



Name of Church
First Congregational Church of Stratford
Address
2301 Main St Stratford, CT 06615
Conference:
Southern New England
Association:
Fairfield East
Title
Pastor
Start Date
Feb 10, 2025
Description
FCC Stratford Pastor Search

Church Contact Information

203-378-2644 (Church Primary Phone)

Listing Information

Web Presences

<https://www.firstchurchstratford.org> *Type: Professional*

<https://www.facebook.com/firstchurchstratford> *Type: Other*

<https://www.instagram.com/firstchurchstratford> *Type: Other*

<https://www.youtube.com/c/FirstChurchStratfordCT> *Type: Other*

Additional Formal Ecumenical Affiliations

No response

UCC Conference or Association Staff Contact Person**Name:**

Margret Hofmeister

Title:

Area Conference Minister, SW Region

Phone:

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Summary Ministry Description

Welcoming. Friendly. Dedicated. Faithful.

These words describe the members of The First Congregational Church of Stratford, CT. The history of Stratford is the history of our church. Founded in 1639 by Rev. Adam Blakeman and 64 faithful souls, FCC Stratford has been a radiant part of the Stratford community for over 380 years.

We recognize that things have changed over the past few decades. While we have a faithful group of worshippers, enrollment has gone down in our Sunday school, youth group, choir and committees. Yet, we are blessed to have many dedicated members who work collaboratively to seek God's will and move our church forward. Our fellowship hour is packed with people sharing stories, laughing and talking about the work we do on God's behalf. While we recognize the need to adapt and change with the times, we also revere the traditions that have brought us this far. Our membership values classic liturgy, text, traditions and music. Yet, for the past three years we have conducted a contemporary service monthly which is popular and well attended. We have installed a large retracting screen that is used each Sunday to enhance the worship experience for both in-person and virtual members. In the past few years, we have increased our Christian outreach, providing our members with opportunities to serve the hungry and poor in our area and around the world.

We seek a pastor who can help us to discern God's path for us, holding on to the best parts of who we are while guiding us to discover what we can be! We need a leader who possesses the ability to recognize what is currently working, while crafting a vision for the future. We are blessed with a healthy endowment that allows us to maintain our beautiful facilities and take care of our staff while we seek to grow our membership and pledges.

Seeking a place in the future, finding joy in the present and appreciating the past. We are ready and excited for a new pastor to help us with all three!

Church pictures**What we value about living in our area.**

Stratford is a vibrant, diverse suburb located on the scenic shores of Long Island Sound. With its beaches, parks, and waterfront restaurants, it offers a high quality of life and the charm of a classic New England community mixed with a bustling small city atmosphere. Rich in history, Stratford is home to generations of families who have grown up here and continue to shape its identity. Residents treasure the beauty of the changing seasons, life by the shore, and the rich cultural diversity that defines the town today.



Over the past few decades, Stratford has undergone significant transformation. While Sikorsky Aircraft remains a major employer, other industrial pillars such as Avco Lycoming have long since closed. The town's demographic makeup has also shifted dramatically during this time and we acknowledge that our church community does not yet fully reflect Stratford's current diversity. Still, the town's spirit of inclusion and vibrancy is unmistakable—seen on summer evenings at Short Beach's "Blues on the Beach" festival, crisp fall days at Booth Memorial Park, in the energy of the "Main Street Festival" and in restaurants as diverse as its residents that dot the town.

The train station, walking distance from the church, offers a 90-minute ride to NYC. The town has easy access to I-95, the Merritt Parkway and Rt. 8. Located in Fairfield County, the Stratford area is home to strong education and health care options. Stratford is a great place to live!

Current size of membership

607

Average in person attendance

110

Does your church hold virtual worship services?

Yes

Choose platform type(s) and number for virtual worship.

Video Conferencing

On average, how many devices are logged in per service?

21

Video Hosting Platform

On average, how many views are received per service?

25

Languages used in ministry

English

Position Title

Pastor

Position Duration

Settled

Compensation Level

Full Time

Does the total support package meet conference compensation guidelines?

Yes

Link to current Conference guidelines

[Download compensation guidelines](#)

Scope of Work

Some fields reference [The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ](#).

The United Church of Christ recognizes *The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers* in the formation of ministers, in the practice of active ministry, and throughout life. For the purposes of completing a denominational Profile, ministers are asked to spend some time with the *Marks*.

The Scope of Work developed by our church using the [Call Agreement Workbook](#).

[Download scope of Work](#)

3 core competencies that we imagine could be foundational in our next minister's relationship with the church.

First:

PREACHING:

We are seeking a minister who delivers sermons that are both relatable and deeply meaningful messages that connect the timeless truths of the Bible with the realities of our daily lives. Our congregation is hungry for preaching that inspires, challenges and encourages us - sermons that not only help us grow in faith but also draw us back, week after week, eager to learn more. We long to see how Scripture speaks to our world today, and guides us in living out God's love with purpose and hope. When surveyed, the congregation responded that they seek sermons that:

1. Demonstrate relevance to our everyday lives
2. Are uplifting, affirming and inspiring.
3. Make us want to come back each Sunday.
4. Show clear understanding of Biblical text.

Second:**PASTORAL CARE:**

We seek a minister who is genuinely a "people person" - someone who can connect with people of all ages and stages of life. Whether offering comfort and companionship to an elderly member facing end-of-life realities, or sharing a silly moment with children at a cookie decorating party, or having a deep conversation with our youth about seeking God in a troubled world, we need a pastor who has genuine compassion, joy and love for all members of our congregation. We believe that the changes we seek to make, both in our church and in our hearts, can only happen when we feel trusted, cared for and loved by our pastor. Strong, authentic relationships form the foundation for spiritual growth, and we are eager to build that trust with a pastor who leads with both heart and humility.

