 32 restored buildings, plus gardens and farm animals. — Google

**Population:** 188,509 (2022)

**ZIP code:** 44301-44321, 44325-44326, 44328, 44333-44334, 44372, 44396, 44398

**Age:** About 199 years

**Area codes:** 234, 330

**Demonym:** Akronite

**Elevation:** 945 ft (288 m)

**Founded:** 1825

**Current size of membership:** 514 Total Members. 290 Active members

**Languages used in ministry (other than English):** None

**Position Title:** Senior Minister

**Position Duration:**

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

**Compensation Level:**

Full Time

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

Yes, the congregation will offer a package at or above Conference Guidelines.

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

### **Scope of work for full time PASTORAL POSITION**

#### **40-50 hours weekly / 10-12 units**

- Preparation and leadership of Sunday worship including scripture study, crafting of liturgy and bulletin, sermon preparation, guiding and encouraging lay liturgists, planning of music with musical staff or volunteers, preaching, offering of prayers, etc.
- Faith formation and vitality through prayer, Bible study, and service. Identify helpful resources and opportunities for lay persons.
- Develop leadership to create ministry and programs.
- Pastoral care in collaboration with lay people.
- Community engagement allowing the church to be an ambassador of God's love.
- Strategic planning for current and new directions in ministry.
- Attending meetings and leading as needed for church programs, in collaboration with lay leadership.
- Participating in wider church activities such as conference and association meetings.
- Administration responsibilities (unless delegated) such as email, scheduling, more.
- Encouraging faithful financial development and stewardship.
- Responsibility for oversight and supervision of staff.
- Availability to wider community for funerals, weddings, special worship programs, and as a representative of the church to local organizations.
- Counseling, listening and referral.
- 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.

## **Core Competencies:**

We are looking for a minister who is compassionate, collaborative, and inclusive. Someone who will inspire members to participate in leadership roles, so that we can collaborate as a Church to best serve our community through outreach programs and partnerships. We desire a minister who will work with members to implement changes and build partnerships in the community. Additionally, our new minister will provide emotional support and opportunities for spiritual growth for our members. A minister who embraces a diverse congregation, and who promotes social justice both within our membership and in the wider community.

## **1c. COMPENSATION AND SUPPORT**

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**Salary Basis:** The congregation will follow conference guidelines for salary and housing.

### **Benefits:**

Medical, Dental and Vision

### **What is the expected living situation for your next minister:**

Living within the greater Akron community.

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

To be determined by Settled Minister.

**State any incentives:** Additional incentives open for negotiation.

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

The congregation actively participates and supports clergy involvement in community organizations (for example the MLK Celebration Day Scholarship Group and the Akron Area Interfaith Council.) The Living Water Association Spire Center School of Possibility (Inspiration, Reimagining, and Exploration) is a remarkable resource for growth and networking. The Association also provides Communities of Practice for clergy support and spiritual nurturing.

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

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

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

1. Celebrate inclusivity and diversity: Help our congregation to continue to be a beacon of inclusivity, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of background or identity, feel welcomed and valued. This includes addressing the needs of LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups.
2. Foster social justice and enhance community engagement: Help our congregation to work to expand social justice outreach programs, and supportive services for members.
3. Promote spiritual growth and worship engagement: Provide engaging and spiritually enriching experiences and offer opportunities for members to deepen their spiritual relationship with God.
4. Strengthen congregational growth and unity: Focus on increasing church membership, particularly among young families and diverse communities. This includes creating programs and activities that attract and retain members, fostering a vibrant and growing congregation.
5. Support lay leadership: Support, encourage, and empower lay leaders and volunteers in their decision making roles and to help foster a strong sense of community ownership. Help to promote the growth of our members to become strong and effective lay leaders.

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

The vision for the next minister includes several key ways in which they will assist the congregation in making an impact beyond its walls:

1. Community Engagement and Partnerships: The minister will empower members to build strong community partnerships that amplify our outreach efforts, as well as foster relationships with other churches and interfaith groups to help create a broader network of support.
2. Advocacy and Social Justice Initiatives: The minister will lead, inspire, and mobilize the congregation in advocating for social justice. This includes participating in local and national advocacy efforts, organizing community events focused on social issues, and supporting initiatives that empower marginalized communities. Their leadership will inspire and mobilize the congregation to take meaningful action on issues such as racism, LGBTQ+ rights, poverty, and more.
3. Outreach Ministries: The minister will support the mission of our outreach ministries, encouraging the congregation to provide comprehensive support to those in need.
4. Worship: The minister will bring creativity and innovation to the church's programs and services, ensuring they are relevant and impactful. New avenues for spiritual growth and educational programming to help attract and retain a wider audience are welcomed to help the church extend its reach and impact.
5. Lay Leadership: The minister will focus on empowering congregation members to use their gifts and talents in service to others. By providing training, resources, and opportunities for members to develop their skills, the minister will help build a congregation that is equipped to make a difference in the community, and fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among members.

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


We appreciate language that is culturally sensitive, relevant, and celebrative of diversity.

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

Based on the information provided, here are four areas of excellence from The Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministry that the next minister will display to further equip First Congregational Church of Akron in fulfilling its mission and vision:

- 1. Exhibiting a Spiritual Foundation and Ongoing Spiritual Practice:** Spirituality + Inspiring Spirituality - The minister will demonstrate a deep and authentic spiritual life, rooted in prayer, scripture, and ongoing personal faith development. This spiritual foundation will serve as a source of inspiration and guidance for the congregation, helping members to deepen their own spiritual practices and grow in their relationship with God. By modeling a vibrant spiritual life, the minister will encourage the congregation to engage in regular worship, study, and reflection, fostering a spiritually rich and dynamic church community.
- 2. Building Transformational Leadership Skills:** Leadership + Management - The minister will exhibit strong leadership abilities that are collaborative, adaptive, and empowering. They will be skilled in fostering partnerships, engaging with diverse groups, and leading the congregation through change and growth. The minister's leadership will focus on empowering members to take active roles in ministry and outreach, developing their gifts and talents for service. This approach will help create a congregation that is resilient, adaptable, and capable of making a meaningful impact both within and beyond the church walls.
- 3. Working for Justice and Mercy:** The minister will be deeply committed to social justice, advocating for systemic change and addressing issues of inequality, inequity, and injustice. They will actively engage in community organizing, advocacy, and service initiatives that promote justice, inclusivity, and compassion. By leading the congregation in these efforts, the minister will help the church live out its mission of being a beacon of hope and justice in the community. Their dedication to justice and mercy will inspire and equip the congregation to take bold and effective action on behalf of marginalized and oppressed groups.





4. **Caring for All Creation:** The minister will have a strong commitment to environmental stewardship and the care of creation. They will lead the congregation in developing and implementing initiatives that promote sustainability, conservation, and respect for the natural world. This could include educational programs, community projects, and advocacy efforts focused on environmental justice. By emphasizing the importance of caring for creation, the minister will help the congregation recognize their responsibility to protect and preserve the environment as an integral part of their faith and mission.

These areas of excellence will enable the next minister to effectively guide First Congregational Church of Akron in living out its core values, fulfilling its mission, and becoming the community of faith that God is calling it to be.

## *Who is God calling us to become?*


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

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

God is calling First Congregational Church of Akron to become a congregation that embodies the following characteristics:

We want to become a congregation that values and practices collaborative leadership, where all members are encouraged to participate in decision-making and ministry activities. This involves creating a culture of shared leadership, where the collective wisdom and gifts of the congregation are utilized to achieve common goals. The church is called to be a model of cooperative and democratic governance so we can continue to be a strong community where everyone feels welcomed, valued, and accepted. A community committed to working for social justice, advocating for the voiceless and helping to foster an environment where spiritual growth is the priority.

We realize that in order to achieve those goals we must also be a community that is open to change and innovation and willing to adapt to new challenges.



