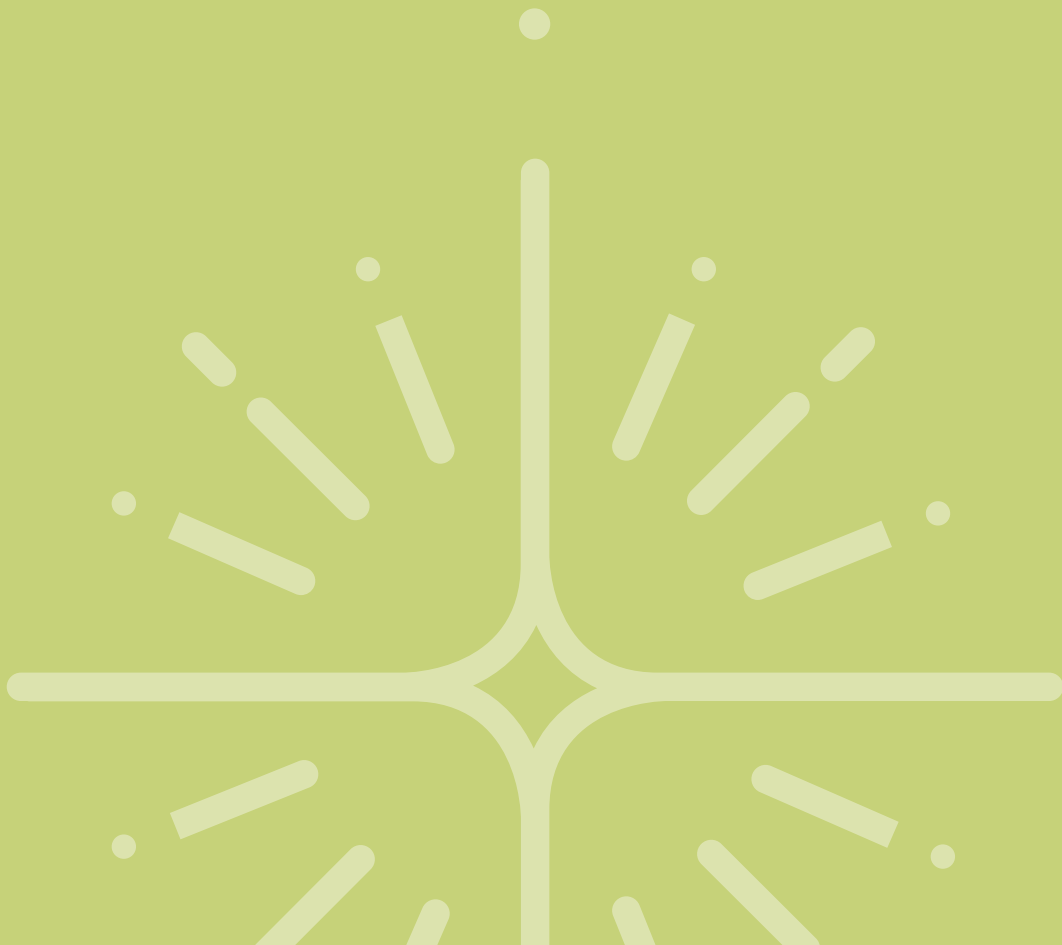




MORNINGSIDE HILLS

United Church of Christ

Church Profile



Position Posting: Morningside Hills United Church of Christ

SEEKS A FULL-TIME SENIOR PASTOR

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Preferred Start Date: September 1

Morningside Hills UCC

(Previously Edina Morningside Congregational UCC and Linden Hills UCC congregations)

4201 Morningside Road

Edina, MN 55416

morningsidehills.org

Contact: Rev. Cindy Mueller

Minister for Congregations in Transition

Minnesota Conference UCC

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Our mission: Morningside Hills UCC is a loving community where people renew their spirits, grow in faith, and act for justice.

Our vision: Morningside Hills UCC envisions a kinder and more just world where people know and show the love of God.

SUMMARY MINISTRY DESCRIPTION

This full-time, settled position follows a successful eight-year pastorate and an interim period. The compensation and housing allowance follows conference guidelines based on experience. Health and dental benefits are provided; these will be negotiated.

CORE COMPETENCIES

- 1 Insightful, loving worship leader
- 2 Pastor with a heart for faithful service
- 3 Empathetic minister with diplomacy skills
- 4 Competent administrator and organized minister

See descriptions of these competencies on page 5.

MAJOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Worship: Prepare and lead creative, spiritually rich, and musical worship services.

Faith formation: Help deepen members' faith via prayer, worship, Bible study, and more.

Congregational care and growth: Provide pastoral care and grow congregation.

Community care: Help enable community engagement and new directions in ministry.

Administration: Supervise staff and take care of administration in a timely manner.

See job description on page 19.

Welcome

We know who we are at Morningside Hills. To begin:

- We're a historic United Church of Christ congregation in Edina, Minnesota.
- We're two newly united UCC congregations.
- We're a congregation that regularly makes music, theater, art, and fun.
- We're a progressive congregation that believes God is still speaking.
- We're a welcoming congregation, aiming to offer a radical hospitality.
- We're an open-and-affirming congregation, welcoming people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.
- Most importantly, we're a loving congregation that follows Jesus and offers care to others—in our church, our community, our nation, and our world.

And we're so much more.

In 2024 Morningside Hills United Church of Christ adopted a new mission: We're a loving community where people **renew their spirits, grow in faith, and act for justice.**

We serve the communities of Edina, St. Louis Park, southwest Minneapolis, nearby suburbs, and people everywhere through our online and in-person ministries. Our faith is over 2,000 years old. Our contemporary practices are compassionate and focused on community. We envision **a kinder, more just** world where people **know and show the love of God.**

LIKE TO LEARN MORE?

- Morningside Hills UCC, a newly merged congregation in 2023, began as two historic churches — Linden Hills UCC, founded in 1896, and Edina Morningside UCC, founded in 1902.
- Our location is in the heart of a historic neighborhood called Morningside.
- Our beautiful building is over 100 years old and in need of some repairs.
- Yet we look ahead, for example, voting to install a large solar panel project in 2026.
- We're an open-and-affirming congregation — in fact, our church was among the first in Minnesota to legally marry a same-sex couple in August 2013, the first month such marriages were legal.
- We welcome the chance to worship together in a variety of ways — every winter, for example, we hold monthly Taizé services on Sunday nights.
- We've created this church profile so that you'll get to know MHUCC and our history, our strong points and our challenges. If, after reading, you believe you'd make a great fit for our congregation and we'd suit you too, please apply.



