

THE UNITED CHURCH OF ROWAYTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

ANNUAL REPORT
2023



The United Church of Rowayton

Mission Statement

We are a Christian community, dedicated to welcoming all who seek a relationship with God, to sharing God's Word and love, and to nurturing all in their journey of faith.



Open and Affirming Statement

The United Church of Rowayton is an open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ, which renews and strengthens its commitment to advocate justice and equality for all people. Therefore, led by God's Spirit and with consideration of our brothers and sisters in faith, we declare that we welcome, respect and care for people of every gender, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, marital status, economic circumstance, and physical and mental ability into the worship, rites and sacraments, fellowship, and leadership of our church. We recognize and love each and every individual as a child of God. With God's grace we therefore covenant to grow and practice a unity of faith that transcends our differences and celebrates our lives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Officers | 3 |
| Statistical Report | 3 |
| Church Activities Highlights | 4 |
| Reports From. . . | |
| Interim Pastor | 5 |
| Lay Leader | 8 |
| Board of Household Concerns | 10 |
| Treasurer's Report | 12 |
| 2024 Proposed Capital Budget | 12 |
| 2024 Proposed Budget | 13 |
| Board of Deacons | 14 |
| Music Department | 16 |
| Altar Committee | 17 |
| Board of Christian Outreach | 18 |
| Board of Christian Outreach Benevolence | 19 |
| Director of Christian Education | 20 |
| Communications Committee | 23 |
| Lay Delegate to Connecticut Conference/Fairfield West | 23 |
| Caregiving Ministry | 24 |
| Memorial Committee | 25 |
| Memorial Garden Committee | 25 |
| Nominating Committee | 26 |
| Nursery School – UCNS at a Glance | 27 |
| Nursery School – Budget 2022- 2023 | 28 |

THE UNITED CHURCH OF ROWAYTON
72nd Annual Meeting, February 4, 2024

OFFICERS FOR 2023

| | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| Moderator | Tammy Langalis |
| Clerk | Bill Peltz |
| General Treasurer | Bill Sarr |
| Assistant Treasurer | Jim Ackerly |
| Business Manager | Bill Sarr |

STATISTICAL REPORT

| | |
|---|------------|
| Total Adult Members on rolls as of December 31, 2022 | 338 |
| Inactive Members Removed from Church Records During 2023 | 0 |
| Transfers Out During 2023 | 9 |
| Members Deceased | 6 |
| Members Received During 2023 | 13 |
| Confirmands Received in 2023 | 7 |
| Adult Members on rolls as of December 31, 2023 | 336 |
| Baptisms | 10 |
| Weddings | 1 |
| Funeral and Memorial Services | 10 |

Members and Friends who died in 2023

Henry Todd
John Geoghegan
Dossie Sullivan
Tom Guarcello
Michael Knox
Sally Reynolds

CHURCH ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS – 2023

In lieu of an annual history and because church records are now archived digitally, this year the congregation decided to include a short list of highlights in the Annual Report.

Special Events

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| January 15 -29 | Outreach Sunday Undie Drive |
| February 3 | Annual Meeting |
| February 22 | Ash Wednesday Service |
| March 5 | First Communion Sunday |
| March 19 - April 2 | Outreach Easter Basket Drive |
| April 2 | Palm Sunday |
| April 6 | Maundy Thursday Service |
| April 7 | Good Friday Service |
| April 9 | Easter Sunday Services |
| May 5/6 | Handbell Festival |
| May 7 | Confirmation Sunday |
| May 22 – June 4 | Outreach Spring Food Drive |
| June 11 | John S. Livingston Memorial Scholarship recipients announced and high school senior graduates congratulated |
| July - August | Worship in Pinkney Park |
| September 10 | Rally Day service |
| September 24 | Pastor Sal Sapienza Candidating Sunday Congregation votes unanimously to hire Pastor Sal as our next Settled |
| Pastor | |
| September 29 – 30 | African Music Festival |
| October 29 – Nov. 12 | Outreach Thanksgiving Dinner Drive |
| November 13 | Congregational Meeting – Proposed Budgets are approved |
| November 19 | Tellabration! |
| November 26 – Dec. 10 | Outreach White Dove Toy Drive |
| December 3 | Worship, Christmas Tree Lighting & Pasta Dinner (Cancelled due to email hoax) |
| December 18 | Living Nativity |
| December 24 | Christmas Eve Services 10:15am and 9:00pm |
| December 31 | Pastor John Livingston's and Marsha Hall's last Sunday |