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

God is calling our congregation to continue to provide essential community leadership in the areas of social justice, food justice, and inclusivity. Our community faces many challenges, including homelessness, food insecurity, and de-churching; our congregation remains committed to addressing these challenges. Here are some experiments:

**Amplified Youth.** Our youth meet with other churches in the area for a youth night and activity. It has become a way for the youth in our community to grow and learn and meet friends. It has grown over time and has been very successful. The hope is to continue to connect with more congregations to grow that program to help congregations with low numbers of youth to find safe spaces. Amplified youth is LGBTQ+ friendly.



*Amplified Youth!*



**Shower Bus.** Our church partnered with an organization to sponsor and host a mobile shower and hygiene bus for the homeless in our community. By making basic human needs available to those less fortunate, it will be a positive first step forward and will help improve both their self image and self confidence.



# Shower Bus

"We are introducing a shower bus to Akron in Summit County, Ohio! This initiative will offer showers, clean clothing, and shoes to support the most vulnerable members of our community. The shower bus is expected to provide around 20 showers per day. Follow the progress of retrofitting the shower bus on our YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram channels." Forever R Children [foreverchildren.org](http://foreverchildren.org)

Forever Children PortagePath

## Mobile Therapy Center & Shower Bus

**AUGUST 12**

First Congregational Church of Akron  
292 E Market St, Akron, OH 44308

9 AM - 1 PM

@foreverchildren

@portagepath\_akron



**Food Justice.** What started as a small food cupboard has evolved into a staple in the wider Akron community. The Feeding Hope Food Pantry continues to grow and serve more each year, offering more services and products such as varying food options, providing toiletries, distributing bus passes, and supplementing shelf stable food with fresh produce from the Feed My Sheep Garden.

PB&J Backpacks is a weekly ministry that serves the elementary students at Mason Community Learning Center. Every Friday during the school year, volunteers pack 144 bags of food, which are delivered to the children at Mason CLC, who may not have food at home over the weekend.

# Food Justice



## Here are some challenges:

Challenge:

1. How to engage the University of Akron student community.
2. How to grow our youth ministries.

# Who are we now?

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

## 3a. Congregational Reflections

### Describe your congregation's life of faith

- 1. Live Out a Resilient Faith:** Drawing inspiration from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, members commit to embodying a faith that is strong, adaptable, and deeply rooted in love and compassion.
- 2. Promote Unity in Diversity:** The church is dedicated to creating a culture that celebrates diversity and ensures the flourishing of every individual, reflecting God's unconditional and all-encompassing love.
- 3. Actively Engage in Social Justice:** Members are committed to confronting systemic injustices and empowering marginalized communities through advocacy, community development, and holistic care initiatives.
- 4. Foster a Sacred Community:** The church aims to cultivate a welcoming and supportive environment where all individuals find belonging as beloved people of God.

### Description of God in Worship Liturgy:

In worship liturgy, God is most often described as a loving, inclusive, and compassionate Creator who desires justice and well-being for all of creation. Worship often includes references to God's radical love and acceptance, emphasizing the importance of embodying these values in daily life.

### The Holy Spirit in the Midst:

The Holy Spirit is perceived as an active and dynamic presence within the congregation. Members describe the Holy Spirit in several ways:

- 1. Guiding and Inspiring:** The Holy Spirit is seen as a source of inspiration and guidance, leading the congregation to new understandings, deeper faith, and innovative approaches to ministry.
- 2. Empowering for Service:** The Holy Spirit empowers members to serve others, advocating for justice, and engaging in acts of compassion and kindness.
- 3. Creating Unity:** The Holy Spirit fosters a sense of unity and community, helping to build strong relationships among members and encouraging collaborative efforts.
- 4. Transformative Presence:** The Holy Spirit is recognized as a transformative force that brings healing, renewal, and growth to both individuals and the congregation as a whole.

# Congregational Reflections

## LIFE OF FAITH



### Members pledge to:

- Live out a resilient faith
- Promote Unity in Diversity
- Actively Engage in Social Justice
- Foster a Sacred Community



### God in Worship Liturgy:

God is most often described as a loving, inclusive and compassionate Creator who desires justice and well-being for all creation. Worship often includes references to God's radical love and acceptance, emphasizing the importance of embodying these values in daily life.



### Members describe the Holy Spirit in several ways:

- Guiding and Inspiring
- Empowering for Service
- Creating Unity
- Transformative Presence



### Worship and Spiritual Practices:

- Inclusive Liturgy
- Engaging Sermons
- Active Participation
- Music and Arts



### Spiritual Growth Opportunities:

- Bible Study Groups
- Payer Meetings
- Retreats and Workshops
- Service Projects

## Worship and Spiritual Practices:

- 1. Inclusive Liturgy:** Services are designed to be inclusive and welcoming, with language and practices that reflect the church's commitment to diversity and justice.
- 2. Engaging Sermons:** Sermons are focused on applying the teachings of Christ to contemporary life, encouraging members to live out their faith in meaningful ways.
- 3. Active Participation:** Worship often includes opportunities for members to actively participate, such as through communal prayers, shared reflections, and interactive elements.
- 4. Music and Arts:** The church has a strong tradition of incorporating music and the arts into worship, using these elements to enhance the spiritual experience and foster a sense of community.

## Spiritual Growth Opportunities:

The church offers various programs and activities to support spiritual growth, including:

- 1. Bible Study Groups:** Regular study groups that explore scripture and its application to modern life.
- 2. Prayer Meetings:** Opportunities for communal and individual prayer, fostering a deeper connection with God.
- 3. Retreats and Workshops:** Events focused on spiritual development, personal reflection, and community building.
- 4. Service Projects:** Activities that encourage members to put their faith into action by serving others and advocating for justice.

Through these practices and commitments, First Congregational Church of Akron seeks to nurture a vibrant and active faith community that embodies the teachings of Christ and works towards the well-being of all God's creation.

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

First Congregational Church of Akron is known for its warm, open, and affirming environment where all individuals, regardless of their background, are welcomed and valued. We celebrate diversity; we are diverse in people and diverse in theology. Our church building is a safe space used for diverse community activities, support groups (AA, SSOULE, PFLAG), and membership events. We pay attention and are responsive to the community's growing needs. We value our history and our heritage as a congregation and as a member of the Akron community. Members feel a strong sense of belonging and support, fostering a close-knit community that cares for one another. The congregation values its heritage and traditions while also being open to innovation and new ways of expressing and living out their faith.

These strengths and positive qualities enable First Congregational Church of Akron to create a vibrant, welcoming, inclusive, and impactful community that embodies the teachings of Christ and works towards the well-being of all God's creation.

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

We have two worship spaces, the Meetinghouse and the Upper Room.

The Upper Room hosts the 9:00am service. The atmosphere is relaxed and casual; the music is more contemporary. Communion is celebrated weekly. The service is streamed online.



The Meetinghouse hosts the 11:00 am service. The atmosphere and the music are more traditional, including a blend of traditional hymns, strong organ and choir performance. Communion is celebrated monthly. The service is streamed online.





The same sermon is usually preached at both services. The sermons are engaging, relatable, informative, and spiritually enriching. The topics are seasonally relevant. A lectionary is commonly used to inform services, but is not a requirement.

At least quarterly our congregation gathers for a joint service at 10:00am in the Meetinghouse. The service is a beautiful blend of both traditional and contemporary styles.



We also have a Chapel that is currently used as a waiting area for the Food Pantry, occasional special worship gatherings, and free jazz music concerts (Walk Spirit, Talk Spirit).



## *A Recent Baptism at First Congregational Church of Akron*

The Baptism took place in the church's Meetinghouse, which provided a sacred space for the ceremony. The congregation played an active role in the ceremony, emphasizing the important covenant that Baptism represents between the individual and the church. The ceremony was personalized to reflect individuals' spiritual journey, and was designed to ensure the individual felt fully embraced by the church community.