Third:**STRATEGIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP:**

We seek a minister with a vision that helps us to see new paths forward to serve God while balancing the traditions of this historic congregation. We await that guidance both in terms of our worship practices and the way we handle the business of the church. We see the relationship between pastor and congregation as a partnership, valuing collaboration and sharing. We have begun a process of self-reflection concerning our boards and committees, seeking to make them more efficient and effective. We do not expect our new settled pastor to provide all the solutions, but rather to encourage us to continue faithfully and purposefully in our journey.

Compensation and Support

The salary basis comes from the [Call Agreement Workbook](#), equal to Cash Salary plus Value of Parsonage/ Housing Allowance. The Conference can assist in determining these amounts or provide a worksheet to be used to calculate these values.

SALARY AND BENEFITS OFFERED: SALARY BASIS: ITEM OFFERED	AMOUNT OR PERCENTAGE(If DETERMINED)	IS THIS NEGOTIABLE	PASTORAL CANDIDATE DETERMINES
Salary (Cash basis determined from Conference/ Association Guidelines)	86000	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing Allowance	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Any Experiential Difference (Related to years of experience)	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Salary Basis: 86000			
Pension/Annuity	12040	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Security and Medicare Offset	6579	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Medical/Dental Insurance	25000	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Life Insurance	1200	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability Insurance	1200	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worker's Compensation	1200	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If needed, please comment further on your church's salary and benefits for the minister.

The total package listed above is split between salary and housing. The pastor can negotiate/determine what portion is salary and what portion is housing allowance. The salary, housing allowance and benefits package should be considered an aggregate number. We will work with the pastor to determine how he or she wishes to split up these benefits. In addition, different pastors have various health care insurance needs based on the size of their family, their age, and whether their spouse works and has health benefits. We try to follow the guidelines set out by the UCC for compensation and benefits which includes vacation time, continuing education opportunities and some travel reimbursement using current IRS guidelines.

The expected living situation for our next minister.

Our next minister will receive a housing allowance and will be expected to live within a reasonable distance of the church.

If a parsonage is provided, will the church offer a home equity allowance to the pastor? (The recommended guidelines for a home equity allowance is equal to 1.5% of the average home value in the community; this is considered taxable to the minister. The Housing Equity Offset should not be calculated into the Salary Basis upon which other Benefits are determined. Churches should consult a tax advisor prior to establishing any account for an equity allowance to ensure compliance with IRS rules on nonqualified deferred compensation plans.)

No

The church does not provide a parsonage.

How our church will adopt part-time adjustments in the pastoral schedule to support a minister's bi-vocational employment.

We are seeking a full-time pastor who prioritizes their calling with us.

Additional reimbursements the next Pastor can expect to receive as part of their employment:

Conference and/or Association meeting registrations

Criminal background checks.

Peer and professional supports available for ministers in our association/conferences.

The Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ Center for Transformational Leadership offers many opportunities for learning and engagement. The Fairfield East Association also offers occasional programs and opportunities for clergy discussion and collaboration.

Who Is God Calling to Minister with Us?

The ministry goals we envision our next minister collaborating with the congregation to achieve.

Goal 1: We will find new ways to share our faith in God and love of Christ with a world in desperate need of grace and compassion. By focusing on the true purpose of church, we will grow and revitalize our congregation.

Our next minister will play a crucial role in a revitalization effort aimed at both maintaining the strong, vibrant membership we have and growing it for the future. Through inspirational messages and sharing the Good News, we want the minister to fill us with love so that it can be seen in everything we do. We hope the minister will be a catalyst of growth and revitalization.

Goal 2: We will worship God honestly and passionately, and find inspiration in worship to serve God and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Our next minister will lead worship that nourishes our members and inspires them to do God's work out in the world. This will require careful planning and prayer, listening to the Holy Spirit, understanding the needs of the congregation, and helping relate the scriptures to our everyday lives.

Goal 3: We will care for each person who enters our doors with love, compassion and respect.

Our next minister will get to know the members and friends of our church and treat them as beloved children of God. The minister, along with members of the church, will care for those in our congregational family in times of crises and joy, through hugs and words of encouragement, and will be in the best sense a PASTOR to us. The minister will encourage members to use their God-given gifts in the service of others.

Goal 4: We will carefully consider how we handle "church business" and work towards updating our structure to meet the needs of a changing world.

As we continue to examine our board and committee structure in an effort to be responsive and efficient, we hope that our next minister will provide guidance and insight to help us decipher what God's plan is for our church and how we can best achieve it.

How our vision of the minister we are now seeking will assist the congregation in making an impact beyond its walls.

Our church motto is simple: LOVE COMES FIRST.

We believe that if we use this tenant as a guide, then we will make an impact beyond our walls. God's love for us and our love for God inspires us to put love first.

Love of Neighbor compels us to serve our brothers and sisters, no matter what journey they may be on.

Love of Children compels us to provide a way for young people to feel loved and accepted as children of God.

Love of Nature compels us to glorify God's creation by acting in ways that help sustain it for future generations.

We are searching for a minister who will help us set priorities that align with the idea that LOVE COMES FIRST.

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

The minister must be proficient in both spoken and written English.

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

STRENGTHENING INTER- AND INTRA-PERSONAL ASSETS

We seek a minister of strong moral character, who respects the dignity of all God's people, and who can love and support each member of our community.

EXHIBITING A SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION AND ONGOING SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

As our spiritual leader, it is important to us that our next minister lives a life of discipleship and helps the members of our congregation to do the same.

ENGAGING SACRED STORIES AND TRADITIONS

We seek a minister who can bring life to the sacred stories and traditions in worship, making them relevant to those in attendance. We want someone who will proclaim the good news with enthusiasm, witnessing to the presence of Christ in our world and encouraging us to seek out the Holy Spirit in everything we do.

