

LONGWOOD HILLS CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

1255 EE WILLIAMSON ROAD, LONGWOOD, FLORIDA 32750

WWW.LONGWOODHILLSCHURCH.ORG

We are an inclusive spiritual community, seeking to live out a more just and generous Christianity.

We think faith is less about doctrines and dogmas demanding total agreement, and more a life to be lived, enjoyed and given away.

We exist to welcome all people into a relationship with Jesus Christ, equip people with a faith that works in real life, and sends us in service into the world in Jesus's name.



WHO WE ARE

Longwood Hills Congregational Church (LHCC) is an active and engaged congregation of Christians who has established a warm, welcoming, and inclusive community of believers. We seek to show the love of Jesus to each other and to those around us, not just on Sundays, but all year long. Our church strives to be a place where everyone can worship authentically, without pretense or judgment. Our members have found 'home' in our church where we welcome all questions and do not shy away from challenging discussions. We believe our church is stronger with diversity and that God is bigger than we can imagine. Our members come from different walks of life, faith

backgrounds (Baptist, Catholic, evangelical, no-faith traditions) and parts of the country and world. While we have not gone through the formal O&A process, we are, in practice, Open and Affirming.



Welcoming 16 new members on 11/16/24

Our congregation of 141 members is active in ministries that range from a community food pantry, annual children's events, and youth drama programs, to a variety of book and Bible studies. As our bylaws state, "We seek to be a vibrant Christian church that exists to give glory to God in Jesus Christ. We see ourselves as a mission center for Christian renewal in the lives of all individuals, families and congregations."

CHURCH HISTORY

Longwood Hills Congregational Church began as a mission of the North Park Baptist Church in 1975. By 1985, the mission had grown and transformed into Longwood Hills Baptist Church. Longwood Hills Baptist Church had a reputation for bending the rules, which included allowing women in leadership positions. In 1995, Longwood Hills Baptist Church chose to become Longwood Hills Congregational Church and joined the United Church of Christ. After many years of utilizing the current fellowship hall as the sanctuary, the new sanctuary was completed in 2001. Our beautiful sanctuary is the result of the hard work and dedication of several members of the church leadership team at that time.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, exclusively online services were offered and the congregation continued to be engaged in weekly worship. We have seen an increase in visitors and new members since coming back to in-person worship services. This is evidenced by our membership growth from 95 in 2021 to 141 by the end of 2024. Our live online streaming continues to provide an alternative way for visitors and members to attend our service, if for some reason they cannot visit in-person.

LHCC is resilient and faces challenges head-on. When the church's facilities were damaged in multiple ways due to Hurricane Ian in September 2022 and other unnamed storms afterward, the church set a goal to raise money for the repairs and a committee worked with FEMA to secure a grant and collect bids for the work. Through a pledge drive, bingo nights, bake sale at a local farmer's market and other fundraising initiatives, the church pulled together and met the goal that had been set. These funds, alongside funds from FEMA, allowed the most critical repairs to be completed so that our church facilities continue to be a space in which all can worship safely.



STATISTICAL SUMMARY

- Active Membership: 71 in-person, 13 online
- Total Reported Membership: 141
- Sunday Morning average attendance: 82 (combined total in-person and online)
- Youth Sunday School registrants for last 3 months: 15 (11 school-age, 4 nursery)
- Average Church School Attendance for last 3 months: 8 (5 school-age and 3 nursery)
- Members-In-Discernment: 1
- Members serving on Boards and Ministry Teams: 50
- Missions Giving, average over 5 years: <1% of budget

Results of most recent stewardship campaign compared with previous year:

2023 Budget	\$175,860
2023 Actual	\$242,035*
2024 Budget	\$198,658
2024 YTD	\$130,126 (3rd quarter)
2025 Budget	\$176,700

*Includes FEMA grant for hurricane damage and special donations

Our annual budget projections are based on only the pledges received at the time the budget is presented to the congregation for approval. Presenting a realistic budget for the congregation each year reminds members to return their pledge cards, identifies the current fiscal needs of the church, and allows the leadership team to plan fundraising activities and campaigns to close any shortfall. Additionally, our church has built a reserve account to address any budget shortfall and/or the emergency needs at the church.

