

Rossmoor Community Church

WHO ARE WE NOW?

CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS

We are an ecumenical congregation whose membership is drawn from the Rossmoor Active Adult Community (ages 55+), with a few associate members from nearby adult communities. Affiliated with the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ since its founding, the Rossmoor Community Church (RCC) has had a Christian presence here in Rossmoor for the past 57 years.

Mostly lifelong Christians, from many denominational backgrounds, we are people of strong faith who take seriously our calling to be Christ's witnesses in this beautiful community. We listen for the Holy Spirit's guidance in sermons, and we caringly support each other on our faith journeys. We have embraced our diversity and are grateful for the rich blessings that our diversity brings to us.

Our worship service is, for the most part, "traditional" but we are also willing to embrace new worship experiences that will inspire us and grow our faith.

CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

RCC is located within a gated community (age 55 plus) in central New Jersey, convenient to both Princeton and New Brunswick and about an hour in either direction from New York and Philadelphia. Located near exit 8A of the New Jersey Turnpike, Rossmoor is nestled on 418 acres in Monroe Township, one of many communities exclusively serving seniors. Originally called Leisure World, Rossmoor was the first of these to be built by Ross Cortese, a visionary developer from California. It remains the largest of the adult communities. There are approximately 3,000 residents living in 2,303 homes at any given time.

Rossmoor was initially built to appeal to snowbirds – people from the mid-Atlantic region who liked to stay warm throughout the winter by spending those months in Florida. Then, when it got too hot to play golf and tennis in Florida, they'd return to their property in Rossmoor. Some of our residents still resemble that initial target market for Rossmoor.

However, the newer residents are creating a much more diversified populace than the community previously had. So, while Cortese envisioned an environment in which Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish faith communities shared a common facility, we now recognize that there are other faiths represented in our community. We have a number of Asian American residents who are of the Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist faiths.

Some of our residents are children of immigrants. Others are immigrants themselves. You will meet people here who were born in all corners of this Earth. Furthermore, we sit in a township with a recent influx of many Asian Americans.

PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING

RCC is administered by the Church Council, whose members are elected by the congregation to serve for either a two-year or three-year term.

With a membership of 70, RCC is unique in offering dual membership whereby a member may join RCC and also keep his/her membership in another church. We also have some congregants who attend services regularly, as well as financially support the church, but choose not to join. Some are Roman Catholics who enjoy participating in our services and frequently serve in various capacities. In fact, we have as many Catholics as Protestants attending our Ash Wednesday service each year. We count all of our “visitors” as friends of the church.

On any given Sunday, we are likely to have between 35 and 45 people attending our 11am worship. Once a month, we happily welcome the Rossmoor Chorus that provides magnificent music for our service. On those Sundays, there will be 50 to 65 people in attendance, including the 25 or so chorus members. Communion is celebrated on the first Sunday of each month. We even celebrate the occasional wedding!

CHURCH FINANCES

Several years ago, we were fortunate to have a Council Chair who, working with a Merrill Lynch advisor, helped the Church Council develop a strategic financial plan for 2017-2021 which was successful. However the COVID pandemic took a toll on membership and our finances. As a result we currently rely a good deal more on earnings from reserves, to meet our monthly expenses.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Rossmoor Community Church was founded a year after the community opened in 1966. An eleven o'clock worship service is held each Sunday morning, weather permitting, in a stately building called the Meeting House. It resembles a traditional church, sitting on a village green in New England. The developer, Cortese, wanted Rossmoor to look and feel like a New England village, which it does. Rossmoor has individual colonial-style homes, co-ops and condominiums, built around a 125-acre golf course. Because there's hardly a sand trap visible from the street, it appears that we have our own miniature Central Park with 22 miles of sidewalks within and around the entire three-mile perimeter. A great feature!

The Meeting House is owned and maintained by the Rossmoor Community Association, Inc. (RCAI) and actually belongs to all Rossmoor residents. As a result, the Meeting House is used for other purposes besides our church services.

RCC rents space for the pastor's office, the secretary's office, and a small meeting room on the second floor of the Meeting House. Church Council meetings, and larger committee meetings, are held in the Meeting House parlor on the first floor.

The Meeting House is also used for worship services by other faith communities within Rossmoor. The Jewish Congregation holds services twice a month on Friday evenings and the Catholic Society celebrates a monthly mass.

The Interfaith Council, of which RCC is a part, organizes three special services a year – for the National Day of Prayer, Memorial Day, and a Thanksgiving Day program on the Thursday before Thanksgiving – all are held in this building.

The Meeting House also becomes the venue for concerts, with highly-acclaimed professional artists, as well as productions by the resident theater group called *The Players*.

Because the Meeting House is maintained by RCAI, we enjoy worship services in a beautiful building that is well-maintained by the Association but for which we pay nothing. We don't move furniture or equipment because these things are taken care of by our custodial staff that also sets up and monitors our sound system which is used to record all Sunday services. Members of our Altar Prep committee set up the altar in

the Meeting House with the liturgical paraments of the season. A local florist delivers a lovely bouquet of seasonal flowers that may be donated by members to honor special celebrations and remembrances. Members also provide Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies and daffodils.

