



Welcome to the

First Congregational Church of Essex Junction (FCCEJ)

2026 Narrative Community & Church Profile

No Matter Who You Are or Where You Are On Life's Journey, You Are Welcome In This Place

FCCEJ is a vibrant, Open and Affirming United Church of Christ congregation located in the heart of Essex Junction, Vermont. We are seeking a compassionate, inspirational and organizationally skilled Senior Pastor to lead us into our next chapter of ministry. FCCEJ is welcoming, joyful, intellectually engaging and deeply committed to serving the wider community and we are looking for a pastor to join us in these callings.



Our Community

[Essex Junction](#) combines small-town relationships with access to the opportunities of Chittenden County. Residents embrace our strong schools, parks, libraries, diverse dining and shopping, proximity to Burlington, the University of Vermont, UVM Medical Center, Lake Champlain and year-round outdoor recreation. The community is known for civic engagement, inclusivity and a strong sense of neighborliness. Our membership draws from many surrounding communities as well as Essex Junction. From the Lake Champlain Islands to Cambridge, Jericho, Williston, Waterbury, members travel to us for our services and mission.

Our History

[FCCEJ](#) was founded in the nineteenth century and has been serving the community for more than 150 years, FCCEJ joined the United Church of Christ in 1961. The church is widely recognized for its outreach ministries, Open and Affirming commitment, food pantry, thrift shop and community leadership.

Who We Are

Our vision is to be the church that most fully embodies Christ's vision of love by fulfilling the spiritual and physical needs of our community. We build relationships with God, each other, the community and the world through prayer, worship, fellowship, education, outreach and service. Our values include:

- Inquiry: we grow through an intellectual journey and feel empowered to challenge, question, and explore our faith.
- Inclusion: We are an open and affirming, diverse, and inclusive congregation that offers an invitation to meet Jesus Christ no matter where you are on life's spiritual journey.
- Service: We seek opportunities to live Christ's love through active engagement in our world.
- Fellowship: We express kindness and compassion with each other through Christian community.
- Stewardship: We are responsible in the use of our time, talent, and treasure to care for our church.
- Worship: We express our faith through meaningful experiences in the presence of God through Word, Sacrament, Music, and Fellowship.
- Fun: We are a place where people can laugh and be joyful.



Congregation Snapshot

Approximately 400 active members and 284 active non-members participate in church life. Worship attendance averages 60–115 for each service. The congregation spans five generations, though we recognize a need to engage more young families and younger adults.



Worship & Music

Meaningful [worship](#), strong preaching and exceptional music are central to congregational life. [Music ministries](#) include Sanctuary Choir, Finally at First praise band, children's music programs, communion, livestream worship and creative seasonal services.

Mission & Outreach

[Major ministries](#) include the Heavenly Food Pantry, Heavenly Thrift Shop, Dismas House dinners, support for veterans, unhoused neighbors, refugee and immigrant communities, mission trips, Pride events and interfaith partnerships.





Faith Formation

[Programs](#) serve children, youth and adults through Sunday classes, confirmation, discussion groups, sermon talk-back sessions, family dinners, mission opportunities locally and across the country, Bible studies and seasonal events.

Ministry Opportunities Ahead

Key goals include engaging younger generations, developing a new strategic vision, expanding diversity, strengthening spiritual formation, evaluating staffing models and sustaining the church's strong culture of connection with the community and state.

Financial Strength

FCCEJ maintains a [healthy financial position](#) with annual income exceeding budgeted expenses, a significant endowment, multiple church-owned properties and a history of successful [capital campaigns](#).

The Pastor We Seek

The congregation identified three primary competencies: Compassion; Inspirational and Engaging Spiritual Formation; and Organizational Leadership & Management. The next pastor should build relationships, communicate faith effectively, empower volunteers and represent the church in the wider community.

Conclusion

FCCEJ encompasses a rare combination of vibrant faith, strong lay leadership, financial stability, community engagement and authentic welcome. The congregation seeks a pastor who will help shepherd us into a faith filled, growing and impactful future. If this role sounds exciting to you and you would like more information, we would love to hear from you! Please continue to read our UCC Profile below.





Name of Church

First Congregational UCC of Essex Junction

Address

39 Church St

Essex Junction, VT 05452-4723

Conference:

Vermont

Association:

Champlain

Title

Senior Pastor

Description

seeking full-time pastor

Web Presences

- ☐ <https://www.fccej.org/v5/>
- ☐ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fccej>
- ☐ <https://www.youtube.com/@FCCEJ>
- ☐ <https://www.facebook.com/firstcongregationalej>

UCC Conference or Association Staff

Contact Person Name:

Rev. Paul Sangree

Title:

Associate Conference Minister at Vermont Conference, United Church of Christ

Phone:

(508) 838-0475

Email:

psangree@vermontucc.org



Summary Ministry Description

We seek an experienced, compassionate, highly capable minister to join our caring and vibrant family of faith and intentionally lead us in our ongoing vision to accept and serve all people in the spirit of Christ. Located in the heart of beautiful Essex Junction, First Congregational Church of Essex Junction (FCCEJ) is a welcoming, joyful, service-driven, active church filled with the Holy Spirit. We strive to live out the words that open every service: “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome in this place.” Through our Cottage Meetings, we heard again and again that these aren’t just words, but a true reflection of who we are and our deeply rooted identity as an Open and Affirming church.

Grounded in extravagant welcome, meaningful connection, compassionate service, and spiritual growth, we seek a minister who will partner with us in nurturing a diverse and growing community of faith. Our ideal candidate has experience guiding a large and dynamic congregation, and the ability to inspire, support, and harness the energy and talents of dedicated staff and volunteers to carry out our mission. We are looking for a compassionate leader who connects authentically with people of all ages and fosters meaningful relationships across the congregation.

FCCEJ is our home, and we are a family. Together, we are committed to making a positive impact both within and beyond our walls. Our members say they experience God through meaningful and relevant worship, through beautiful music in the sanctuary, through ministries like our food pantry and thrift shop, through children and youth programs, and through moments of deep care and personal connection during times of joy, challenge, and loss. We also value the opportunity to grow in faith, ask questions, and share our gifts. We are excited to welcome new leadership through the UCC Succession Transition Model and step forward into the next chapter of our shared ministry.

What we value about living in our area.

FCCEJ is nestled in the center of the City of Essex Junction, a friendly, caring, progressive, inclusive, and engaged community. The city offers a unique blend of small-town charm and companionship, paired with the benefits of being in Vermont’s most populous county of Chittenden. Essex Junction is a short drive to Burlington, Vermont’s largest city and home to a wide range of cultural activities on and off Church Street, plus the University of Vermont and its medical center. Together with our neighboring Town of Essex, the area features excellent schools, a thriving economy, multiple libraries and parks, exciting community celebrations and events, and a vibrant dining and shopping scene - many of which are within walking distance of the church.