CARING FOR ALL CREATION

Our church motto is LOVE COMES FIRST. That is delineated as Love of Neighbor, Love of Children and Love of Creation. We want our next minister to demonstrate sincere care for all of these elements.

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 God is calling us to become as a congregation.

We believe that this question has ever-evolving answers. As the world continues to change rapidly, so does the congregation that God needs us to be. For many years, the purpose of this church seemed to be solely to serve its own members. We have come to understand that God's purpose for us extends beyond our walls. That does not mean we should ignore the needs of our own members, but rather to feed their needs so that they may feed others.

To the best of our understanding at this moment, God is calling us to be devoted members of a Christian community of faith where we are spiritually nourished and challenged, and to take the overwhelming love we feel from God and share it with our brothers and sisters through service.

We understand that some churches go through structural changes such as selling off their church building to focus more on social service. Some churches choose the more insular path of focusing on its own members and not providing them a vehicle to serve others. We believe that God is calling us to serve both our own members and our brothers and sisters outside of our church. We want our worship to be dynamic and engaging so it might fill our members, both in-person and online, to a place where they want to share the good news with others. We want to experience God in our Sunday worship and find the calling that the Holy Spirit has for each of us.

We want to be a model for how our town, state and nation should work. We have people of varying talents, outlooks and political leanings. Yet together, we work side-by-side to further the mission of our church and to work towards God's plan on earth. We want to show the world that LOVE COMES FIRST.

How God is calling us to reach out to address the emerging challenges and opportunities of our community and congregation.

The polarized political climate that is palpable in our country seems to be present in every aspect of life. People have taken sides. It's a sad and stifling predicament. That polarization is a learned behavior and can at times create tensions between members of the congregation. Most often, we choose to ignore the tension and refrain from engaging in difficult conversations. While that "keeps the peace" we understand that the underlying leanings are still there.

We must learn to better address differences and find commonalities that are faith based.

One example of this dichotomy is that we have recently experimented with changes to the liturgy, such as alternate wording to the Lord's Prayer. While some have found the changes to be positive or at least appreciate looking at the prayer from another point of view, many have been uncomfortable with altering traditional wording. While this conflict has not been openly discussed, the tension exists. Members who dislike the changes are hesitant to bring their concerns directly to the minister or Deacons. The challenge for our church is to find a way to discuss important issues, acknowledging differences and listening to each other to foster understanding. Even if everyone doesn't end up happy, they would at least understand the feelings of their counterpart. Our interim minister has done a good job of helping us to reflect on this need and allowed us to think about why we are resistant to change.

As far as a multi-year strategic plan, although we have a strong financial plan in place that has the church prepared for many possible outcomes, we do not currently have a comprehensive multi-year strategic plan for the entire church. We are open to a pastor who is willing to guide us in partnership to expand our financial model into other areas of our church. While not official, surviving the pandemic was our last plan. Now that we have done that, we are open to preparing a strategic plan for the future.

Congregation Reflections

We would describe our congregation's life of faith as...

At the heart of our church is the guiding principle of **"Love Comes First."** We strive to live out this motto in everything we do—through our love for our neighbors, for children, and for creation. It captures the essence of God's command for us to love and care for one another in a single, meaningful phrase.

As a covenantal church, we rely on the guidance and protection of all three parts of the Trinity.

In worship, we often describe God as a loving, benevolent, and grace-giving Father (and sometimes Mother – although we more often leave gender out of our description of God). We experience the Holy Spirit most vividly in the people we encounter—the congregation's members we see each week and those we serve in our community. The Holy Spirit moves within us, inspiring acts of service and fellowship. We see this Spirit at work in how we welcome others during fellowship time, serve with joy at Nourish Bridgeport and The Lord's Table, supply food to local families through Sterling House, pack meals for hungry children through RISE, and extend hospitality to guests at our Lenten Community Dinners. Through these actions, we strive to embody God's love in practical and life-changing ways.

Strengths or positive qualities of our congregation.

1. The People:

We are a welcoming, loving and caring congregation. New members often indicate this as the primary reason they chose to worship with us. Our fellowship time after worship is well attended each week and lasts almost as long as the service itself.

There is a positive sense of community, and members use their talents to serve both the church and community in many ways.

2. The Music:

Music plays a vital role in the life and worship practices of our church. Our music program is diverse and flexible from our Grammy-nominated organist to our professionally-trained operatic choir director, to our octogenarian harmonica player, to our faithful choir and flute soloist. Additionally, our contemporary worship band leads a powerful service monthly, with a folk-rock approach to singing God's praises.

3. Service:

Over the past few years, service to others, mostly in the form of hunger relief, have become an important part of our congregation. People are happy to serve in a variety of capacities.

4. Welcoming All:

In spite of a range of political leanings among our members, we are united in our welcome of ALL people. We are an Open and Affirming Congregation.

A growing edge for our congregation and what we plan to strengthen as a congregation

We are not alone in wanting for our membership to grow. We believe we have a wonderful church and want to have more people experience it. In our survey and in-person meetings with members and friends of our church, we heard about a true love for this church by nearly everyone involved. However, as a congregation we are hesitant to speak of our love for God and this church to others. We want more people to come....but we are just hopeful that they will show up. Our survey indicated a real concern for the lack of young people and young families. We believe faithfully serving God is our highest priority. But we also believe we must find ways to make our church more visible in the community and to create a positive buzz in Stratford that will make people want to come through the doors. We hope that as a new pastor becomes part of our family, our enthusiasm for FCC Stratford will grow to the point that people we know without a church home will be compelled and inspired to join!

