

THE SPIRE

August 2023

We seek to be a Christian community by worshipping God through prayer, music, and the proclaimed Word. Following Christ's example, we enthusiastically reach out to everyone with compassion, respect, and love so that we may grow in faith and commitment together.

Church of Christ, Congregational, UCC

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An Open and Affirming Congregation

Worship God, Serve our neighbors, Share God's love.



A Message from the Moderator

Jan Krohn

Hope you are enjoying the summer despite all the rain!

1. The new windows in the pastor's office and parlor are in. Thanks to Women's Fellowship for the donation of the windows and those who donated towards the installation. You can still contribute to the cost of the installation. Stop by and see them!
2. Thanks to those who have been hosts for groups renting church space for their function. Host's open and close the church after an event. If you are interested being a host, please contact Julie.
3. After more consideration we will not be changing the church lock code.
4. We have not had much response in our search for our new pastor which we did expect during the summer. However, the slow process can be discouraging and of concern. Rev Mary last month gave a sermon that gave us hope through prayer and trust in God's faithfulness. I hope her message assists us in our search for the future of Millis UCC, Congregational.

Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 11, 2023 Philippians 1:3-11

You may have heard that a terrible fire destroyed the First Congregational Church in Spencer last week. I was stunned as I watched the footage that showed the church's once majestic steeple topple to the ground as flames roared through the rest of the building. I could only imagine the depth of the shock and grief that the people of the Spencer church were experiencing after the inferno, likely caused by a lightning strike, ravaged their historic building. The church's interim pastor, Rev. Bruce McLeod, said later, "For a lot of folks it was like a death in the family. For folks who have gone through the milestones here from baptisms to weddings to funerals, it's devastating."

Our church buildings mean a lot to us, and with good reason. Our sanctuaries are just that - safe havens where we can experience the love of God and neighbor. They are places where we come before God to worship, sing, and pray. They are places that house preschools and food pantries and community gatherings. And as Rev. McLeod pointed out, they are places where many of our most significant life events happen.

In the days following the fire, I found myself thinking about the Spencer congregation and what their life would be like as a faith community without a building. Not surprisingly, I also thought about the congregation I served in Stoughton, who also lost their building, not by fire, but because they decided that in order to be faithful followers of Jesus they had to sell it. You see, they had discerned that, although they could

have kept spending their investment funds in order to care for their well-loved but aging building, doing so would not be good stewardship of the resources that God had entrusted to them.

So what does it look like to be a congregation without a building? Is it even possible?

Well, two days after the fire, the Spencer congregation worshiped at the UCC church in neighboring Leicester, with whom they share a pastor and with whom they had been developing a relationship. The two churches began an experiment in shared ministry back in February, sharing one interim minister and worshiping together on Sundays. The people from each congregation were getting to know and care for one another, so when the fire struck the Spencer church, that congregation didn't have to worry about where they would meet. Rev. McLeod said, "It's almost as though God knew that we would need each other and drew us together for mutual support and care. It's almost as though God knew something we didn't. Of course God knew."

If any of my former congregants from Stoughton were here today, they could tell you a similar story about their church. When the pandemic hit in March 2020, the bridge pastor at the UCC church in Brockton contacted me to see if we would be interested in sharing online worship together, for what she and I (and everyone else) anticipated would be for a mere two weeks. As you know, we (and everyone else) were wrong about the duration of the lockdown and the "couple of weeks" turned into many months. Although our two churches were worshiping together only on Zoom, relationships were still being formed, and later, when it was safe to meet in person we planned outdoor events so that people could meet face to face.

A year or so later, when it became clear to us in Stoughton that our church was no longer viable as an independent entity, we were supported during the very difficult and complex process of selling our building and dissolving our ministry by the relationships we had already established with our friends at Christ Congregational Church in Brockton. We began worshiping in their sanctuary and our two congregations started the process of weaving together our ministries and our lives. Reflecting on the ways that the relationship between the two churches flourished during this time leads me to echo the words of Rev. McLeod: "It's almost as though God knew that we would need each other and drew us together for mutual support and care. It's almost as though God knew something we didn't. Of course, God knew."

I share these stories with you today because I think there is wisdom to be gleaned from the experiences of both the Spencer and Stoughton congregations. Both of these faith communities were well aware of the challenges they faced in sustaining their ministries in this post-pandemic era. They both had the willingness, and the courage, to seek not what they as individuals wanted but rather, what they believed God desired for their future. They developed the ability to look beyond their doors. They concentrated on nurturing connections with others. They facilitated personal relationships, which by the way, are almost certain to attract people who value meaningful connection.

The Spencer and Stoughton congregations also refused to keep repeating that well-worn expression beloved by far too many congregations, "But we've always done it that way."

How did this transformation happen?

The verses we just heard from Paul's letter to the church in Philippi might give us a clue.

Paul, who is deeply fond of the Philippians to whom he writes, spends much of this passage talking about prayer. In fact, he both begins and ends it with references to prayer. Paul thanks God “every time” he remembers the Philippian people, especially for their “partnership in the gospel.” He reminds them of his confidence that the God who has entered into relationship with this beloved community will not let go of them until God’s plan for them is complete.