Surrounded by the natural beauty of the Green Mountains and Lake Champlain, this region offers abundant recreational activities and opportunities to enjoy the outdoors in every season, including our famous “stick season” and “mud season.” We are within a 2-3 hour drive of Montreal, Boston, and the Atlantic coastline. Our community has a diversity of income levels and age brackets, a mix of lifelong Vermonters and newcomers, and a small but growing racial and ethnic diversity. Above all, our community is characterized by a strong spirit of neighborliness and pride of place, making this a vivacious and deeply connected place to call home.

Current size of membership: 400

Average in person attendance: 115

Does your church hold virtual worship services? Yes

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

Video Hosting Platform

On average, how many views are received per service?

10

Languages used in ministry: English

Position: Senior Pastor

Position Duration: Settled

Compensation Level: Full Time

Does the total support package meet conference compensation guidelines? Yes

Conference guidelines <https://vermontucc.org/ministerial-compensation/>

Scope of Work

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

Compassion

We are seeking a minister who leads with compassion – for the people in our congregation, for our church, for our neighbors, and our world. We seek someone who builds authentic relationships, fosters a strong sense of belonging, and is deeply present in the life of the congregation. Key attributes include:

- Approachability, warmth, and empathy
- Strong listening, pastoral care, and counseling skills to support individuals and families in times of joy and sorrow
- Authenticity, humility, and emotional intelligence
- A passion for community engagement and outreach
- A commitment to creating an open, welcoming, and affirming environment

Inspirational & Engaging Spiritual Formation

We are seeking a minister who nurtures and inspires spiritual growth through meaningful worship and dynamic preaching. We value sermons that are grounded in scripture, intellectually engaging, and relevant to the realities of our daily lives. Through compelling storytelling, theological and historical insight, and authentic communication, our minister will encourage us to deepen our faith, explore life's questions, and keep looking and listening for God in our lives and in the world around us. Key attributes include:

- Dynamic preaching and engaging storytelling
- Strong theological and biblical knowledge
- Ability to interpret and explain scripture clearly and contextually
- A commitment to fostering reflection, lifelong learning, and spiritual growth
- Communication marked by authenticity, energy, humor, and hope
- The ability to connect ancient texts to contemporary issues and everyday experiences

Organizational Leadership & Management

We are seeking an experienced organizational leader to guide our large, multi-faceted church and its ministries. We seek someone who can think strategically and see the big picture while also attending to day-to-day operations. Our next minister must be able to manage staff, collaborate with volunteer leaders, delegate responsibilities, and harness the gifts of the congregation. At times, they will be called upon to help navigate change, build bridges, and resolve conflict. Key strengths include:

- Strategic leadership and vision-setting
- Effective management of staff and administrative responsibilities
- Developing and empowering lay leadership
- Encouraging sound financial management and stewardship
- Collaborative flexibility with ability to foster open communication
- Community leadership and partnership-building
- Balancing support for existing ministries with innovation to meet emerging community needs

Compensation and Support

SALARY AND BENEFITS OFFERED: SALARY BASIS: ITEM OFFERED	AMOUNT OR PERCENTAGE(IF DETERMINED)	IS THIS NEGOTIABLE	PASTORAL CANDIDATE
		☒	DETERMINES ☐
Housing Allowance	0	☒	☐
Any Experiential Difference (Related to years of experience)	0	☒	☐
Salary Basis: 0			
Pension/Annuity	0	☒	☐
Social Security and Medicare Offset	0	☒	☐
Medical/Dental Insurance	0	☒	☐
Life Insurance	0	☒	☐
Disability Insurance	0	☒	☐
Worker's Compensation	0	☒	☐

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

The stable financial health of our congregation is a testament to our shared dedication to ministry and the vision we hold for this church's future. We are positioned to offer a compensation package that meets all UCC guidelines and reflects the experience, skills, and calling of our next Senior Pastor, because we believe investing in the right minister is investing in our future.

The expected living situation for our next minister.

Parsonage or living nearby with a housing allowance. There is a 2100 square foot, five-bedroom parsonage or a smaller option of a two-bedroom apartment.

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.)

Yes

Our church compensation follows UCC guidelines for salary and housing.

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

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

Conference and/or Association meeting registrations
Other meeting registrations (or educational requirement registrations).
Reimbursement for use of personal vehicle.
Cell Phone and/or Internet.
Criminal background checks.
Community of Practice Participation.

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

Following is a list of supports that will be available to our next settled pastor:

1. Weekly Ecumenical Lectionary group
2. Monthly gatherings of the Champlain Association* of VTCUCC** clergy
3. Weekly Meeting with Vermont UCC clergy hosted by Conference minister
4. Fall and Spring Meetings of the Champlain Association
5. VTCUCC Annual Meetings and plenty of opportunities for VTCUCC Committee work
6. Informal social action groups of lay people and clergy
7. Personal relationships with local ecumenical clergy

*Champlain Association encompasses UCC clergy in Northwest Vermont

**Vermont Conference United Church of Christ

Who Is God Calling to Minister with Us?

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

As we look to FCCEJ's next chapter, we envision our Senior Pastor working with our congregation to achieve the following ministry goals:

Assessing Models of Ministry Staffing — We have been using a programmatic model, but have been limited by lack of available part-time staff. Our minister can help us move forward with this model by recruiting staff to fill positions or help us seek an alternative model that better meets the needs of our vibrant church.

Engaging the Next Generation — Building on our Family Friday Dinners and existing youth programs, we intend to develop a sustainable, creative model to welcome and retain young families, youth, and young adults, ensuring the long-term vitality of our congregation and creating a more generationally diverse congregation.

Deepening Spiritual Growth — We plan to continue and expand our culture of intellectual and spiritual engagement through meaningful preaching, sermon dialogue, Bible study, and faith formation programs that meet people at every stage of their journey.

Expanding Our Reach and Diversity — Our minister can facilitate growing relationships with immigrant and refugee communities, our Nepali Christian neighbors, the LGBTQ+ community, and others on the margins, so that our Open and Affirming identity is ever more fully lived out in the diversity of our congregation and the use of church facilities.

Developing a New Strategic Vision — Our most recent 10-year strategic plan concluded in 2024. We look to our minister to co-lead a collaborative visioning process that charts our course for the next five to ten years.

Sustaining Community and Connection — We plan to maintain the joyful, relational energy that defines FCCEJ through this season of transition, ensuring that our congregation remains a place where individuals feel known, cared for, and connected to something larger than themselves.

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

Our next minister will help sustain and grow our direct service to neighbors in need: through our Heavenly Food Pantry, Heavenly Thrift Shop, monthly Dismas House dinners for the formerly incarcerated, LIFT Sundays for our unhoused neighbors, and our semi-annual mission trips to communities like the Blackfeet reservation in Montana. These are not programs that run themselves; they require a pastor who champions them, inspires participation, and helps connect our congregation's gifts to our community's needs.