Four MHUCC Snapshots

MHUCC is a warm and loving community that strives to follow Jesus' example and teachings in our church, our community, our nation, and our world; an open-and-affirming congregation whose previous staff members have included full-time pastors, interim pastors, and a music director who've belonged to the LGBTQ+ community; and a flock that desires to learn about its faith in myriad ways via worship, Sunday school, Bible studies, book club selections and discussions, youth group, Front Porch Fridays (field trips for those ages 55 and up), and more.

Visitors and new members are drawn to MHUCC for many reasons, among them, our historic building (complete with an inviting garden, colorful bike rack, and a Little Free Library), myriad opportunities to volunteer at church and in the community (often highlighted during community announcements), our worship music (choir, bell choir, soloists, and contemporary music group), insightful sermons, our welcoming post-worship coffee hours, weekly Sunday school for kids, friendly and welcoming members and more. When asked, one active new member said she was looking for a "fun and funky church" and found it in Morningside Hills.

More than a third of our 150+ members attend Sunday worship in person, and a few more attend online. In addition to Sunday services (communion is held once a month) and children's Sunday school, we offer a number of church-related activities, including:

- Weekly Bible study led by our minister with approx. 15 attendees
- Weekly Chancel Choir rehearsal led by our music director with approx. 12 members
- Weekly Bell Choir rehearsal led by our music director with approx. 12 members
- Periodic Mass Chaos (contemporary music group) rehearsals led by our music director with approx. four members
- Periodic youth gatherings led by our faith formation director
- A 20-member active prayer chain, managed by congregants
- Periodic book studies, often led by congregation members
- Annual baked potato lunch and meatloaf lunch (Women's Fellowship)
- Annual cookie sales week prior to Easter and Christmas (Women's Fellowship)
- Morningside Theatre Company, with approx. 300 (mostly area youth) participants
- Game nights and chili cookoffs

We live out our faith as members. Our congregation continues to engage and grow in its work toward a kinder, more loving, and more equal world. Our expression of service, a central tenant of our identity, continues to develop as needs and capacity change. We have members who:

- provide rides to church, Bible studies, and choir practice
- bake cookies to raise funds for special ministries
- send Valentine gifts to youth away at college and the military
- lead book studies on faith, equity and more
- host speakers on many topics, including environmental justice and Islam
- lead an Alzheimer's support group
- grow, harvest and donate our garden's vegetables to VEAP, a food pantry
- donate food, diapers, hats, mittens, and more
- regularly deliver Meals on Wheels
- serve homelessness-focused nonprofits Simpson Housing and Beacon
- visit legislators at the Minnesota State Capitol on behalf of ISAIAH
- support and/or visit Mukusu School in Kenya
- provide funds during special offerings to nonprofits
- host a Music That Makes Community event
- and much more

Who's God Calling to Minister with Us?

MHUCC's next minister will collaborate with us to inspire members and visitors:

- To follow Jesus' commandment in the church and in the wider world: "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34 NRSV).
- To support members and visitors of all ages and backgrounds as they grow in faith via worship, Bible studies, educational programs, and more.
- To apply learnings and lessons from insightful, engaging and well-researched sermons to their everyday lives.
- To foster communication efforts within our church community to ensure greater understanding among members and between groups.
- To do good and share with others "for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (Hebrews 13:16 NRSV)" — helping our church focus our justice efforts and leveraging our limited resources to make the greatest impact.
- To grow our congregation's capacity to live into discomfort in the world during these challenging times (and among ourselves) — "for God didn't give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7 NRSV).

- To increase our church's draw in the neighborhood and local area by not only inviting community organizations to meet in and use our facilities, but also by welcoming them to partake of unique programming, special speakers, and arts events, including those offered by Morningside Theatre Company and Morningside After Dark (see photos, this page).

SCOPE OF WORK

- prepare and lead Sunday worship, including studying scripture, crafting liturgy and the bulletin, preparing the sermon, guiding and sometimes finding lay liturgists, planning music in coordination with musical staff or volunteers, preaching, offering of prayers, etc.
- lead faith formation and vitality through praying, offering Bible study, serving, identifying helpful resources and opportunities, and helping lay persons take advantage of them
- develop leaders by working with people in the church to create ministry and programs
- provide pastoral care in collaboration with other ordained members
- offer community engagement and lead the way for the church to be an ambassador of God's love



Who's God Calling to Minister with Us? (cont'd)

- officiate weddings and funerals for participants in the worshipping community
- offer strategic planning for current and new directions in ministry, in conjunction with Vision Council
- attend meetings and provide leadership as needed to church programs, in collaboration with lay leadership and staff
- participate in wider church activities, such as conference meetings
- take care of administration responsibilities (unless delegated), such as email, website, church supply purchasing, etc.
- provide faithful financial development and stewardship
- supervise staff, including administrator and preschool staff, and coordinate with other outreach and ministries, such as Morningside Theatre Company and Morningside After Dark
- be available to wider community for funerals, weddings, special worship programs, and as a representative of the church to local organizations

- provide counseling, listening, and referrals
- study and pray to increase faith and to improve skills so as to lead, teach, and preach better
- energize and deepen spiritual connections and faith understandings of others in all they do
- attend the annual conference meeting

FOUR CORE COMPETENCIES

We expect four core competencies will be foundational in our next minister's relationship with Morningside Hills. They are as follows:

- 1 An insightful, loving worship leader.** MHUCC's services are warm and welcoming with lots of members participating via sharing weekly announcements, reading scripture, performing music, offering joys and concerns during the community prayer, and looking for new insights and understandings from the sermon. Our new pastor will not only welcome this kind of engaging community worship service but add to it with their own creativity, experience, research, and wisdom.
- 2 A pastor with a heart for faithful service.** Our emphasis on faithful service focuses primarily on housing and food justice, including partnerships with Beacon Interfaith Housing, VEAP, Simpson, and Isaiah. Volunteer activities have included serving meals at Simpson; making birthday bags at VEAP for children who would otherwise go without; holding food drives, also at VEAP; and visiting with lawmakers at the state capitol. In addition, our Do Something! group offers opportunities to get involved, including protesting on behalf of immigrants and people without a voice. That said, we know we could be doing much more—especially offering more service opportunities for families with young children. We expect our new pastor will help light the way forward as we work to level up our generosity, diligence and bravery, helping greater numbers of people.
- 3 An empathetic minister with diplomacy skills.** MHUCC has one major issue with our building, challenges around moving forward with our preschool (Minnesota's oldest), and pressing questions about balancing building use for our homegrown organizations (e.g., preschool and Morningside Theatre Company) and other community groups while addressing space and safety concerns. Ideally, our new pastor will bring deep experience around working with people who have disparate opinions, offering compromise and maintaining kindness to ensure the greater good.