CURRENT STAFF MEMBERS-2

Part-Time Pastor

Part Time Office Administrator & Music Director

OUR WORSHIP SERVICE

Our Sunday worship service begins with an instrumental or vocal interlude while candles are lit by children from our congregation. Following this, the Pastor welcomes all to the service, makes announcements and invites the congregation to recite the Mission Statement of our church. After those gathered then pass the peace and greet others, the worship team leads the congregation in contemporary songs as well as a traditional hymn. The Pastor invites the church to a moment of quiet reflection to prepare for a time of prayer while they gather the prayer requests that have been posted on the Prayer Wall in the Sanctuary. The Pastor leads the congregation in a personal prayer as well as the Lord's Prayer. At the beginning of each month, communion is celebrated. On every other Sunday, children are invited to come forth for a children's sermon led by the Pastor or other members of the Faith Formation ministry. After the children are ushered to Sunday school, a member of the congregation reads the selected Bible passage for the service. The Pastor delivers their message and invites the band up for a final song before closing out the service with a Benediction.



VOLUNTEER MINISTRIES

Longwood Hills Congregational Church has many volunteer-led ministries and a Steering Committee that meets monthly. Below is a brief description of each ministry represented on the Steering Committee.

STEERING COMMITTEE

This committee is composed of the Pastor and the leads for each ministry. They meet monthly to provide oversight and direction for the church. Members of the Executive and Steering Committee are elected by the congregation.

BUILDING & GROUNDS MINISTRY

The mission of the Building and Grounds ministry is to provide a clean functional facility to be used as a tool of the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ. The primary focus of this ministry is to provide building and campus maintenance.

This ministry has successfully completed several major projects over the last three years including working with FEMA to access funds for tree removal and new roofing due to impacts from Hurricane Ian and other storms. Building and Grounds oversaw critical projects, such as pressure washing, repainting the exterior of the building as well as the interior of the narthex. This ministry also coordinates work days, particularly before large community events and after hurricanes. Rental of the facility is facilitated through the work of this team as well.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH MINISTRY

The mission of the Community Outreach ministry is to discover ways to express God's love through service to those in the community and invite them to experience our loving congregation. The two primary outreach programs of this ministry are Impact Theater and Food Pantry.

Impact Theater was started several years ago by a church family and has put on over 20 shows since its opening. Impact Theater has at least 9 youth performances annually.

Each cast is separated by age. In the spring season, there are two shows, each with two performances. In summer, we have another two shows, each with two performances. Summer shows are rehearsed through a drama camp for one to two weeks. We have recently begun offering weekly workshops for music, theater, and dance. We also have an end of the year show



as a fundraiser. We have one paid position currently who serves in the administrative role. This program has been relatively self-sustaining. We average around 150-200 attendees per show. We additionally offer scholarships to give opportunities for all to participate.

Our mission statement is, "We provide a nurturing and inclusive space where everyone can develop artistically, spiritually, emotionally and socially through theater." Our newly revised slogan is, "Where inclusivity takes center stage."

The LHCC Food Pantry is run by volunteer members of the church and is open on the second and fourth Wednesday afternoon and prep on the alternating Wednesdays. The Food Pantry serves approximately 40 families at each opening. Special bags are

prepared for Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas meals.

This ministry hosts events on LHCC campus, such as the Easter Egg Hunt that averages 200 guests. We assist with the Pet Blessing service as well as representing the church in events in the community like National Night Out. We have also attended local parades and community festivals.