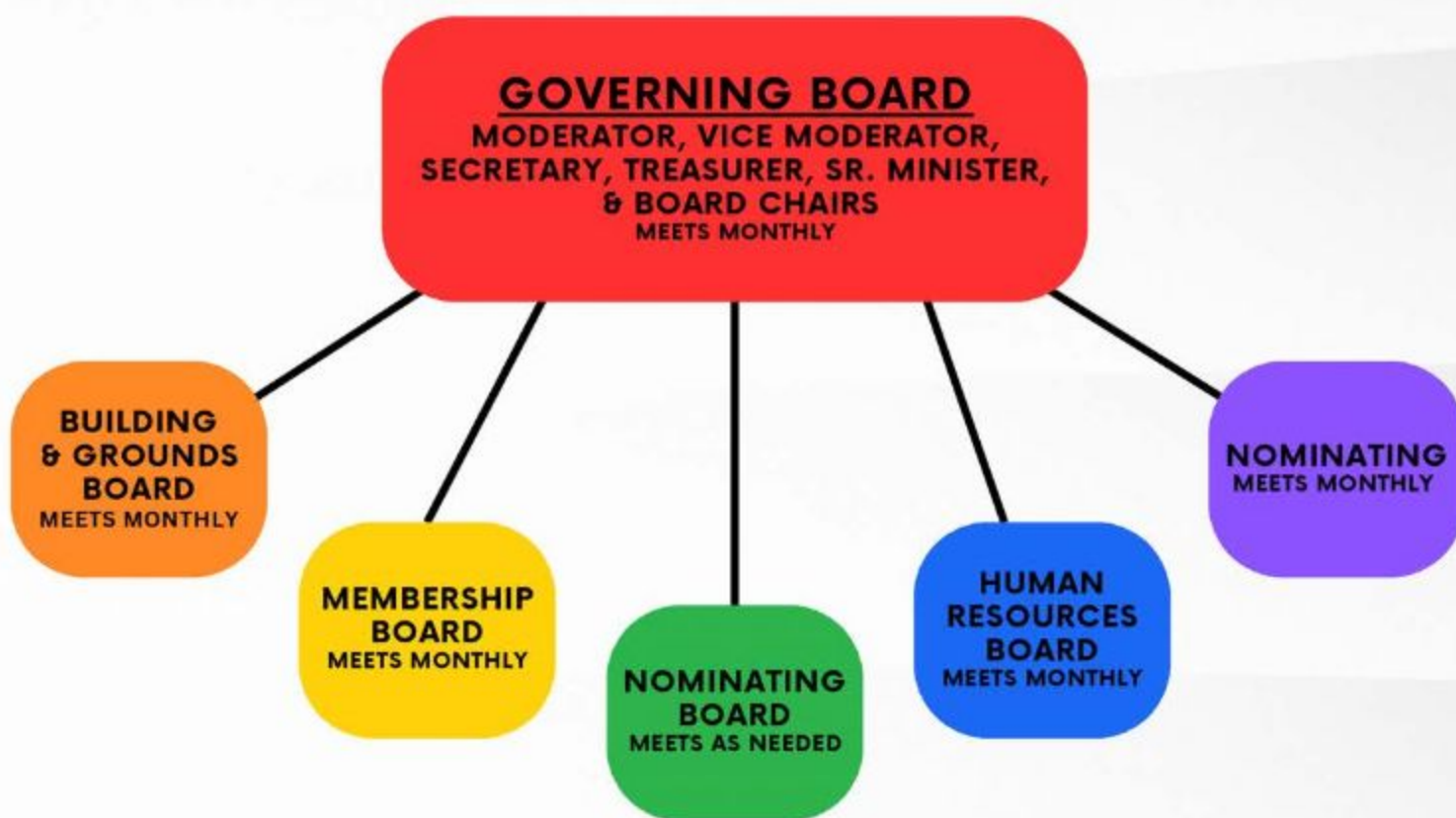
*Baptisms  
&  
Affirmations of  
Baptism*

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

Vision for Faith Formation: First Congregational Church of Akron is dedicated to fostering lifelong spiritual growth and faith formation for all members. The church's educational programs are designed to nurture a deep, resilient faith that is responsive to the needs of the community and reflective of the church's core values.

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

The congregation is organized through a Board and Committee structure. The Governing Board is the coordinating and administrative board. Other boards are: Building and Grounds, Membership, Nominating, and Human Resources. The Nominating Board meets as needed and the other boards meet monthly, mostly via virtual meetings.



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

During the COVID pandemic our congregation relied heavily on office staff to assist our congregation to transition to both virtual worship and meetings so that decisions could be made as to how to move forward in the long term.

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

Yes

# 3B. 11-YEAR REPORT

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



Church#: 520050

Assoc: 566

Schedule: 0

First Congregational Church of Akron

Akron

OH

44308

YEAR	MEMBERS	AVG WEEKLY ATTENDANCE	CHR ED/ FAITH FORM	CONFIRMATION	CONFESSION	TRANSFER OR REAFFIRM	DEATHS OR TRANS OUT	OTHER LOSSES	NET MEMBS ADDS-REMOVED
2013	615	150	12	0	0	0	0	0	0
2014	420	150	12	0	0	0	0	195	-195
2015	415	160	30	0	8	7	16	4	-5
2016	415	160	30	0	0	0	0	0	0
2017	415	160	30	0	0	0	0	0	0
2018	415	160	30	0	0	0	0	0	0
2019	416	160	30	0	15	0	14	0	1
2020	411	160	0	0	6	1	9	3	-5
2021	423	160	0	0	2	0	12	0	-10
2022	427	105	57	0	13	4	13	0	4
2023	427	105	57	0	6	0	6	0	0

YEAR	CURRENT EXPENSES	CAPITAL PAYMENTS	BASIC SUPPORT	TOT OTHER UCC GIVING	TOTAL OCWM	OTHER GIFTS	WIDER MISSION	BASIC SUPP% CURR LOCAL	TOTAL EXPEND	PLEDGES AND OFFERINGS
2013	\$677,819	\$0	\$3,400	\$868	\$4,268	\$0	\$4,268	0.35	\$982,105	\$0
2014	\$677,819	\$0	\$4,200	\$500	\$4,700	\$0	\$4,700	0.43	\$982,519	\$0
2015	\$1,006,011	\$0	\$4,167	\$500	\$4,667	\$12,150	\$16,817	0.41	\$1,024,828	\$289,591
2016	\$1,006,011	\$0	\$3,718	\$1,000	\$4,718	\$0	\$4,718	0.37	\$1,012,729	\$0
2017	\$1,006,011	\$0	\$4,367	\$3,669	\$8,036	\$0	\$8,036	0.43	\$1,016,047	\$0
2018	\$1,006,011	\$0	\$1,978	\$4,597	\$6,573	\$2,780	\$9,353	0.20	\$1,017,384	\$0
2019	\$1,006,011	\$0	\$0	\$2,469	\$2,469	\$0	\$2,469	0.00	\$1,010,480	\$0
2020	\$939,116	\$0	\$2,500	\$0	\$2,500	\$0	\$2,500	0.27	\$941,616	\$258,782
2021	\$1,117,200	\$0	\$3,000	\$6,000	\$9,000	\$0	\$9,000	0.27	\$1,126,206	\$208,441
2022	\$666,417	\$0	\$0	\$3,500	\$3,500	\$0	\$3,500	0.00	\$669,917	\$222,548
2023	\$995,921	\$48,610	\$0	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$0	\$3,000	0.00	\$998,921	\$209,043

% CHANGE	MEMBERS	AVG WEEKLY ATTENDANCE	CHR ED/ FAITH FORM	TOTAL ADDITIONS	TOTAL REMOVALS	CURR LOCAL EXPENSES	TOTAL OCWM	TOTAL EXPENDITURE
2016-2023	2.89	-34.38	90.00	0.00	0.00	-1.20	-54.36	-1.81
2013-2023	-30.67	-30.00	375.00	0.00	0.00	1.85	-30.00	1.71

Please note: Zero values ("0" or "\$0") may reflect missing information in some years. Christian Education/Faith Formation refers to Church School Enrollment for all figures before 2007.