Who's God Calling to Minister with Us? *(cont'd)*

4 A competent administrator and organized manager.

MHUCC is small but mighty. As the lead, and only, minister with a full-time administrator, a part-time community minister, a part-time music director, and a part-time faith formation director, a lot of administrative and organizational work falls on the pastor — despite the many active volunteers who participate in multiple ways. The minister needs to be able to organize and accomplish (when not able to delegate) the many must-dos that underpin MHUCC.

PEER AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORTS

In the Twin Cities and Minnesota, faith leaders find many peer and professional supports, among them:

- Currently, our interim pastor convenes a small UCC clergy group that includes pastors from MHUCC, Lynnhurst UCC, Lyndale UCC, Union UCC, and Chapel Hills UCC. They meet monthly for breakfast and some coordination for special joint services.
- Organizations like ISIAH and Beacon have tried to organize clergy around action agendas. Other groups include Minnesota Interfaith, Minnesota MultiFaith Network, Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light, the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, and the Minnesota Council of Churches.
- The Damascus Project, a joint program of the Minnesota and Wisconsin UCC Conferences for professional development and support.
- Catholic monastic communities, such as St. John's and St. Ben's in Minnesota, offer holistic support — intellectual, spiritual, and relational — for those willing to invest time and energy.
- UCC Conference annual meeting.
- Various local seminaries.
- Continuing education opportunities at local colleges and universities.
- Independent spiritual directors and therapists who specialize in serving clergy.
- An annual fall retreat for clergy.
- Outdoor ministry opportunities.
- Four Thursdays are offered in a hybrid format for up-to-date information and resources in faith formation.
- Boundary training and anti-racism training in a variety of formats and locations.
- Covenant Days for regional clergy and laity.

A PEEK INSIDE MHUCC

Despite today's date, deep in October, it's a summery Sunday morning, and Morningside Hills is humming to life. Upstairs, greeters welcome members and visitors who help themselves to coffee and catch up with one another in our gathering space. Soon the bell rings in the church tower and folks take their seats as community announcements kick off the service. As always, there are a bunch, including:

- **an upcoming book launch/retreat** for *How Shall I Stand Between River and Land?* by Leni de Mik, Ph.D, a church member who was a child in the Netherlands under Nazi rule
- **a field trip** to Luther Seminary for an exhibit, *Exploring Human Origin; What Does It Mean to Be Human?*
- **and a thank-you** to all the members and friends who attended an American folk song singalong the day prior— before making handmade signs and joining up with a local protest.

Following announcements, children join Kami Winter, faith formation director, upfront for her message and then head down the stairs for Sunday school. Pastor Budd Friend-Jones shares an insightful sermon, “A Working Alleluia.” This is fittingly paired with the Chancel Choir's lively version of the Black spiritual *Guide My Feet*, directed by Jack Johnston. Next, members voice joys and concerns in a community prayer. We all join in with “Oh, God, receive our prayer” after each supplication.

Throughout the service, the delicious scents of chili and corn bread waft up the stairs. Soon members are digging into a chili lunch for this special fundraiser that supports families whose children are coping with cancer. And as the last of the diners leave, kids start arriving via cars, bikes, scooters, and foot to rehearse *James and the Giant Peach*, the latest production of the 15-year-old Morningside Theatre Company. In short, it's another busy Sunday at MHUCC. Like a mustard seed, we're small but mighty.

More MHUCC Snapshots



Top: Preschool students make art and play on indoor playground equipment. Below: MHUCC members and visitors sing folk songs to guitar accompaniment before joining a nearby protest.

Our Setting

MHUCC is located in the historic Morningside neighborhood of Edina, bordering St. Louis Park and Minneapolis.* The area combines tree-lined residential streets with urban accessibility; it also features nationally recognized schools, major employers, a flourishing arts and intellectual community, and lots of lakes, parks, and trails.

THE TWIN CITIES REGION OFFERS:

- A rich cultural life — universities, theaters, museums, and musical organizations
- Strong interfaith and justice networks
- Professional sports and outdoor recreation
- A thoughtful, civically engaged population

Our congregation reflects this context: Members are well-educated, socially aware, and deeply invested in community life. Additionally, our congregation's demographics largely reflect the neighborhoods adjacent to our church and other neighborhoods with which our church connects.

The one neighborhood trend that our congregation hasn't fully mirrored is age demographics, since the neighborhood has gotten younger in the last several years while our church membership doesn't completely reflect that.

However, through Morningside Theatre Company, which draws many local participants, and neighborhood groups that meet at MHUCC, our church serves as a neighborhood institution that touches many neighbors, whether or not they're members.



**In 2023, the median household income in Edina was \$129,225, and 4.4% of the population lived below the poverty line; in St. Louis Park, the median household income was approx. \$100,000, and 7.35% of the population lived below the poverty line; in Minneapolis, the median household income was approx. \$80,000, and 8.1% of the population lived below the poverty line.*

For more information about local demographics, see ARDA Report.

Our Mission and Our Vision

Due to our focus on a successful merger, no major changes or experiments have been introduced in the last year, and we haven't adopted a new multiyear strategic plan. However, our mission and vision statements, adopted after the merger, reflect our hearts:

- **Our mission:** Morningside Hills UCC is a loving community where people renew their spirits, grow in faith, and act for justice.
- **Our vision:** Morningside Hills UCC envisions a kinder and more just world where people know and show the love of God.

Our mission statement reflects our values and time spent on various activities.

Action in the community for us includes doing outreach work plus offering our building spaces for community activities. Our worship services and community gatherings foster renewal of our spirits and growth in faith as we continue to engage in various outreach activities, and we work to include all through an extravagant welcome, online availability of services, Bible study, book discussions, thoughtful and relevant preaching, beautiful music, and coffee and treats.

Our vision for the future, like most mainline protestant congregations in the current age and climate, is tempered by real challenges. How we resolve those challenges will directly affect how we step up to implement our vision and imagining.

There's a higher number of hours and effort expended on our church's physical plant and management than we'd like. This is due to our aging building, and that it's the physical locus of our efforts to foster renewal of people's spirits, growth in faith, and action in the community.

Additionally, some practices we've implemented in the past, and that we view as worth building on, include:

- offering Our Whole Lives curriculum for teenagers
- hosting, via ISIAAH, listening sessions with political officials on current issues
- offering Morningside U Saturday morning classes on everything from genealogy to lefse making
- creating a day-long retreat for teens and parents, including a speaker/author on sexuality, plus breakout sessions on mental health, grief, and more
- expanding volunteer outreach to local organizations — e.g., inviting neighborhood youth to make birthday bags for a food shelf and coordinating donation drop-offs
- and growing participation in justice organizations, such as Beacon Interfaith Housing and ISIAAH.

