

United Church of Underhill (UCU)

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unitedchurchofunderhill.com

Mission Statement: "The mission of the United Church of Underhill is to be a Christian community offering spiritual growth to all and responding to the needs of people according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. We are in covenant and connection with the people of the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church."

THE COMMUNITY

The United Church of Underhill sits at the heart of Underhill Flats, a village in the shadow of Mount Mansfield in Chittenden County—Vermont's most populous county. UCU serves the neighboring towns of Underhill (population approximately 3,000) and Jericho (approximately 5,200), which together form a close-knit bedroom community located twenty miles east of Burlington and the University of Vermont. Two blocks from the church, Mills Riverside Park offers 216 acres of meadows and wooded hillsides that serve as a gathering place for farmers' markets, sports teams, outdoor concerts, and community events throughout the year.

The ethnic makeup of the area is largely white and reflects Vermont's rural character, with a mix of long-established families and professionals who commute to Burlington, Montpelier, and the greater Champlain Valley. Affordable housing is a pressing community concern. While the school-age population has trended downward in recent years, the towns remain deeply invested in their schools, libraries, and local institutions. The church is widely regarded as a pillar of the Underhill-Jericho community—a place where residents of all backgrounds find welcome, whether they attend regularly or simply turn to UCU in moments that matter most.

OUR CHURCH

1. Our Identity: The United Church of Underhill is a federated congregation—a genuine union of two Protestant traditions. When the Underhill Congregational Church (UCC) and the United Methodist Church of Underhill merged in 1973, they did not simply share a building; they formed something new. Today, UCU draws from the strengths of both denominations while maintaining a distinct identity all its own. We are Open and Affirming (UCC) and Reconciling (UMC), a dual designation we adopted in January 2019 affirming that people of all gender identities, sexual orientations, races, immigration statuses, abilities, and faith backgrounds are fully welcome in the life, leadership, sacraments, and ministry of this church. Our pastoral leadership alternates between the two denominations; our current pastor, Rev. Jennifer Mihok (UMC), is concluding a deeply valued eight-year ministry with us in June 2026. We are now seeking a UCC interim pastor to guide us through a season of transition and discernment.

2. Congregation: Our active membership stands at 139 (95 UCC, 44 UMC), with an average Sunday morning attendance of approximately 50 people, including about 12 children in eighth

grade or below. An additional 10 to 20 people join us each week through our livestream, either in real time on Sunday mornings or by streaming during the week. We are a congregation that spans generations—young and old, singles and families, lifelong Christians and thoughtful seekers. We are honest about a challenge we share with many New England churches: our active leadership skews older, and sustaining that leadership over the long term will require continued growth among younger adults. Encouragingly, one of our most significant areas of recent growth is in families with young children—a trend visible every Sunday morning in the energy and joy our youngest members bring to worship and to Sunday Friends. We are a congregation committed to doing the work of renewal, not simply hoping for it.

3. Worship: We gather for worship every Sunday at 10:00 a.m. Our style is traditional but lively—grounded in the rhythms of the church year, enriched by diverse music, and shaped by thoughtful preaching. A children’s sermon is a beloved part of every service, and our Sunday Friends program provides engaging Christian formation for our youngest members following the children’s sermon. Music is central to our worship life; our Director of Music Coordination curates a wide range of musical offerings including handbells, choral ensembles, organ, and instrumental guests. All services are livestreamed, and our tech volunteers have built a capable and reliable platform for our hybrid congregation.

4. Christian Education and Faith Formation: Christian education is an area of active investment and aspiration at UCU. Our Ministry in Christian Education (MICE) provides Sunday Friends programming for children, a biweekly middle school group, and monthly Family Fun Nights that bring families together for fellowship and hands-on activities. For adults, Women in the Word meets weekly via Zoom under gifted lay leadership, and periodic adult study series have explored topics ranging from early Christian texts to climate justice and the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. We have not yet been able to hire a part-time Christian Education Director or a contract accompanist—but a generous anonymous gift of \$25,000 per year for three years, designated for Christian education and worship music, has opened a meaningful door. This is an exciting and urgent opportunity: the funds must be used or they are forfeited, and we are eager to put them to work with the right leadership and creativity.