From the Interim Pastor (December 2022-December 2023)

In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) German Lutheran pastor and theologian

I begin with the following excerpt from my Annual Report for 2022:

Since I accepted the Call to be the Interim Pastor, I have felt God's very strong guiding Presence in my life, stronger than ever before and I have been so grateful for the gift of life!! I am committed to do whatever is needed to support the search for the new settled Pastor. Unlike any other Interim Pastor that could have been hired, I love this church with all my heart and want the future of The United Church of Rowayton to be led with positive spirit, engaging ministry, strong Pastoral leadership, and loving fun and joyful moments. I encourage the members and friends of this unique and very special spiritual place to be grateful for the dedication of the people on the chosen Search Committee as they begin this tremendous journey. Be grateful for all the leadership and staff of the church who have worked so hard, since June, keeping the church moving forward. Be grateful!!

2023 has been a **year of gratitude**. To quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ***"It is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."***

On Sunday January 8, 2023, I introduced the theme for my messages that I planned for the year: **Walking on the Road**. Each Sunday I focused on an aspect of faith and life that would guide us as individuals and guide the members and friends of The United Church of Rowayton through the year bringing us to 2024 with much gratitude.

These were my themes: **Walking the Road of.....** New Beginnings; Compassion; the Golden Rule; Faithful Restoration; Patience; the Ebbs and Flows of Life; Transformation; Hopefulness; Grief; Into Jerusalem; Resurrection Joy; Amazement; Soulful Living; Love and Friendship; Faith Formation; Encouragement; Character; Singing Hymns; Extravagant Welcome; Perseverance; Kindness; God with Us; Overcoming; Challenges; Forgiveness; Grace; God's Sustaining Presence; Change; Finding Purpose; Giving Thanks; Toward Christmas; Toward Bethlehem; Living Nativity; Christmas Eve; Into the New Year.

The motivation for my theme **"Walking the Road"** was greatly influenced by the song, *"Walk on Faith"* by the country singer Mike Reid.

*We have come to the place in our lives where faith must be stronger than fear
For if true love is our destination, through every storm it must always be clear;
The surest way to get there from here is to walk on faith, trust in love
Just keep on putting one foot down in front of the other.
When the valley's so wide we stumble in stride
Everything inside wants to give up
Walk on faith, trust in love.*

It has been my privilege, honor and joy serving as your Interim Pastor and walking this road of faith and love with you!

“It is only with gratitude that life becomes rich.”

I am grateful for so many things that make my life rich, among them especially Judi, my family, and friends. However, for this annual report, as I reflect upon 2023, I want to focus on two other things for which I am grateful.

First: I am grateful for the dedication and devotion of the members of the Search Committee who were commissioned to find the new settled pastor. They did, indeed, fulfill their responsibility. The Reverend Sal Sapienza is truly remarkable! From the first moment I heard he was the number one candidate, I knew, in my heart, that he was the best and right person to lead the church into the future.

I said in my message on Sunday, December 31:

This is a week of new life and hope and possibilities as you welcome The Reverend Sal Sapienza, as your Pastor, Preacher, Teacher, Counselor, and Spiritual Leader. Pastor Sal and his wonderful husband, Gregg are on their way today, driving from Michigan, planning to arrive tonight in time to celebrate the new year in their new home. I met them both last week when they were here for a few days. I already love them!! Judi and I are looking forward to developing a good and strong friendship with them as we move into the new year!

Just like Judi and I were welcomed many years ago, I know you all will gracefully and enthusiastically offer them your love and support and guidance as together you begin a new chapter of mutual ministry continuing the legacy of service and love offered by this amazing church!

Second: I am grateful for the Ministry of Music of Marsha Hall. I said during my message on November 19th, the Sunday of celebration for her retirement:

*Today we are affirming how the gift of music can lift our spirits and stir our souls.
So many people have become more grateful people because Marsha Hall has so willingly and faithfully shared her gift of music and inspired this church to make music such important part of the worship experience. And now with Marsha's strong musical foundation this church will*

continue building and growing and creating a music program that will move into the future reaching the hearts and souls of people of all ages.