Our challenge is not ideas or enthusiasm — our challenge is herding the cats of focus. How do we allocate the energies, time, and resources of our people to the activities that benefit both our church and, more importantly, our world, while maintaining people's capacity and enthusiasm to contribute? God is calling us to reach out, love our neighbor, and harness our energy and resources in an effective and helpful way. Identifying where our vision takes us within that framework is an ongoing process.

Additionally, we're aware of two issues: First, one building wall has a serious structural issue that we've contained with metal braces; a more lasting solution must be decided upon in the next year to five years. Second, we're running into issues sharing space between our preschool, which serves roughly 15 students, and Morningside Theatre Company, which serves hundreds of children annually. Both are important ministries of the church that are overseen by boards made up of elected church members. Our minister's responsibility for supervising the staff of these ministries is done in conjunction with the board; each ministry has a Vision Council seat filled by an elected church member. While the theater is growing, the preschool is shrinking. Because of a previous preschool issue roughly two decades ago, some members are extra sensitive to changes around this church offering.



Our Community Impact and Justice

Beyond our walls, our congregation works toward housing and food justice by partnering with myriad nonprofits that engage with these dual goals. Additionally, our Do Something! group offers a variety of ways to get involved in our community, including protesting on behalf of immigrants. Other volunteer activities include delivering Meals on Wheels, cooking and serving meals at shelters, and holding food drives. Our hope is that our new pastor shares these values, has led similar efforts, and will guide us as we find new ways for our congregants to make the world a better place for all.

We're an English-speaking, majority-white congregation at present. That said, we've recognized various groups during special services, e.g., National Holocaust Remembrance Day (in honor of Jewish neighbors and Jewish spouses of members), Pride Sunday, etc. We hope to expand our cultural capacities as we seek to show God's love to all.

We look forward to our new minister leading our congregation's ministry in developing in our faith and our action in the world, including:

- Exhibiting a spiritual foundation and ongoing spiritual practice
- Engaging sacred stories and traditions
- Caring for all creation
- Participating in theological praxis
- Working together for justice and mercy

Community ministry and ministry in and on behalf of the wider church are supported, as much as possible, by the church, and count toward the congregation's understanding of the minister's availability. Being a small church with one minister, however, means that extensive involvement can be challenging to balance while doing church administrative work.



A Congregation in Transition

The past three years have been transformative:

- We successfully merged two historic congregations.
- We adopted a new name and unified mission.
- We completed a period of discernment and visioning.
- We experienced staff transitions as leaders moved into new callings.*

We now stand at a hopeful and pivotal moment: During a congregation-wide Reimagining session, members were asked to imagine the future of our church, assuming no practical limitations such as budgets. The vision that emerged is rooted in three interconnected themes that highlight our aspirations for growth, connection, and impact. We're now looking for a pastor who not only shares these three parts of our vision, but who can inspire and lead us as we collectively build a future that's even more connected, spiritually vibrant, and impactful in our community and beyond. The three themes are as follows:

1 Cultivating deeper community and care: Our congregation deeply values connection and seeks to strengthen the bonds within our community. This includes fostering more intentional care of one another, potentially through care teams, and ensuring that our community members, from longtime church members to new visitors, feel genuinely welcomed and included. We envision a community where gratitude is openly expressed, communication is clear and compassionate, and a profound sense of belonging and support is experienced by everyone.

2 Nurturing progressive faith and spiritual growth: Our members want to enrich our spiritual lives through worship that thoughtfully blends tradition and newness. We appreciate a progressive perspective, inclusive language, and a genuine welcome of diverse experiences of God, while respecting those with a somewhat more conservative viewpoint. We're eager to expand opportunities for adult spiritual formation, including workshops, retreats, and interactive learning experiences. In addition, our youth members have voiced interest in both creating a group to provide feedback about the life of the church from their perspective, and interacting with the pastor and adult congregants

**Our previous pastor founded and runs PRISM, an organization advocating for LGBTQ+ liberation; our former music director was named executive director of Music That Makes Community; and our previous church administrator accepted a position closer to her home and young child's school.*



in sharing their learning and growth. While previous programming included such efforts, many have been left behind since Covid. Overall, we wish to create welcoming, inclusive spaces; provide spiritual nourishment; offer respite from societal anxieties; and build strength to interact with an increasingly complex world.

3 Expanding our programming, our relevance and our outreach: We recognize that small churches are closing — many because they've pulled into themselves and leaned into what they've always done. Based on feedback shared during our congregational listening

A Congregation in Transition *(cont'd)*

sessions last year, we believe that a large majority of our members are open to changes that expand our programming, our relevance and our outreach. We realize that change is never easy. We also hope that our changes will help attract more people — not for the sake of growth but because people find real community here.

Additionally, our church has a strong social justice orientation and a desire to be an even more active force for good in the world. We envision bolstering our engagement with the wider community through creative programs and partnerships, making our building a busier central hub for neighborhood activity, and collaborating with interfaith and community organizations on pressing social justice issues. Doing so includes renewing our focus on youth involvement, offering service opportunities, and increasing our public visibility to share our inclusive and justice-oriented mission.

We're not perfect — far from it. Two areas require changes: First, we need to improve our communications, both within our walls and those going out in the world. Our congregation attempts, with varying success, to foster open communication, to spread helpful information, to show respect, and to make an effort to hear everyone's

voice before making decisions. As Minnesotans, we're somewhat conflict avoidant, however, which means sometimes potential conflicts don't get immediately addressed. As Rainer Maria Rilke said, we live the questions. We also live the answers.

Second, because of our small size, we must better discern which of our social justice emphases should be paramount to have the greatest impact — that “herding the cats of focus” idea mentioned previously.

Finally, as with any church, ours has had, and continues to have, some conflicts. But it's been nearly 20 years since any major strife. Edina Morningside legacy members would refer to this as the preschool conflict. Some tender feelings still exist about that clash, which may affect the current discussion about roles of the preschool and the Morningside Theatre Company (see photo, this page) in the church vis-a-vis one another.

For Linden Hills legacy members, the decisions to merge churches and to sell their church building were traumatic, and the process of getting to that point generated conflict. Although these congregational decisions were overwhelmingly passed and most, if not all, former members who disagreed didn't join the merged church, delicate feelings still endure about that experience too.