What worship is like when our congregation gathers.

Sunday worship is the highlight of our church week. Our congregation eagerly gathers each Sunday, and the joy of fellowship is palpable. Sometimes, the excitement of reconnecting with one another means it takes a little time to settle into worship. To help focus the congregation, a few years ago we introduced the "chiming of the bells," which occurs when the minister enters the chancel for a moment of prayer at the cross. This serves as a gentle signal that worship is beginning and helps us transition into a time of reflection and devotion. Communion is served by passing plates on the first Sunday of each month. On most Sundays, we use traditional liturgy and sing hymns from The Chalice Hymnal. On the fourth Sunday of each month, we celebrate worship in a contemporary style with a folk rock band. We also have numerous special services each year which feature our children leading worship or our choir sharing a cantata, and a Fat Sunday service featuring a New Orleans style brass quintet. We pass the peace, engage our children in a children's message and share joys and concerns before the pastoral prayer. We also welcome many members who join us in via live stream.

The educational program/faith formation vision of our church.

As with many churches, our Sunday School has been declining in enrollment over the past decade. Before the pandemic, however, we had steady attendance and our youth group was active. During those years, confirmands would sometimes serve as readers, our youth and children would each lead a service each year, and our young people felt a connection to the church. Post-pandemic, as many churches have, we have struggled to see young families and young people return. We have a paid Children and Youth Coordinator who is experimenting with new ways to attract young families. Our church has a history of providing young people a chance to be in leadership positions. In fact, one of our Search Committee members is in high school and one of our alternates is in college.

Children are welcomed each Sunday and enthusiastically participate in children's message time. Bible studies for adults have been inconsistent over the past decade. Often, they will be led by a member who is excited about a particular book or topic.

Recent topics/books include:

- "When We Walk By" - a joint study on homelessness with the Stratford Public Library
- "The Dangerous Act of Worship" - led by our interim minister

How our congregation is organized for ministry and mission.

Our current organizational structure is:

CHURCH COUNCIL - Oversees all boards and committees of the church.

TRUSTEES - Handles all financial and personnel decisions of the church.

DEACONS - Handles the spiritual and worship activities of the church.

BENEVOLENCE - Handles the financial contributions we make to worthy organizations around the world.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION - Oversees the Sunday School and youth programs.

STEWARDSHIP - Conducts the annual pledge campaign drive.

NOMINATING - Seeks out volunteers to serve on the boards and committees.

MUSIC - Oversees the traditional music program including worship music and concerts.

SOCIAL JUSTICE TEAM - Helps the congregation to be aware of and understand social justice issues.

CHANCEL COMMITTEE - Makes sure the church is appropriately decorated for each of the church seasons.

PASTORAL RELATIONS - Supports the minister with challenges within our congregation.



Too many of our members serve on multiple committees. It has become challenging to fill the open spots on committees, although they are all currently filled. These are among the reasons that we are examining the effectiveness and efficiency of our current administrative structure.

When it comes to decision-making, 10 hours are spent in meetings per month.

Is the pastor expected to attend all church meetings?

No

In times when action had to be taken quickly, for example when a crisis or disaster occurred. These were the key leaders in taking this action and this was accomplished by...

The last crisis that occurred was the pandemic. With the help of the heads of various committees along with several members who work in IT, we were able to quickly transition to offer online access to worship and meetings. We provided music, prayer services and continued meetings during this time. The benefits of the technological upgrades are still felt today by our faithful friends who cannot physically come to church on Sunday.

Generally, when important decisions must be made quickly, a group consisting of the chair of the Council, the head of The Trustees, the Senior Deacons and the minister will discuss options. Others who may have valuable insight (such as the facilities director or technology team) will be consulted, and decisions will be made. These are communicated to the congregation by the church secretary.

The Chair of Trustees is currently working with town officials to put protocols in place to appropriately handle emergency situations. We have just approved a new safe church policy that aligns with the UCC requirements. We have also installed a new video and electronic security system in accordance with suggestions by the Stratford Police Department.

A copy of an organization structure, by laws and/or annual report to further explain the patterns of the church's activity and governance

[FCC Stratford Church Constitution 20.pdf](#)

11-Year Report

Download a copy of the 11-Year Report developed with the help of our conference staff and UCC Data Hub.

[Download 11-Year Report](#)

Congregation Demographics

Describe those who participate in your church.

DEMOGRAPHIC	NUMBER
NUMBER OF ACTIVE MEMBERS:	200
NUMBER OF ACTIVE NON-MEMBERS:	25
TOTAL OF CHURCH PARTICIPANTS (SUM OF THE NUMBERS ABOVE):	225

ARE THESE NUMBERS ESTIMATES?

Yes

Percentage of total participants who have been in the church:

TIME	PERCENTAGE
MORE THAN 10 YEARS:	75%
LESS THAN 10, MORE THAN 5 YEARS:	15%
LESS THAN 5 YEARS:	10%

ARE THESE NUMBERS ESTIMATES?

No

Number of total participants by age:

AGE	NUMBER
0-11	10
12-17	7
18-24	5
25-34	10
35-44	15
45-54	20
55-64	20
65-74	40
75+	40

ARE THESE NUMBERS ESTIMATES?

Yes

Percentage of adults in various household types:

HOUSEHOLD TYPE	PERCENTAGE
SINGLE ADULTS UNDER 35:	10%
HOUSEHOLDS WITH MINORS:	20%
SINGLE ADULTS AGE 35-65:	10%
JOINT HOUSEHOLDS WITH NO MINORS:	40%
SINGLE ADULTS OVER 65:	20%

ARE THESE NUMBERS ESTIMATES?

