

INTRODUCING THE NEW LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE



The new Local Church Profile is not just for congregations in search of a pastor. *All* congregations are encouraged to engage in its process of discovery every 3-5 years. The UCC Local Church Profile reflects valuable data, assesses ministry, clarifies change, and helps advance the calling of the congregation. Not just to be completed by a search committee – the more participation, the better!

**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Muskegon, Michigan

Senior Minister

Michigan Conference, United Church of Christ

Date: October 27, 2025

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*“God is able to provide you with every blessing, so that
having all sufficiency in all things at all times,
you may abound in every good work.”
(2 Corinthians 9:8)*

INSTRUCTIONS

The new Local Church Profile supports the calling and discernment of United Church of Christ congregations with their current or future pastoral leadership.

For many congregations, the interim time between ministers is an intentional season that is guided in part by the preparation of a Local Church Profile. Using the Profile, the church can discover its data and express its story for the reliable discernment of a search committee and the beginning of a new ministerate. Searching ministers will want to see this document in its entirety.

The interim season is not the only time in a church's life when it's valuable to give attention to explore a congregation's vocation. Three sections of the Local Church Profile – **WHO ARE WE NOW**, **WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR**, and **WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME** – are meant to be updated every 3-5 years. Known together as the “Discovery Document,” these three sections can be completed by a visioning group, a governing body, a transition team, or other group – not just the search committee – in order to draw forward the gifts and imaginative possibilities of a congregation. The church's engagement with the “Discovery Document” might not have the same sequence as the completed Local Church Profile that is read by candidates.

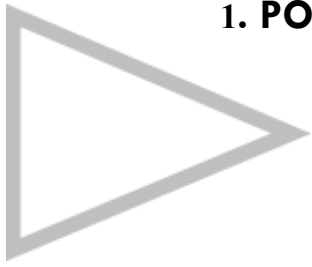
Some questions are easy to answer. Some are not so easy. Prompts are provided to stimulate narrative response if needed; these italicized prompts are merely examples from which to choose or to inspire your own. Efforts to answer the questions will prompt conversations and explorations and story-tellings and many prayers. As the Spirit moves throughout the process, congregations will shape a collective articulation of Christ's leading (**WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME**). This last question to be answered becomes the first section to be read by searching ministers in the Local Church Profile, and it is the boldest and most actionable piece for faithful leadership into the future.

Your conference can provide materials referenced in the Local Church Profile, such as the 11-Year Report containing data as reported by your congregation annually to the UCC Data Hub, and MissionInsite reports containing demographic information on your community. More information on types of ministerate in the United Church of Christ can be found in the Call Agreement Workbook. Be sure to use the Call Agreement Workbook's Scope of Work to describe in this Local Church Profile the position being sought.

When it is time for ministerial search, the conference can counsel you on posting the Local Church Profile together with your public listing at UCC Ministry Opportunities (<http://oppsearch.ucc.org>).

The last page of the Local Church Profile contains a statement that parallels the consent statement signed by ministers in the UCC Ministerial Profile. In keeping with the covenantal relationship between a church and those it seeks to call, this statement encourages an open, honest exchange of information. On behalf of the United Church of Christ, and on the basis of

the best knowledge available to them, your conference staff will validate your completed Local Church Profile when it is ready to be shared in relationship with prospective new leaders.



1. POSITION POSTING

- a. LISTING INFORMATION
- b. SCOPE OF WORK
- c. COMPENSATION & SUPPORT
- d. WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?

1a. LISTING INFORMATION

Church name: [First Congregational Church](#)
Street address: [1201 Jefferson Street](#)
[Muskegon, MI 49441](#)
Supplemental web links: Website: fccmuskegon.org
Facebook: [First Congregational Church U.C.C.](#)

Additional ecumenical affiliations (*e.g. denominations, communions, fellowships*):
[United Church of Christ](#)

Conference: [Michigan Conference](#)
Association: [United Church of Christ](#)
UCC Conference or Association Staff Contact Person (Name, Title, Phone, Email):
[Rev. Dr. Lawrence Richardson, Associate Conference Minister of Church Vitality and Transitions, \(517\) 295-3637, lawrence@michucc.org](#)

Summary Ministry Description:

In a short paragraph, reflect on where your church is going and what it might look like when you get there. What do you need to get there? Who are you seeking to join you on this part of your church's faith journey?

[Our church is heading into a season of growth, connection, and renewed purpose. We imagine a future where our pews are filled with people of all ages and backgrounds—where kids laugh in the hallways, conversations are deep and real, and our work in the community continues to make a real difference. When we get there, worship will still feel like home: full of beautiful music, thoughtful preaching, and genuine care for one another. To move forward, we need a minister who can walk with us—someone grounded in faith, passionate about justice, and ready to help](#)

us grow in spirit and in numbers. We're looking for people to join us who care about others, love good questions, and want to be part of something meaningful.

Photographs:

Insert 1 – 3 images of your church, its people, its parsonage or building or gathering space, etc.



What we value about living in our area (2 – 3 sentences):

We value living in Muskegon because it's a place where community still matters. We love being near the lakeshore, with its natural beauty, beaches, and sunsets that never get old. There's a strong sense of local pride here—people show up for one another, support small businesses, and work together to make things better. Our church is proud to be part of that fabric. From our downtown location, we serve as a hub for compassion and connection—offering meals, groceries, a community garden, and a place where everyone is welcome. We've been part of

Muskegon's story for over 150 years, showing up for justice, standing with neighbors, and helping shape a community rooted in love, dignity, and hope.

Current size of membership: 388

Languages used in ministry (*other than English*): None

Position Title: Senior Minister

Position Duration (*choose one, delete the other options listed*):

Settled – a called position intended for longer-term ministry in which the minister moves church membership to the congregation and moves standing to related association

Compensation Level (*choose one, delete the other options listed*):

Full Time

Does the total support package meet conference compensation guidelines? Yes

1b. SCOPE OF WORK

(add here the Scope of Work developed by your church using the Call Agreement Workbook)

Core Competencies:

(List three core competencies that you imagine could be foundational in your next minister's relationship with the church. For example, a church seeking a pastoral care minister might hope to call someone who is caring, sensitive and sociable, while a church seeking an executive minister might want an organized, detail-oriented and time-conscious person.)

Three core competencies we believe are foundational for our next minister's relationship with the church are:

1. **Relational Leadership** – We seek a minister who is approachable, a good listener, and naturally builds strong connections across generations. Someone who leads with empathy, encourages collaboration, and fosters a sense of belonging within the

congregation and the wider community.

2. **Prophetic Preaching and Teaching** – We value a minister who is a thoughtful communicator and Biblical scholar—someone who can offer sermons that are relevant, justice-oriented, and spiritually rich, helping us connect faith to action in today’s world.
3. **Visionary and Practical Administration** – We are looking for a leader who will work collaboratively and in cooperation with the people of FCC to serve the life, witness, and service of FCC well into the next generation of the 21st century. The minister will have the gifts of wisdom and care to oversee the staff and its administration, ministries and finances of FCC.

1c. COMPENSATION AND SUPPORT

Salary Basis (*from the Call Agreement Workbook, equal to Cash Salary plus Value of Parsonage/Housing Allowance*): \$80,000

Benefits (*choose one*):

Salary plus Benefits

What is the expected living situation for your next minister (*e.g. parsonage, living nearby with a housing allowance, living elsewhere to commute as needed*)?