The faith of which Paul speaks is something I witnessed in Stoughton, and I have a feeling it’s alive in the Spencer church as well. Throughout the years we spent discerning the future of the First Congregational Church of Stoughton, we endeavored to be prayerful. We prayed before and after meetings. We shared our feelings with God and one another even when it was difficult to do so. We expressed our gratitude for each other and for the ways that the Holy Spirit was guiding us through a process that none of us really wanted to happen.

Although the life of faith is always nourished by prayer, I believe it’s especially important to pray during times of transition such as the one you’re in now.

The decisions you make in the next few months will shape your future as a congregation. As you seek your next settled pastor you might be attracted to someone who assures you they can grow your church. You might be tempted to sit down with pen and paper and analyze your options, listing the pros and the cons of a particular candidate. You might decide to make checklists and spreadsheets. But that kind of analysis, while helpful to some degree, is ultimately incomplete because it doesn’t seem to involve God. And God wants more than anything to be part of your future. God desires your highest good, both as individuals created in God’s image and likeness and as a

church committed to sharing Christ’s love with the world.

So, I encourage you today to pray for your church and to trust in God’s faithfulness - God has been faithful to you in the past and will continue to be so going forward. I encourage you to seek what God desires in all the decisions you will make. Be willing to think in new ways, to take risks, to imagine the blessings that await you, but be ready - they may not be what you expect or think you need.

Pray for your Search Committee - theirs is a holy job with lots of responsibility. Pray that God will send the right person to be your next settled pastor (and that you will be the right church for them too.) Pray for companions to support your church and its vision. Be vigilant in inviting the Holy Spirit to direct your future so that you can go where God is calling and create with God a kingdom of love and justice for all people.

And I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

May it be so.

Rev. Bruce McLeod’s account of the fire at the Spencer church can be found at <https://www.sneucc.org/newsdetail/spencer-interim-pastor-expresses-gratitude-after-fire-17450008>

Prayer Requests

If you would like to be added to the prayer chain, or if you or someone you know wants to receive prayers for a specific situation, please contact Mary Jensen



Prudential Corner

Here is a summary of our finances over the first half of this year (1/1/23-6/30/23):

	Thru 6/30/23 YTD Actual	Thru 6/30/23 YTD Budget	difference
Pledges	49,893.30	50,404.028	510.72
Total Income	83,192.56	78,329.10	4,863.46
Total Expenses	103,887.81	124,283.50	20,395.69
Net	-20,695.25	-45,954.40	25,259.15

We are starting to see the effect of not having a settled/interim Pastor on the payroll, which though positive for our finances, is obviously not where we want to be as a Congregation. At least for the time being, we will continue to report the actual numbers against the budget that was approved at the Annual Meeting, which included funding for a settled Pastor.

As a result, our Year To Date budgeted expenses are \$20,395.69 more than the actual amount. We budgeted for a loss of \$45,954.40 for the first six months of the year, so our circumstance has resulted in us having an actual deficit of \$20,695.25. This is the amount that we will need to take out (or already have)

of our investments. Though it appears that we are \$25,259.15 ahead of what we budgeted (which we are), our expenses continue to be higher than our income.

Through the first six months of this year, we have withdrawn \$25,000 from our investment account to cover expenses. We have been as judicious as possible, only liquidating some of our investments when necessary to make sure there are enough funds to cover the expenses that are needed on a monthly basis. At the end of June, our balance with Vanguard was \$332,645.69. This leaves us with \$255,566.31 in the General Fund, \$48,966.87 in Board Restricted Funds, and \$42,106.05 in Donor Restricted Funds.

As always, please reach out to your Prudential Team with any questions, thoughts, or suggestions as to how we report these numbers to the Congregation.

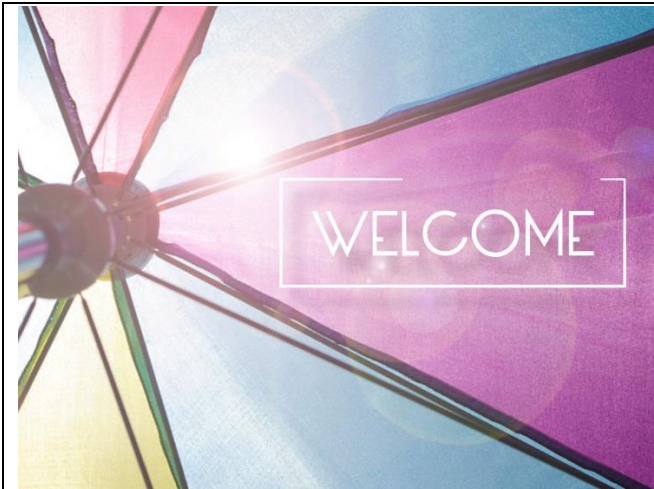
From Your Deacons

Though it has been a tough summer so far in regards to weather, the Deacons are hopeful that our outdoor worship services might happen more frequently in August. Weather permitting, we will be worshipping outside throughout August, so pack your chairs and blankets. We ask that folks park in the middle of the parking lot or on the side with the playground on Sunday mornings, to leave the spaces by the lawn open for those who might want to set up their chairs there.