Serving as Our Pastor – the Basics



MEMBERS

Morningside Hills has approximately 150 members and five active non-members. We estimate that 75% of members have belonged to either Edina Morningside UCC or Linden Hills UCC (now combined as Morningside Hills) for more than 10 years, 15% have been members 5–10 years, and 10% have been members for less than five years. Regarding our adult members' highest education levels, we estimate 5% high school, 40% college, 40% graduate school, and 15% specialty training. We estimate 40% are employed, 10% aren't fully employed, and 50% have retired. We estimate that 15% of member households have minors at home, 70% have no minors at home, and 15% have single adults over age 65. Finally, our total participants by age are estimated to be 8, ages 0–11; 7, ages 12–17; 5, ages 18–24; 5, ages 25–34; 5, ages 35–44; 20, ages 45–54; 30, ages 55–64; 30, ages 65–74; and 40, age 75+.

WORSHIP

We offer one Sunday service at 10 a.m. at MHUCC. Our minister generally plans worship with the music director and faith formation director. A regular worship service includes community announcements, usually delivered by several members leading various church efforts; a sharing of the peace; Time With Children, most often provided by faith formation director; a thoughtful, often challenging sermon offered by our pastor; monthly communion; and music, which may include our chancel choir, bell choir, organ, piano, Mass Chaos (contemporary music group), special solos, and/or instrumentalists. During the winter, monthly Taize services are also offered on Sunday evenings, led by members of the congregation.

Over the years, we've held special services in response to mass shootings and other traumatic events. Most recently,

Serving as Our Pastor – the Basics *(cont'd)*

we held a Service of Light and Lament on January 17 to help process the trauma and dislocation caused by ICE in our metropolitan area. These special services are often planned, and even led, by members.

Special services planned by church leadership include Rally Sunday each September, a blessing of the animals, a Blue Christmas service, two Christmas Eve services, Lenten services and soup suppers with other UCC congregations, a Mardi Gras Sunday service (complete with a Dixieland Band, which includes one member), an Ash Wednesday service, a Maundy Thursday and/or Good Friday service (often in conjunction with other UCC congregations), an outdoor Easter sunrise service, a blessing of the bikes, and a summer service at the Lake Harriet bandshell with other congregations. Our minister also presides over baptisms (up to two per year recently), funerals (five in the last year), and weddings (infrequent).

LAY LEADERSHIP

MHUCC offers a variety of ways to serve on various committees that make a big impact on the life of our church. Generous Hospitality, Spiritual Life, and Faithful Service teams meet once a month after church for one hour. The Trustees team, which oversees the church's finances, meets once a month for approximately two

hours. Morningside Theatre Company and the preschool teams also meet once a month. Leaders of each of these teams plus the moderator and associate moderator form the Vision Council, which meets monthly for approximately two hours.

While the minister isn't expected to attend all of these meetings, they typically attend the Vision Council and Trustees meetings, and may choose to attend other meetings. We also have personnel and pastoral relations committees. Additionally, various ad hoc groups, including our new communications group, meet once or twice a month as needed.

In the case of an emergency, the minister and moderator can reach out to key affected leaders and ask for their assistance. If a decision is required urgently, our Vision Council can act via an email vote.

PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING

Our minister serves as head of staff, supervising a full-time church administrator, part-time music director, part-time faith formation director, part-time community minister, part-time preschool director and part-time teacher, most of whom have been on staff for 4–7 years, except for our music director (2 years) and our church administrator (1 year). In addition, the minister liaises



Serving as Our Pastor – the Basics *(cont'd)*

with the Morningside Theatre Company, a ministry of our church that boasts approximately 300 participants a year and recently attained 501(c)3 status, which may bring some transitions and changes in the coming year. The minister also liaises with Morningside After Dark, a coffeehouse event held two to three times a winter that attracts almost 200 people for each performance.

PREVIOUS PASTORS AND RETIRED MINISTERS

Edina Morningside: Rev. Joe Clay served as minister for 27 years, beginning in 1973. After he retired, the church hired Rev. Rosemary Rocha in 2000. She served as pastor for nearly 15 years until she retired. After an interim period, led by Rev. Howard Bell, Rev. Oby Ballinger became the settled pastor in 2016.

Linden Hills: Pastor Eliot Howard served as minister for 27 years, beginning in 1993. After he retired, the church promoted Pastor Lawrence Richardson from associate pastor to senior pastor; he served until 2021, when the Linden Hills congregation began worshipping with the Edina Morningside congregation. Rev. Paula Northwood worked with the congregation as interim pastor as they discerned next steps.

Morningside Hills: Rev. Oby Ballinger became pastor of the merged churches at the time the merger took effect, and stepped down from the pulpit in January 2025 to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, founding PRISM in the Twin Cities.

Our churches have been blessed by our ministers — both long-serving pastors and ministers who've enjoyed shorter tenures. We've maintained good relationships with many of our former ministers, without breaking boundaries that interfere with the current minister. Our congregation sees the people who've provided ministerial leadership as individual people, beyond their ministerial roles, and honor their place in the history of our church(es).

Within the memory and knowledge of our memberships, no past leader has left under pressure or by involuntary termination. Our church hasn't been involved in a Situational Support Consultation, and no previous minister has been the subject of a Fitness Review while at our churches or been a contributor to a conflict following their pastoral service within our churches.

Other congregation members who've held past pastoral positions at either Edina Morningside or Linden Hills:

- Rev. Eliot Howard, ordained and retired, helps lead ISAIAH efforts but doesn't generally attend worship services.

- Rev. Elaine Kirkland, ordained and retired, former music director, filled in during Rev. Ballinger's sabbatical. She's not an active member.

Congregational members and regular participants who are ordained or commissioned ministers, or who hold Lay Ministerial Standing, and congregational Members in Discernment:

- Rev. Dr. Frank Bennett, ordained, functions as our community minister by visiting homebound members in coordination with the Senior Minister, leads an Alzheimer's support group on a monthly basis, and occasionally leads services if our minister is absent.
- Jeffrey Brunsgaard is in seminary.
- Rev. Molly Cox, ordained and retired, often fills in to provide pastoral care during our minister's absence.
- Katie Gant is in seminary and will be ordained in 2026.
- Rev. Emily Goldthwaite, ordained, four-way covenant with Beacon Interfaith Housing, has offered several sermons/homilies over the years.
- Rev. David Groenemann, ordained and retired, attends worship and sings in choir.
- Rev. Jo Beth Marshall, ordained and retired, sometimes assists during a service.
- Rev. Nathan Roberts, ordained, three-way covenant, serves as a youth pastor at a Lutheran church. He also helped found Daylight Center and School in Kenya.

We've been blessed to have many ordained ministers as church members, and feel that reflects well on our community. Minister members work to support the settled pastor whenever asked and otherwise participate in community life like any members.