We also seek a minister who will deepen our relationships across faith traditions — building on our growing ecumenical partnerships through Good Friday services, Easter Sunrise worship, our inaugural Essex PRIDE service, and our longstanding connections with local Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim communities. A minister who networks naturally with other faith leaders multiplies our impact far beyond what any one congregation can do alone.

Equally important is a minister who advocates boldly and compassionately for justice — supporting immigrant and refugee neighbors, standing with the LGBTQIA+ community, and lending the moral voice of our congregation to the civic life of our city and state. Whether through the Burlington Area Interfaith Group, local clergy partnerships, community prayer, or participation in city committees, we want a minister who is known and trusted beyond our doors.

In short, our next Senior Pastor will be a presence in the community who makes our neighbors — church and unchurched, rural and urban alike — feel the warmth and mission of FCCEJ long before they ever set foot inside.

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

We do not have a multi-language requirement for our next minister, as our congregation worships in English. We do seek a minister who genuinely embraces cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender diversity and reflects that in their preaching, pastoral care, and community engagement. As an Open & Affirming congregation serving a community that includes immigrants, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and people from many faith backgrounds, we need a leader whose life and ministry embody radical hospitality — one who helps ensure that everyone who walks through our doors feels welcomed as a child of God.

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.

1. **Strengthening Interpersonal & Personal Integrity** - leading by example with strong character, emotional maturity, and healthy relationships grounded in faith, integrity, accountability and respect for all people; effectively communicates with people of all ages and at all stages of life, including young people.
2. **Building Transformational Leadership Skills** - leading the church with vision, faith, and openness to the Holy Spirit; thinking strategically and demonstrating effective church administration; nurturing leadership development of self and others through lifelong learning.
3. **Engaging Sacred Stories and Traditions** - bringing sacred stories and lessons to life through engaging preaching and meaningful worship; sermons reflect a deep knowledge and understanding of the bible and historic context, while connecting messages to people's lives and contemporary issues. Supports faith formation for all ages by meeting people where they are and inviting questions.
4. **Working Together for Justice and Mercy** - advocating for justice and following Jesus' example of radical hospitality that honors the dignity of all people; engaging in mission and outreach to meet the needs of our neighbors, our community and our world. Building relationships that further ground our church as a welcoming and trusted community hub.

Who Is God Calling Us to Become?

After listening to our congregation and reflecting together, we believe God is calling us to build on the strong foundation we have created by continuing the meaningful work we currently do, while seeking new opportunities to deepen our impact and open our arms wider to embrace more people from all parts of our community. We feel called to be a congregation that loves our neighbors, shines light in our community, and helps people to learn and grow in their faith.

At our core, we believe we are called to be a place of extravagant welcome and acceptance, where everyone has a place and no one feels alone. We seek to be a place of respectful dialogue, listening and learning. We hope to be a safe haven, especially for those who may feel excluded elsewhere, and to be a place of peace where people can deepen their relationships with God and with one another.

We believe God is calling us to be the “hands and feet” of Christ in our community, a congregation known for showing up, caring for others, and responding to real needs. Whether through feeding the hungry, operating our thrift shop ministry, sharing meals with formerly incarcerated individuals, welcoming immigrant neighbors, or being a community space for local AA and Scout groups, we strive to embody the compassion and generosity of Jesus. We want to be the kind of church where people see God at work, and where people know they can turn for help to find support and care.

At the same time, we feel called to grow. This includes broadening our church family, especially to underrepresented people, and strengthening connections within our congregation. We are called to work more collaboratively across ministries, breaking down silos and using our collective gifts more effectively.

As we look ahead, we embrace both continuity and change, trusting that God is guiding us into the next chapter of our shared journey.

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

In 2023, when our Associate Pastor accepted a call elsewhere, we chose to experiment with a programmatic staffing model rather than hire another full-time ordained pastor. We expanded responsibilities among other staff, hired part-time coordinators for faith formation and communications, and relied more heavily on lay leadership. While this model has allowed us to continue key ministries, it's proven difficult to recruit qualified candidates for part-time youth ministry positions. The retirement of our long-time Christian Education Director increased our reliance on staff and volunteers.

This challenge led us to an innovative experiment: we commissioned a gifted and experienced lay leader to serve as Assistant Minister on a volunteer basis (10 hours/week). After much discussion and acknowledging concerns by the Vermont UCC Conference, our congregation embraced the new model. It was approved by the Church Council in early 2026. This arrangement applies only within FCCEJ and our next senior pastor will have the opportunity to evaluate its effectiveness and decide whether to continue it.

A second experiment is focused on young families. Like many congregations, we experienced a decline in family participation during and following the COVID pandemic. After noticing several families attend worship for the first time in 2025, our staff launched monthly Family Friday Dinners to capture the momentum and create connection and community. Volunteers enthusiastically supported the events, allowing parents and children to build relationships without having to cook and clean. What began with a couple of families has grown to as many as seven families every month. We see this ministry as a pathway for strengthening our community while nurturing the next generation of faith formation.

We hope our next strategic planning process will help us discern the best staffing structure, programs, and leadership models to support our mission and growth for years to come.

Congregation Reflections

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

Our faith is rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ and grounded in scripture, while being open, thoughtful, and engaged. We encourage questions, exploration, and differing perspectives. Programs like sermon discussions and small group learning sessions reflect our commitment to an intellectually alive and spiritually curious congregation.

We live out our faith through our Values:

- **Inquiry:** We grow through an intellectual journey and feel empowered to challenge, question, and explore our faith.
- **Inclusion:** We are an open & affirming, diverse, and inclusive congregation that offers an invitation to meet Jesus Christ no matter where one is on life's spiritual journey.
- **Service:** We seek opportunities to live Christ's love through active engagement in our world.
- **Fellowship:** We express kindness and compassion with each other through Christian community in many settings.
- **Stewardship:** We are responsible for the use of our time, talent, and treasure as we care for our church and church family.
- **Worship:** We express our faith through meaningful experiences in the presence of God and each other through Word, Sacrament, Music, and Fellowship.
- **Fun:** We are a place where people can laugh and be joyful.

Strengths or positive qualities of our congregation.

Every Tuesday morning at 8:30 am, up to 35 people gather with the the prior Sunday's worship leader (typically the Senior Pastor) in the Marvin Lounge for fellowship, coffee, and Sermon Talk Back (STB). This group discusses the nuances and theology of the entire worship service: the sermon, music, children's message, and other elements. This dedicated group has tremendous spirited conversations and provides personal support every week.

STB starts with an icebreaker question, followed by discussion about the service. Some congregants come in with notes they've taken during Worship. This setting encourages inquiry, connections, openness, and a willingness for people to listen to one another and embrace personal stories. This two-way communication is a strength of our church. The Cottage Meetings, held to inform the search process, highlighted our congregation's strengths. Here is a sampling: "When I first came through the door, I felt at home."