### 3C. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Describe those who participate in your church.

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Number of active members:	277	✓
Number of active non-members:	273	✓
Total of church participants (sum of the numbers above):	550	✓

Percentage of total participants who have been in the church:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
More than 10 years:	201	✓
Less than 10, more than 5 years:	47	✓
Less than 5 years:	42	✓

Number of total participants by age:

0-11	12-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	<i>Are these numbers an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
10	12	15	15	30	25	40	25	25	✓

Percentage of adults in various household types:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Single adults under 35:	20	✓
Households with minors:	28	✓
Single adults age 35-65:	20	✓
Joint households with no minors:	35	✓
Single adults over 65:	30	✓

### Education level of adult participants by percentage:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
High school:	39%	✓
College:	27%	✓
Graduate School:	14%	✓
Specialty Training:	20%	✓
Other (please specify):		

### Percentage of adults in various employment types:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Adults who are employed:	80	✓
Adults who are retired:	60	✓
Adults who are not fully employed:	35	✓

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

Our congregation is blessed with a remarkable range of talents and professions that reflect the diversity of our members. Some are educators, while others work in fields like law, food service, healthcare, business, and technology.

This variety in our professional lives not only showcases the diverse skills and experiences within our congregation but also strengthens our church's mission. Each of us brings something unique to the table, using our expertise to support and uplift one another, while also contributing to the wider community in meaningful ways.

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

Our church, predominantly made up of white members, is a warm and welcoming place that embraces a rich tapestry of diversity within our congregation. While many of us share similar backgrounds, we are fortunate to have members who are African-American, Asian-American, LGBTQ+, and first-generation immigrants. Their presence enriches our community and brings a variety of perspectives and experiences to our church life.

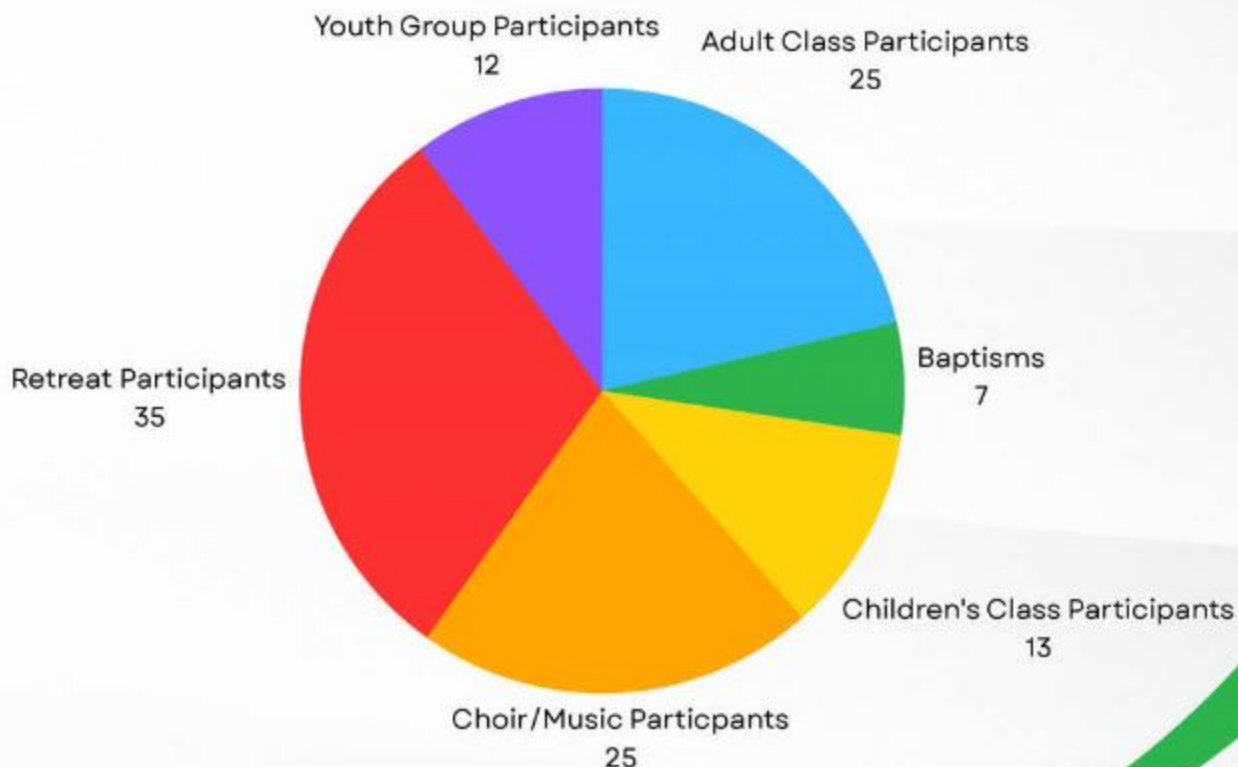
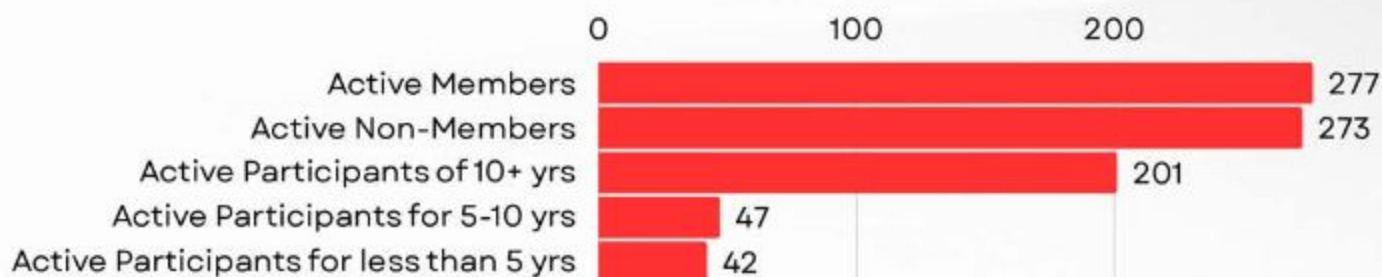
# Who We Are



**LGBTQ+**  
Open & Affirming



Since 2016



**Has your congregation recently had a conversation about welcoming diversity, or do you plan to hold one in the near future (perhaps using, for example, the Welcoming Diversity Inventory)?**



In 2016, after a 2-year process of prayerful reflection and discernment, First Congregational Church of Akron formally adopted its Welcoming Statement, and became an Open and Affirming Church in the UCC.

**3d. PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING**

Ways of Gathering	Estimated number of people involved in attendance	Who plans each of the listed gatherings? ( <i>list any and all worship planners, such as various lay leaders, pastors, musicians, other staff</i> )
Adult Groups or Classes	25	Pastors
Baptisms ( <i>number last year</i> )	2023=0 / 2024 = 7	Pastors,
Children's Groups or Classes	13	Associate Pastor
Christmas Eve and Easter Worship	412	Pastor,
Church-wide Meals	50-75	Sunday Bakers, Salad Sunday Volunteers, Membership Board
Choirs and Music Groups	25	Praise Band Leaders, Organist, and Bell Choir Director
Church-based Bible Study		
Communion ( <i>served how often?</i> )	1 x month & Weekly	Pastors
Community Meals	80	Membership Board, Communications Manager, Food Services Manager & Assistant



Ways of Gathering	Estimated number of people involved in attendance	Who plans each of the listed gatherings? <i>(list any and all worship planners, such as various lay leaders, pastors, musicians, other staff)</i>
Confirmation <i>(number confirmed last year)</i>	0	
Drama or Dance Program	N/A	
Funerals <i>(number last year)</i>	5	Pastors
Intergenerational Groups		
Outdoor Worship	N/A	
Prayer or Meditation Groups	N/A	
Public Advocacy Work		
Retreats	1, 35 participants	Pastor, Associate Pastor, Admin Asst.
Theology or Bible Programs in the Community		
Weddings <i>(number last year)</i>	0	
Worship (time slot: _____)	30	Pastor, Associate Pastor, Admin Asst., AV, Musicians, & Vocalists
Worship (time slot: _____)	82	Pastor, Associate Pastor, Admin Asst., AV, Organist
Young Adult Groups or Classes	8	LGBTQ+ Group Leader(s)
Youth Groups or Classes	12	Associate Pastor
Other		

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

Name	Three- or Four-Way Covenant? (3 or 4 or No)	Ministry Setting	Type of Ministry Role	Retired? (Y or N)
Diane Shirey	No	Parish	Associate & Solo Minister	Y
Michael Howard	Four-Way	Living Water Association	Associate Association Minister for Faith in Action	N
Jeff Nelson	Four-Way	UCC National Office	Minister for Search and Call	N
Mike Bone	Three-Way	Interim Minister	Sr, Solo, and Interim	N
Dr. Steven Savides	No	Parish	Minister	N
Andrew Courtney	Four-Way	Army Reserve	Chaplain	N
Sarah Courtney	No	Parish	Associate Minister	N
Nanette Pitt	No	City of Akron	Chief of Strategy	N

**If one or more previous pastors or retired ministers currently hold membership in the church, describe their role(s) in the life of the congregation:**

At any given time, the church has boasted several retired clergy, both UCC and from other denominations. These individuals participate in the ministry of the church as they choose yet not in planning or visioning or decision-making. The Living Water Association discourages any retired minister from serving as officers, on boards or on decision making bodies of the church.