Living nearby (within approximately a 20 mile radius of the church) with housing allowance

Comment on the residential/commuting expectations for your next minister.

We would like our next minister to live within our community (20 mile radius of the church).

State any incentives (*e.g. school debt reduction or retention bonus after a certain number of years in position*): Any and all incentives would be open to negotiation

Describe peer and professional supports available for ministers in your association/conference:

We belong to the Grand West Association of the Michigan Conference of the UCC, Muskegon County Cooperating Churches, and the Downtown Ministers' Alliance.

If applicable, describe how your church will adopt part-time adjustments in the ministerial schedule to support a minister's bi-vocational employment: N/A

1d. WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?

Describe the ministry goals you envision your next minister co-collaborating with the congregation to achieve.

We envision our next minister partnering with us to grow a church that is vibrant, inclusive, and deeply engaged in both faith and action. Together, using the gift of hospitality, our deep desire is to welcome new people—especially younger individuals and families—into a community where all feel seen, valued, and spiritually nourished. We want to strengthen our intergenerational connections and create space for fresh ideas while honoring the traditions that ground us, especially our rich worship and music life.

With our next minister, we aim to deepen our commitment to social justice and community outreach—expanding partnerships, amplifying our impact, and ensuring that our faith continues to show up in real, tangible ways throughout Muskegon. Internally, we look forward to clarifying our organizational structure, improving communication, and empowering members to use their gifts in leadership and service. Ultimately, we seek a minister who will co-create a future with us that’s rooted in Christ’s love, fueled by justice, and open to the Spirit’s call for growth, healing, and transformation.

Describe how your vision of the minister you are now seeking will assist the congregation in making an impact beyond its walls.

The minister we are seeking will inspire and support our congregation in living out our faith boldly in the wider community. By modeling a deep commitment to social justice and inclusion, the minister will help us move beyond words into meaningful action—strengthening our outreach like the Saturday breakfast, Mobile Food Pantry, church food pantry, and community garden, and expanding partnerships with local organizations. Through powerful, Biblical preaching and authentic engagement, our minister will challenge us to be active agents of change, advocating for marginalized groups and fostering healing across divisions. Their ability to connect with people of all ages and backgrounds will help us build bridges in Muskegon and beyond, making our church a true beacon of hope, compassion, and justice in the world.

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

As an Open and Affirming congregation, we are seeking a minister who is fluent in the language of inclusion, justice, and affirmation. This means using language—both in worship and everyday interactions—that reflects the sacred worth of every individual, including people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, races, abilities, and backgrounds. We need a minister who speaks with care and intention, ensuring that all feel seen, welcomed, and valued, especially those who have historically been marginalized and/or alienated by the church.

Culturally, we hope for a leader who understands the complexities of identity and is comfortable engaging in conversations around race, gender, and equity. This matters deeply to us because our

sense of calling is rooted in the belief that the Gospel is for everyone—and that our church must be a place where love is not just spoken, but lived out in visible and meaningful ways. Our next minister should be someone who not only affirms diverse identities, but also helps us continue learning and growing as a congregation committed to justice, healing, and radical hospitality.

Based on what you have learned about who your church is, who your church's neighbor is, and who God is calling the church to become, describe four areas of excellence from *The Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministry* that your next minister will display to further equip the congregation's ministry in these areas.

Four Areas of Excellence for Our Next Minister

1. Building Transformational Leadership and Community Engagement

Our church has a long and vibrant tradition of community presence — partnering with organizations like [Muskegon County Cooperating Churches](#), the Downtown Ministers, and [Congregation B'nai Israel](#); supporting the CROP Walk and the annual [MLK observance](#); and actively serving through local outreach. To continue this legacy, our next minister will demonstrate excellence in leading and inspiring the church to engage the wider community as an expression of faith. They will nurture relationships across boundaries of denomination, faith, and culture; represent our congregation in public witness; and guide us in discerning how to serve God by serving our neighbors in love and justice.

2. Nurturing Spiritual Formation and Faithful Worship

Rooted in our covenant to walk in God's ways and participate in God's church, we value worship that is intellectually grounded, spiritually rich, and musically excellent. Our next minister will demonstrate excellence in engaging sacred stories and traditions to deepen faith, preaching with insight and authenticity, and creating worship experiences that speak to both heart and mind. They will invite the congregation into prayer, study, and reflection that strengthen our shared discipleship and inspire daily living aligned with Christ's teachings.

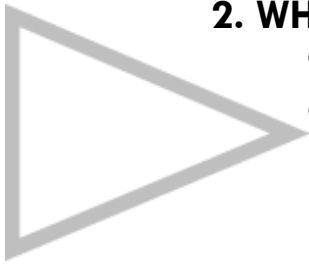
3. Caring for All God's People through Pastoral and Relational Ministry

As an open and affirming congregation that embraces diversity and inclusion, we seek a minister who embodies a Christ-like heart in caring for God's people. This includes offering compassionate pastoral care, welcoming all who enter our doors, and building intergenerational relationships rooted in trust, empathy, and grace. The minister will help us live more fully into our calling as a caring, connected community where every person's story is honored and every voice valued.

4. Leading Faithfully through Justice, Service, and Collaboration

Our congregation's long-standing commitment to social justice and service — from the food pantry and community garden to advocacy and outreach — reflects our understanding of faith in

action. Our minister will work together with us for justice and mercy, equipping us to continue and expand these ministries. This includes helping the congregation discern where God is calling us next, strengthening lay leadership, and cultivating partnerships that extend our collective witness for equity, compassion, and hope in Muskegon and beyond.



2. WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME?

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37 NRSV)

Who is God calling you to become as a congregation?

God is calling us to be a church that cares well for the people already here, helping one another grow through learning, sharing, and deeper faith. At the same time, we’re being called to reach out—to younger folks, to our downtown neighbors, and to the new people moving into the waterfront area—so that our community keeps growing and reflecting the place we’re planted.

We’re called to live out what we believe, not just say the right words, but put our faith into practice in real and visible ways. That means offering ministries that invite people to be part of this church, creating a space where diversity is celebrated, and always looking for the common ground we share in Christ.

At our best, we will be a church that respects one another no matter who we are or what we think, a church where we can talk honestly and kindly, and a church that isn’t afraid to welcome new people in. We believe God wants us to be Jesus’ hands at work and sandals on the ground—showing up, helping out, and making a difference right here in our community.

Describe how God is calling you to reach out to address the emerging challenges and opportunities of your community and congregation.

For example, describe two experiments your congregation has initiated or engaged in the past year; what were the results and where do you see your next steps? Has your church had a multi-year strategic plan or vision statement; if so, where do you see that plan/vision taking you?

We feel God calling us to show up in profound and practical ways that make a real difference for people around us. Over the past several years, we’ve tried a few new things to see what works. Our monthly food truck, community breakfast, and garden have been a big hit—not just because

of the food, but because they give people a place to gather, connect, and feel welcomed. It's been a great way to build relationships with neighbors we might not have met otherwise. And our community garden continues to bring people together over something as simple—and as life-giving—as growing food and sharing it.