"When my daughter transitioned, one of the first places she attended dressed as her authentic self was an FCCEJ event." "I was unemployed for 14 months and the choir took care of me."

"The church is active throughout the week, not just Sundays."

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

As we look to the future, we recognize several key needs:

- **Engage younger generations:** We have a patchwork of programs for youth, young adults, and families - including our new monthly dinners for young families - but we need to improve our offerings.
- **Expand the diversity of our congregation:** Refugee resettlement has brought many immigrant families to our area of Vermont. Our Food Shelf serves this population, and we provide space for the Nepali Church to meet. How do we reflect this in our worship?
- **Grow our impact beyond church walls:** Through our Food Shelf, Thrift Shop, and Missions Committee, we engage with many in our larger community, but we're always looking for more ways to make a difference.
- **Diversify revenue streams:** An ad hoc working group recently formed to explore options for redeveloping some of our property and buildings to generate revenue and help sustain our mission.
- **Maintain energy and participation during transition:** Positive feedback on the cottage meetings (listening sessions) we held to kick off our pastoral search makes us realize we need a plan to build connection with our new pastor. How do we continue and increase engagement in our church community?

What worship is like when our congregation gathers.

Worship is meaningful and engaging. We value preaching that connects biblical teachings to everyday life, offering theological depth and practical lessons. In person, worship is held in our historic sanctuary. We make our services accessible by live-streaming and having headsets for the hearing impaired. Every service includes a children's message.

Music plays a central role in our worship life, enriching our community and spiritual expression. Music groups include the Sanctuary Choir, Finally at First (praise band), Joyful Noise (children's choir), Currier Bell Choir, Heavenly Harmonies (women's choir), Men at First (men's choir). We have a historic and well-maintained pipe organ. Our services are sometimes experiential. Communion comes in different formats. We've practiced laying on of hands and washing of feet; lit candles and had opportunity for personal blessings; hiked up Mt. Philo for an outdoors Memorial Day service; had Blessings of the Animals; shared a Seder meal during Holy Week; and gathered for Easter Sunrise Service outdoors.

The educational program/faith formation vision of our church.

We engage our youth in several ways. For elementary and middle school ages, we lead Faith Formation classes with a mix of lectionary and paid curriculum. Jr. High youth enjoy Peer Time (Youth Group) with church-based crafts and conversation, bowling, barbecues, board games, and field trips. We have offered youth-focused service trips in the past, and our current service is multi-generational. The 2025 Christmas Pageant was a big, successful, all-kids production. Many of our older youth joined our pastor's final Confirmation Class, which is typically offered every other year. The Youth Ministry Team runs programming for youth in 6th-12th grade. Our Christian Formation Coordinator directs K-5th grade programming. Both are overseen by the Christian Formation Committee (CFC). CFC hosts a number of beloved traditions: Welcome Back Sunday, Pretzel Sunday, and Ice Cream/Volunteer Appreciation Sunday. In Summer 2026, CFC is experimenting with a new format for Vacation Bible Camp in which families gather for three evenings for a short worship, activities, and dinner. We're always exploring ways to meet the needs of young children and families to "instill lifelong habits and spiritual tools."

How our congregation is organized for ministry and mission.

Our church is organized around a central Church Council, consisting of a representative from each committee, led by a President and Vice President. The Council does "the work of the church," making policy decisions and approving financial plans. These meetings are open to the congregation-at-large, but only council members may vote on motions.

Each committee consists of 6-12 members and typically meets monthly. The Nominating Committee recruits members to committees based on their interests and availability. The Senior Pastor often assists the Nominating Committee by helping identify potential candidates, drawing on their relationship with and knowledge about the individual's interests and gifts.

Information from Council is disseminated through newsletters, social media, and committee reports. Committee roles are determined by our Bylaws, which were most recently updated in 2026.

Our last 10-year strategic plan expired in 2024. We will be looking at the new Senior Pastor to provide leadership, alongside the Strategic Plan working group, to establish a new vision for the next five to 10 years.

When it comes to decision-making, 15 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...

In Summer 2021, a new constituent of the congregation, "Joe," reached out to the then-Associate Pastor, Rev. Josh Simon, as the senior pastor was on vacation. Joe notified Rev. Simon that he was a registered sex offender under supervised release. The executive leadership group was consulted and a committee was formed. With input from a social worker, the committee took the following steps:

1. Joe was thanked for notifying us and asked to refrain from attending services until an appropriate plan was in place.
2. Our insurance company was consulted regarding liability. The state UCC office was consulted for guidance.
3. Conditions of release were reviewed. Joe was unable to use the internet so virtual attendance was not an option.
4. Within two months, a plan was created that included:
 - Joe would be prohibited from meeting with children in church.
 - A volunteer would be assigned to accompany Joe during any time at our church.
5. Rev. Simon continued to meet individually with Joe for spiritual guidance.

Although Joe ultimately chose not to attend worship at FCCEJ, our congregation lived up to our values of inclusion and was willing to support him.

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

☐ [Download FCCEJ-2025-Annual-Report-Final.pdf](#)

☐ [Download FCCEJBYLAWS-2026.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_First Congregational UCC of Essex Junction_2025.pdf](#)

Congregation Demographics

Describe those who participate in your church.

DEMOGRAPHIC	NUMBER
NUMBER OF ACTIVE MEMBERS:	400
NUMBER OF ACTIVE NON-MEMBERS:	284
TOTAL OF CHURCH PARTICIPANTS (SUM OF THE NUMBERS ABOVE) :	684

ARE THESE NUMBERS ESTIMATES? No

Percentage of total participants who have been in the church:

TIME	PERCENTAGE
MORE THAN 10 YEARS:	62%
LESS THAN 10 , MORE THAN 5 YEARS:	18%
LESS THAN 5 YEARS:	20%

ARE THESE NUMBERS ESTIMATES?

Yes

Number of total participants by age:

AGE	NUMBER
0-11	48
12-17	32
18-24	33
25-34	16
35-44	29
45-54	39
55-64	61
65-74	81
75+	119

ARE THESE NUMBERS ESTIMATES?

No

Percentage of adults in various household types:

HOUSEHOLD TYPE	PERCENTAGE
SINGLE ADULTS UNDER 35:	10%
HOUSEHOLDS WITH MINORS:	15%
SINGLE ADULTS AGE 35-65:	20%
JOINT HOUSEHOLDS WITH NO MINORS:	30%
SINGLE ADULTS OVER 65:	25%

ARE THESE NUMBERS ESTIMATES? Yes

Education level of adult participants by percentage:

EDUCATION LEVEL	PERCENTAGE
HIGH SCHOOL:	0%
COLLEGE:	0%
GRADUATE SCHOOL:	0%
SPECIALTY TRAINING:	0%
OTHER EDUCATION LEVEL: See ARDA	0%

ARE THESE NUMBERS ESTIMATES?