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

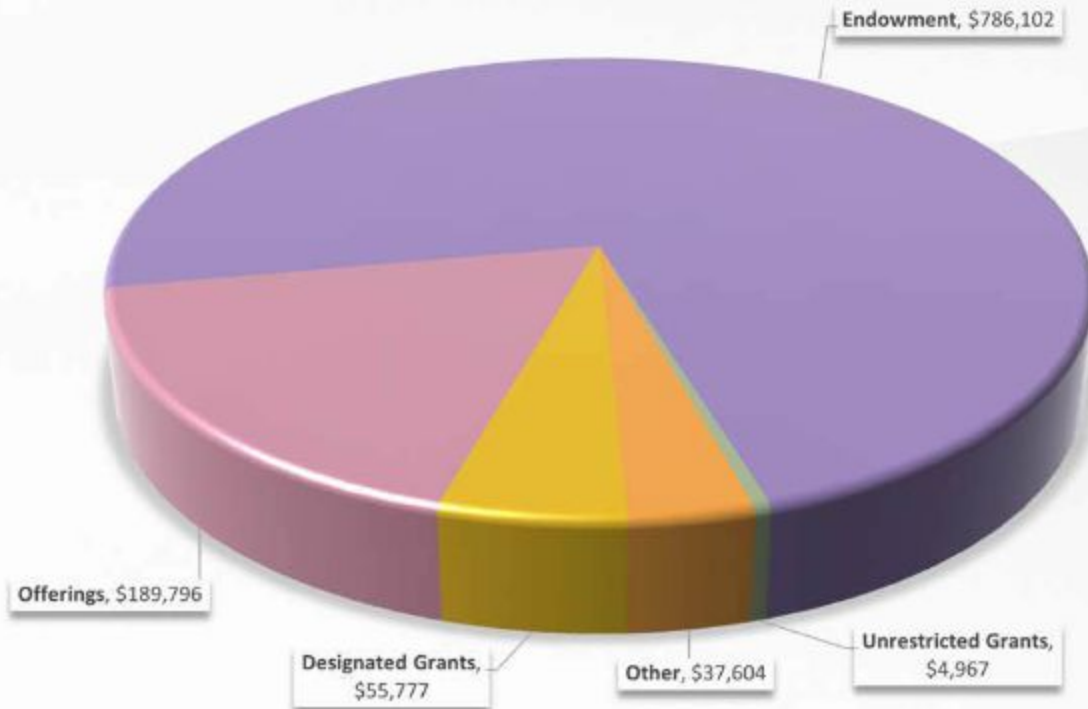
Staff Position	Head of Staff?	Compensation (full time, part time, volunteer)	Supervised by	Length of Tenure for current person in this position
Finance & Communications Manager		Full time	Senior Minister	6 years 1 month
Administrative Assistant		Full time	Senior Minister	<1 year
Events Manager		Part time	Senior Minister	<1 year
Associate Minister		¼ Time	Senior Minister	3 years 3 months
Coordinator for Children's Ministries		Part Time	Associate Minister	<1 year
Childcare Workers x2		Part Time	Coordinator for Children's Ministries	1 year
Organist & Choir Director		Part Time	Senior Minister	7 years
Lead Musicians Early Service		Part Time	Senior Minister	<1 year
Vocalist and Musicians		Part Time	Lead Musicians Early Service	3 years
Lead AV Tech		Part Time	Senior Minister	3 years 7 months
AV Techs		Part Time	Lead AV Tech	>1 year
Facility Manager		Part Time	Senior Minister	<1 year
Food Service/Cleaning Assistant		Part Time	Facility Manager	1 year 3 months
Facility Maintenance		Part Time	Facility Manager	1 year
Custodial Assistant		Part Time	Facility Manager	<1 year

### Reflection

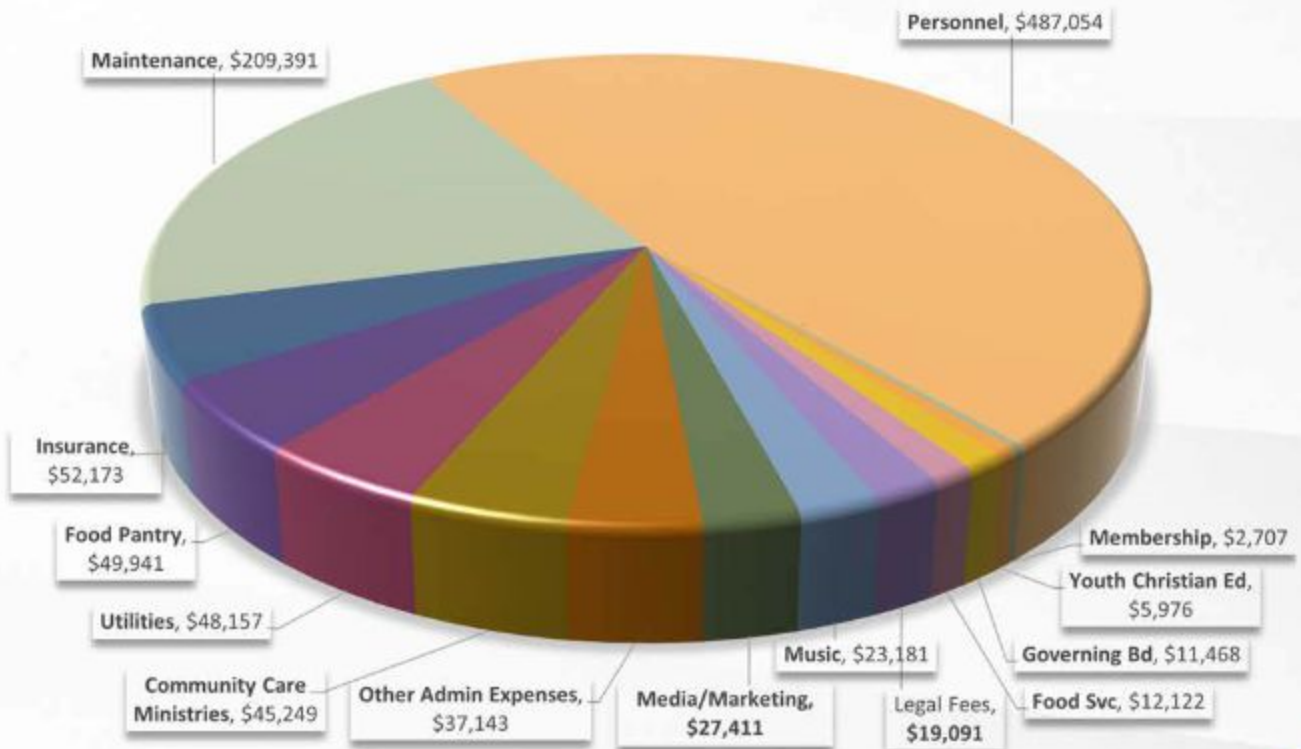
There is a divide between the members who have been here a long time, in some cases their whole lives, and what they see as the goals and aspirations of the church vs. the newer and younger members who may have a less traditional outlook for our future.