Yes

Education level of adult participants by percentage:

EDUCATION LEVEL	PERCENTAGE
HIGH SCHOOL:	35%
COLLEGE:	40%
GRADUATE SCHOOL:	25%
SPECIALTY TRAINING:	0%
OTHER EDUCATION LEVEL:	0%

ARE THESE NUMBERS ESTIMATES?

Yes

Percentage of adults in various employment types:

EMPLOYMENT TYPE	PERCENTAGE
ADULTS WHO ARE EMPLOYED:	50%
ADULTS WHO ARE RETIRED:	40%
ADULTS WHO ARE NOT FULLY EMPLOYED:	10%

ARE THESE NUMBERS ESTIMATES?

Yes

The range of occupations of working adults in the congregation:

Our church's members work in a great variety of fields. While we have a large group of members who have retired from the work force, we have members who work in education, medicine, office support, finance, real estate, banking and business. We have folks who work in service, repair, construction and technology. There is not one overwhelming field that occupies a majority of our members.

The mix of ethnic heritages in our congregation, and the overall racial make-up.

The vast majority of our members are white and of European heritage. There are also members who are people of color, Latinae and those of mixed heritage. However, we recognize as a congregation that we do not reflect the community in which our house of worship sits. We would like our future congregation to more appropriately reflect the wonderful diversity of God's children.

What diversity means in our context?

We know that "thou shalt not steal" is one of the commandments, but we are going to "steal" the suggestion provided in the question.

We are a 98% white congregation that is class-diverse, and made up of about 60% former Catholics, coming from a Western European descended heritage. Our greatest diversity comes from the variety of socio-economic backgrounds from which we come, as well as our political leanings and outside interests.

With great honesty, "diversity" would not be a word we would use to describe our membership at present.

Has our congregation recently had a conversation about welcoming diversity, or do we plan to hold one on the near future

No

Participation and Staffing

Participation and Planning of Gatherings

WAYS OF CHURCH GATHERING	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PEOPLE INVOLVED IN ATTENDANCE	WHO PLANS EACH OF THE LISTED GATHERINGS
Children's Groups or Classes	5	Director of Youth
Christmas Eve and Easter Worship	200	Minister and Deacons
Church-wide Meals	60	Women's Service League
Choirs and Music Groups	25	Choir Director
Church-based Bible Study	15	Member
Communion (served how often?)	110	Communion is shared the first Sunday of the month
Community Meals	500	Member and team
Confirmation (number confirmed last year)	7	Minister
Funerals (number last year)	8	Minister
Weddings (number last year)	1	Minister
Worship (digital / online / livestream)	25	Director of Technology
Youth Groups or Classes	3	Children and Youth Director

Worship Times

WORSHIP (TIME SLOT):	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PEOPLE INVOLVED IN ATTENDANCE	WHO PLANS EACH OF THE LISTED GATHERINGS
10:00 am	110	Minister with help from Deacons and Tech Team

Additional comments:

Three Sundays per month, our worship can be described as traditional with the organ accompanying selections from the hymnal and a traditional liturgy. One Sunday per month, we hold a contemporary service led by a folk-rock worship band. It has been very well attended over the past three years. We are open to exploring how contemporary elements can help engage an evolving congregation and complement the traditional form of worship. Worship begins at 10am (9:30 in summer). We also have two Christmas Eve services and an evening Maundy Thursday service.

List of all members or regular participants in our congregation who are ordained or commissioned ministers, or who hold Lay Ministerial Standing. Additionally the names of Members in Discernment in our congregation.

NAME	THREE-WAY OR FOUR-WAY COVENANT	MINISTRY SETTING	TYPE OF MINISTRY ROLE	RETIRED
Member 1	3	None	No official role	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member 2	none	None	No official role	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member 3	none	None	No official role	<input type="checkbox"/>

Previous pastors or retired ministers who currently hold membership in the church and their role(s) in the life of the congregation:

Member 1 is a retired minister who attends services on occasion.

Member 2 is a licensed UCC minister. He occasionally serves as a supply preacher when our minister is away. He is also on the Pastoral Search Committee. He is retired from Sikorsky Aircraft and found a second calling in the ministry.

Member 3 is an ordained Southern Baptist minister. He currently serves as lead Chaplain for Hospice in our area. He is on the Diaconate.

List of all current staff:

STAFF POSITION	HEAD OF STAFF	COMPENSATION	SUPERVISED BY	LENGTH OF TENURE FOR CURRENT PERSON IN THIS POSITION
Interim Minister	Minister	full	Trustees	1 Year
Administrative Asst	Minister	full	Trustees	15 Years
Children/Youth Director	Minister	part	Trustees	2 Years
Social Justice Coordinator	Minister	part	Trustees	3 Years
Choir Director/Media Specialist	Minister	part	Trustees	5 Years
Financial Secretary	Minister	part	Trustees	20 Years
Ogranist	Minister	part	Trustees	22 Years
Technology Coordinator	Minister	part	Trustees	5 Years

Reflection: What this information reflect about our congregation's overall ministry:

We rely on strong lay leadership to supplement the work done by our full-time minister. We are aware that our church demographics sadly do not match those of the community in which our church sits. We believe work needs to be done in reaching out to members of this community. While it is clear we do some things very well, in other ways we are treading water - waiting for an influx of new members who will allow our ministry to more fully serve God's purpose for us. We are willing to use gifts from our endowment to sustain our programming, but understand that is not a forever answer.

Church Finances

Current Annual Income

SOURCE	AMOUNT
Annual Offerings and Pledged Giving	247060
Endowment Draw (beyond what is permitted by spending policy, "drawing down the principal")	250000
Fundraising Events	5000
Rentals of Church Building	12500
Benevolence	40375
Total	554935

Current annual expenses (dollars budgeted for most recent fiscal year):

440542

Attach most recent church budget, spending plan, operating statement, or annual treasurer's report as shared publicly with the congregation, or – if your church does not pass an annual budget–list current budgeted expenses here.