Yes

Percentage of adults in various employment types:

EMPLOYMENT TYPE	PERCENTAGE
ADULTS WHO ARE EMPLOYED :	0%
ADULTS WHO ARE RETIRED :	0%
ADULTS WHO ARE NOT FULLY EMPLOYED :	0%

ARE THESE NUMBERS ESTIMATES?

Yes

The range of occupations of working adults in the congregation:

Our congregation reflects our city with a range of professional, paraprofessional, and service positions. Our wider community has a large semiconductor manufacturing facility, as well as the University of Vermont, St. Michael's College, Champlain College, and University of Vermont Medical Center. Many congregants are employed at these organizations. Other congregants work at local businesses, schools, and nonprofit organizations.

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

Our congregation is predominantly white with European heritage, reflecting the broader demographics of our community. There is a notable French Canadian influence among some of our longtime members and our surrounding neighborhood.

While our Sunday congregation remains largely homogeneous, our church is home to a vibrant 100-member Nepali Christian congregation that gathers for worship each Saturday. We also welcome immigrant and refugee neighbors through our Food Pantry and a below-market apartment. These relationships reflect our aspiration to become a more diverse and inclusive congregation.

What diversity means in our context?

The diversity of our congregation lies in the people. We share a similar cultural heritage, but we have a diversity of ideas. Our five-generation congregation, while liberal-leaning, has people from across the political spectrum. We come from, and live in, diverse economic situations. We have members across the gender and sexual orientation spectrum. Many people in our church come from faith backgrounds including Catholic, Protestant, Unitarian, and unchurched. These rich perspectives inform and diversify our faith community, and we celebrate each person as a unique and precious child of God.

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

Adult Groups or Classes (in person or online)	60	Senior Pastor, Members
Baptisms (number last year)	2	Senior Pastor
Children's Groups or Classes	20	Children's Ministry Coordinator, CF Committee, Members
Christmas Eve and Easter Worship	490	Senior Pastor, Deacons, Staff, Music Leaders
Church-wide Meals	60	Senior Pastor, Staff
Choirs and Music Groups	80	Music Director, Members
Church-based Bible Study	10	Members
Communion (served how often?)	12	Senior Pastor, Deacons
Community Meals	20	Staff
Confirmation (number confirmed last year)	6	Senior Pastor
Funerals (number last year)	8	Senior Pastor
Intergenerational Groups	16	Mission Committee
Outdoor Worship	40	Senior Pastor
Public Advocacy Work	20	Members
Retreats	25	Church Officers
Weddings (number last year)	2	Senior Pastor
Worship (digital / online / livestream)	10	Deacons, Administrator, Volunteer
Youth Groups or Classes	8	CF Committee

Worship Times

WORSHIP (TIME SLOT):	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PEOPLE INVOLVED IN ATTENDANCE	WHO PLANS EACH OF THE LISTED GATHERINGS
1015	75	Deacons, Senior Pastor, Band Leader
0830	40	Deacons, Senior Pastor, Music Director
0900	75	Deacons, Senior Pastor, Music Director (Summer Worship)
1000	115	Deacons, Senior Pastor, Music Director (Communion Sunday)

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

Our church is a vibrant and active community, with dedicated and capable staff and strong lay leadership. Our church places a high value on pastoral care, fellowship, supporting children, youth and families, music, mission, and lifelong learning. Many hands, volunteer and pastoral, are needed to support these various ministries. With our current programmatic staffing model, we hired a part-time digital media specialist, full-time administrator, and part-time children's ministry coordinator. We continue to recruit for a part-time youth ministry coordinator.

Church Finances

Current Annual Income

SOURCE	AMOUNT
Annual Offerings and Pledged Giving	414000
Endowment Proceeds (as permitted within spending policy, such as a cap of typically 4.5%-5% on total return)	5000
Fundraising Events	11000
Rentals of Church Building	9000
Rentals of Church Parsonage	40800
Support from Related Organizations (e.g. Women's Group)	10000
Sawyer House Rental	16800
Other Income	94319
Total	600919

Current annual expenses (dollars budgeted for most recent fiscal year): 524956

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 FCCEJ- 2026 Budget--PCREPORT2026 BUDGET- \(2\).pdf](#)

Considering total budgeted expenses for the year, compare total ministerial support. What is the percentage? 30

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
Strengthen the
Church
Neighbors in
Need Christmas
Fund

In what way is OCWM (Basic Support) gathered?

We currently budget for Basic Support in our operating budget.

If calculated as a percentage of operating budget, this is the percentage? 3

Total amount of loan debt:

No response

Reason for debt:

n/a

Are capital and other

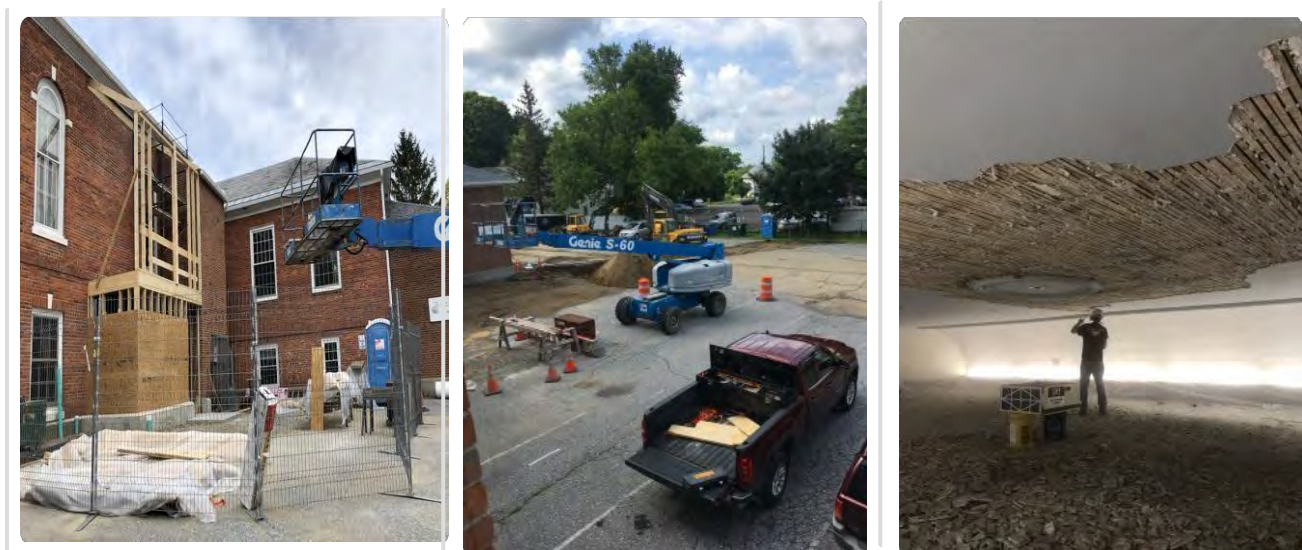
payments current? Yes

Capital Campaigns

Description of any building programs projected or underway.

