

The Congregational Church of Westminster West

44 Church St., Westminster West VT 05346

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

We are a groovy little congregation who have lots of fun together: join us! Having enjoyed two decades of faithful service by our former pastor, we are now engaged in the search and call process. We seek a pastor who will accompany us on our journey of spiritual growth and service together, sharing the leadership of a small, but committed and enthusiastic congregation. Our whole congregation has engaged deeply in many years of discernment, and now has joined together in the preparation of this profile, both in formal discussions and also in heart-felt prayer.

Who are we as a church?

Over the past two decades, our church family has grown more solid in our basic knowledge of scripture and theology, and has become comfortable talking about our faith and praying aloud. We have developed into a lively band of confident seekers who know that we have something very special to offer our neighbors and other seekers. We practice a non-orthodox, Jesus-loving faith, and have become a community of sanctuary for people all along the continuum of faith who seek to grow in spirit. We are a mission minded congregation leaning towards social justice and actively working on living a ministry of food and fun. Our services include levity and irreverence, and our mission outreach includes both feeding those who are experiencing food insecurity and inviting our neighbors together for community dinners and our annual Church/Community fair.

The gifts of our church are many. In addition to our spiritual growth and practice, we have an ad hoc church choir which is accomplished and capable of singing classical, gospel, shape-note along with a wide range of traditional spiritual songs. We are lusty hymn singers and are blessed to be supported by talented and versatile musicians who bring skills on guitar, organ, piano and voice to our service music. Our congregation is rich with musicians and the love of music is one of the fundamental ties that bind us together. We sponsor a quarterly newsletter, headed up by our talented church treasurer, with a mailing list of hundreds of members of the community both here in Westminster West and across

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the country. We are an Open and Affirming Congregation, believing deeply in both extravagant welcome and an open communion table.

Yet despite these attributes, we still experience challenges within our village and the broader region. We have 31 official members, of whom about 23 attend services regularly along with a handful of non-members who are with us many Sundays. We wonder how to serve as a community church given a population of diverse thinkers, a public fearful of explicit expressions of faith, individuals suspicious of institutions, families struggling with the burdens of everyday life, and home-bound elders hoping to remain connected to people they once knew. To that end, we have focused our congregational discernment on our continued mission as a church and a congregation, seeking guidance through our activities funded by a Lily Foundation grant in 2015, and again in 2023 during our pastor's sabbatical. We encourage interfaith dialogue by sometimes extending invitations to Muslim and Jewish community members to address our congregation. To foster our relationship with creation, we've had programs on earth-based spirituality and engage in Sunday meditative nature walks. Our discernment process has been both rich and robust, and has led us to renewed faith in ourselves and the gifts we have to cherish and to offer others in our small community.

What is our community and area like?

The village of Westminster West is part of the larger town of Westminster, and close neighbors to the towns of Putney to the south and Saxtons River to the north. The church draws congregants from each of these communities. We see our community as one that is deeply impacted by the presence of traditional hill farmers, some of whose families have lived here since before the American Revolution, and progressive back-to-the-land farmers and artisans who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s to make these hills their homes. We boast four working farms, producing everything from vegetables to meat, milk and cheese, and providing local goods through their own farmstands, in addition to selling their produce and products on a more local and national scale. We have two internationally acclaimed artisanal cheese producers as well, placing our village on the map for foodies. Our village center is marked by a thriving little library, our church and an unheated grange hall which is also available to the community for events. On the other end of town is the tiny two-room school, where many of our children attended, but which now serves as an experiential learning center for Westminster's elementary school students.

People who live here are proud of their community and their antecedents. Every year, the church hosts a "Cabin fever Dinner", which has as its central attraction the promise of

neighborly story-telling. There we hear stories from people whose ancestors have farmed these hills alongside people who moved into yurts in a muddy field, each with a strong theme of love for the quiet and beautiful bounties of nature all around us and the funny eccentricities of both neighbors and animals.

Although we are an older community, our school is thriving as young people both return to this corner of Vermont or seek to make it their home. The church, however, has no regular families with children in attendance. We live in the most secular state in the nation, according to recent Pew Research findings, but many residents do express gratitude for the fact that there is a vibrant faith community housed in the village. Spiritual life thrives in our town even though few claim ties with religious institutions.

What are we seeking in a Pastor?

In our last search process, we outlined our position as a congregation with three ministries: we minister to one another through our lay-led services and open invitation to contribute to growing and applying our theological understanding both to scripture and to our world. We minister to the community through our provision of our church as a community center, and through our neighborly commitments to food and fun. Our third ministry of pastoral care is provided by our pastor, whom we seek to nurture our congregation and our community in these commitments and practices.

We seek a pastor who will be able to work with a lay-led congregation, many of whom are retired clergy themselves or college professors (there are two local colleges in the nearby communities of Putney and Dummerston, at which several members of our congregation have taught or still teach, and a vibrant community college in near-by Massachusetts, where another of our congregants teaches). We do not engage in critiquing or criticizing individual approaches to worship—we challenge ourselves to welcome a diversity of voices. We experiment with our worship services, sometimes (mainly during the summer) focusing on meditating in the natural world through prayer walks, sometimes meditating on psalms and scripture through *Lectio Divino* practices. However, most of the time we do hold ourselves to an agreed-upon lectionary (at this point we use the Narrative Lectionary out of the Luther Seminary) and standardized order of worship to provide consistency to our services. We seek a pastor to help us to sponsor and support diversity of thought within a theologically based message of God's loving-kindness and care for God's creation. We want to be clear that we only expect our half-time pastor to be responsible for two worship services per month. We take it upon ourselves to schedule lay-led services for the other 2-3 services. Other responsibilities include managing pastoral care for the

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congregation, leading the deacons in their care for the spiritual welfare of the church and the continued scheduling of services, representing the spiritual and mission needs of the congregation and community at Board of Trustees meetings, and, to the extent that a half-time pastorate allows, to be a presence in the community for outreach and fellowship. This scope of responsibilities closely follows the Compensation Guidelines from the Vermont Conference.

Finally, we seek a pastor who will help and support our congregation to continue as a *living* church. We look for an interim or bridge pastor who is comfortable with a lively exchange during a sermon or afterwards during fellowship. We seek one who welcomes and encourages the rich gifts of this church and one who challenges us by both helping us to let go of things we need to let go of, while helping us to clarify our search.

What are our financial arrangements for that pastor?

Our 2025 budget allocates \$40,500 for compensation for an interim pastor (assuming the next nine out of twelve months of service). Please note that the Congregational Church of Westminster West holds worship every week, including during the summer. This proposal assumes that we will take on an interim Bridge pastor at the end of this quarter, and will subsequently be responsible for this package for the rest of the year, e.g., 75%. This total includes:

- Salary
- FICA
- Housing
- Pension Board (pension dues, dental/health insurance, disability/life insurance)
- books and education

We would extrapolate back to 12 months in 2026. The precise allocation of the \$40,500 will be negotiated directly with the incoming interim pastor.

Rejoicing in Hope we remain,

The Search Committee of the Congregational Church of Westminster West