### 3e. CHURCH FINANCES

AkronFCC Income  
\$1,074,247



AkronFCC Expenses  
\$1,031,064



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

15%

**Has the church ever failed to pay its financial obligations to a minister of the church?**

No

**At any given time, the church has boasted several retired clergy, both UCC and from other denominations. These individuals participate in the ministry of the church as they choose yet not in planning or visioning or decision-making. The Living Water Association discourages any retired minister from serving as officers, on boards or on decision making bodies of the church.**

Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM - Basic Support)

One Great Hour of Sharing

Strengthen the Church

Neighbors in Need

Christmas Fund

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

Budgeted fixed donation of \$3,000 (0.2%)

**What is the church's current indebtedness?**

Total amount of loan debt: \$0

Reason for debt:

Are capital and other payments current? yes

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

Plans underway to purchase adjacent property. Agreed purchase price of \$450,000.

Purchase should be concluded in 2024. A loan will be acquired to purchase property.

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

NA

**If a capital campaign is underway or anticipated, describe:**

NA

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

NA

**Does your church have an endowment?**

Yes

**What is the market value of the assets?**

\$14,957,861

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

Regular monthly draw

**What is the percentage rate of draw (last year, compared to 5 years ago)?**

Draw in 2023 was 5%. Five years ago, the draw was 4.6%.

**Describe draw on endowment, if any, to meet operating budget expenses for the most recent year and the past five years:**

Regular monthly draw set at 5% to support church budget. Budget has been supplemented by the regular monthly draw for the past five years.

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

Assuming a 0% investment growth, current endowment would last for the next 21 years. If the investment growth was projected to be 5%, the endowment would last indefinitely.



**Please comment on the above calculations or estimates:**

Other Assets:

Reserves (savings): \$49,841

Investments (other than endowment): \$1,052,416

Does your church have a parsonage? no

**Describe all buildings owned by the church:**

One building that houses the Meetinghouse, a separate worship space, Fellowship Hall, offices, youth programming wing, and food pantry.

**Describe non-owned buildings or space used or rented by the church:**


N/A

**Which spaces are accessible to wheelchairs?**

All public spaces within the building are handicapped accessible, with assistance from ramps and an elevator. The main bathrooms are ADA accessible.

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

Our Church recently voted to increase the amount we are allowed to draw from the endowment. We elected to make this change for a number of reasons, but partly due to lower fundraising numbers. Our Church recently created a dedicated fund for the food pantry to increase their ability to independently fundraise and better service our community.



# Significant Moments For AkronFCC

## Becoming Open and Affirming

In 2017, First Congregational Church of Akron adopted an Open and Affirming statement publicly affirming its commitment to welcoming and including LGBTQ+ individuals in all aspects of church life. This decision highlighted the church's dedication to inclusivity and diversity, shaping its identity as a safe and welcoming space for all people.





# Significant Moments For AkronFCC

## Feeding Hope Food Pantry

In 1980, a community food cupboard was created by First Congregational Church of Akron, which gave way to a fully functioning food pantry, currently serving over 400 families per month. In the last ten years, the food pantry has expanded rapidly, partnering with local farms, businesses, and organizations to help provide fresh food and other necessities to those in need. Additionally, the church grows nearly 2,000 pounds of produce in our Feed My Sheep Garden for distribution in the food pantry. These initiatives align with the church's mission of addressing food insecurity in the wider community.



# Significant Moments For AkronFCC

## Community Support

From the beginning, when the wider Akron community has found itself at the center of turmoil, our church has opened its doors to help become a safe space to assist as best it can. During the Jayland Walker shooting protests, we served as a space for community forums and support. During the development of a community wide project commemorating Sojourner Truth and her famous *Ain't I A Woman* speech, our church provided a meeting space for community partners, contributed financially to the development of a memorial, created and held programming, and helped to promote local events.



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

Due to the COVID pandemic, our church was forced to adapt and modify in accordance with state and federal mandates. As the pandemic progressed, so did the various means by which we became accessible; including building renovations for ADA compliance as well as with outreach through Zoom and YouTube. These changes were implemented to ensure the safety of the congregation while continuing to provide spiritual support and to maintain community connections. Efforts were made to ensure that both in-person and online worship experiences were inclusive and engaging. Since the pandemic restrictions have ceased, but our church has maintained its use of technology platforms to help promote and encourage engagement. Our church newsletter and directory is now offered in a fully electronic format.

Through careful planning, investment in technology, and a commitment to inclusivity and safety, First Congregational Church of Akron successfully managed this significant change, ensuring that worship and community life could continue uninterrupted during a challenging time.

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

First Congregational Church of Akron recognizes that conflict is a natural part of any community and approaches it with a commitment to its core values of inclusivity, justice, compassion, and open communication. Here’s how the congregation values and manages conflict:

The church holds congregational meetings where members can discuss issues openly and vote on important matters. This ensures that decisions reflect the collective input and consensus of the congregation. Members are encouraged to practice active listening, ensuring that all voices are heard and understood. This helps to create an environment where people feel respected and valued, even when disagreements arise. In all discussions, members are expected to treat each other with respect and kindness. This involves refraining from personal attacks and focusing on constructive dialogue. Members are encouraged to approach conflicts with a spirit of forgiveness and grace, recognizing the importance of maintaining unity and harmony within the congregation.

### **Examples of Conflict Resolution**

There was recent conflict regarding updating the endowment policies. In order to resolve that conflict, the Church held three extra open meetings for members to attend and ask questions, provided the congregation with an FAQ sheet to help promote understanding, and hosted a lawyer for the meeting to answer questions. We believe that working together in a transparent fashion is the best way to avoid and resolve conflict.

## Ministerial History

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

### Sr. Ministers

2015-2024 Rev. Nanette Pitt

2000-2016 Rev. Jay Groat

1997-1998 Rev. Dwight Mexcur

1989-1995 Rev. Gabe Campbell

### Associate Ministers

2021 - Present Rev. Robert Burt, III, AM for Young Adults & Families with Children

2019 Rev. Antigone Lowrey - Associate Minister

2007-2014 Rev. Duane Angel

2007 Rev. Tim Fitch

2006 Rev. Duane Angel—Minister of Pastoral Care

Rev. Tim Fitch—Minister of Family Life

1999-2005 Rev. William Rodefer

1990-1997 Rev. Dianne Shirley

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

Overall, First Congregational Church of Akron has learned that effective ministerial leadership requires a combination of compassion, effective communication, cross-cultural experience, and the ability to balance social justice work with pastoral care. We are looking for a minister who can be their authentic self and encourage members to do the same. We are looking for a minister who is invested in our future. We are looking for a minister who is able to provide more pastoral care, or can help our members become leaders to help provide that care. We need someone who can take many perspectives into account, while ultimately helping to resolve conflict.

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

Yes - Dwight Mexcur resigned in December of 1999 for personal reasons.

### **Has your church been involved in a Situational Support Consultation?**

Yes. In regard with a retired pastor who was chairing a board and serving on council hence, disrespecting boundaries.

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

No

# Who is our neighbor?

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

## 4.a COMMUNITY VISION

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

As an open and affirming congregation, we have sponsored The Akron Pride Festival since its inception at Hardesty Park. Now the Pride Festival encompasses all of downtown Akron. Our Church hosts a table and marches in the Equality March. We also help promote the event.

Our church's food pantry serves the wider community in our mission to address food insecurity. The food pantry also provides food to low income students and families who attend Mason CLC. Our church provides winter coats annually to the students at Mason CLC.

Currently transformational: The property purchase and decision on what to do with it.

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

Our whole lives sexuality educator training. Partner with Tempel Hills part of the UCC's outdoor ministry in the Living Water Association.