We've also started hosting weekly Genders and Sexualities Alliance (GSA) meetings and a monthly bike repair shop. Both have opened the door to new connections. The GSA has given people a safe and affirming space, while the bike repair is a fun, hands-on way to meet practical needs and strike up conversations.

All of this fits with the spirit of our minister's leadership, centering on unity, respect, and God's love for all. Looking ahead, we hope to grow into a place that not only feeds people's bodies and spirits but also challenges the mind and creates space for learning, discussion, and connection. Our next steps are to keep building on what's working, stay open to new ideas, and keep listening for how God is leading us forward.

3. WHO ARE WE NOW?

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39 NRSV)

- a. CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS
- b. 11-YEAR REPORT
- c. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS
- d. PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING
- e. CHURCH FINANCES
- f. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

3a. CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS

Describe your congregation's life of faith.

For example, what beliefs and commitments are stated in your congregation's purpose statement or membership vows? How is God most often described in worship liturgy? In what ways would you describe the Holy Spirit in your midst?

First Congregational Church of Muskegon outlines the following Covenant and Statement of Faith:

Covenant:

Together we covenant with God, understood in the life and teachings of Jesus:
To walk in God's ways, known or to be made known to us;
To commit ourselves to the Christian way as we understand it;
To affirm our participation in the Church which is the body of Christ; and
To serve the world God Loves.

Statement of Faith:

This Church accepts the Scriptures as its authority in matters of faith and practice. The right of every member to diligently study and interpret the Scriptures, and the duty to respect the considered interpretations of others, leads this Church to the understanding that Christian truth as contained in the Scriptures is in essential accord with the belief of the United Church of Christ as set forth in the Statement of Faith adopted by the General Synod of the United Church of Christ (modified), as follows:

“We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit, who is made known to us in Jesus our Brother, and to whose deeds we testify:

God calls the worlds into being, creates humankind
in the divine image and sets before us the ways of life and death.
God seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.
God judges all nations and all humanity by that will of righteousness

declared through prophets and apostles.
In Jesus Christ, the Man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord,
God has come to us and shared our common lot,
conquering sin and death, and reconciling the whole creation to its Creator.
God bestows upon us the Holy Spirit,
creating and renewing the Church of Jesus Christ,
binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.
God calls us into the Church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be servants in the service of the whole human family,
to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism, communion, passion and victory.
God promises to all who trust in the Gospel
forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
the presence of the Holy Spirit in trial and rejoicing,
and eternal life in that kingdom which has no end.
Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto God. Amen.

Describe several strengths or positive qualities of your congregation.

One of our biggest strengths is the way we come together around hospitality and service. Our monthly breakfasts and food truck gatherings aren't just about food—they're about creating a space where people can connect, feel cared for, and experience community.

We're also blessed with Christ-centered, love-centered preaching that challenges and encourages us, along with fantastic music that lifts our spirits and brings worship to life. As a church, we're not interested in putting on a show—we care about depth, authenticity, and always striving for a deeper understanding of God, our faith, and each other.

Another strength is the way we do life together. We're open and affirming, and we work collaboratively to make decisions as a congregation. We don't hand the reins to one person; instead, we value everyone's voice and assume good intentions when people share their thoughts. That spirit of trust gives people the freedom to speak up and participate. We also have strong teams and departments that share the work, which keeps us moving forward without burning anyone out.

While we honor our history and legacy, we stay open to new ideas and new ways of living out our faith.

Finally, we know who we are and where God has placed us. We're an anchor in this downtown neighborhood, and we're committed to staying here—rooted, steady, and ready to serve the community around us.

Describe what worship is like when your congregation gathers.

For example, where does worship take place, and what is it based around? What was a recent baptism like? What are some words used to describe good preaching?

When we gather for worship in our beautiful, New England style sanctuary, it's a traditional service—rooted in liturgy, scripture, and song—and always with a progressive message of God's love for all humankind. Music plays a central role, with an excellent choir, a dynamic music director and organist, and a wide range of styles. On any given Sunday, we might sing an old-time hymn, lift up a newer piece, or be moved by a contemporary or renaissance anthem. The music isn't just a performance; it's substantive, thoughtful, and crafted to help us reflect and respond to God's presence.

Our preaching is often described as Christ-centered, love-centered, and thought-provoking—messages that invite us into introspection while also calling us to live out our faith in daily life. Our focus is on creating space to encounter God's grace, to wrestle with what faith means for each of us, and to celebrate being part of a community rooted in love.

Special moments, like baptisms, are celebrated with joy and reverence, woven seamlessly into the life of the congregation. These services remind us that worship is not just about tradition, but about living into the ongoing story of God's love, hope, and welcome for all.

Describe the educational program/faith formation vision of your church.

For example, how are young people in leadership? How do people continue to form their faith over a lifetime? Name a topic studied or curriculum used recently; what was the impact of this study on those who attended?

Our Sunday school for children and youth is very small, and we recognize this as an area we want to grow. In the past, we've had a meaningful affirmation of faith program, led with dedication and heart, though usually with just a handful of students at a time. This summer, we hosted a Vacation Bible School with about a dozen children—a mix of kids from our own congregation and from the wider community. It was a small group, but it gave us hope for what's possible when we create spaces that welcome both our members and our neighbors'

children. Our goal of building up young families will be an important first step before we can fully develop a larger vision for youth Sunday school.

At this time, much of our focus is on adult education and faith formation. Our vision is to continue strengthening opportunities for our current members to go deeper—through studies, discussions, and programs that encourage reflection, understanding, and living out our faith. The emphasis is less about formal curriculum and more about creating space for adults to keep asking questions, learning together, and finding new ways to live faithfully over a lifetime.

As we grow in numbers and resources, we will be able to expand what we offer for children and youth, while continuing to deepen our adult education programs that are already central to our congregation's life.

Describe how your congregation is organized for ministry and mission.

From the By-Laws of the First Congregational Church -UCC of Muskegon (7/1/24):

The Governing Board shall be primarily responsible for leadership in the spiritual life of this Church. Its powers to implement and make policy as well as direct the administrative life of the Church shall be primarily carried on with the mission of the Church in mind, both as expressed in the Covenant and the Statement of Faith contained in these By-Laws as well as the discovered and revealed understandings of the real and practical meaning of the purposes for which the Church is gathered. In the conduct of its other responsibilities including the business, educational, social and service missions of the Church, its responsibility for spiritual leadership shall be the paramount concern in its determination.

The Governing Board, subject to those powers reserved to the members, and always subject to the authority of the membership, shall be the executive body of the church and shall exercise all power and authority concerning the expenditure, collection, borrowing, and handling of funds... exercise responsibility for all business affairs of the Church not otherwise specifically provided for or reserved...

In addition to the election of officers and its general duties set forth above, the Governing Board may appoint any representatives to the association and conferences of the United Church of Christ, approve Church staff appointments/hiring, in general initiate and implement all Church policies, and shall appoint when necessary members of a search committee for a Senior Minister in a number deemed appropriate by the Governing Board.

The Church membership shall elect at each annual Congregational Meeting members from the regular and associate members to the departments. The departments are:

The Department of Worship and Music

The Department of Christian Education
The Department of Missions and Service
The Department of Building and Grounds
The Department of Congregational Life
The Department of Member Care
The Department of Finance and Endowments

The Governing Board shall designate and approve or disapprove from time to time the activities of the departments which shall be the primary organizations of the Church for carrying out its mission.