5. Mission and Community Engagement: UCU is a church that takes seriously its call to serve. Our missions are many and deep-rooted. We are a founding partner of the Essex-Jericho-Underhill Ecumenical Food Shelf, which serves approximately 77 families per month, and our congregation provides consistent volunteer labor and a steady supply of donations year-round. Our Clutter Barn, open during the summer and at Harvest Market, diverts donated goods from landfills and into the hands of people who need them—generating nearly \$30,000 in revenue in 2025. Our Missions Ministry supports dozens of local and global organizations through targeted collections and budgeted giving throughout the year. And through our PINS partnership with the Vermont Department of Children and Families, we provide direct support to vulnerable families in our community.

Perhaps our most ambitious expression of mission is Harvest Crossing, a partnership with Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity to develop 8.6 acres of land directly behind the church into eight permanently affordable homes for working families, with remaining open space preserved for community use. After nearly six years of planning, fundraising, environmental

study, and permitting, the Underhill Development Review Board granted unanimous final approval in November 2025. Site work is expected to begin in the summer of 2026. The project has raised close to \$1 million through a combination of private donations, federal and state grants, and community partnerships. This is the most tangible expression of UCU's belief that faith compels action.

6. The Old-Fashioned Harvest Market: Every September, UCU transforms into the center of one of Vermont's most beloved community traditions. The Old-Fashioned Harvest Market, now in its 52nd year, draws thousands of visitors to the church grounds for two days of food, cider, crafts, entertainment, a parade, a fun run, and the Clutter Barn. The event is organized and staffed almost entirely by church volunteers and generated more than \$69,000 in net revenue in 2025—revenue that is essential to our operating budget. Harvest Market is simultaneously a logistical undertaking of remarkable scale and a joyful expression of who UCU is: a congregation that knows how to bring people together and have fun doing it. Our UCC regional leader described it simply: "You are a church that knows how to have fun and invite your community to join you." An interim pastor will arrive just as planning for the 52nd market gets underway, and enthusiasm for this tradition is genuinely welcome.

7. Leadership and Governance: UCU is governed by a Church Council composed of representatives from each of our active ministries: Worship, Missions, Christian Education/MICE, Trustees, Membership and Evangelism, Harvest Market Representative, Harvest Crossing Representative, Stewardship, Listeners (our Pastor-Parish Relations equivalent), Nominating, and Auditing. Financial stewardship and property management are the responsibility of the Trustees. The church is well organized, financially stable, and supported by a committed group of lay leaders. Our 2026 operating budget is \$201,976. In April 2026, we are beginning a formal process of organizational discernment with consultant Paul Nickerson (nickersoncoaching.com), with an initial focus on articulating our mission, vision, and core values in preparation for both the interim and settled pastor searches.

8. Gifts and Skills We Seek in an Interim Pastor: We are a congregation in a season of genuine transition—saying farewell to a deeply beloved pastor, taking stock of who we are, and preparing for our next chapter. The full-time interim pastor we seek will be a partner in that work, not simply a placeholder. We are looking for someone who is collaborative and curious, able to work alongside an engaged lay leadership and a congregation full of ideas. We need someone with a genuine gift for pastoral care and healing, capable of tending to a community that will be navigating grief and change alongside hope and growth. We value technological fluency: UCU communicates well through digital tools and maintains a robust online presence. We are looking for someone organized enough to thrive in a church with a great deal going on—from weekly worship to Harvest Market planning to the Harvest Crossing groundbreaking to the work with our consultant. And above all, we seek someone who is energized by community: by serving the towns we love, by building relationships within the congregation, and by walking with us as we discern our future.

The interim pastor will play a peripheral role in supporting the settled pastor search but will not serve on the search committee itself—that responsibility will rest with lay leadership working in

partnership with the Vermont Conference. The expected length of the interim is one to one and a half years.

9. Compensation: Compensation will be determined in accordance with Vermont Conference UCC guidelines approved in 2025. A church-owned parsonage is available at 9 Park Street, Underhill—adjacent to the church. Full details regarding salary, benefits, and terms of call will be provided to candidates in conversation with the Vermont Conference.