We have a number of small renovations underway, including new siding for our parsonage building this spring. The total cost of the project is \$40,000. We are also exploring how to remove a small portion of one or two of our pews to create a more comfortable space for wheelchairs. Cost is expected to be under \$10,000.

Pictures



Description of any capital campaigns in the last ten years:

YEAR(S) 2018

PURPOSE:

To restore and preserve key infrastructure, make our home more welcoming and accessible, and further our efforts to expand ministry and outreach.

GOAL: 1,090,000

RESULT: 1,130,000

IMPACT:

Beautiful, fully restored sanctuary (plaster restoration, painting, window restoration, sound system/streaming technology; lighting upgrades); roof repairs/replacement; parking lot restored with new accessible entrance; added ADA bathroom on first floor; energy efficient lighting; enhanced security through keyless entry system; Kitchen and Marvin Lounge renovations for improved fellowship and mission outreach; major elevator repairs and modernization; Fellowship Hall structural repairs and new flooring; new more-visible church sign; major organ repairs; new flooring in offices/halls/classrooms (including removal of old asbestos tiles).

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

After much discussion and discernment, our congregation prioritized renovations to “our home” as the focus of the 2018 Our Home, Our Future, Our Time Capital Campaign. We faced a daunting list of critical needs, including essential infrastructure repairs, necessary accessibility and safety improvements, and well-worn spaces throughout the building, including sacred spaces like our sanctuary. Our prayer was that addressing these core needs would create a safe, welcoming, and functional space so that we could more fully direct our energy and resources toward mission and outreach in the future.

Does your church have an endowment? Yes

What is the market value of the assets?

1000000

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

Yes, we have an endowment policy where we withdraw 5% for approved projects submitted by committees

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

5% based on FCCEJ Endowment Policy

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

Endowment draw is not used for operating expenses

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

Other Assets

Rental properties x2

Reserves (savings): 236,964

Investments (other than endowment): 389000

Does the church have a parsonage? Yes

Fair market rental value of the parsonage: 40800

How is the parsonage used? Currently used for rental property

Street

3 Church Street

City

Essex Junction

State VT

Zip

05452

Finished square footage: 2176

Number of Bedrooms: 5

Number of Bathrooms: 2

Assessed real estate value:

464000

Available for minister residence? Yes

Expected minister residence? Yes

Condition of structure, systems and appliances

Well-maintained with new siding and basement upgrades

Entity in the church responsible for review and needed repairs Trustees

Parsonage pictures



Description of all buildings owned by the church:

Our property consists of an historic church building, a storage barn, a two-story, 5-bedroom parsonage, and another 2-story home where we have a thrift shop on the first floor and a 2-bedroom apartment on the second floor. The main church building is home to our beautiful sanctuary, a large Fellowship Hall, ample classroom and meeting room space, administrative offices, and a small gym. Our Food pantry operates out of Fellowship Hall twice a month. We have a lower-level space available for rent or use by various church groups. A new preschool has leased space starting in summer 2026.

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

The church rents parking spaces from an office building across the street for overflow parking

Accessibility features of our building(s):

Listening devices in the sanctuary, or wireless technology to connect to hearing aids

Wheelchair access in bathrooms Handrails on all stairs

Sound system in sanctuary and other meeting places (fellowship hall, large meeting rooms, etc.)

Exterior access such as ramps for wheelchair users or people requiring other mobility assistance

Interior access to different floors for wheelchair users or others with mobility aids (elevator, chair lift, ramps)

Access to worship spaces, including chancel and pulpit, for wheelchair users and people with other mobility aids

Access to childcare spaces for wheelchair users and people with other mobility aids

Which spaces are accessible to wheelchairs:

The church is fully accessible to wheelchairs with the exception of the four classrooms on the third floor, and the lowest level of our administrative wing/rental space. We have drawn up plans to make that space accessible by adding a ramp inside our building. However, the new preschool tenant doesn't need this so the project is on hold for the foreseeable future. The addition of an ADA-compliant bathroom on our first floor was a critical accessibility improvement.

Policies regarding financial practices of the church:

Our church's financial practices and responsibilities are governed by our Bylaws and Financial Policies and Procedures, which outline the roles of all financial officers and establish clear protocols for managing church funds.

Key practices include defined roles for Financial Secretary and Treasurer, clear authorization protocols for the payment of bills, and structured oversight through auditors and committees responsible for budget, finance, and endowment matters. These safeguards ensure that our financial resources are managed responsibly and in the best interest of our congregation.

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

Our strong financial position reflects our congregation's deep commitment to ministry and mission. A successful \$1.1 million Capital Campaign, a healthy annual budget, a robust endowment, and revenue-generating properties like our Thrift Shop all demonstrate the generosity and vision of our members. We are well-positioned to support our next Senior Pastor with a competitive compensation package, sustain our vibrant programs, and continue expanding our outreach — locally through our Food Pantry and Dismas House, and globally through our mission trips and international giving.

Historical Information

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

1. First Congregational Church of Essex Junction has a 150-year history of serving our community. In 1867, the First Congregational Society of Essex Junction was formed. In 1961, FCCEJ joined the United Church of Christ. Our social activism was evident in the opening of the Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop in 1995 and the Heavenly Food Pantry in 1998 to serve our neighbors in need.
2. In 2000, Vermont led the nation in codifying Civil Unions. The same year, the congregation at FCCEJ voted to allow ministers to perform civil unions in the church. This affirming decision helped lay the foundation for thoughtful discussions, education, and prayer. In 2012, the congregation voted 97-3 to become an Open and Affirming congregation.
3. Most significantly, we raised over \$1.1 million in our recent Capital Campaign. This generosity showed the congregation's support and commitment to preserving our historic church. It will allow us to serve our members and our community well into the future.

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

Like many churches, FCCEJ was profoundly affected by the Covid pandemic. In addition to suspending in-person worship, the church was in the midst of major Capital Campaign renovations. Church leadership responded immediately to keep the congregation safe and connected, enabling staff to work remotely and committees to meet online. The church approved \$15,000 to purchase equipment needed for modified worship services. Initial investments in cameras and a new sound system allowed streaming to begin quickly, despite a steep learning curve and many challenges.

Volunteers and staff worked collaboratively to make online worship possible. Remaining funds were later used for permanent cameras and electrical upgrades to improve reliability and ease of use.

Streaming worship had long been a goal of the congregation, especially for snowbirds and homebound members. Today, one service each week is livestreamed with interactive participation, and services are posted on YouTube for later viewing.

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.

When disagreements arise, we strive to approach one another with respect and a willingness to listen. Grounded in God's love and guided by our common mission, we value grace, patience, and honest communication. We recognize that each person brings their own experiences and perspectives, and that differing views can deepen understanding.