[Download church budget](#)

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

34

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

No

Is your church 5-for-5, i.e. does it include each of the following contributions during the church year? (indicate those included during the most recent fiscal year)

Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM – Basic Support)
One Great Hour of Sharing
Neighbors in Need

In what way is OCWM (Basic Support) gathered?

Our Board of Benevolence provides \$4000 of support for SNEC-OCWM and \$4000 of support for the National-OCWM. The Trustees also provide another \$2000 per year to OCWM as part of the operating expenses of the church. The congregation also supports One Great Hour of Sharing and Neighbors in Need.

If calculated as a percentage of operating budget, this is the percentage?

3

Total amount of loan debt:

No response

Reason for debt:

No response

Are capital and other payments current?

Yes

Capital Campaigns

Description of any building programs projected or underway.

There are currently no capital campaigns underway. We are considering a capital campaign to replace the slate roof.

Pictures

Description of any capital campaigns in the last ten years:

YEAR(S)	PURPOSE	GOAL	RESULT	IMPACT
0		0	0	
0		0	0	

Description of any capital campaigns underway or anticipated:

YEAR(S)	PURPOSE	GOAL	RESULT	IMPACT
0		0	0	
0		0	0	

Description the prominent mission component(s) involved in the most recent (or current) capital campaign.

We have not had a capital campaign in over 20 years.

Does your church have an endowment?

Yes

What is the market value of the assets?

3500000

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

We do quarterly transfers.



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

About the same.

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

Regular withdrawals are taken to support financials needs; some larger capital expenses are covered by the endowments infrequently.

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

We hope indefinitely.

Please comment on the above calculations or estimates:

N/A

Other Assets

We own a set of historic communion silver. That silver is on loan to the Yale University Art Gallery. The silver is valued at \$1,600,000 per insurance.

Reserves (savings):

No response

Investments (other than endowment):

No response

Does the church have a parsonage?

No

Description of all buildings owned by the church:

The church owns the building where we worship.

Description of non-owned buildings or space used or rented by the church:

We do not currently rent or use any space outside of our church.

Accessibility features of our building(s):

Exterior access such as ramps for wheelchair users or people requiring other mobility assistance
Accessible parking spaces
Interior access to different floors for wheelchair users or others with mobility aids (elevator, chair lift, ramps)
Access to child care spaces for wheelchair users and people with other mobility aids

Large print bulletins
Wheelchair access in bathrooms
Handrails on all stairs
Sound system in sanctuary and other meeting places (fellowship hall, large meeting rooms, etc.)

Which spaces are accessible to wheelchairs:

Most of the church is accessible to wheelchairs. This includes the sanctuary (but not the pulpit, choir lofts or balcony), restrooms in both the narthex and bottom floor, the lower hall, the upper hall, the church office including the pastor's parlor (but not the minister's office), and the church school rooms. The Trustees are currently undertaking a review to determine what other ways we can make our church accessible to all.

Policies regarding financial practices of the church:

We have a Financial Controls Policy in place. We are happy to provide this to serious candidates. All financial transactions require at least two officers of the church.

Reflection: After reviewing the church's finances and assets described above, what this information reflects about our congregation's mission and ministry:

While the church is blessed with a healthy endowment, we have become accustomed to relying on those resources for church operations and capital expenses. Since our pledges have been relatively static for a couple of decades, the endowment keeps us operational. We continue to work on strategies to improve giving while always looking at ways to streamline expenses.

Historical Information

Significant happenings in the history of our church that have shaped the identity of our congregation.

1. The church voted to become an Open and Affirming Church in 2006.

This process allowed us to examine what it truly means to love all God's children. With God's help, we continue to learn what it means to be a welcoming congregation.

2. Historical Significance.

More than 25 churches have been formed from our roots. This church was at the epicenter of the founding of Stratford, the abolitionist and women's movements, and had a major influence on the social and foundational issues of the United States.

3. The pandemic.

As with every church, the pandemic forced us to find new ways to reach people, introducing technology as a platform for worship and meetings.

Most Important Event In 10 Years: Retirement of our minister of 20 years. This event has allowed us to look at who we are and who God wants us to be. We are beginning to understand the need for change, but we are confronted with the reality that change is hard!

A specific change our church has managed in the recent past.

In 2006, our church voted to become Open and Affirming. We are a congregation that is made up of people from all sides of the political spectrum. Many who knew our church believed it was a risky undertaking. We began the process with multiple informational meetings. We agreed (and stuck to) the idea that everyone would be listened to and not judged. This created an atmosphere of honesty and openness. People spoke passionately on both sides of the resolution. We took a great deal of time patiently talking through what it meant to be Open and Affirming, prayerfully consulted the scriptures, and eventually voted overwhelmingly in favor of embracing the designation. While we lost about 5 families/individuals after the vote, we have welcomed many more people who are happy to be in a community that extends its welcome to all God's children. Still, not all of our members are comfortable with being loud and proud about our O&A status. God is still speaking to us about this.

Every church has conflict, some minor, some larger. "Where two or three are gathered, there will be disagreement....". These are our congregation's values and practices when it comes to conflict.

Conflict is not something our church is terribly comfortable with so we generally avoid it whenever possible. Our love for each other, in spite of sometimes differing opinions, overrules any desire to clash. The result is that we often don't discuss critically important things for fear of offending someone. We must learn to be comfortable having courageous conversations, centered in love, that will allow us to grow as a community of faith. We must learn to trust that church is a safe place to discuss, share, disagree and find common ground.

The most recent major conflict through which our church has navigated.