Each Department meets monthly and meeting times are usually an hour long. The minutes of these meetings are included in the monthly agenda of the Governing Board. Any issues requiring Governing Board action are raised and discussed; actions are approved or disapproved by majority vote. Governing Board meeting are normally an hour long.

For time sensitive issues, usually related to building repairs, that exceed the remit and/or budget of individual departments a brief will be sent to the Governing Board members with a request for approval/disapproval returned by e-mail vote.

Our By-Laws are available upon request.

3b. 11-YEAR REPORT

First Congregational UCC Muskegon 11 Year Report

3c. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Describe those who participate in your church.

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Number of active members:	388	x
Number of active non-members:	20	x
Total of church participants (sum of the numbers above):	408	x

Percentage of total participants who have been in the church:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
More than 10 years:	60%	x
Less than 10, more than 5 years:	30%	x
Less than 5 years:	10%	x

Number of total participants by age:

0-11	12-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	<i>Are these numbers an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
	23	19	36	27	50	41	62	30	x

Percentage of adults in various household types:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Single adults under 35:	4	x
Households with minors:	10	x
Single adults age 35-65:	5	x
Joint households with no minors:	47	x
Single adults over 65:	40	x

Education level of adult participants by percentage:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
High school:	18%	x
College:	60%	x
Graduate School:	22%	x
Specialty Training:		
Other (please specify):		

Percentage of adults in various employment types:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Adults who are employed:	44.5%	x
Adults who are retired:	49%	x
Adults who are not fully employed:	6.5%	x

Describe the range of occupations of working adults in the congregation:

We have members who work in building maintenance, manufacturing, transportation, food service, education, banking and investment management, the medical field (nurses, physical therapists and physicians), law, social work and ministry.

Describe the mix of ethnic heritages in your congregation, and the overall racial make-up. Most UCC congregations tend to describe themselves as “diverse.” Yet, the vast majority of UCC congregations are mono-cultural. What does diversity mean in your context?

The majority of our members are white with no predominant ethnic identity. We have a significant number of LGBTQ+ members/families, and we have a small number of African American and Hispanic members.

Has your congregation recently had a conversation about welcoming diversity, or do you plan to hold one in the near future (perhaps using, for example, the Welcoming Diversity Inventory)? Please note the date. Comment after the exercise:

After a number of community/Church sessions with the [Muskegon Pride Association](#) and [Healthwest](#), our community mental health resource, we began the process of being recognized as an [Open and Affirming Church](#) which was accomplished in 2023. Since then we have become the home of the [Westshore GSA](#), a social and support group for teenagers in our community. This energetic group now numbers about 20 members.

3d. PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING

Complete the following chart. Please leave blank any fields that are not applicable to your congregation.

Ways of Gathering	Estimated number of	Who plans each of the listed gatherings? (list any and all worship
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	people involved in attendance	planners, such as various lay leaders, ministers, musicians, other staff)
Adult Groups or Classes	7 - 25 each session for 8 sessions Progressive Christianity discussion group.	Senior Minister, Elisabeth Major Confirmation teacher
Adult Groups or Classes	20 - 30 each session for 1 Adult Education lecture & 1 congregational talent show.	Outreach Committee, Christian Ed Department, Congregational Life Department
Adult Groups or Classes	30 - 40 each session for 3 Trivia Game events.	Congregational Life Department, Diane & Tom Goodman Gamerunners, Outreach Committee
Baptisms (number last fiscal year)	1	Senior Minister
Candlelight Concert (annual)	Musician participants: 52, Attendees: 180	Dr. Michael Match Music Director, Worship & Music Department, staff.
Children's Event - Trunk or Treat	Over 440 attendees, 8 "Trunks"	CE Director Gillian Sutherland, CE Dept, Westshore GSA group, Director Jessica Krause, Congregational Life Dept
Children's Groups or Classes	Sunday classes & Early Childcare room: 0 - 6 during 34-week Sunday classes, average 2	Youth Worship CE Director Gillian Sutherland
Children's Groups: VBS	9 -12 students + 10 youth & adult leaders, 5 evenings	Youth Worship CE Director Gillian Sutherland, Elisabeth Major
Choirs and Music Groups	30-40 each	Music Director Dr. Michael Match -

	rehearsal	Motet Choir
Choirs and Music Groups	15 each rehearsal	Music Director Dr. Michael Match - Canterbury Bells
Christmas Eve, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Worship	Christmas Eve 164, Palm Sunday 147, Maundy Thursday 51, Good Friday 20, Easter 220	Senior Minister, Dr. Michael Match Music Director, Worship & Music Department, staff.
Church-wide Meals Summer Picnic	Approx. 50 people attended	Congregational Life Department with assistance from Christian Ed Department, staff
Church-wide Meals Thanksgiving	Approx. 70 people attended	Congregational Life Department with assistance from Christian Ed Department, staff
Communion (served monthly + Maundy Thursday)	Average attendance Communion Sundays: 108	Senior Minister; Communion Team Morgan & Vivian Witmer, Scott Beemer; Worship & Music Department. (Skipped January due to minister's vacation)
Community Breakfasts (served monthly)	11 meals served an average of 137 guests and 30 volunteers each	Saturday Breakfast volunteer crew - volunteer coordinator Donna Lachniet; Mission Department
Community Emergency Food Pantry (weekly)	Served 542 households with 1,272 individuals by referral from LOVE INC or walk-in guests.	FCC Food Pantry volunteer crew - pantry coordinator Shirley Lawton; site coordinator Donna Lachniet; Mission Department; Love INC Registration partner, staff
Community Food Pantry Mobile (monthly)	Monthly serves an average of 226 households with 534 individuals	Mobile Food Pantry volunteer crew - volunteer coordinator Donna Lachniet; Mission Department
Community Garden	Engages 35	Saturday Breakfast Garden Coordinator

	gardeners during the May - October growing season	Lora Swenson, volunteer gardeners, volunteer coordinator Donna Lachniet; Mission Department
Community group use:	10-20 weekly	GSA
Community group use:	32 rehearsals, 25-65 attendees each	Muskegon Civic Theatre rehearsals
Community group use:	24 rehearsals, 2 concerts. ~25 singers each rehearsal	Muskegon Chamber Choir rehearsals, concert
Community group use:	2 series of 8 classes each, 6 - 10 attendees each class	Love INC New Directions classes
Community group use:	12 classes, 13 - 23 dancers each session	Line Dancing classes
Community group use:	6-10 weekly	3 C's & Cardio Drumming Exercise classes

Additional comments:

List all members or regular participants in your congregation who are ordained, licensed, or commissioned ministers. Indicate those with current United Church of Christ Three-Way Covenants (i.e. serving in a congregation) or Four-Way Covenants (i.e. serving in a ministry beyond a congregation).

Name	Three- or Four-Way Covenant? (3 or 4 or No)	Ministry Setting	Type of Ministry Role	Retired? (Y or N)
Brewster Wilcox	3	Church	Senior Minister	Y
Cindy Barnum-Steggerda	3	Not active	Mental Health Counselor	N

Dan Barnum-Steggerda	3	Church	Senior Minister	Y
Kristen Orion	3	Health Care	Chaplain	N

If one or more previous ministers or retired ministers currently hold membership in the church, describe their role(s) in the life of the congregation: [Occasional supply minister, serving on Department Committees](#)

List all current staff, including ministers. Exclude the position you are seeking to fill. Indicate which staffperson serves as head of staff.