We have a Pastoral Relations Committee to help navigate concerns involving pastoral staff in a fair, thoughtful, and transparent manner. When committees disagree about an issue, we bring the matter to Council for discussion and discernment, seeking consensus and compromise whenever possible. Over time, we have learned that process matters and that conflicts can arise when stakeholders feel left out or when opportunities for discernment have been missed.

When we fall short, we believe forgiveness is an essential part of faithful relationships. Our goal is not just to resolve conflict, but to learn from it, build trust, and move forward together in faith.

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

In 2021, the unexpected departure of our daycare tenant created a \$20,000 annual budget gap and large vacant space. A committee was formed to explore possibilities for future use, and recommended relocating our Food Pantry from Fellowship Hall into that space.

The proposal had benefits, including dedicated food distribution and storage space. However, pantry leaders did not believe the plan adequately met their needs, leading to tough but necessary conversations about decision-making, representation, and what would best serve the church as a whole.

While the process was challenging, it created an opportunity for many voices to be heard and for groups to work collaboratively toward a resolution. Ultimately, the Food Pantry remained in Fellowship Hall, while consolidating storage to reduce its footprint. The vacant space has since been used by church groups, rented intermittently to outside organizations, and a new preschool has leased a portion of the space beginning this summer.

Ministerial History:

Name: Rev. Mark Mendes	Years of service: 19	UCC Standing
Name: Rev. Roger Daly	Years of service: 3	UCC Standing
Name: Rev. Steve Garvey	Years of service: 19	UCC Standing
Name: Rev. Joshua Simon	Years of service: 6	UCC Standing

Name: Rev. Sandy Daly	Years of service: 3	UCC Standing
Name: Rev. Timothy LeConey	Years of service: 5	UCC Standing
Name: Rev. Heike Werder	Years of service: 3	UCC Standing
Name: Rev. Sally May	Years of service: 1	UCC Standing
Name: Rev. Devon Thomas	Years of service: 2	UCC Standing

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

We respect and encourage the boundaries our ministerial staff maintain for their emotional and physical health. Vacations and sabbaticals are encouraged.

FCCEJ has been fortunate to call senior pastors who have chosen to spend 10-20 years with us, helping create stability and foster growth. Our church has also mentored young associate pastors, helping them "launch" to senior pastor roles. It has been a joy to see them grow.

40+ years ago, a former minister was defrocked in retirement after inappropriate relationships with parishioners while at FCCEJ.

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?

Yes

Community Vision

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

FCCEJ's Missions Committee oversees our outreach ministries. Dedicated volunteers run our Heavenly Food Pantry, which operates twice monthly; and our Heavenly Thrift Shop, which provides affordable clothing and home goods.

Revenues from the Thrift shop (\$84,067 over 2023-25) are granted to other local nonprofit organizations.

We provide monthly dinner and companionship at Dismas House, a transitional housing program for formerly incarcerated people, and outreach to Josh's House, a supportive community for veterans.

On LIFT (Living In Faith Together) Sundays our congregation builds hygiene kits that may be given to unhoused people. This project engages the youth in writing personal notes and adult members in building the kits.

Biannually, FCCEJ sends a multi-generational team on a mission trip. This year's trip will return to the Blackfeet reservation in Montana to provide service projects.

We host monthly Friday Night Suppers for any young family to come dine and socialize for free.

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

FCCEJ has a good working relationship with the Vermont UCC Conference. In 2024, we hosted the Vermont Conference Annual Meeting. We send four representatives to the Meeting every year when it is held at other sites. Our current Senior Pastor is an active member, and current treasurer, of the UCC Champlain Association of Churches. The Champlain Association is a regional, covenantal network of United Church of Christ congregations located in Northwest Vermont. It is one of seven regions in Vermont.

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

FCCEJ often participates in the annual Essex PRIDE celebration with a table and games. In 2025, the organizing committee asked us to host a service for the LGBTQIA+ community. Speakers included members of the community as well as the local Catholic priest and elected officials. We anticipate that this interfaith service will become an annual event at FCCEJ in December, commemorating the date Civil Unions were codified in Vermont. We support the annual COTS (Committee on Temporary Shelter) Walk, a fundraiser to end homelessness. Our Faith Formation program annually supports a charity of the children's choosing. Our music program has embraced the Royalties for Spirituals Project: a practice of valuing musical contributions of enslaved Africans to American worship and song. We honor unrecognized musicians by singing their pieces with reverence, gratitude, and open hearts. Royalties for the use of these songs are donated to a local organization that supports African American musicians.

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.

FCCEJ went through the discernment process to become an Open and Affirming congregation over 20 years ago. This designation is not in-name-only, but a lived commitment to welcome all who join us. We are a welcoming community, accepting and serving all in the spirit of Christ.

Part of our active ministry includes:

- Welcoming the refugee community by renting our parsonage and apartment (when available) at below-market rates to individuals and families who are immigrants
- Providing space for the Nepali Christian community to meet
- Hosting a Korean language school.

We would be open to exploring more of the above statements of witness in the future, should the congregation or Senior Pastor feel they would help us live more fully into our mission.

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

Holy Week in our community has many ecumenical traditions. This year's Good Friday service was an ecumenical

service with nine churches represented. We annually share our Easter Sunrise Service with the Essex Catholic community. During the Lenten season, we have begun hosting a Seder dinner. We have also opened our pulpit to a local Rabbi and Imam to share their faith traditions.

We held pride-centered services annually, and then held our first PRIDE worship service in conjunction with Essex PRIDE in 2025. This service was ecumenical, including the local Catholic priest and a neighboring UCC pastor. Other members of the LGBTQIA+ community both attended and participated in the service.

As part of our youth Confirmation class, confirmands experience worship at other houses of worship. Past visits have included evangelical services and a synagogue. This experience is very meaningful for the youth and leads to interesting conversations and growth opportunities in their faith journeys.

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

Our mission is to build relationships with God, each other, the community, and the world through prayer, worship, fellowship, education, outreach, and service. We build relationships with God and each other through worship and coffee hour, Faith Formation, choirs, Sermon Talkback discussion group, Searchers study group, Coffee Clatter, Bible study, book group, monthly grief support group, and young family dinners. Our church is governed by a Church Council with representatives from each committee.

In addition to our Food Pantry and Thrift Shop, FCCEJ offers quarterly Community Concerts at First that bring musical acts to Essex Junction, hosts community workshops for seniors on aging and financial planning, and has initiatives supporting former prisoners, veterans, and the unhoused. We organize and fund a bi-annual, multi-generational service trip. Our facilities are used by community groups like AA, The Vine Nepali Christian congregation, Scouting Troops, Tai-Chi, and Bone Builders.

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.

The Senior Pastor's Scope of Work includes the role of community ambassador, which involves wider church activities and community ministry. The congregation expects their Senior Pastor to be active at all levels of wider church life, both within the UCC and the Essex Junction/Burlington community. Previous ministers volunteered and held positions in the UCC Champlain Association, the VT UCC, and national church settings.