Our worship services and special programs are promoted through RCAI's community television station as well as through the *Rossmoor News* that is published monthly.

Our dedicated prayer chain members meet twice a year and welcome new members throughout the year. They take turns sending cards to members who are ill, grieving, or in need of encouragement. The Prayer Chain receives a weekly e-mail message with the names that were submitted for prayer the previous Sunday during worship.

Our church has dedicated volunteers who serve on the Church Council as well as the committees under the Council. Members also serve as Liturgists each week. During the past several years, we've had a part-time minister, a part-time secretary, and a part-time organist, all of whom kept services going during the COVID pandemic via technology, when all Rossmoor facilities were shut down.

OUR VISION

Our congregational vision is to foster, and support, a caring community among our members and the community at large, through the provision of meaningful worship experiences, engaging fellowship opportunities, and initiatives designed to support those in need that are provided in a welcoming and thoughtful manner.

It is our sincere desire that our new pastor will work with us to attract the generation that, to a great extent, has rejected Christianity and church-going. Together, we hope to make the baby boomer residents feel accepted upon return to the church. This may not be as challenging as we'd once anticipated as a recent study from the USC points out that many people become more engaged in religion, and religious activities, as they approach the later stages of life. They are more likely to become churchgoers, or engage in spiritual practices, in their post-55 years. It is encouraging to remember that while baby boomers choose to leave organized religion, many of them were raised going to Sunday school and/or church.

One of the earliest messages that many churched boomers can remember is that "Jesus loves me." And at a state of life where their adult

children, and their families, have their own very active lives, it can be comforting to return to that venue where one likely felt a sense of love and comfort. To make boomers truly feel at home in our church, we may need to make some changes to accommodate them. It is true that the basic needs of people never change, but we realize that boomers may not be touched by the old, traditional methods.

Our new pastor's messages may need to meet them where they are today. So, while the message of hope, salvation and a new life in Jesus is sacred and unchanging, the method of delivery of this message probably should not be. If we do not meet boomers where they're coming from, messages from the pulpit will fall on deaf ears and be tuned out as irrelevant.

It is helpful to remember that this generation came to faith as contemporary worship was being introduced in churches. Thus, boomers appreciate messages presented not only verbally, but those incorporating technology to illustrate key points. They don't identify with anything that implies they're getting old, other than seeking guidance in navigating health issues. Small groups for Bible study, prayer, meditation, meaningful discussion or for support may prove helpful.

WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?

The Interfaith Council was founded at Rossmoor quite early in this community's history. The faith communities work together to put on several special services as well as assemble and deliver Thanksgiving dinners to homebound Rossmoor residents on Thanksgiving Day. While these are all worthwhile, we sense that we could be doing a better job of getting to know our neighbors of other faiths. We believe we have a role to play with regard to creating a greater sense of unity in our increasingly diverse community. The members of the Interfaith Council could, and probably should, be the community leaders modeling pluralism.

The RCC Benevolence Committee also sponsors a community-wide effort through their annual school supply drive for local underprivileged children. They also sponsor the "Souper Bowl" campaign and sock drive for the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen and men's shelter. From time to time, money is donated to areas in need of disaster relief.

Each winter, before Christmas, RCC sponsors an annual drive to collect coats and warm clothing for distribution by Your Grandmother's Cupboard, a statewide Christian organization, that distributes clothing free of charge to area centers where clothes are most needed. This event has very strong community-wide support in Rossmoor.

The church leaders sponsor a spaghetti dinner – open to the entire community to raise funds for our benevolence activities.

Additionally, in 2022 Rossmoor was devastated by hurricane Henri. Over 100 homes were flooded and most lost everything. RCC stepped up and raised over \$80,000 and good furniture was collected in the Club House to help our neighbors.

WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME?

God is calling us to be:

- faithful followers of our Master teacher, Jesus Christ,
- faithful in worship,
- faithful in supporting our faith community,
- faithful in praying for and supporting each other,
- faithful in caring for our homebound members.

The following scripture speaks to our Pastor Search Team as we seek to answer the question, “Who is God calling us to become?”

“Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season shall we reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

Galatians 6:9-10

Many in our membership have been serving in churches all of their adult lives and feel blessed that they can still serve as leaders. Some of our members have “aged-out” of leadership roles but remain dedicated church attenders and supporters. They like the convenience of our church, that is handicapped accessible, and the fact that they are worshipping with their longtime church friends and Rossmoor neighbors.

The Church Council wants the church to be there for these devoted members to sustain them in their elder years. The Council also wants RCC to continue as a beacon of light for the entire Rossmoor community. We believe that the presence of our church strengthens the fiber of our entire

community and we will be there for them when residents decide to become a part of our loving church family.

The Pastor Search Team is seeking a dynamic pastor with a passion for older adult ministry and who brings to the pastorate strong administrative skills as well. We also look forward to welcoming a new pastor who can identify with our vision and will provide our congregation with meaningful, relevant, inspiring, and uplifting worship services.

As a community of faith, we are pleased that we are known in our larger Rossmoor community as a warm, welcoming, and caring church. Scripture teaches us that all things are possible to those who believe. Our core group of dedicated and capable volunteers believe that, together, the possibilities we foresee for our future can, and will, become our new realities.