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

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessible to All (A2A)           | <input type="checkbox"/> Just Peace                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creation Justice                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Global Mission Church                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economic Justice                  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open and Affirming (ONA)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faithful and Welcoming            | <input type="checkbox"/> WISE Congregation for Mental Health   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> God Is Still Speaking (GISS)      | <input type="checkbox"/> Other UCC designations:               |
| <input 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?**

Currently, we are an Open and Affirming (ONA) congregation, which reflects our dedication to welcoming LGBTQ+ individuals. Additionally, there is strong interest in exploring other designations such as Creation Justice, which aligns with our environmental initiatives, and Inter-cultural/Multi-racial engagement, which reflects our desire to embrace and celebrate diversity. These areas resonate with our mission, and we are considering them as we continue to deepen our commitment to being a just and inclusive community.


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

Annual MLK Event, worship service



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

The congregation includes a "Purpose" Statement with its bylaws.



*First Congregational Church of Akron continually seeks to be a church rooted in Christ, fostering justice, and celebrating diversity.*

## *Purpose*

To share Christ's light and welcoming, open and loving message with all people.



## *Vision*

The Vision of AkronFCC is to be a beacon of the light of Christ.



## PURPOSE

The Vision of First Congregational Church is to be a beacon of the light of Christ. In so doing, this church shall:

- Encourage the worship of God by all people.
- Build and nurture the inter-generational Christian family.
- Develop and inspire Christian leadership.
- Foster and honor our heritage of "Freedom of Thought and Expression."
- Provide opportunities for religious education and spiritual growth.
- Be a leader and voice of reason and understanding in the Interfaith community.
- Actively serve the community and the world through personal commitment, mission and outreach.

The congregation has been intentionally organized to minimize time spent in meetings in order for congregates to more actively engage in direct ministries.

### **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?**


The congregation at First Congregational Church of Akron expects the pastor to balance internal pastoral care with active community outreach and involvement in wider church activities. The pastor's role includes leading community initiatives, such as food justice programs and social justice advocacy, while also participating in broader church and community efforts. The congregation supports the pastor in dedicating time to these external commitments, recognizing their importance in fulfilling the church's mission of inclusivity and justice.

## 4B. MISSION InSite

### **Comment on your congregation's MissionInsite report with data for your neighborhood(s) or area. What trends and opportunities are shown? How do your congregation's internal demographics compare or contrast to a) the neighborhoods adjacent to your church, and b) other neighborhoods with which your church connects?**

The congregation of Akron First Congregational Church is open to and actively engaged with urban membership while also drawing individuals from a broader range of urban and suburban neighborhoods. This diversity in residency reflects the church's commitment to inclusivity and its role as a spiritual home for people from various backgrounds. While the church's internal demographics may differ from the immediate neighborhood by including members from different socioeconomic and geographic areas, this diversity enhances the church's ability to connect with and serve a wider community.





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

Our congregation has aspirations to welcome more young families and children as members. Our current membership does not lend itself toward that aspiration. Our goal is to engage those types of members to increase our children and youth ministry.

Our congregation has made strides toward becoming more racially diverse and LGBTQ+ friendly; However, our congregation does not reflect the demographic of the community we are located in. We are located in a low income, racially diverse, and largely transient community. We are also located in close proximity to a major university, but that is not reflective in our membership. We are looking for ways to better engage our geographic community, and are hoping for a pastoral candidate to help bridge those divides.

We have several ministries that are geared toward caring for our immediate community, but we want to work to make more impactful connections. We want to be working as a part of the community to foster a sense of belonging and long term investment. Our desire is to build momentum.

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

First Congregational Church of Akron is known for its inclusivity, active social justice outreach, engaging worship, music programs, supportive community, a safe space for the LGBTQ+ community, and a respected historical legacy. These attributes have shaped its reputation as a theologically progressive and welcoming congregation dedicated to making a positive impact both within the church and in the broader community.

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

New members cite the church's open and affirming mission as a reason to get involved. The supportive and caring nature of the congregation is a significant draw. New members feel a strong sense of belonging and support, particularly during challenging times. The church's outstanding music programs, including traditional hymns and contemporary music, guest performers and the choir are other aspects that bring people through the doors to First Congregational Church of Akron. Also expressed as a reason to get involved are Inspirational and meaningful sermons, availability and accessibility of service. New people come because they like the offering of two different services.



# References

## REFERENCE 1

Chandra M. Bramlett  
Volunteer with Feeding Hope food pantry  
330.687.8138  
Chandra.Bramlett@gmail.com  
Not a member of First Congregational

I am writing to you today as a regular volunteer at the Feeding Hope Food Pantry at First Congregational Church of Akron. I began volunteering at Feeding Hope about once a month with other members of the Junior League of Akron. After about a year I started volunteering more often, and I am now there most Monday evenings. I enjoyed the work and the relationships built with other volunteers, loved being able to share the volunteer opportunity with my children, and relish the feeling of meaningful service. During the pandemic we were pre packing bags of food to be distributed the next day, but as soon as we were able, we reverted to being a choice pantry, giving each guest the dignity of selecting the food that they prefer. As an introvert, I was initially nervous about this change, but I quickly grew to absolutely love interacting with our guests, chatting with them as we shop, and doing my best to make them feel welcome and valued.

While this ministry is not new to FCC, the need for this ministry was exacerbated during the pandemic, and even more so as food prices skyrocketed, and SNAP benefits were cut. This food pantry brings people from all over the city and county, people of all ages, nationalities, and even socio-economic statuses. We see the working poor, coming to the food pantry directly after work, and we serve the unemployed. We serve people who have their own homes or apartments and just need a little help to make ends meet, and we serve the unhoused who don't know when they will get their next meal. We serve native Akronites, and we serve immigrants and refugees looking to make a better life. We serve college students, and residents of halfway houses. In short, we serve anyone in need.

One of the many strengths of the food ministry is the dignity with which volunteers serve our guests. I am frequently struck by the graceful and compassionate way volunteers handle challenging and heartbreaking situations. The food pantry nourishes both bodies and spirits, those of the guests, and of the volunteers.

Last year, the Junior League of Akron made the decision to pivot from our focus on food insecurity to that of period poverty. The high cost of menstrual products plays a role in someone's food budget, so we see the two issues as going hand-in-hand. I have been absolutely tickled with how readily Feeding Hope embraced our new project, and partnered with us to distribute menstrual products through the food pantry. Despite my fondness for my volunteers, I could not have been more shocked and pleasantly surprised

with the way the older volunteers, particularly the men, supported this new endeavor. Not an eyelash was batted, nor a blush seen. They immediately understood how these items could support the individuals that we serve, and that was all that mattered.

While I am certainly biased about the value of this ministry, there are indeed some areas that could be improved upon. The first being the need for more regular volunteers. Despite the size of FCC, there are not many members who volunteer with the food pantry on Monday evenings. One evening a month, or one evening every other month, could make a meaningful difference. And while I'm sure that many members are involved with other church ministries, this one provides the rare opportunity of direct service to some of the most vulnerable in our community. Volunteering with the guests of the food pantry is both an opportunity to serve others, and to be humbled. Additionally, while I understand that many congregants may be feeling donor fatigue, the food pantry is often in need of both food and personal care items. While reminders to donate money or items to the pantry is fine, I truly believe that there would be more buy-in from congregants if they were directly involved with the food pantry. It is difficult to interact with our guests and not be overwhelmed by a mix of compassion and sadness. The more time that I spend volunteering with this ministry, the more I want to do to ease the burden of our guests. They are not numbers on a tally of persons served, they are real people with real hopes and dreams and needs.

Despite having worked in social services and with low-income populations for two decades, this direct service has been some of the most meaningful. There are so many stories, some uplifting, some heartbreaking. While I relish the looks on the faces of children when they get to pick out their favorite snack, or get a new book or stuffed animal, I also appreciate the learning opportunities. While I like to think that I have the shopping role down pat, I was thrown for a bit of a loop some months ago by a woman who was living out of her car. She felt safest in her car rather than in a shelter, but living in a car presents some obvious challenges, including how to prepare and store food. While we moved through the aisles, I had the eye-opening experience of just how many foods, even those we consider convenience items, need to be cooked, heated, or kept cold. The staples of pasta and rice were no good to her, and the dairy items and frozen meats were useless to this woman. We got creative with some items that the woman could eat immediately, what would stay good for a few days, and what items might last through the week. This experience not only made me extremely grateful for my good fortune, but also made me realize how much I take for granted, even with having done this work for several years.