In August, we will worship with the Norfolk congregation at their church on August 6th. The Deacons will be covering the August 20th service, and Rev. Mary will be leading our worship services on August 13 and August 27.

If you have ideas for worship or would like to help lead a service as a lay person (including reading scripture, leading prayer, or giving a brief message), please speak to one of the Deacons. Please keep an eye on the Spire and bulletin for important worship dates coming up.

Lauren, Allen, Kathy, Katie, and Doug



Welcoming Committee

The Welcoming Comm was excited to host the Visitor's Tea on the afternoon of June 29th.

The Tea is in honor of both those who visit and those who are visited. Smiles, laughter, fancy hats and the joy of sharing conversions and food filled Fellowship Hall. It was wonderful to see so many attend on a hot summer afternoon.

A special thank you to Sue Conte for assisting me in making it a success.

The Visitor's have been a long-standing outreach group of our church. They are a dedicated group who visit, make phone calls and send cards to those who are unable to attend church or other events in person. Their service and care for others is so important and appreciated.

If you are interested in joining the Welcoming committee or would like to greet/usher on a Sunday morning, beginning in September, please leave a message with the church office. Greeting/ushering is a simple and minimal time commitment to welcome those attending services.

Enjoy the rest of the summer,
Wendy Schneider



To protect our members from scammers, we will no longer be publishing personal phone numbers or email addresses in the Spire. All members and friends should have a copy of the Church Directory where that information can be found. You can always contact the church office as well.



The mission committee welcomes suggestions from the congregation of charitable organization(s) and/or a service activity we can contribute to. Please contact any member; Art Payne, Judy Kosinski, Casey Woodley or Jan Krohn.



**The next edition of the Spire will be
September and the deadline will be
Aug 20th, 2023**

Worship Bulletin

The bulletin can be found at: www.millisUCC.org

To join Sunday worship services by Zoom, use this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87562091923?pwd=MVpJT21NelRck9wM1UyaUtBalZsZz09>

If using phone, dial: 1-646-558-8656 US (NY)

Meeting ID: 875 6209 1923

Passcode: 02054

Find your local number:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/kc6vTurh6j>

Host with the Most?

As the church expands the rental of the building to more one-day users, we need a cadre of Church Hosts. These Hosts would unlock the church and make sure lights and heat are working and then lock up afterwards, making sure lights and heating are off. There would be no monthly meetings other than to coordinate who's covering which days. There's no heavy lifting or moving of furniture. You would not need to be on-site the entire time. It will require a brief training about the facility. If you are interested in being a Church Host, please contact Julie in the office.



Committee Meetings

8/2 - 7:30 PM ~ Christian Education – Zoom

8/8 - 12:00 PM ~ Prudential - Zoom

8/10 – 10:00 AM ~ Visitors Group – Parlor

8/11 – 10:00 AM ~Worship Meeting

8/13 - 11:30 AM ~ Diaconate Meeting

8/22 - 7:00 PM ~ Church Council



We are grateful for Lauren and Doug Briggs for planning and executing the services without Rev. Mary and for Rev. Mary planning last Sunday's fun baseball service.

Thank you to Steve Howie for keeping for taking care of the lawn every week.

Special thanks to our wonderful Hosts, Sue Conte, Karen Hatch and Wendy Schneider who let our renters in and out of the building.

Socializing with the M&M's Mondays in the Parlor!

The M & M's (Monday Morning Needlework Group) gather in person in the Parlor every week! Join in the fun on Monday mornings, any time **10 AM – 12 PM**. All are welcome – bring handwork if you have it or just come to socialize!

Refreshments

Each Sunday we all enjoy a drink and snack following worship, but these don't magically appear. Everyone sharing a little, creates a feast. Please look through your calendar and pick a Sunday - next month, during the summer, next fall – when you will provide the refreshments. When we all take a turn, we only need to do it once per year. Please contact the church office with your preferred week. If when the time comes you cannot be there, we'll just find someone to swap Sundays with you.



BOARDS & COMMITTEES

Leadership & Committees

Moderator	Jan Krohn (22)
Church Clerk	Sue Conte (22)
Treasurer	Gail DiGioia (22)
Collector	Brooks Corl

Diaconate		
Katelyn Andrews (23)	Doug Briggs (23)	Lauren Briggs (21)
Kathy Stevens (23)	Allen Williams (23)	
Missions		
Casey Woodley (22)	Jan Krohn	Art Payne
Prudential		
Doug Coutts (21)	Bill Wright	
Christian Education		
Brenda Marrero (23)	Doug Briggs (22)	Kelly Williams (21)
Welcoming Committee		
Wendy Schneider (23)		
At-large Members of Church Council		
Art Payne (21)	Judy Ackerman (21)	
Pastoral Relations Committee		
Linda Jones (21)	John Smith (21)	Jo-Ellen Briggs (21)
Jen Payne (21)		
Memorials Committee		
Sue Conte (21)		

**Church of Christ
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We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

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