MHUCC Finances

Our approach to our church’s finances and assets is reflected in our mission as a congregation, where people renew their spirits, grow in faith, and act for justice. For example, for earth justice, our congregation voted nearly unanimously last fall to invest in approximately 80 solar panels.

Our finances are healthy because our congregation is generous, even providing a Second Offering each Sunday; our members are servant leaders, enabling us to keep our paid staff small; and our investment portfolio generates income, offsetting a portion of our operating expenses.

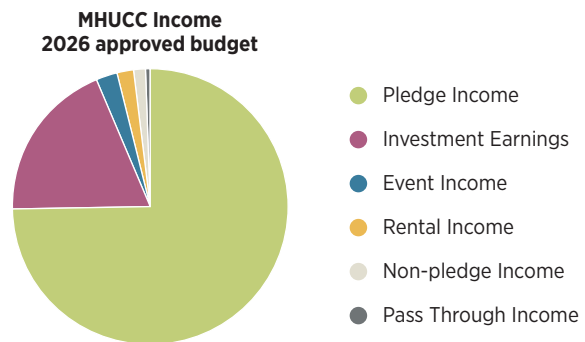
Our Board of Trustees develops the annual budget, which is passed by the congregation. Trustees also monitor and approve spending requirements outside the budget. Unbudgeted expenditures over 5% of the total budget

require congregational approval. Trustees work responsibly, diligently, and transparently. Congregational budget meetings run smoothly with straightforward discussion. Our recent budget passed unanimously, reflecting trust in our community. For additional information regarding structure, *see Constitution and By-Laws*.

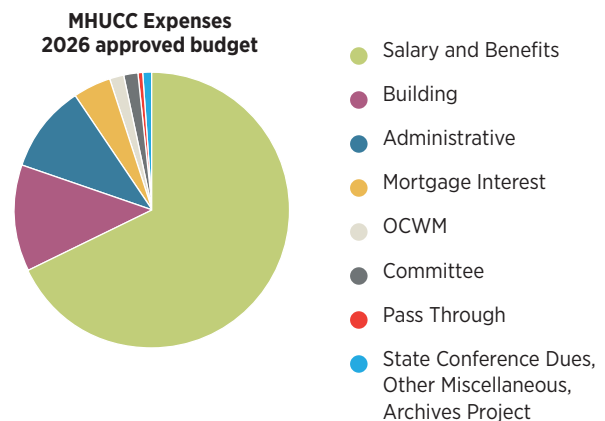
Total ministerial support is 31% of total budgeted expenses. Neither of our original churches has ever failed to pay its financial obligations to a church minister.

MHUCC is 5-for-5, giving to Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) Basic Support and four Special Mission Offerings: One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, and the Christmas Fund. We also contribute a flat dollar amount to OCWM.

Income Categories	2026 Budget
Pledge Income	\$325,205
Invest Earnings Applied to Budget	\$82,327
Event Income	\$11,471
Rental Income	\$7,549
Non-pledge Income	\$5,750
Pass Through Income	\$2,000
Total	\$434,302



Expenses	2026 Budget
Salary and Benefits	\$294,265
Building	\$54,573
Administrative	\$44,790
Mortgage Interest	\$19,009
OCWM	\$7,200
Committee	\$6,450
Pass Through	\$2,600
State Conference Dues	\$1,800
Other Miscellaneous	\$1,700
Archive Project	\$1,020
Total	\$433,407



MHUCC Finances (cont'd)

Balance Sheet	
Cash	\$77,784
Investment Accounts	\$1,356,503
Accounts Receivable	\$7,199

CAPITAL CAMPAIGNS

Edina Morningside UCC held a capital campaign in 2015–2016. Its purpose was to repair a structural issue with the east wall of the church and to remodel the gathering area to create a more welcoming, functional space. The goal was \$800,000, and the church raised \$787,971 of actually-paid pledges. The church borrowed funds from the UCC Church Building and Loan Fund to cover costs so that work could commence while pledges were still being paid over a three-year period. Costs for repairs and renovation exceeded projections so a decision was made to finance a portion of the costs as a mortgage rather than using other resources to completely pay off debt.

MHUCC is currently considering a new capital campaign to make structural repairs on the west wall.

CHURCH ASSETS

Investments held at United Church Funds

Balance 12/31/25	Operating/ Unrestricted	LHUCC Endowment (earnings unrestricted)	LH Legacy (restricted)	Total
Cash & Equivalent	\$45,374	0	\$79,657	\$125,030
Beyond Fossil Fuels (Balanced Fund)	\$494,909	\$165,680	\$128,766	\$759,396
Beyond Fossil Fuels Fund (Equity)	\$261,680	\$93,385	\$72,051	\$427,116
Total	\$771,963	\$259,066	\$280,473	\$1,311,502

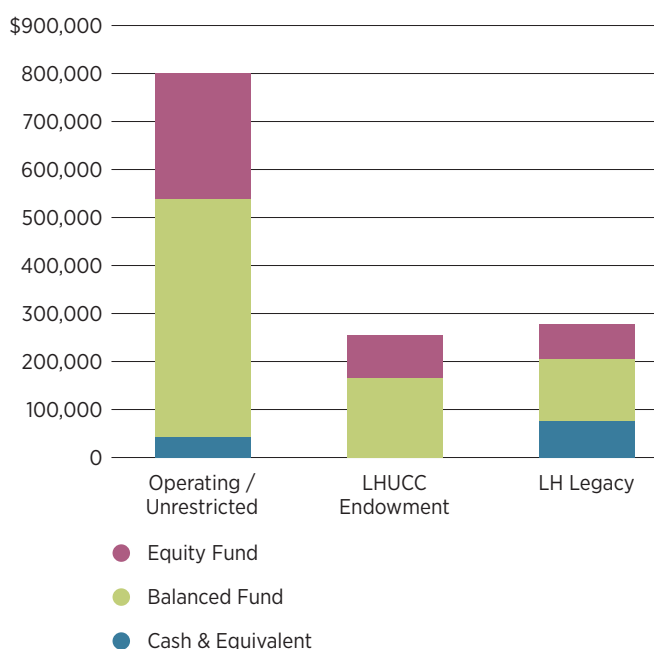
The so-called LHUCC Endowment is a quasi-endowment, resulting from the recent merger between Edina Morningside UCC and Linden Hills UCC. Of this, \$250,000 is restricted until May 1, 2029, per merger agreement. Earnings aren't restricted and get transferred to the Operating account.

A number of small funds are designated for certain purposes, such as periodic bells repair and building maintenance. A quasi-endowment restricted fund allows only earnings to be available for use for the next several years. The Linden Hills Legacy Fund of roughly \$280,000 is designated for outreach.