The role has included a weekly ecumenical lectionary group, an informal ecumenical protest group, City of Essex Junction Committees, Rotary membership, Essex Area Clergy Group, the Burlington Area Interfaith Group, The Essex Pride Group, the Essex Justice Center and various City of Essex Junction opportunities for public prayer at various public events. There have been exchange and educational programs with both the Jewish synagogues in the area and the Islamic Center of Vermont.

The ARDA Reflection

ARDA/Report

[Download ARDA Community Profile.pdf](#)

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

The ARDA community profile for our area suggests several key trends. Population growth is modest or mixed, with a relatively stable residential base, meaning many residents stay long-term. At the same time, a significant portion of the population is "unclaimed" religiously, indicating many people are not actively connected to a congregation.

These trends create opportunities for outreach to spiritually unaffiliated neighbors, as well as relationship-building in a stable community. Ministries focused on newcomers, families, and community engagement could be especially effective.

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.

Our congregational makeup contrasts with the ARDA data. While the neighborhood includes a mix of ages (including younger families or working adults), the church skews older, which can limit connection with younger or unaffiliated residents.

This gap suggests both a challenge and an opportunity: the congregation may struggle to reflect community demographics but can intentionally develop ministries (e.g., young adult outreach, family programs, flexible worship styles) to bridge the divide. Building intergenerational relationships could help align the church with its broader community.

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

To reach unaffiliated individuals, we may need to:

- Prioritize relationship-centered, low-barrier engagement over traditional attractional models.
- Build authentic relationships through small gatherings, service projects, and community meals, encouraging personal invitations.
- Meet practical needs with childcare, food support, mental health groups, and job assistance.
- Offer accessible, discussion-based spaces using welcoming language.
- Maintain a strong, friendly digital presence.
- Emphasize belonging before belief.
- Foster inclusion, connection, and purpose for the spiritually curious.

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

Our church is known for its inclusivity, liberal theology, and outreach. There is a real connection with the community including with residents who do not attend our church. Our local state representative commented, “Most churches want to keep politics out of the church. This ministry has chosen to stay connected with local legislators and subcommittees have invited us in for discussion...I applaud all community outreach.”

Many people in the community associate our church with the Food Pantry and Thrift Shop.

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

“I felt like I was home” is how one new member described her experience at FCCEJ. “The welcome was personal and people were genuinely friendly.”

New people in our church are drawn to the music program which boasts over 50 members in various choirs, including “open choir Sunday” when anyone can come sing with the choir and worship band.

People are also drawn to our active Mission focus including the Food Pantry, filling bags for the unhoused, and semi-annual mission trips. People are also drawn to our engaging and vibrant Sunday services and the warmth of the community of people gathered there.

References

☐ Elaine Haney

I am a former longtime city councilor in Essex Junction and have interacted with the First Congregational Church in various ways.

Primary Email Address: elaine.haney62@ gmail.com

Mobile Phone: 802-324-2546 Reference

Response

The "Congo Church" is the most prominent church in our little city, being right on Main Street and always a hub of activity. They house our local food shelf, The Heavenly Pantry, providing them with enormous storage capacity and allowing them to open their doors twice a month, no matter the weather, to serve those in need. It's the only food shelf in our city and is desperately needed.

I am not a church goer and have only been to the Congo Church for ceremonies and holiday concerts. Every time I go it is packed. They have for many years hosted a Memorial Day service at which students read essays about what Memorial Day means, and the choir performs patriotic songs. It's a very moving service and as far as I know it's the only one in the area that honors veterans in that way.

This church is a focal point of our community.

☐ Father Charlie Ranges

I am Fr. Charles Ranges, SSE, Pastor of Holy Family-St. Lawrence and St. Pius X Churches in Essex, Vt.

Primary Email Address: holyfamily2@ comcast.net

Church Primary Phone: 802-878-5331

Reference Response

The First Congregational Church is known to be an open and progressive congregation and very welcoming to everyone including our gay brothers and sisters. Its' theology is liberal with free thinking. The sermon is the most important feature in the worship service and Rev. Mark is noted as being inclusive and a good speaker. He has a public presence in the community and is recognized by most everyone. He is friendly and humorous. The next pastor should have these good qualities. What his and my congregations are facing is a challenge of attracting young families. The congregations re generous but aging. The next pastor needs to have a personality that is attractive to this group of peoples and perhaps be young him or herself. I would be open to meet candidates for the position and be helpful in any way.

☐ Kris Murnane

Kris Smith Thyme President of Essex Pride

Essex Pride has and continues to collaborate with the First Congregational UCC of Essex Junction

Primary Email Address: essexvtpride@ gmail.com

Response

FCCEJ has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to creating a welcoming, affirming, and inclusive community for all. Their actions reflect the values of love, dignity, and service, making the church a cornerstone of community support.

As President of Essex Pride, I have had the privilege of working closely with FCCEJ. Their partnership has been genuine and deeply impactful. Rather than simply expressing support, they have consistently shown up for the LGBTQ+ community through meaningful collaboration, volunteerism, and by opening their hearts to those who have too often been excluded from faith communities.

FCCEJ fosters a relationship built on trust, mutual respect, and a shared belief that every person deserves to be celebrated and welcomed exactly as they are. Their willingness to stand publicly alongside the LGBTQ+ community has helped create a stronger and more compassionate Essex.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, as we search for our new pastor, we ask for prayers for this individual as well as for our congregation. We pray that patience, understanding, and a sense of calmness guide us during this process. We also pray that the new Senior Pastor will see and understand the importance that God represents in our lives.

God, with all understanding that as we go through this transition, we all realize there will be times that will feel heavy. We pray that you lighten the feeling of heaviness and replace it with joy. This church has full faith that you will guide our future Senior Pastor to us.

Statement of Consent

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

The FCCEJ Search Committee was appointed by Church Council. All members of the Committee contributed to the profile. Members of the Committee represent the major committees of FCCEJ. The information gathered for this Profile were gathered by open Cottage meetings with our congregation, online surveys, and our working knowledge of the committees, mission, and values of FCCEJ. Members are Catherine Shearer (Chair), Jen Dooley (Secretary), Bob Driver (Chaplain), Micah Heaney-Forbes, Matt Clark, Judy Allen, Marian Lawlor, Betty Marthaler, Laura Marthaler, Kaki McGeary, and Amy Trimble McIntyre.

2. Additional comments for interpreting the profile:

Readers and interested candidates will hopefully find the profile useful for learning about FCCEJ and comparing it to other opportunities. We feel like our church and community offer so much more than is captured in this profile. To help convey a fuller picture, we have created a supplementary document which will help express more of the depth, breath, and love we have for our church, our congregation, and our local region. We hope you find both the profile and the supplement useful. We look forward to meeting you!