In a moment, the choir will sing the anthem that was written by Gwyneth Walker to honor Marsha Hall on her 40th year of making music at the church. It was premiered November 18, 2018. A Glad New Song... ..

"I've learned to sing a glad new song, a song of hope and joy I bring. My cup is running o'er and o'er and o'er with blessings full of peace and love. And still, there's more and more." Marsha Hall has put a glad new song, in so many hearts. That song of joy will go on and on and on and our hearts are filled with great thanksgiving!

"It is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."

Finally, someone once said, "Life will be as beautiful as you decide to view it, starting with your eyes and ending with your heart."

From the first time we set our eyes on this church in January 1986, Judi and I have had a beautiful and rich life here and we end with hearts filled with so much love and gratitude.

"It is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."

I share the closing words I spoke at the end of worship on December 31, words from the book, *The Way of Gratitude, A New Spirituality for Today* by Galan Guengerich, Senior Minister of All Souls in New York City:

*Today is the first day of the rest of your life. No matter what has gone before, today presents you with a new and unique opportunity, one that has never come before and will never come again.
Make the most of it!*

*May the Grace of Jesus the Christ, the Love of God,
and the Peace of the Holy Spirit be with you forevermore!*

With love,

John

FROM THE LAY LEADER

2023 was another momentous year for the United Church of Rowayton. There were many new and exciting challenges for me as Lay Leader and for our congregation. Once again, all the boards and committees pitched in and did yeoman's work to keep the church running smoothly during another transitional year as we searched for, and found, a new pastor.

It was very reassuring having John Livingston as our interim pastor for the last 6 months. His knowledge, leadership and guidance were so important and helpful to us all as we moved through the search process for our new pastor. It was also heartwarming that John, Judi and family were able to see and participate in using Livingston Hall, Judi's Place and other namings in honor of their retirement.

The Settled Pastor Search Committee worked tirelessly for many months creating a church profile, then a candidate profile, then finding and interviewing candidates, and then ultimately inviting the final candidate to preach and be approved by the congregation. Many thanks! On Sept 24, Sal Sapienza came to us from Saugatuck, Michigan, offered his candidacy and was accepted as our new pastor. He will be only the third pastor to lead the United Church of Rowayton in 78 years! We extend a warm welcome!

We received the announcement of Marsha Hall's retirement in October. Marsha was the Music Director for 47 years! An incredible accomplishment and commitment. We are so grateful to her for years of beautiful music that inspired our worship and enriched our lives. We wish her well in retirement. Gratefully Ellen Dickinson, who was the Children's Choir director has stepped up and will be the interim Director of Music. Ellen has many years of musical talent and experience. Rachelle Dorset, a very talented ringer, will be directing the Adult and Youth Bell Choirs.

The Board of Household Concerns, led by Pat Begos, oversaw needed repairs to the parsonage. There had been an unresolved leak for years and Mike Harden finally got to the root of the problem. A new roof, new front door and new bathroom were installed just in time for Pastor Sal's arrival on December 31. A new air conditioning system was installed in Livingston Hall, allowing greater use of the room in the warmer months. The Norwalk Tree Alliance generously donated and planted 2 new maple trees along the side driveway replacing the ones that had fallen over the past few years.

The Board of Deacons had many firsts again this year with many extra meetings, multiple special services and recognitions. All the challenges were handled beautifully with Chris Sabol's calm leadership.

Under the direction of Val Harden and Emma Sikes, the Board of Christian Education continues to serve our young people with toddler care, church school, Anchors and confirmation, encouraging participation in all aspects of the church and growing their faith.

The Board of Christian Outreach, co-directed by Wendy Blattman and Melanie Lynch, supported many local non-profit organizations and held six successful donation drives, giving our membership many opportunities to give to others in need.

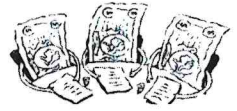
I would like to thank the staff for diligently working through the transition process. Kris Jenkins, Bill Peltz, Bill Sarr, Marsha Hall, Val Harden and Dileep Chandran have done so much to keep the day-to-day operations running smoothly. Something we do not take for granted. We are very grateful for their dedication, help and caring.