For more information, please visit unitedchurchofunderhill.com or harvestcrossing.org. We look forward to meeting you.

A Church Worth Knowing

A supplemental narrative for prospective interim pastors

United Church of Underhill • Underhill, Vermont

Picture the last weekend of September in Vermont. The maples are turning. The air has that particular quality—cool and bright and full of something you can't quite name. And in a small village at the foot of Mount Mansfield, thousands of people are streaming toward a white clapboard church on Park Street.

They've come for the apple cider, the homemade soup, the parade, and the french fries. They've come because they came last year, and the year before that, and because their parents brought them when they were small. They've come because in Underhill and Jericho, the Old-Fashioned Harvest Market is not just an event—it is a *ritual*. And behind every booth, every tent, every jar of jam and plate of cookies is a member of the United Church of Underhill who has been planning, hauling, baking, and laughing since April.

This is UCU at its most visible. But it is not UCU at its most essential.

On a Sunday morning in Underhill Flats, something quieter and just as remarkable is happening. About fifty people have gathered in the sanctuary—young families with children who can barely sit still, longtime members who have worshipped in this building for decades, visitors who found us online and decided to come see for themselves. The service is traditional but alive: there is music that ranges from handbells to choral arrangements to the occasional moment of joyful improvisation. There is a children's sermon that draws the youngest members of the congregation forward, and the sound of their voices fills the room in a way that makes everything feel possible.

This is a church that has been doing something unusual since 1973: it has held together two Protestant traditions—the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church—not as a compromise, but as a genuine synthesis. UCU is not a UCC church that tolerates its Methodist members, nor a UMC congregation with a Congregationalist wing. It is something rarer: a community that has spent fifty years learning to draw from the best of both traditions while becoming something distinctly its own. Our UCC regional leader put it plainly: *"The church represents the best of both and also a uniqueness all your own."*

UCU has a long memory and a forward gaze. The same congregation that faithfully hosts the ecumenical food shelf, quilts blankets for Vermont Department of Child and Family-Partners in Service, and collects school supplies for children in need is also the congregation that looked at

8.6 acres of land behind the church and saw not a field but a neighborhood. Harvest Crossing—UCU’s partnership with Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity to build eight permanently affordable homes for working families—is breaking ground this summer. It is the product of six years of prayerful discernment, relentless fundraising, and stubborn hope. It is what happens when a congregation decides that faith without works is not enough.

The interim pastor who joins us this summer will arrive at a moment of real energy. The Harvest Crossing shovels will be going into the ground. A new cohort of young families—one of the most exciting areas of recent growth in our congregation—will be filling the pews and the Sunday Friends classroom. A generous three-year gift designated for Christian education and worship music will be waiting to be put to imaginative use. And a formal process of organizational discernment, already underway with an outside consultant, will be shaping UCU’s vision for its next chapter.

We will be honest with you: we are also a congregation navigating loss. Pastor Jen Mihok has been with us for eight years—a beloved presence whose gifts for preaching, pastoral care, and community-building have left a deep mark on this church. Saying goodbye to her will not be easy. The interim pastor we seek will need to be someone who understands that grief and hope can occupy the same room, and who has the pastoral wisdom and personal warmth to hold both.

We are not looking for a caretaker. We are looking for a partner—someone who is curious about who we are, collaborative in the way they lead, organized enough to thrive in a church with a great deal going on, and genuinely energized by the work of serving a community. We are a “Google shop” that livestreams our services, communicates through digital tools, and expects our pastor to be comfortable in that environment. We are also a congregation that still makes coffee after church and lingers in the fellowship hall because we actually like each other.

If you are reading this and something in it resonates—if the idea of walking alongside a congregation like this during a season of transition and possibility sounds like meaningful work—we would very much like to hear from you.

UCU is not a perfect church. We are aging in some ways and growing in others. We have more ideas than bandwidth and more heart than we sometimes know what to do with. But we are a community that shows up—for the food shelf, for the Harvest Market, for the family that just lost someone, for the affordable housing project that everyone said would take too long.

We show up. And we’d love a pastor who does the same.