FAITH FORMATION MINISTRY

The mission of the Faith Formation ministry is to make faithful disciples of people of all ages. This ministry has a team of dedicated volunteers that teach Sunday School and provide nursery care during service. One of the areas that our church feels passionate about is welcoming all children, no matter their abilities or neurotype. Our Sunday School teachers adapt their teaching style to the needs of the children, so that all may be included and contribute to the activity, as they feel comfortable. Weekly Children's Sermons are coordinated with the Pastor and Worship team during church services. Adult Faith Formation opportunities are provided throughout the year. These include book studies, Bible study groups and monthly Coffee Fellowship sessions.



WORSHIP MINISTRY

The Worship ministry's mission is to provide inspiring and Spirit-filled worship of God. This is one of the largest ministries because it includes the music and the coordination of volunteers for service on Sunday mornings:

The *Praise Band* is led by the part-time Music Director and includes talented musicians and singers from the congregation.

The *Choir and Handbell Choir* is led by volunteer directors within the congregation and performs on special occasions during the year including during the Lent and Advent sessions.

The *Sunday Service Volunteers* include a team of rotating congregation members that serve as ushers, greeters, sign managers, camera & sound booth operators and media assistants.



SHEPHERD MINISTRY

The mission of the Shepherd ministry is to nurture all our members with love and concern; to strengthen our relationship as a family of Jesus Christ. The congregation is divided into 8 flocks with each shepherd serving 10-12 families. Shepherds not only assist the Pastor with care for members of the church, but also those who attend the church, but are not yet members. This unique approach helps newcomers feel welcomed and cared for, as their assigned shepherd reaches out personally to check in and sends cards for special occasions. Our Shepherds are an integral part in assisting the Pastor with new member orientation, congregational visitation (including hospital visitation) as well as meals and cards, when needed. This ministry team is also responsible for establishing and maintaining an electronic Church Directory.

STEWARDSHIP MINISTRY

The Stewardship ministry's mission is to invite our members and others to experience the joy of sharing all that they have and all that they are in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. This ministry is responsible for the annual stewardship campaign and coordinating additional giving opportunities throughout the year including

- Per Capita Offering
- One Great Hour of Sharing
- Neighbors in Need
- Strengthen the Church
- The Christmas Fund

TECHNOLOGY MINISTRY

The Technology ministry is newly formed as of 2023 and serves the church's needs in the areas of online presence and coordination of technology required for worship services. Recent projects from this ministry include revamping the church's website, maintaining social media presence, improving YouTube streaming of services and updating the sanctuary sound system. The ministry utilized a grant from the UCC conference in December 2023 to update the media computer and choir microphones.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS & GROUPS AT LONGWOOD HILLS CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

SHARING OUR SPACE

Longwood Hills Congregational Church provides space for groups and individuals:

- PFLAG (focused on creating a caring, just, and affirming world for the LGBTQ+ community)
- Meals on Wheels (pick up location only)
- Compassionate Friends (a non-profit helping grieving families)
- Seminole Youth Alliance (providing a safe space for LGBT youth and young adults)
- The Music Room (Music Lessons)
- Milestones Through Music (developmental music class for young children)

OPEN HANDS FARM

A unique aspect of our church is our cooperative relationship with Open Hands Farm. Run by a church member, Open Hands Farm is a small, organic market farm with crops grown on church property. She maintains the farm, which saves the church from spending resources and energy maintaining grass, which does not benefit communities or the environment. Open Hands donates produce and herbs to the food pantry and a portion of her profit goes back to the church. Open Hands has previously offered classes on starting and maintaining gardens to the church and community and has engaged with the church's youth to learn about God, while exploring God's Creation.



CHURCH WORK CREW

When FEMA funds ran short of expectations following impacts from Hurricane Ian, the Steering Committee compiled a list of short and long-term goals needed to maintain the church building and grounds. Out of this need, the church work crew developed and meets every Wednesday morning to complete indoor and outdoor maintenance of the facilities. This includes mowing the lawn, removing



branches, repainting walls, repairing items and tackling large-scale cleaning, such as mopping the Fellowship Hall. This work crew also helps the church with hurricane preparations, when needed.