BUILDING

MHUCC only owns the church building. This three-story building features an elevator that serves the sanctuary and fellowship hall levels. The third floor is accessible by stairs. Restrooms on the sanctuary level are accessible, and there are handrails for all stairs. Three designated parking spaces are located directly in front of the building. All parking is street parking; there is no parking lot. Our audiovisual systems are outdated and replacement discussions are underway. Our playground and patio area (where we've held many outdoor summer services) is located on one side of the church. Most activities take place at our church building, although Morningside Theatre Company has performed at Hopkins High School for certain performances.

MHUCC Investment Portfolio



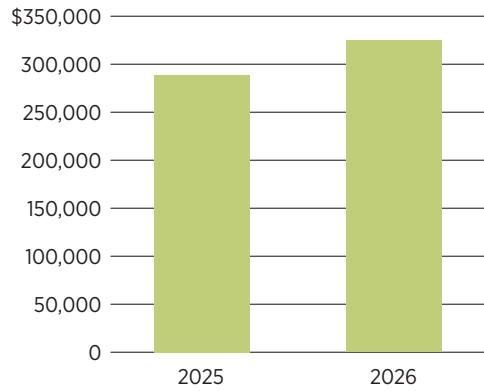
MHUCC Finances *(cont'd)*

PLEDGES

MHUCC had a healthy pledge drive for 2026. The table below shows the pledging units and dollar amounts from 2025 and 2026, with additional statistics from this year's pledge drive.

Pledges	2025	2026
Number of Pledges	60	60
Dollars Pledged	\$290,143	\$324,705
Dollar Increase		\$34,562
Percentage Increase		11.9%
Number of Pledges: New or Increased		36
Dollars from Increases		\$52,695
Number of Pledges Moving to Next Gift Level		10
Number of Pledges: Decreased or Non-renewed		9
Two Pledges Non-renewed Due to Death (decrease in dollars)		\$9,600
Seven Pledges Decreased (decrease in dollars)		\$3,180

2025-2026 Pledges



Job Description

Morningside Hills UCC (the merged congregations of Edina Morningside UCC and Linden Hills UCC) is a small-but-mighty, open-and-affirming, progressive church where people renew their spirits, grow in faith, and act for justice. Ideally, our new pastor will help lead this welcoming, loving, and justice-minded congregation as we seek to deepen our faith and better the lives of people in our community, state, country and world. MHUCC is located in the historic Morningside neighborhood of Edina, Minnesota.

Seeking: Full-time, salaried, ordained pastor

Preferred: Mid-career pastor (5–15 years) with parish ministry experience

Education: Master of Divinity degree

Ministerial standing: Eligible for ministerial standing in the Minnesota Conference of UCC or ecumenical partner churches
Working relationships: church staff (i.e., community minister, church administrator, music director, faith formation director, and artistic director of Morningside Theatre Company), moderator, lay leaders, and congregation
Among the many skills required: interpersonal, relational, and community-building skills; writing skills; organizational and technological skills; and more.

Competencies: Provide leadership and spiritual guidance to and among congregational members and visitors. Lead weekly worship, working with our music director, faith formation director, and lay leaders to offer a creative, coordinated and sometimes outside-the-box worship service. Write and preach inspiring and challenging sermons that include both biblical teachings and yet relate to the challenging world we live in today. Work flexible hours to best serve congregation and mission of MHUCC. Participate in congregational life, welcome and support new members, guide church mission engagement, and provide pastoral care in cooperation with our community minister. Collaborate with other churches and faith-based organizations, even those that aren't Christian. Perform weddings, baptisms, confirmations, and funerals. Lead a weekly Bible study, lead weekly staff meetings, attend monthly Vision Council and Trustee meetings, and check in at monthly committee meetings. Understand and commit to teachings and traditions of the UCC. Maintain confidentiality.



Appendix

REFERENCE LETTERS:

- Joni Bennett, Community Member
- Samantha Sands, Vail Place, Outreach Partner
- Rev. Mark Kuether

February 2, 2026

To: Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ

Re: Pastoral Search Reference for Morningside Hills United Church of Christ

To Whom It May Concern,

As a longtime resident of the Morningside neighborhood, I am writing to tell you how much I and my family have appreciated and benefited from the work of Morningside Hills United Church of Christ (MHUCC). While maintaining membership and worshipping at a large Lutheran church, we have participated in a number of programs, groups, and projects at MHUCC.

Since we first connected with MHUCC in 1991, when we enrolled our older son in its nursery school, we have known MHUCC as a place that welcomes and nurtures children, whether or not they are members of its congregation. In 1991, the neighborhood elementary school had closed a little over a decade earlier, and the MHUCC nursery school was very popular. Our son loved his teachers and formed a couple of lifelong friendships with other boys in the neighborhood. More recently, my grandchildren have played on the “indoor playground” that MHUCC has opened on cold winter weekend afternoons.

For almost as long (since 1992), we have experienced MHUCC as a place that nurtures neighborhood connections by opening its doors to, and partnering with, neighborhood groups. The Morningside Woman’s Club (MWC), founded in 1937, has never been an MHUCC auxiliary but has met monthly since the 1950s in the MHUCC Fellowship Hall. With informative and entertaining programs, childcare available for a small fee, and fundraising for college scholarships, the MWC attracts a large, multi- generational membership of women from Morningside, other Edina neighborhoods, and surrounding cities. Through my own membership since 1992, I have been able to share and expand my leadership skills in MWC and the community, and to make several very dear friends.

The neighborhood connections nurtured by MHUCC helped create the Morningside Neighborhood Association (MNA) in 2003. As a separate village for over 40 years (1920-1966), and in a city and school district with representation at large, Morningside had struggled for decades to have a voice in public decision-making. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the neighborhood had been threatened with loss of its park and playground and closure of public streets, without public notice or opportunity to comment. A small group of us with backgrounds in public policy and process, including people I had met at the nursery school and MWC, had been able to obtain and share information, but our goal for the neighborhood was regular communication and better access to public process. In 2003, participants in a neighborhood meeting voted to form the Morningside Neighborhood Association (MNA), with the purpose: “To promote a better community through group action, to promote involvement in decisions made by local government, and to represent the interests of all residents and property owners in Morningside.” When the City of Edina adopted a neighborhood association policy in 2012, the MNA was the first to apply and become City-recognized. City policy, Minnesota non-profit law, and the MNA Bylaws all require the MNA to hold an annual meeting. Just two spaces in Morningside are large enough to host a meeting to which everyone in the neighborhood is invited – MHUCC and the Weber Park Shelter. MNA annual meetings were held at MHUCC in 2004, 2005, 2022, and 2025, and the Steering Committee met monthly at MHUCC for several years before and after major church remodeling.