The last truly open "conflict" came through our Open and Affirming process. Even then, by respecting each person's views, allowing all to speak candidly without judgement, and seeking the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us, we managed to overwhelmingly approve the call to be Open and Affirming. While we lost a very few families, most of them had greater disagreements with the church and denomination than just O&A.

Overall, our congregation likes each other and functions well together. However, we acknowledge that we must find ways to share differing opinions in a respectful and mature way.



Ministerial History:

Name: Rev. Ed Rawls

Years of service: 20

UCC Standing

Name: Rev. Meg Williams

Years of service: 6

UCC Standing

Name: Rev. Tom Walter (Interim)

Years of service: 2

UCC Standing

Name: Rev. John Clarke

Years of service: 10

UCC Standing

What our church has learned about itself and its relationship with people who provided ministerial leadership.

Our last two settled senior pastors have served for twenty and ten years. This tells us that we are able to establish strong and lasting relationships with our ministers. We have learned that it is a loving relationship that we value and desire with a minister. In both of those cases, we were able to welcome a new person in without clinging to the one who left. We believe that indicates a healthy understanding of the pastor/congregation relationship. We consider ourselves to be partners with the minister, even while we seek the minister's guidance and leadership.

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

No

Has your church been involved in a Situational Support Consultation?

No

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

No

Has a previous minister been a contributor to conflict following their tenure as pastor?

No

Community Vision

How the relationships and activities of our congregation extend outward in service and advocacy.

As mentioned before, our appreciation of the need to serve has increased over the past five years. Here are some of the activities we have been involved in:

- Nourish Bridgeport: *Serves meals to those in need in our neighboring city of Bridgeport. We provide kitchen staff and volunteers.*
- The Lord's Kitchen: *Serves monthly meals to those in need in our local community. We provide kitchen staff and volunteers.*
- Sterling House Food Pantry: *We bring food donations to fill the pantry once per month.*
- Rise Against Hunger: *Our church volunteers to package meals for children around the world. So far this year, we have packaged 20,000 meals.*
- Ghana: *Our church continues to work with a church in Ghana to support a local community. We helped build a health center and dormitory for a school for girls in Ghana. In 2024, a delegation of our church went to the town where the school is housed in order to more accurately describe the impact of our efforts to our congregation.*

Our congregation's participation in meetings, relationships and activities connecting the wider United Church of Christ.

Church members have served as delegates to the Fairfield East Association at various points over the last many years. Other members have attended or served as delegates at the National Synod. Our current relationship to the UCC can be described as cordial but not very active. We support the UCC financially and in spirit. Our church has made major contributions to Silver Lake Conference Center over the years, building the Hubbell Chapel and the Nurse's Station. We appreciate our relationship to the UCC, but we also enjoy a strong sense of independence. There are some members who distrust outside influence on our church from the UCC, whether that influence is perceived or real.

How our church engages with the community organizing movements in our community.

The Social Justice Team provides awareness of movements in our community along with opportunities to get involved in those activities. As our congregation is a mixture of conservatives, progressives, moderates and non-political people, we tend to not be involved in movements. Rather, we work together on service projects that help those in need.

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, through [Just World Covenants](#) or affiliations with other groups. Check any of the following partnerships which your congregation has formally adopted, or movements which otherwise apply to your congregation.

Open and Affirming (ONA).

What the above statement(s) mean(s) to our community. How our congregation plans to work toward the above statements of witness in the future.

We are an Open and Affirming Congregation. We proudly welcome all "no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey". We are still working to understand how to best live that ideal. We believe it is an ongoing process of reflection and compassion. One of our young members who also happens to be part of the LGBTQ+ community speaks of how they had almost given up on church, having been shunned by their childhood church because of who they were. They found a home at FCC Stratford. This is a powerful witness to the great choice we made to become O&A.

Our Social Justice Team has introduced us to the WISE program. Recently, we had Mental Health Awareness Sunday and one of our amazing young people delivered a very powerful sermon about their own journey with neurodiversity. We have also hosted informational seminars on the subject. We are fledgling in our work on WISE, but dedicated to meeting all people where they are and embracing the total person.

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

Our church has traditionally been active in the Stratford Clergy Association. Some of the activities we join with other churches on include:

- Annual Sunrise Easter Service at Booth Memorial Park.
- Annual Beach Service: *Joint worship with another local UCC Church at Short Beach.*
- Baptist-Congregational Unity: *We have entered into relationship with a local Baptist church with a predominantly Black membership. We take turns hosting worship and lunch. The spirit at the services has been enthusiastically positive. We plan to continue this partnership in the future.*
- Annual MLK Service: *An ecumenical service which rotates to different churches each year. Our church has hosted and attended these services for the past decade.*
- The Bridge: *Our youth have joined with other churches to collect and distribute winter clothing to those in need under a bridge in Bridgeport.*
- The Lord's Kitchen: *We work with a local Catholic church to provide hot meals for those in need.*

How our mission statement compares to the actual time spent engaging in different activities.

While our congregation has a mission statement posted in our constitution, if you asked our members what our mission statement was, we believe most would say LOVE COMES FIRST. Without being dismissive, we believe that everything we do has that at the heart of it. Therefore, our time engaged in all the activities mentioned in this profile is time spent on that mission.

The scope of work assigned to our pastor(s). How their community ministry and their ministry in and on behalf of the wider church accounted for in the congregation's expectations on their time.

One of the expectations for our next minister is that they will have some presence in the community. However, as each person brings different gifts and abilities, we prefer not to strictly define what that means. Rather, we want to encourage our new pastor to use their gifts to bring Glory to God bravely and boldly in the community. In the past, our ministers have joined community task forces, served ashes on Ash Wednesday at the local train station, and sat on the boards of community centers. We intend to work with our new pastor to encourage them to be present in the community based on their goals and strengths. We will also support the new minister in serving their needs to be as active as they wish in the wider church ministry, provided they are also meeting the needs of Stratford Congregational.