Staff Position	Head of Staff?	Compensation (full time, part time, volunteer)	Supervised by	Length of Tenure for current person in this position
Business Administer	N	Full Time	Senior Minister	9 years
Director of Music	N	Full time	Senior Minister	8 years
Office Manager	N	Full Time	Senior Minister	17 years
Facility Manager	N	Full Time	Senior Minister	17 years
Organist	N	Part Time	Senior Minister	8 years
Christian Education	N	Part Time	Senior Minister	3 years

REFLECTION

Reflection: After reviewing the congregational demographics and activities above, what does this information reflect about your congregation's overall ministry?

[We are a stable, but aging congregation.](#)

3e. CHURCH FINANCES

Current annual income (dollars used during most recent fiscal year)

Source	Amount
Annual Offerings and Pledged Giving	\$305,818
Endowment Proceeds (<i>as permitted within spending policy, such as a cap of typically 4.5%-5% on total return</i>)	\$38,300
Endowment Draw (<i>beyond what is permitted by spending policy, "drawing down the principal"</i>)	\$47,230
Fundraising Events	\$6,308
Gifts Designated for a Specific Purpose	\$18,030
Grants	\$15,039
Rentals of Church Building	\$3,938
Rentals of Church Parsonage	\$--
Support from Related Organizations (<i>e.g. Women's Group</i>)	\$--
Transfers from Special Accounts	\$56,493
Other (specify):	\$
Other (specify):	\$
TOTAL	\$412,838

Current annual expenses (dollars budgeted for most recent fiscal year): \$539,378

[Annual Budget 2025-26](#)

Considering total budgeted expenses for the year, compare total ministerial support. What is the percentage? 24%

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? If calculated as a percentage of the operating budget, what is that percentage? (*recommended 10%*) *per member fee, Mission Department line item, solicitations*

What is the church's current indebtedness?

Total amount of loan debt: 0

Reason for debt: N/A

Are capital and other payments current? N/A

If a building program is projected or underway, describe it, including the projected start/end date of the building project and the total project budget. N/A

If the church has had capital campaigns in the last ten years, describe:

Year(s)	Purpose	Goal	Result	Impact
2015	Replace Boiler	\$460,000	\$460,000	Kept Church heated
2021	Air Purification and Air Conditioning	\$90,000	\$90,000	Allowed us to use the church safely after COVID

If a capital campaign is underway or anticipated, describe:

Year(s)	Purpose	Goal	Result	Impact
2023	Thermostat Campaign	\$280,000	\$71,209	Updated boiler system and regulated energy use.
		\$	\$	

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

The last three Capital Campaigns dealt with fifty year old HVAC systems. They were undertaken to bring these systems up to current standards and to make the Church safer and comfortable for the congregation. The Air Purification and Conditioning work was necessitated by the COVID crises.

Does your church have an endowment? **yes**

What is the market value of the assets? **\$850,000**

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

We have a budgeted draw and we will consider draws for unforeseen expenses mostly in building maintenance.

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

2025 10% 2020 - 3.5%

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

While Personnel and Admin costs have remained pretty steady with adjustments for cost of living, the Pledged Contributions have declined. The decline is attributed to the aging population of the church; we have learned that new members are typically younger and do not contribute at the same level as our more established members. We also experience unexpected expenses due to aging building systems (i.e., roof leaks and subsequent repairs) in our 75+ year old church building.

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

17 years

Please comment on the above calculations or estimates:

We have been drawing about \$50,000 from Endowments above the 4.5% draw that represents interest earnings. At this rate our current fund of \$850,000 will be drawn down in 17 years. This estimate assumes there are no more Legacy Gifts to the fund and our building expenses hold steady at current rate; both of these assumptions are speculative.

Other Assets

Reserves (savings): **\$40,000**

Investments (other than endowment): **N/A**

Does your church have a parsonage? **No**

~~Fair market rental value of the parsonage:~~
~~How is the parsonage used?~~
~~Street / City / State / Zip:~~
~~Finished square footage:~~
~~Number of Bedrooms, Number of Bathrooms:~~
~~Assessed real estate value:~~
~~Available for minister residence: Y/N~~
~~Expected minister residence: Y/N~~
~~Condition of structure, systems and appliances~~
~~Entity in the church responsible for review and needed repairs~~

Describe all buildings owned by the church: [church building](#)

Describe non-owned buildings or space used or rented by the church: [N/A](#)

Which spaces are accessible to wheelchairs? (*worship space, pulpit, fellowship space, facilities, etc.*) [All but the Pulpit and one basement meeting room.](#)

Reflection: After reviewing the church's finances and assets described above, what does this information reflect about your congregation's mission and ministry?

[The congregation of FCC is committed to maintaining a high standard of stewardship relating to our church building and property. This is not only for the safety and comfort of our congregation but for the neighborhood we live in. We are a significant part of the landscape of the oldest neighborhood in Muskegon and we feel the responsibility of honoring our neighbors by upholding physical and esthetic values. We want our Church to be welcoming and inviting to our neighbors and be considered an asset to the community.](#)

3f. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Name one to three significant happenings in the history of your church that have shaped the identity of your congregation. Add the most important event in the life of your church in the past 10 years.

[First Congregational Church of Muskegon was organized in 1859 with twelve charter members who met at first in Wheeler's Hall above a drug store and then in the basement of a friendly Methodist Episcopal church. When the first church was built in 1864 there were four churches](#)

in Muskegon, sixteen paper mills, two banks and many more taverns serving a population of 2,000 people.

As Muskegon prospered during the Lumbering era, so did First Congregational Church. A second church was built in 1884, the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding. The congregation grew and soon two Mission churches were formed, becoming McGraft Memorial Congregational Church and Jackson Avenue Congregational Church. During this time a leading Lumber Baron and philanthropist collaborated with First Congregational Church to establish Hackley Hospital, the area's first hospital, and until closing in 2020, FCC was a member of its Board of Trustees. FCC continued to contribute to the community in the following years by participating in the foundation of the Visiting Nurses, Rescue Mission, Boy Scouts, Radio Club for broadcasting services, British War Relief, Red Cross, United Way, Jefferson Towers (low income retirement apartments), the Yellow House community outreach center, Dispute Resolution Center, Habitat for Humanity, and others.

As the congregation grew and the church building aged a new church was built in 1955. The new church has, in addition to the Sanctuary, a Chapel, Parlor, Meeting Hall and full kitchen, offices, and several classrooms and rehearsal rooms which accommodated the growing number of members throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In 1963 FCC's membership was 1,781; requiring two Sunday Services as well as a Chapel service, double education programs for elementary and high school students, four choirs, and Prudential Board of 30 members.

The Music Department of First Congregational Church has been a source of great inspiration and pride for our congregation. At its peak we had four choirs, a music school with 170 students. FCC has been and still is renowned for its excellent music program which is shared generously with the whole community. Our Candlelight Service has been a staple of the Muskegon area Christmas celebrations for more than 60 years. Our Motet Choir has between 30-40 singers and our Bell Choir has fifteen musicians.