TERTULIA

Tertulia, which means a social gathering to discuss literature, arts, or current affairs, formed out of a vision to build community among the growing number of younger people attending Longwood Hills Congregational Church following the COVID-19 pandemic. This informal group is composed of individuals under the age of 50 and



gathers monthly to engage in a social activity or community service project. Recent events have included bowling, compiling hygiene kits for distribution at the food pantry and attending a local fall festival. The group also organized a bake sale to raise funds for a church in Tampa impacted by hurricanes Helene and Milton, raising over \$780. The group connects via group chat regularly.

WALKING GROUP

This group is open to all and is held informally on Monday nights. The group meets to engage in some exercise and fellowship. Several who attend regularly also meet up for local walk/run events, such as the Winter Park Road Race.



SPECIAL EVENTS

The various ministries of the church collaborate for events that have become traditions in the congregation. These special programs invite the community to join us in celebrating and sharing in the love of God and offer a way to mark God's hand in our lives through the rhythm of the calendar. During the year, LHCC typically hosts the following:

- Pentecost service with photograph of congregation wearing red
- Special events and services during Holy Week, Ash Wednesday, Christmas week
- Community Easter Egg Hunt
- Blessing of the Pets
- Breakfast with Santa
- Hosting performances of Kairos Adventures' Joy Street Choir

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Longwood Hills Congregational Church would like to continue to grow in membership. We consistently meet the needs of our current congregates but would also like to attract additional members and families. Our youth program is small, but steady. We currently have a smaller middle school aged group and would like to continue to be able to provide meaningful Sunday school options for them. With hopes to expand our congregation, ministries and youth programs, we also must contend with meeting the demands of a large campus and grounds. Like most every church and non-profit agency, financial constraints are always a concern. However, by focusing on the continued growth and engagement of our congregation, our goal is to fully fund each of our church's ministries and provide a sustainable operating budget while continuing to maintain a beautiful campus that serves our community.

WHO WE ARE SEARCHING FOR

Based on a congregational survey, Longwood Hills Congregational Church is searching for someone who:

- ❖ Is a dynamic and engaging speaker who communicates with clarity and humor.
- ❖ Is spiritually grounded, with integrity and a strong Biblical knowledge to inspire and motivate the congregation
- ❖ Can encourage people to relate their faith to their daily lives and help them to deepen their walk
- ❖ Is community minded and open to collaborating with and respecting individuals with diverse perspectives
- ❖ Embodies sincerity and trustworthiness
- ❖ Values and fosters genuine connections
- ❖ Can manage the church's business and financial functions, working with staff and Steering Committee
- ❖ Can foster growth in membership and within new opportunities, while balancing change with continuity

COMPENSATION PACKAGE

Part time Pastor position: 20 hours weekly

\$40,000/annually

Vacation: 4 weeks paid time off

Professional Development: As approved by Steering Committee

PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- "The Pastor shall be an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ or one of the affiliate denominations with the United Church of Christ. The Pastor, within a year, shall seek and gain full and regular ministerial standing in the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ."
- Facilitate Sunday morning services and activities as well as "special" services (Christmas Eve, Maundy Thursday, etc)
- Hold part-time office hours
- Meet with Worship & Music Ministries and staff weekly to plan services
- Represent the church in local civic and clergy events
- Serve on Impact Theater Board
- Conduct Baptisms, Dedications, Weddings and Funerals, as scheduled
- Mentor Members-In-Discernment (We have one person currently)
- Liaise with Florida UCC
- Provide Pastoral care to congregants, as needed

CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord of all things big and small, You know the person who is best suited to fill this need for our congregation. Guide this process and inspire the person who You have called to step out in faith and become a part of our journey as a church. Bless us all with wisdom and discernment as we move forward.
Amen.*

*Thank you for your interest in our church. We look forward to
meeting you!*



LONGWOOD HILLS CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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Dr. Stephanie Salinas, Pastor

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November 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I have been serving as the pastor (Designated Term) of Longwood Hills Congregational Church since November 1, 2021. I will be retiring from local church ministry in February 2025, and have been asked by the search committee to write a congregational recommendation letter.