As you review the annual report, think about what time and talents you might be able to offer the church. I encourage you to join a board when the nomination committee calls, or just volunteer without being asked. I promise it will be a rewarding experience and will help you grow in your faith.

With gratitude and appreciation,

Tammy Langalis, Lay Leader/Moderator

BOARD OF HOUSEHOLD CONCERNS



The Board of Household Concerns is responsible for all aspects of the Church's finances including the setting of budgets, revenue and support, and expense monitoring; overseeing the Church's endowment and other invested funds; and maintaining the Church's physical property.

I would like to begin by thanking Board members:

- Bob Eydt, (Completed 3rd year). Bob has been an invaluable sounding board for all of our decisions
- Penne Weicker (Completed 3rd year; Recording Secretary). Penne has made sure we know and remember what we deliberated and decided
- Bill Sarr (Completed 3rd year; Business Manager and Treasurer). Bill keeps us on budget and well-informed about our financial status
- Mike Harden (Completing 2nd year). Mike has been willing to get his hands dirty and managed the repairs to the parsonage
- Chris Stiller (Completing 2nd year). Chris has offered sound practical advice on our property issues

There are many others who were indispensable to our work this year:

- Jim Clark (Chair of Investment Subcommittee). Jim has ably managed our endowment through a tumultuous year
- Tammy Langalis, our Moderator, has been a true leader and partner in helping us make wise planning and spending decisions, and who added 2024 Stewardship Drive Chair to her already extensive responsibilities.
- Carolyn and Dave Snyder, for running a successful 2023 Stewardship Drive
- Kris Jenkins, without whom our Stewardship Message would have been unheard.
- Dileep Chandran, who keeps us well maintained and operational every day.

Last but not least, thanks to the Congregation for providing the oversight and financial commitment to keep our Church vibrant during a year that has been challenging both financially and pastorally.

We are also very much looking forward to working with Pastor Sal in 2024 to continue to maintain and improve our Church's facilities and finances.

Budget

The Church's revenue budget for 2023 was \$498,600. Actual revenue was \$493,688, including \$326,162 in pledge contributions, which exceeded our 2023 pledge goal of \$320,000. It was necessary for us to transfer \$72,000 from our endowment to our operating account (of the \$97,000 authorized in the budget). Actual expenses for 2023 were \$490,128 which was about \$8,000 below the budgeted amount (\$498,600). Because expenses were lower than revenue, we were able to achieve a small positive net income. Thanks to Bill Sarr for managing our expenses so closely.

Stewardship

Our 2024 Stewardship Drive began in November with a goal of \$334,000.

Investments

Our endowment rebounded in 2023 after the economic downturn in 2022, ending the year at \$2,319,000 (up from \$2,198,000 a year earlier). This increase is after accounting for the \$72,000 transfer to the operating budget and \$68,000 transfer to the capital budget.

Property, Plant and Equipment

The major projects undertaken this year were the replacement of an air conditioner compressor in the meeting house, replacement of the hot water heater, and repairs to the parsonage, including a new roof.

Capital projects budgeted for 2024 include: staining the exterior of the Sanctuary, the purchase of equipment for livestreaming services, and final payments for work done on the parsonage.

Respectfully,

Patrick Begos
Board Chair



TREASURER'S REPORT as of December 31, 2023

| <u>Bank Balances</u> | <u>December 31, 2021</u> | <u>December 31, 2022</u> | <u>December 31, 2023</u> |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Fairfield County Checking | 119,316 | 83,921 | 92,365 |
| Fairfield County Money Market | 89,693 | 19,614 | 59,618 |
| Ameriprise Financial | 31,069 | 11,259 | 11,906 |
| Total | 240,077 | 114,794 | 163,890 |
| Benevolence Checking | | | |
| Deacon's Fund | 10,625 | 3,571 | 1,761 |
| Outreach | 13,314 | 14,680 | 15,829 |
| Sabbatical | 10,394 | - | - |
| Total | 34,333 | 18,251 | 17,590 |
| Capital Checking | | | |
| Capital | 990 | 2,216 | 6,150 |
| Emig Fund | 1,200 | 6,803 | - |
| Livingston Scholarship Fund | - | - | 7,279 |
| Memorial Funds | 4,260 | 5,428 | 3,462 |
| Total | 6,450 | 14,447 | 16,891 |
| Flower Fund | 9,405 | 11,984 | 15,804 |
| Memorial Garden Checking | 7,738 | 7,739 | 8,520 |
| Schwab Memorial Garden | 38,230 | 34,472 | 37,615 |
| Total Bank Balances | 336,234 | 201,687 | 260,310 |