I would like to thank the transition team for asking me to contribute to the church profile in their search for a new settled minister; and I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this, and for considering First Congregational Church of Akron. While I am not a member of the church, I am a big fan of the history of social justice at FCC, and am honored to be able to play a small part in one of their most important ministries. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them; I'm always happy to talk about the meaningful work of the Feeding Hope food pantry!

Sincerely,  
Chandra M. Bramlett

## REFERENCE 2



August 20, 2024

First Congregational Church of Akron  
292 E Market St.  
Akron, OH 44308

To Whom it May Concern:

PFLAG Akron has had an on-going and positive relationship with First Congregational Church of Akron since 2017. We are a non-profit community organization that serves the LGBTQ+ population in Greater Akron. We are a 42-year-old organization and FCC welcomed us when we were looking for a new place for our monthly support group meetings.

They have been very accommodating in allowing us to use their facilities, and in 2024 worked with us to come up with an appropriate solution to have a security presence at our support group meetings.

Because this congregation is public about being an open and affirming congregation, we have felt at home in this space. I'm happy to answer any questions about our experience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kim Rivers".

Kim Rivers, President  
PFLAG Akron  
[pflagakron@gmail.com](mailto:pflagakron@gmail.com)  
330-412-0289

## REFERENCE 3

Karen Brandt

Volunteer Feeding Hope Food Pantry

3306184077

[karen.brndt@gmail.com](mailto:karen.brndt@gmail.com)

Non-member volunteer

I began volunteering at the Feeding Hope Food Pantry in May of 2023 after Larry Becker came to our church (Bath United Church of Christ) and spoke about the ministry, soon after I retired from teaching and our church was looking at ways we could get involved in local outreach.

Volunteering each Tuesday morning and once a month on Monday nights has become one of the highlights of my week. Our church had recently started doing a weekend lunch bag ministry for an Akron Public School and a few members were interested in potentially starting up a food pantry in that area and wondered what all it involved. Volunteering regularly at Feeding Hope has shown me how much work and organization is involved. I am constantly moved and impressed with the dedication of the volunteers, particularly those in charge of scheduling volunteers and buying/stocking the shelves. They quickly made me feel like a partner in ministry and welcomed me—and other Bath Church members—with open hearts and warm smiles. To a person, everyone reaches out to the clients with loving hearts, a respectful manner, and open arms. Never content with what they're already doing, the leaders are continually looking for ways to improve our services and be more helpful to our clients, all the while witnessing God's love and endeavoring to give hope and love to all who walk through the doors of First Congregational. Volunteering there has made me a better person and steward of all God has given me.

Feeding Hope Food Pantry is run very efficiently and effectively. When our church was thinking of starting a small food pantry near an elementary school we partner with, Feeding Hope Food Pantry, run by First Congregational Church, was recommended food pantry to go to to see how an effective food pantry is run. At this point, I have no suggestions on how to improve it, but the managers of Feeding Hope are always asking for tips and looking for ways to make it better for our clients. I feel like the opinions of each one of us matters and the people in charge want our feedback. They also want and encourage feedback from our clients. They're always looking for ways to improve.

After each weekly volunteer opportunity, I leave Feeding Hope blessed by how I've seen God work through the food pantry volunteers and its clients. I see examples of God working through the ministry and its volunteers, and I also see the hope God gives to the clients. The gratefulness on the part of the clients is palpable. Recently, one client voiced to me that the best part of his month is coming to the pantry—partly for the food he gets, but even more importantly, for the smiles, hugs, and respect he gets when he comes through Feeding Hope.

## REFERENCE 4

August 2024

To Whom it May Concern:

I have been asked to write a reference for the Feeding Hope Food Pantry. I am a member of Fairlawn West UCC in West Akron. I lived in Collierville, TN for 16 years before returning to the area in May 2021. While in Tennessee I was a member of Heartsong United Methodist Church where I was involved with our Food Pantry. I found such joy in this ministry that when we relocated back to Akron I wanted to continue this work. Fortunately, John Gossett, a "FWUCCer" was volunteering at the Food Pantry. I tagged along in early 2022 and have been involved ever since.

The Feeding Hope Food Pantry is a well-organized machine. There is a dedicated leadership team and volunteers who are invested, involved and most importantly caring, empathic individuals. I believe our clients feel safe and loved; many returning month after month. When helping clients shop, I hear clients say WOW, this place is awesome, thank you so much and God bless you. I've seen clients cry, laugh and give hugs of gratitude. But it's the volunteers who are grateful and blessed by our clients. These are the areas of strength for this ministry. IMO, the biggest area for improvement would be resources; financial donations and time. The need is great. This is apparent in the increase in the number of new clients and clients served on Monday night. I cannot recall a specific experience to share, but I can tell you that I always drive home with a grateful and fulfilled heart.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts about the Feeding Hope Food Pantry. Should you need to contact me, my information is below:

- Beth Ewing
- [bethewing9@gmail.com](mailto:bethewing9@gmail.com)
- 901-545-9197

# CLOSING THOUGHTS

## a. CLOSING PRAYER

Divine Creator, our hearts are full of gratitude and hope. We thank You for the journey we have shared as a community and for the ways You have guided us through challenges and joys.

Loving Spirit, we lift up our community to You. We pray for Your continued blessings on First Congregational Church of Akron, that we may always be a beacon of inclusivity, justice, and love. Help us to embrace each person with the warmth and compassion that reflect Your boundless grace.

Gracious Spirit, we seek Your guidance as we welcome a new Senior Minister into our midst. Bless them with wisdom, compassion, and a vision that aligns with Your will for this congregation. May they inspire us with messages that speak to our hearts, guide us in deepening our faith, and lead us in acts of service and justice.

We ask that our new minister be:

- A Shepherd of Inclusivity, embracing all with Your radical love and fostering a community where everyone feels valued and included.
- A Voice for Justice, leading us boldly in advocacy and service to address the needs of our community and the world.
- A Guide for Spiritual Growth, encouraging us to grow in our personal faith and understanding of Your wisdom.

As we embark on this new chapter, let us hold fast to the words of Ephesians 4:2-3: *"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."*

We dream of a community where love prevails,  
Where hearts are open, and grace never fails.  
A place where justice flows like a river,  
And peace and unity reign forever.

Musical Spirit, may the melody of our gatherings be ever pleasing to You. Let the harmony of our voices and the joy of our songs bring us closer together and closer to You. Bless us, Prophetic Spirit, as we continue this journey of faith. Guide us, inspire us, and fill us with Your love. May our community always be a reflection of Your Kingdom here on earth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## **b. STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

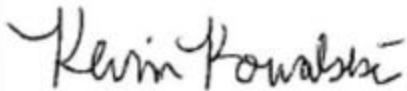
The covenantal relationship between a church and those called by that church to serve as pastors and teachers and in other ministerial positions is strengthened when vital information is openly shared by covenantal partners. To that end, we attest that, to the best of our abilities, we have provided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

### **Which individuals and groups in the church contributed to the contents of this Local Church Profile?**

Transition Team consisting of four people in consultation with the Interim Minister (Rev. Jeffrey Jackson).

Jacob Cook  
Ashlee James  
Nancy Jenkins  
Tevin Tietje



Kevin Kowalski, Moderator



## 6c. VALIDATION BY CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION

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

First Congregational Church of Akron is in good standing with the Living Water Association and is a valued and active congregation in our midst. With a faith-centered foundation, this Open and Affirming congregation is active in its participation and leadership in a breadth of justice issues in Akron, Summit County, and beyond.

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:



Name / Title: Rev. Brian Burke, Transition Consultant

Email: [pastorbdburke@gmail.com](mailto:pastorbdburke@gmail.com)

Phone: 440.225.4458

Date: September 10, 2024

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.

**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**



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