In 1960 First Congregational Church of Muskegon became a member of The United Church of Christ.

Describe a specific change your church has managed in the recent past.

In 2021 First Congregational Church of Muskegon became an official Open and Affirming Church by a unanimous vote of the membership by adopting the following Statement:

We the people of First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, of Muskegon, care for the welfare of our community and welcome everyone, no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey. We welcome into our community people of every age, race, nationality, mental

and physical ability, economic and social status, faith background, marital standing, family structure, gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation. We also invite you to share in the life, leadership, worship, fellowship, sacraments, responsibilities, blessings and joys of our congregation as we seek to grow together in faith and love.

Every church has conflict, some minor, some larger. “Where two or three are gathered, there will be disagreement....” Describe your congregation’s values and practices when it comes to conflict.

FCC has a robust operating system consisting of seven Departments that meet at least monthly. Most issues which may be contentious are raised and discussed at this level and resolved through thoughtful deliberations. If a resolution can not be reached it is referred to the Governing Board. This is an exceedingly rare event.

In the event of personal conflicts that rise to the attention of the staff, we rely on patient listening and deliberation, respecting every individual point of view try to mediate a resolution.

Ministerial History (*include all previous ministerial staff for the past 30 years*)

Staff member’s name	Years of service	UCC Standing (Y/N)
Rev. Tim VanderHaar	20	yes
Rev. Michael Bush	3	yes
Rev. Tom Mason	12	yes

Comment on what your church has learned about itself and its relationship with persons who provided ministerial leadership:

Has any past leader left under pressure or by involuntary termination?

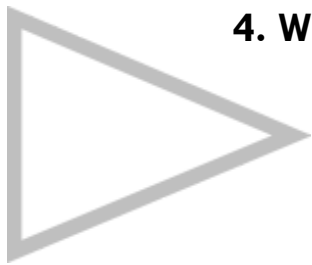
Yes, Rev. Michael Bush had a different vision than the congregation for the future of our church.

Has your church been involved in a Situational Support Consultation?

No

Has a past minister been the subject of a Fitness Review while at your church?

No



4. WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39 NRSV)

a. COMMUNITY VISION

b. MISSION InSite

4a. COMMUNITY VISION

How do the relationships and activities of your congregation extend outward in service and advocacy?

For example, which service activities has your church participated in this past year? Where has the church participated in global connections of care and justice? What is currently transformational in your church’s engagement with neighbors near or far?

First Congregational Church’s outreach extends deeply into the Muskegon community through both direct service and long-term structural support for those most in need. Our commitment to justice and compassion is lived out daily through the ministries we sustain and the partnerships we nurture, and our worship services are streamed weekly on YouTube to reach those beyond our physical walls.

One of the most significant ways FCC serves our neighbors is through Jefferson Towers, a seven-story, 156-unit complex for low-income seniors located just one block from the church. In the 1960s, recognizing the urgent need for affordable senior housing, FCC established Muskegon Retirement Apartments, Inc. (also known as Jefferson Towers) as a nonprofit mission of the church. The church’s Governing Board members serve as shareholders, electing the nine-member Jefferson Towers Board of Directors—most of whom are FCC members—who oversee the facility’s finances and operations. Managed by Callander Commercial, Jefferson Towers continues to provide safe, beautiful, and dignified housing for seniors and has even received the City’s 1st Place Business Property Beautification Award. In this ongoing ministry, FCC is literally and figuratively “in the trenches”, serving our community’s most vulnerable residents.

In addition to this housing ministry, FCC’s campus is a hub of service and advocacy. We host a weekly food pantry, a [monthly food truck](#), a large Saturday community breakfast once a month, a monthly bike repair workshop, and a seasonal community vegetable garden that brings neighbors together around healthy food and fellowship.

Our congregation also supports wider missions through both hands-on involvement and financial giving. FCC has sponsored and participated in the CROP Walk for over 20 years, recently hosted a well-attended Vacation Bible School, and provides meeting space for the local GSA (Genders and Sexualities Alliance), offering a safe and welcoming environment for youth and allies. In addition, FCC supported a community dance group that welcomed participants from throughout the area, continuing our tradition of joyful, inclusive hospitality.

Globally and locally, we contribute regularly to initiatives such as the Hope Project, One Great Hour of Sharing, and other mission efforts responding to needs near and far. Per our bylaws, 6% of all contributions are designated for Missions, reflecting our church's foundational commitment to outreach and compassion.

What is currently transformational in our engagement is how FCC integrates service, justice, and community in tangible, year-round ways. From affordable housing to shared meals, from advocacy for inclusion to global giving, our congregation continually seeks to embody Christ's love in action—building relationships that uplift individuals and strengthen the broader Muskegon community.

Describe your congregation's participation in meetings, relationships and activities connecting the wider United Church of Christ (association / conference / national setting).

First Congregational Church maintains active and meaningful connections with the wider United Church of Christ. FCC is a member of the Grand West Association of the Michigan Conference, where we currently have two official representatives who participate in meetings and regional gatherings. Our former minister recently completed a term as president of the Association, reflecting our congregation's ongoing leadership and engagement within the UCC community.

We also make active use of Michigan Conference resources, particularly during our current Search and Call process, which is being conducted in partnership with the Conference to ensure discernment and alignment with UCC values and procedures.

Financially, FCC supports the wider mission of the denomination by contributing to four United Church of Christ funds, including One Great Hour of Sharing, the Ministers' Retirement Fund, and two international mission funds that extend our reach to global ministries of care and justice. In addition, we faithfully pay our per-member dues to the UCC, demonstrating our shared covenantal commitment to the life and work of the Church at every level.

Through these relationships, FCC continues to live out the UCC's call to be a connected and collaborative body—strengthening our local ministry by participating fully in the broader mission of the United Church of Christ.

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. (Find more information as desired at ucc.org.)

Check any statements below that apply to your UCC faith community.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Accessible to All (A2A) | ☐ Just Peace |
| ☐ Creation Justice | ☐ Global Mission Church |
| ☐ Economic Justice | ☒ Open and Affirming (ONA) |
| ☐ Faithful and Welcoming | ☐ WISE Congregation for Mental Health |
| ☒ God Is Still Speaking (GISS) | ☐ Other UCC designations: |
| ☐ Border and Immigrant Justice | ☐ Designations from other denominations |
| ☐ Inter-cultural/Multi-racial (I'M) | ☐ None |

Reflect on what the above statement(s) mean(s) to your community. Is your congregation interested in working toward any of the above statements of witness in the near future?

[Our Church desires to be involved in programs focused on food/economic justice.](#)

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

[First Congregational Church has a long and active tradition of collaboration with other faith communities in Muskegon. For decades, FCC has been a committed participant in the Muskegon County Cooperating Churches and the Muskegon Downtown Ministers—two partnerships that bring together diverse congregations to address shared concerns, promote unity, and respond to community needs. We have also joined in cooperative efforts with Congregation B’Nai Israel, our local temple, on issues of common interest and mutual respect, and we participate annually in community-wide Martin Luther King Jr. services that affirm our shared commitment to justice and equality.](#)

[Our congregation continues to embrace new opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith engagement. In recent years, FCC members have participated in the \[Prayer Walk Against Gun Violence\]\(#\) and the \[Pride Parade\]\(#\) during Pridefest, demonstrating our belief that faith must be lived out through public witness and solidarity with our neighbors.](#)

[Our Saturday Morning Breakfast is another powerful expression of community partnership. This monthly meal regularly draws five to six local churches who join forces with FCC volunteers to serve 200–300 plates of food to anyone in need of a nutritious breakfast and warm hospitality.](#)

Following each breakfast, a lay member of our congregation leads a short chapel service, providing spiritual nourishment alongside physical care.