I have served churches for decades and can say with assurance that LHCC is the healthiest church I have served. A good percentage of people participate in service and worship. In the past few years, we have seen church leadership shared by an increasing number of newer and younger members. In 2025, about half the Steering Committee (main leadership team) will be under age 50. They have successfully moved to a single-board structure. They regularly use online technology for meetings.

LHCC has a praise and worship format service with some traditional elements. They are flexible about trying new things in worship, and they live-stream every service. They have an active Shepherds group (similar to a Stephen Ministry), which is helpful in a part-time pastorate. They run an active food pantry. They have a huge youth theater program. (Please note that my daughter-in-law is remaining on the theater program staff.)


LHCC is inclusive (LGBTQ+) in practice, but has not officially become a UCC Open and Affirming congregation. We read a very progressive statement at the start of worship each Sunday.

My main wish for LHCC is to get their budget and giving in order. We have worked during my designated term to better define their budget, and we have run stewardship campaigns. They remain out of balance, but somehow find ways to pay their bills. I believe there is "money in the pews" but they need to rethink their giving.

Overall, this is a strong congregation. It is a growing congregation with a good blend of young families and seasoned adults. They have allowed me wonderful creativity. They're awesome folks! Please feel free to reach out if I can be of assistance. The search chairs can share my personal contact information.

Grace & Peace to you in your search,
Steph

Selected quotations from our congregational survey:

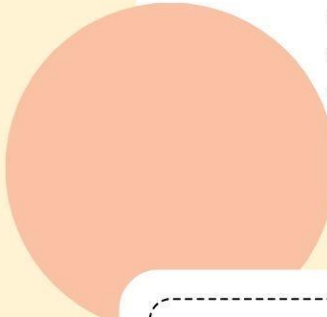


From the first time we came, we felt comfortable and welcomed without feeling suffocated. Our shepherd's actions to connect with us made a big impact, as we felt someone in the congregation was taking the time to reach out and follow up with us. My biggest theme at attending this church is the novel idea that the church should say, "yes."

We love this church and the openness to everyone that seeks God.

There are so many great activities going on in this church! It is incredible how much good is done in this community by such a small congregation! I believe we are poised to do even greater things for our congregation and our community.

The music program is astounding.



Our church leaders have provided strong and steady guidance during extremely challenging times. I continue to pray for God to send us a passionate pastor who is seeking an inspiring and energetic church to lead into the future.

I think it is really important that the pastor remain nonpolitical.

Overall, the church is positive for our community. I love that we are open to all people and this for me is one of the reasons I remain a member.

An email excerpt from a church congregant to the Search Committee:

"When I started looking for a church in Central Florida, I knew I'd have my work cut out for me. I'd already tried and failed to find a church in my twenties that was okay with having me there without my needing to pretend to be someone I wasn't—and I tried a lot. Eventually it got to be too much, so I took a nice, long break until my son was born.

At that point, I tried something I hadn't done before: I googled "liberal churches near me." And Longwood Hills was at the top of the list.

I've known plenty of people who would probably see that as silly or posturing or "church shopping." But I'm sure I'm not the only one in this congregation who can say they've found something special at Longwood Hills that, for a variety of reasons, isn't there for them at other churches.

In particular, I've been impressed—no, continually amazed is more like it—by how this congregation has welcomed my son and helped him feel safe at church. While a pastor isn't in control of their congregation's responses to everyone, they can certainly set a welcoming, inclusive tone, which Pastor Steph and Pastor Jim before her have done beautifully...

Thank you for listening and for doing the work of finding us a new pastor."