The ARDA or MissionInsite Reflection

ARDA/MI File

No response

From looking at our congregation's The ARDA or MissionInsite report, these trends and opportunities are what stood out to us.

The ARDA report about Stratford confirmed what we thought. Stratford is a diverse and historic community. The racial and ethnic makeup of the town is not reflected in our church. We would like to see that change.

Beyond finding ways to extend our welcome to the community, we see opportunities in terms of the fact that 13% of households are below the poverty line. We need to find more ways to help these families to survive and thrive. We were surprised that 22.1% of the Stratford population is Hispanic. There may be opportunities to reach or serve members of that community as well.

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

As mentioned previously, our church's demographics do not match the demographics of the community around us. We recognize this as a deficiency. We are of course open to everyone who enters our doors and we try to provide an extravagant welcome to all. But while our demographics have diversified slightly over the past decade, our membership does not look like our community. We believe that our next minister needs to help us find ways to reach out to our community in ways that will encourage the people who live in Stratford to check us out.

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

The demographics of the Stratford community are shaping the way we choose to serve others. Currently, most of our service projects are hunger based. We see that as a pressing need in both the Greater Bridgeport area and the global community.

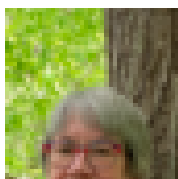
What we hear when we talk to community leaders and ask them what our church is known for.

We are most known for our historical significance and contributions to the community. Community leaders also say we are helpful and welcoming. Our church is home to one of the longest continually active Boy Scout Troops in the country (go Troop 71!) . We open our doors to the Sterling House Community Center, a local chapter of AA for both men and women, and to The New Apostolic Church who meets in our lower hall each Sunday. Folks in town also know us for our Lenten dinners that serve hundreds in the community and for our annual Tag Sale.

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

New people have a variety of reasons they first stepped in the doors of our church. Some have indicated the website, or our commitment to various mission projects or our Open and Affirming status, while others indicate it was more random. Those who join often say it was the warm welcome they received that made them return. There is a concerted effort to get to know our new members and to try to get them involved in some aspect of our church. Inviting them to usher, serve on a committee or just to come upstairs for fellowship and coffee are important to getting and keeping new members.

References



☑ Margaret Williams

Completed: Tuesday, Jun 3, 2025

I served as Associate Pastor for 7 years and retired as Co-Pastor in 2022. I had lived in the neighborhood for 2 decades and knew the church well.

Email Address: megwillia@gmail.com

Business: 907-830-4349

Mobile Phone: (203) 993-5252

Reference Response

A welcoming congregation, these folks make a real effort to reach out to visitors and keep track of newer folks to help them become part of the faith community. They are aware of the need for change in these times, but tradition is very important to them. A patriotic group, they are very proud of the church's historic role in the town.

Music plays a strong role in the life of the church. Long-term music directors have each brought their own strengths. From Oratorio concerts to jazz services to a contemporary ensemble, music has enriched the lives of the listeners, singers, and players, and has been a strong mode of outreach.

Social justice is another strength. After the need to address racial and general social justice came to the forefront in 2020, folks put renewed energy into acting for the betterment of the community.

☑ John Clarke

Completed: Sunday, May 25, 2025

Hello, my name is John Clarke, and I am a former pastor of the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ in Stratford, Connecticut.



Personal: (203) 686-0084

Personal: (203) 686-0084

Reference Response

First Congregational Church of Stratford is a great example of New England independence making for a church looking to the future while holding on with love to the past. I had the opportunity earlier this year to return and lead worship. I discovered to my joy a congregation filled with people who knew me and many who did not. It was the many who did not know me that spoke of the church's ability to grow and change in the midst of the wish to stay grounded and steady in a changing world. The church has had very stable pastoral leadership for the past twenty years and that stability shows in the different people and varied styles of worship shared within the worshipping community. First Church is a worshipping community that will do its best to reflect the love of Jesus Christ as it is manifested within themselves and spreading out into the wider community, they call home.

■ Amory Merriman

Contacted: 3 days ago

Primary Email Address: amorynan@gmail.com

Personal Cell: 7243228220

Reference Response

No response

Closing Prayer

Gracious and Loving God,

Help us to be faithful servants and disciples of our savior, teacher and friend, Jesus Christ. We ask You to send us a pastor to shepherd us from an historic past into a bright and relevant future. Send us one who will come with open arms, ready to embrace and be embraced; one who will guide us to personal understanding of your Holy Scriptures and help us to discern your will for our church. Help us to always listen to your still small voice gently guiding us to find the person ready to join us on our LOVE COMES FIRST journey.

In Christ's Name we pray,

Amen.

Statement of Consent

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

For example, church council or consistory, transition team, etc.

The Settled Pastoral Search Committee was the primary author of this Local Church Profile. However, it was done with the help of many organizations and individuals in the church including The Board of Trustees, Deacons, Church Secretary and Financial Secretary. The survey we conducted and the in-person meetings we had with our congregational family also heavily influenced the work the committee did on the Profile.

2. Additional comments for interpreting the profile:

In all honesty, we feel like we were a bit repetitive in some of our answers. We felt it was better to answer honestly (even if repetitive) to share an accurate picture of our current position, along with our hopes and dreams for the future. The percentages offered are estimates based on our knowledge of our church members. Again, we were cautious about allowing the surveys to be anonymous and did not wish to frighten people from filling out the surveys or participate in the in-person gatherings. We hope you understand that they are good faith estimates.

Oh....and WE LOVE THIS CHURCH!!!