Music also connects us ecumenically. Each December, our Candlelight Concert brings together our choirs and community members from many faith traditions for an evening of sacred music, reflection, and joy—a cherished local event that embodies FCC’s spirit of welcome and unity.

Through these partnerships and shared experiences, FCC continues to build bridges across faiths and denominations, fostering a community grounded in compassion, service, and hope.

If your congregation has a mission statement, how does that mission statement compare to the actual time spent engaging in different activities? Think of the range of activities from time spent gathering, to governance, to time spent going out.

Our congregation does not have a formal mission statement. Instead, the bylaws of First Congregational Church begin with our covenant with God—a living statement of purpose that guides all we do: *to walk in God’s ways, to participate in God’s Church, and to serve the world as understood through the life and teaching of Jesus*. This covenantal language reflects our identity as a church that prioritizes faith in action rather than words on paper.

The activities of the congregation align closely with this covenant. Our members gather regularly for worship, study, and fellowship, but we dedicate significant time and energy to service beyond our walls—hosting food ministries, community breakfasts, social-justice events, and partnerships with other faith groups. Governance, while important, supports rather than overshadows our call to serve. In this way, the balance of our time and ministry embodies our covenant’s rhythm: walking with God, strengthening the church, and serving the world.

Reflect on the scope of work assigned to your minister(s). How is 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 scope of our minister’s work naturally reflects this outward-facing covenant. At FCC, it is both permitted and expected that the minister be deeply engaged in the community and wider church. Many community events and programs in which the minister participates have been sponsored or initiated by First Congregational Church itself, and the congregation views such involvement as integral to faithful leadership rather than an “extra” responsibility.

Community ministry, ecumenical collaboration, and participation in the wider UCC are all recognized and valued aspects of the minister's role. Our expectation is that time spent representing FCC in these settings—whether through advocacy, interfaith cooperation, or leadership in UCC bodies—constitutes essential pastoral work. In short, the congregation sees the minister's community presence as an expression of our shared covenant: a ministry of walking with God by walking with others.

4b. MISSION InSite

Comment on your congregation's MissionInsite report with data for your neighborhood(s) or area. What trends and opportunities are shown? [This information can be gleaned from our data census profile:](#)

https://data.census.gov/profile/Muskegon_city,_Michigan?g=160XX00US2656320

How do your congregation's internal demographics compare or contrast to a) the neighborhoods adjacent to your church, and b) other neighborhoods with which your church connects?

Our congregation is older than the [City of Muskegon](#) population (40% over 65 versus 14%); we are 95% White versus 55% in the city; our education level is higher (82% B.A. or higher versus 15.8% in the city. Our Employment rate is 44.5% versus 48.3% but that reflects a high number of retired persons.

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

We see that our demographics may reflect the current status of church membership for Mainline Protestants (Pew Research Religious Landscape Study 02/26/25) but are out of sync with our city and neighborhood demographics. We believe that our ministries should be directed outwardly as well as inwardly and so we engage in a number of programs and activities that engage the broader community in genuine fellowship and that meet the physical, social and spiritual needs of our neighbors.

What do you hear when you talk to community leaders and ask them what your church is known for?

We were once known as the “country club church” because of the high social status of our membership. We are known as the “Breakfast Church” because we host a monthly breakfast that regularly serves over a hundred guests from the neighborhood monthly. This is part of a four part food security program that includes Mobile Food pantries, regular food pantry and community gardens. We have had many new members in our church who were attracted to us because of these activities.

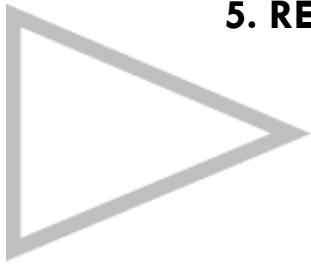
We are also known as an Open and Affirming Church providing a safe space for teens especially but also adults identifying as LGBTQ+. As one young adult expressed “if I ever felt like joining a church , it would be FCC”. We work diligently to have an open door to any searchers looking for a church home.

Our music ministry is also an attraction in our city. We have many opportunities throughout the year to bring the community beautiful musical programs and to invite the community to join them as singers or musicians.

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

They reflect on the friendliness of the congregation and the many opportunities to become engaged. Many new members join to be part of our volunteer work in the neighborhood, to join the choir, to be part of our social life and, especially, to be part of an enlightened spiritual journey that expects and encourages the full agency of each member.

5. REFERENCES



Name up to three people who have agreed to serve as phone and written references. Advise the three references: “The contact information you provide may be shared publicly. Please use contact information that you feel comfortable giving to candidates so they can reach you with their questions.”

Make sure they are not members of your church but are persons who know your church well enough to be helpful to candidates seeking more information. Request a letter from each reference in answer to the four prompts below. Attach the letters (up to three) as desired.

REFERENCE 1

Name: Sarah Rinsema-Sybenga

Position: Program Director

Setting: Muskegon Area District Library

Phone: 231.740.5676

Email: sahrinsema@gmail.com

Relationship to Congregation: Sarah lives in the church neighborhood and worked collaboratively with FCC for two decades in community development activities for core city Muskegon neighborhoods.

Describe some areas of strength in this church’s ministry:

Community development and social justice work in Muskegon: Whether through its decades long Saturday Morning Breakfast program or food pantry, its service with the Muskegon County Cooperating Churches organization, financial and volunteer support of other core city non-profits, FCC has shown a long-term commitment to sharing its building, people, and financial resources towards building a stronger Muskegon.

Music: FCC is known throughout the community as a venue for some of the best church and classical music. Top quality musical leadership attracts top quality musical talent.

Describe some areas for improvement in this church’s ministry:

Aging congregation: While this is not a challenge particular to FCC, as it's felt by most mainline churches across the country, but something to consider: How might FCC attract/retain/engage younger people to continue/grow/shape the future of church life and ministry at FCC.

Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry.

I served as Director of Community enCompass, a grassroots neighborhood development organization in core city Muskegon, for two decades during with FCC was a key church partner. What I appreciated about FCC was that there was strong infrastructure to support the older/mainstay programs (both financially and through volunteers), while at the same time always a will/capacity to participate in new initiatives and collaborative efforts in the community. There is a freshness of vision and a flexibility of mission that is a gift to this community.

REFERENCE 2

Name: Alan Alpert (Rabbi Alpert)

Position: Rabbi

Setting: Congregation B'nai Israel Muskegon, MI

Phone: 231.286.8410

Email: fivea@aol.com

Relationship to Congregation: I have worked with First Congregational Church for almost 50 years

Describe some areas of strength in this church's ministry: First Congregational Church has been a very influential church that does great good in the Muskegon area. I have been able to work well with the ministers and especially Rev. Tim VanderHaar. The church has one of the best, if not the best, music program in Muskegon. The minister and people have been active in Muskegon County Cooperating Churches. For years it provided a Saturday Morning Breakfast to the community. It served several hundred people. I believe it had social service agencies present to help the people who came to the meals. The church has hosted many interfaith events and the people are open and welcoming.