2024 CAPITAL BUDGET

UNITED CHURCH OF ROWAYTON PROPOSED 2024 CAPITAL BUDGET

| <u>Projects</u> | <u>2022 Actual</u> | <u>2023 Actual</u> | <u>2024 Proposed</u> |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Boiler Replacement | 159,375 | - | - |
| Parsonage Refresh | 7,665 | - | - |
| Building Replacement Cost Analysis | 4,250 | - | - |
| Pews Repaired & Stained, Lights Replaced, Bells Refurbished | 12,672 | - | - |
| Meeting House Air Conditioning | - | 27,500 | - |
| New Parsonage Roof | - | 13,130 | - |
| Parsonage Bathroom Replacement | - | 28,915 | - |
| Hot Water Heater Replacement | - | 3,998 | - |
| Sanctuary Staining | - | - | 35,000 |
| Livestreaming Video & Audio Equipment and Installation | - | - | 20,000 |
| Unforeseen | - | - | 20,000 |
| Total Expenditures | \$ 179,937 | \$ 73,543 | \$ 75,000 |

PROPOSED 2024 OPERATING BUDGET

UNITED CHURCH OF ROWAYTON PROPOSED 2024 OPERATING BUDGET

| | 2022 Actual | 2023 Budget | 2023 Actual | 2024 Proposed | Comments |
|--|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|--|
| REVENUE | | | | | |
| Pledges | 346,620 | 260,000 | 260,000 | 280,000 | 2024 Pledges as of 1/30 |
| Pledges Anticipated in 2023 and 2024 Budget | - | 60,000 | 66,162 | 53,700 | |
| Total Pledges | 346,620 | 320,000 | 326,162 | 333,700 | 2024 Pledges required to cover expenses |
| Church and Parsonage Rental | 22,285 | 29,000 | 46,025 | 8,000 | Parsonage not rented |
| Nursery School | 30,857 | 32,600 | 32,528 | 33,400 | Assumes increase of 3% in 9/24 |
| Plate/Unpledged Contributions | 16,179 | 20,000 | 16,877 | 17,000 | |
| Fundraisers, Net | 180 | - | 96 | - | |
| Transfer from Endowment | 60,000 | 97,000 | 72,000 | 93,000 | Maximum of 5% of Unrestricted |
| Expected Employee Retention Credit | - | - | - | 30,700 | Submitted in 9/2023; expected refund in 2024 |
| TOTAL REVENUE | \$476,121 | \$498,600 | \$ 493,688 | \$515,800 | |
| EXPENSES | | | | | |
| Board of Christian Education | | | | | |
| Class Activities and Curriculum, | 5,323 | 5,000 | 6,748 | 6,000 | |
| Youth and Confirmation Programs, | | | | | |
| Special Events, Child Care, Adult Ed | | | | | |
| Board of Christian Outreach | | | | | |
| | 45,900 | 23,800 | 23,796 | 23,800 | |
| Board of Deacons | | | | | |
| Spiritual Development, Supplies, | 6,472 | 6,000 | 5,964 | 6,000 | |
| Music Program Development, | | | | | |
| and Special Programs | | | | | |
| Salary and Benefits | | | | | |
| Clergy and Staff including Communications | 312,394 | 270,000 | 271,026 | 286,000 | New pastor's compensation; 5% increase in staff salaries |
| Director, Director of Music, Children's | | | | | |
| Choir and Youth Handbell Director, Office Manager, | | | | | |
| Business Manager and Director of Christian Education | | | | | |
| Administration | | | | | |
| Office Expenses, Communications | 68,394 | 72,500 | 72,173 | 77,000 | Increased insurance costs; church-paid telephone and broadband for parsonage |
| (Video, Broadband, Telephone, Website), | | | | | |
| Payroll Taxes, Legal, Insurance, | | | | | |
| Stewardship and Social Committees | | | | | |
| Plant and Facilities | | | | | |
| Heating Oil, Electricity and other Utilities, | 111,566 | 121,300 | 110,421 | 117,000 | Decrease of 10% on heating oil partially offset by church-paid utilities for parsonage |
| and General Maintenance of House of Worship, | | | | | |
| Meeting House and Parsonage | | | | | |
| Capital Repairs | | | | | |
| | 7,500 | - | - | - | No transfer to Capital account budgeted |
| TOTAL EXPENSES | \$557,549 | \$498,600 | \$ 490,128 | \$515,800 | |