Another way that I have experienced MHUCC is as a place that seeks to preserve, accurately remember, and, when appropriate, celebrate neighborhood history. First platted when the Twin Cities streetcar line was extended in 1905,

Appendix (cont'd)

allowing professionals to embrace a suburban life (then including chickens and cows) while traveling back and forth each day to work in the city, Morningside was known to have developed without racial covenants and to have welcomed Jewish families. In 2005, the Morningside Centennial year, I led a committee, with representatives from the MWC, MNA, and MHUCC, that planned and held an event a month (most free). In 2025, MHUCC hosted a well-attended presentation by Chad Montrie, Ph.D., author of *Whiteness in Plain View*. His chapter on Edina, and the Twin Cities' own Mapping Prejudice project, both gave a more nuanced view of Morningside's history. Some more-recent (1960s) residential lots had racial covenants, and some in the neighborhood opposed the arrival of an African-American family (countered by a very successful petition of welcome carried door to door by Morningside's mayor and his young son).

I know MHUCC as a place that values science and environmental protection. Its garden is a living demonstration and an inspiration to those of us aiming for sustainability in our own landscapes. For several years, MHUCC has celebrated Earth Day with the MNA at Weber Park, a free event featuring live music, speakers, practical demonstrations, and activities for kids. Planning for this year's event is just beginning.

I also know MHUCC as a place that advocates and cares for its neighbors in the broad biblical sense. MHUCC is one of the congregations that helped Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative build 66 West in Edina, supportive housing for young adults, including those who have aged out of foster care. Last year, MHUCC and the MNA partnered on a Food Drive for VEAP, the food shelf serving Edina and Bloomington. With volunteers recruited by the MNA Steering Committee and MHUCC, the MNA delivered grocery bags and flyers to all 700 homes in Morningside, and collected over 2,000 pounds of food as neighbors brought their bags back to MHUCC. I will be coordinating another MNA food drive this year, and hope to partner again with MHUCC.

While I deeply appreciate MHUCC's outreach to the community and its support of other community organizations, I have especially appreciated MHUCC's open arms for those of us who are separated, even temporarily, from previous spiritual homes. This past fall, at the invitation of Rev. Dr. Budd Friend-Jones, I participated in a small book group discussion of *Miracles and Wonders* by Elaine Pagels. I enjoyed the experience of reading the book but especially enjoyed the group's warm and welcoming conversations.

Thank you for allowing me to share this information with you. I hope it is helpful to your process. Please let me know if you have any questions for me or if there is any other information that I can provide.

Sincerely yours,

Joni Bennett
4003 Lynn Avenue
Edina MN 55416

jonikbennett@gmail.com

612-730-5404

Appendix *(cont'd)*

February 10, 2026

To: Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ

Re: Pastoral Search Reference for Morningside Hills United Church of Christ

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of Vail Communities Clubhouse, I am pleased to offer this letter of recommendation and support regarding your new pastor and the continued partnership between your church and our organization.

Vail Communities is a psychosocial rehabilitation program serving adults living with mental health challenges through a community-based model that emphasizes dignity, purpose, and meaningful employment. For several years, your church has been an invaluable partner through our Transitional Employment (TE) program, providing real, paid work opportunities for Clubhouse members.

Through this partnership since September of 2021, multiple members have had the opportunity to work at the church in cleaning and maintenance roles. These positions have not only provided income, but also structure, confidence, skill-building, and a renewed sense of purpose. For many of our members, Transitional Employment represents an important step toward greater independence and long-term vocational success. The opportunities your church has offered have played a meaningful role in that journey.

Our interactions with your church community have consistently been welcoming, respectful, and collaborative. Church staff have demonstrated patience, flexibility, and a genuine commitment to creating a supportive work environment for individuals rebuilding confidence and work history. This spirit of partnership has made the church a trusted and successful Transitional Employment site for our Clubhouse over the years. We are deeply grateful for this ongoing collaboration and for the church's willingness to open its doors as a place of opportunity and inclusion. Partnerships like this strengthen not only the lives of individual members, but also the broader community by fostering connection, understanding, and meaningful participation for all.

We wholeheartedly support the continued relationship between Vail Communities and your church and look forward to maintaining this strong partnership under your new pastoral leadership. We would love to have you come anytime to our Clubhouse to learn more about it and more about our Transitional Employment program! Please feel free to reach out if you would like any additional information about our program or our experience working together.

With appreciation,

Samantha Sands

Vail Communities Hopkins Clubhouse Manager

952-406-9284

ssands@vailcommunities.org

Appendix *(cont'd)*

March 5, 2026

To: Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ

Re: Pastoral Search Reference for
Morningside Hills United Church of Christ

To Whom It May Concern,

I've been asked to be a reference for Morningside Hills United Church of Christ, and I'm pleased to have been asked. To the extent I know it, MHUCC is a healthy, strong and welcoming congregation.

I served as Interim Minister of a neighboring UCC congregation for three years and five months. That stint concluded at the end of 2025 when I moved on to my current Interim Ministry setting. During that time, I had the opportunity to interact with members of MHUCC on numerous occasions, including many shared worship experiences. In particular, our congregations were part of a five-church partnership that shared our Lenten journeys, rotating hosting responsibilities. Members of MHUCC were always so gracious in their welcome, and fully engaged in the experiences, even when other churches were hosting. In addition to the meaningful shared meal and worship events, I remember many good laughs with members of MHUCC. They are a fun group!

We also engaged in some shared planning and vision work among the five churches. Leaders of MHUCC were fully present as, together, we tried to discern God's leading in how to most faithfully be Christ's Church in our time and place. I so appreciated those conversations.

In addition, I have a good relationship with both Pastor Oby and Pastor Budd. Some of my insights into the congregation have come through them. I am blessed to count them not only among my respected colleagues but also as valued friends.

I fully support the many and varied missions and ministries of Morningside Hills United Church of Christ. I pray for God's leading not only for the congregation, but also for prospective candidates, as you discern the path before you.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Mark Kuether
Interim Minister
Parkview United Church of Christ
White Bear Lake, Minnesota

763-807-1646

Appendix *(cont'd)*

RESOURCES

For interested candidates, Morningside Hills UCC is making available these resources:

- 2026 Budget
- Constitution & Bylaws
- ARDA Report
- 11-Year Reports

You can access all of these resources [HERE](#).



MORNINGSIDE HILLS

United Church of Christ

4201 Morningside Road
Edina, MN 55416
morningsidehills.org