Describe some areas for improvement in this church's ministry: Since Covid I have not been as active in the community as I once was. I am not aware of any improvements that may be required.

Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry: There have been so many. For more than ten years First Congregational Church hosted the Dr. Martin Luther King Essay Contest for the entire community

REFERENCE 3

Name: Claire Root-Benson

Position: Director

Setting: Poppen Program

Telephone: 231-286-4710

Email: Claire.root@gmail.com

Letter:

October 22, 2025

To Whom it May Concern:

Greetings! The First Congregational Church pastoral search committee asked me to provide a letter regarding community involvement, and to be available to contact throughout their process. I'll begin by introducing myself. As someone who was on music and Christian education staff for roughly a decade at FCC, but who never did become a member, and is engaged in arts and nonprofit work in the greater Muskegon area, I am positioned to comment as someone with a perspective both inside and outside of this church.

My name is Claire Root Benson. I grew up singing in the Mona Shores Choir and through connections with FCC, remember fondly many concerts and summer Sundays there, as well as rehearsals with Ann Portenga, who really pushed my musicianship in my high school days. I left the community for a time to complete a vocal music degree at St. Olaf College, then spend a year teaching English as a second language in South Korea. I returned to Muskegon, and served at FCC as music staff for the Youth Alive program from 2009-2020, first as a choir scholar for Motet choir, and assistant director for the Youth Alive elementary voices in tandem with former music director Tom Clark. During some of those years, I also ran Sunday School and Youth Group, and in 2017-19 coordinated much of Youth Alive in cooperation with Dr. Match, as we transitioned to his leadership. The Youth Alive program was a dynamic arts and music focused program, free to community youth and church families alike. We taught challenging music, had a youth handbell choir, and several age groups of classes at sometimes. Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic really killed the program, and it is something I miss deeply in my life.

Currently, I only visit as guest singer for Dr. Match from time to time, or catch a special service such as Candlelight, but have deep relationships with many members of the congregation. I

worship with Covenant Community Church in Muskegon Heights, and work at Muskegon Public Schools, where I direct the Poppen Programs, an arts scholarship opportunity for our district. I am a proud Rotarian and involved in various other volunteer roles in the community.

Recently, as I served on the board of Muskegon Civic Theatre, FCC was so open and helpful for us to lend extremely affordable rehearsal space for us when our other facilities had us in a pinch. FCC has a long history of community collaboration. There are many within the congregation, and even at the local museum, who can comment on older history than I, such as the church's key role in helping form Hackley Hospital alongside Charles and Julia Hackley. I, however, am really happy to speak of the ways in which I have seen the local impact.

Once upon a time, I worked as the volunteer coordinator at the now-closed Muskegon County Habitat for Humanity, which allowed me a glimpse into how involved FCC was in the 30 years and over 100 homes that organization gave our community. They always had contributions and board service through relationships with Habitat, as well as sponsorships of homes, other monetary involvement through Cooperating Churches, and providing volunteers. Housing and helping those in the urban core as Muskegon experienced deep disinvestment, white flight, and huge shifts in the economic status of our neighborhood, has remained important to FCC. They also were instrumental in the establishment of Jefferson Towers, a subsidized senior housing down the block. One joy of Youth Alive was always trick or treating there at Halloween each year—a joy for the residents as well!

FCC has faithfully served their Saturday breakfasts, Food Pantry, and Community Garden in the neighborhood in more recent years, and those items continue and thrive. These programs are seen and known in the neighborhood as walkable resources when food instability is an issue, which is ever-present in our food desert Nelson and McLaughlin neighborhoods.

FCC is also host to a lovely program, post-pandemic, which many students of mine also participate in, and which gives me deep joy. The West Shore GSA youth group, an affirming space for LGBTQ+ youth, is not officially a program of the church, but is allowed space and support, in an effort to fill a need in the community without any pressure to those youth, who may not understand the church as a safe space, with quite good reason. Students from several area high schools are able to transcend any negative cultures surrounding their identities and welcome they may receive at their own schools, and connect with others who understand. It is an incredible thing and has been deeply impactful to some students I know personally.

I have a warm spot in my heart for the FCC community, and have sat in on many committees over my years, so I am happy to talk further about my understanding of how the church operates, engages within its membership and beyond, and what perceptions are like in the wider community of those who interact with the church but are not members. Please feel free to call

me and have a frank conversation, as you discern your potential relationship to this faith community.

Sincerely,

Claire Root Benson

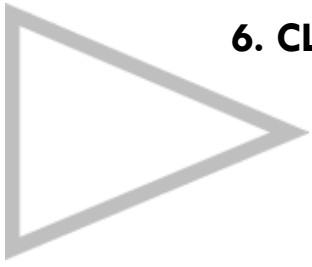
PROMPTS FOR REFERENCES

Describe some areas of strength in this church's ministry.

Describe some areas for improvement in this church's ministry.

Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry.

Anything else you wish to share.



6. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- a. CLOSING PRAYER
- b. STATEMENT OF CONSENT
- c. CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION VALIDATION

6a. CLOSING PRAYER

Include here any prayer or dream for the minister you imagine journeying toward you... a poem, for example, or a Scripture passage or a piece of music that is meaningful to your Search Committee:

Micah 6:8 He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

6b. STATEMENT OF CONSENT

The covenantal relationship between a church and those called by that church to serve as ministers and teachers and in other ministerial positions is strengthened when vital information is openly shared by covenantal partners. To that end, we attest that, to the best of our abilities, we have provided information in this profile that accurately represents our church. We have not knowingly withheld any information that would be helpful to candidates.

As the committee charged with the responsibility for identifying and recommending suitable new minister for our church, we have been authorized to share the information herein with potential candidates. We understand that a candidate may wish to secure further knowledge, information, and opinions about our church. We encourage a candidate to do so, recognizing that an open exchange of relevant information builds the foundation for continuing and healthy relationships between calling bodies and persons seeking a ministry position.

1. Which individuals and groups in the church contributed to the contents of this Local Church Profile? *(for example, church council or consistory, transition team, etc.)*
The Search and Call Committee established by the Governing Board, consisting of seven members of the church along with the Governing Board President acting as an ex officio member, contributed to the contents of this profile.
2. Additional comments for interpreting the profile: N/A

Signed:



Jane Clingman-Scott
Governing Board President, First Congregational Church, Muskegon
Email: janecs1651@gmail.com
Phone: 231-215-9001
October 27, 2025

6c. VALIDATION BY CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION

The congregation is currently in good standing with the association / conference named.

Staff Comment:

To the best of my knowledge, ministerial history information is complete.

Staff Comment:

To the best of my knowledge, available church financial information is presented thoroughly.

Staff Comment:

My signature below attests to the above three items.

Signature:

Name / Title:

Email:

Phone:

Date:

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This document is created through support to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) and is only possible through the covenantal relationships of all settings of the United Church of Christ.

"Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God!'" – Mark 11:22