BOARD OF DEACONS

The Board of Deacons had an eventful 2023! We began 2023 excited once again for the opportunity to work with our Interim Pastor John Livingston. We welcomed John back who quickly went to work to help lead the Board through the year.

Deacons returning for 2023 included; George Albano, Stephanie Close, Sue Guarcello, Kurt Nelson, Lynne Pratt, Chris Sabol and Roger Wachnicki.

New Deacons included: Dana Basta, Barbara Currie, Alyssa Sarr, Brandon Tegano and Justin Zerega.

I would like to thank our Interim Pastor John Livingston for his guidance and leadership he provided to the Board of Deacons. John was instrumental in helping to lead our Board, and in providing direction and guidance as we moved throughout the year. Even while helping to lead the Settled Search Committee, John continued to be well organized and prepared for the services. The Board of Deacons assisted John with many baptisms and memorial services held during the year. The church held a thank you reception for John on December 17th. John's final service with us as our Interim Pastor was December 31, 2023. As John heads back into retirement, we wish John, Judi, and the Livingston Family all the best!

Raymond Fellows Program:

We were very excited to work with the Raymond Fellows program out of The Congregational Church of New Canaan, (part of the Yale Divinity School) for the first time. This program allowed us to invite three of their students over the course of the year as guest preachers. Their students included David Stuart (November), Terrance McQueen (February), and Natalie Owens-Pike (April). Each of them provided a unique perspective, which was well received by the congregation. We believe this was a good jumping off point for hearing different voices leading the congregation.

Summer Services in the Park:

Once again, we continued with the tradition of hosting services (July-August) in Pinkney Park with The Rowayton United Methodist Church. The services were well attended and the congregation enjoyed worshipping outside with the beautiful views the park provides.

Marsha Hall's Retirement/Music Program:

In August, our long-time Music Director Marsha Hall announced that she would be retiring as of December 31, 2023. A thank you reception was held for Marsha on November 17th. The congregation expressed our appreciation to Marsha for her dedication and service to the United Church of Rowayton. During Marsha's reception, the congregation presented her with gifts and heartfelt gratitude. I would like to thank Marsha for the dedication she provided to the United Church of Rowayton. As a congregation, we were so lucky to have Marsha as our Senior Choir Director. Her music brought such joy to our services for 47 years. Marsha's final service leading our music department was on December 31, 2023. We wish Marsha all the best as she begins her retirement journey!

Beginning January 1, 2024, we were excited to welcome Ellen Dickinson as our new Interim Music Director. Ellen has been part of our music program, leading our Children's Choir, for the last few years. We are so lucky to have Ellen leading our music program and looking forward to having her bring her unbelievable talents to the program. We were also excited to announce that Rachael Dorset will now be leading our Adult Handbell Choir! We thank both of you for your service to our church and the music program and look forward to the joy your music will bring to our services.

Welcoming our new pastor Sal Sapienza:

On September 24, 2023 the United Church of Rowayton congregation voted Pastor Sal Sapienza as the third Pastor of the United Church of Rowayton. We are so excited to welcome Sal and his husband, Gregg as part of the United Church of Rowayton family, and look forward to Sal's ministry. Sal's first service leading the United Church of Rowayton was January 7, 2024 and was met with excitement and praise!

Finally, I would like to thank all the Board of Deacons for their time and dedication to the church. 2023 was an eventful year hosting many fellowships, providing assistance for baptisms and memorial services and welcoming changes. All Board members are so willing to help and it's truly a great Board to be a part of.

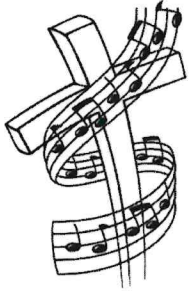
Finally, Stephanie Close, Sue Guarcello, and Roger Wachnicki have served on the Board for the last four years and their time on the board is concluding in February. I would like to extend a special thank you to them as they were instrumental in helping to lead the Board of Deacons through our Covid Protocols, John's Retirement, Pastor Daniel's Interim, Marsha Hall's Retirement, and welcoming our new Pastor Sal Sapienza. Thank you so much for your time and dedication!

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Sabol

Co-Chair
Board of Deacons

MUSIC DEPARTMENT



2023 has been a fruitful year for the Music Department. The Senior Choir has continued to thrive post Covid and to be faithful to the church and its congregation. Adult handbells have flourished and rang throughout the church year. The Children's Choir and Youth Handbells performed for the holiday seasons.

The church hosted a Spring Ring sponsored by Music on the Hill with many bell choirs from around the state participating. Music on the Hill also sponsored a African American Spiritual festival here at the church. Both programs were a resounding success.

This year will mark my retirement from the church, serving more than 45 years. I could not be prouder of this church and its commitment to the Music program. The support for music has always been a highlight for the congregation. I leave with a sense of accomplishment and pride. I leave knowing music will continue to grow. I leave with my sincere thanks and love to all who sing, ring and share their talents.

With Love,
Marsha Hall
Director of Music



ALTAR COMMITTEE

The Altar Committee continues to provide floral arrangements for the altar, bringing the joy and color of flowers in to the sanctuary, and enhancing the videos of the services for those tuning in from remote locations. The regular weekly arrangements are a joyful opportunity not only for our committee members to express their interests and talents with the lilies of the field, but also for members of the congregation and more distant friends to make donations for memorials for loved ones or to celebrate happy events.

To contribute to this effort we welcome any one who would like to prepare an arrangement: there are vases and baskets available at the Meeting House. After the service sometimes the flowers are taken to someone who may need the extra encouragement of the miracle of flowers. Please call anyone on the Altar Committee to pick a date.

We feel it is important that passing traffic see that the Church is actively celebrating the seasons. For Easter we decorate the outside Cross with spring flowers. For our Harvest celebration we show off the wealth of the earthly bounty with colorful fruits of the field both inside and out. For Advent and Christmas there are wreaths on all the doors to the Sanctuary and Meeting House, plus the large wreath behind the pulpit, and the beautiful Advent wreath with candles which Kathy Draper has continued to create with generous contributions from her own garden. We had red poinsettias in the planters, plus around the altar there were white poinsettias, red cyclamen, plus red amaryllis. Lynne Pratt was ready early to ensure sufficient lengths of roping for the traditional roping and bows. We are very grateful for the extra labor Dileep cheerfully takes on, cleaning up the needles after our decorating.

The Altar Committee also usually provides the carnations for Mother's Day. Stephanie Close continues to take care of the green plants in the planter.

We continue to be so grateful for the guidance and mentorship of June Strubinger who has been our guiding light for so many years.

Our funding comes entirely from donations to our separate account. We do not receive any funding from the annual church budget.

The committee members are: Ellen Bobka, Stephanie Close, Barbara Currie, Kate Davies, Kathy Draper, Lynne Pratt, Caroline Robinson, Kathy Siever, June Strubinger and Bev Viele.

Respectfully submitted,
Kate Davies
Altar Committee Chairperson

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN OUTREACH

Mission and Purpose: The mission of the Board of Christian Outreach is to improve the lives of those in need in the greater Norwalk area with love and compassion. The Board accomplishes this primarily by disbursing UCR's benevolent funds to agencies and individuals offering mission and service programs, holding various drives and collections, providing education and service opportunities for our Family of Faith, and allocating grant money from the Emig Fund.

Benevolence Allocations: The Board of Christian Outreach allocated \$23,800 to 20 Norwalk-based agencies in 2023. (Dollar amounts and agencies on following page.)

- | | |
|----------------------|-----|
| • Children/Education | 27% |
| • Human Rights | 21% |
| • Food and Shelter | 18% |
| • Health | 18% |
| • Social Welfare | 16% |

Drives and Collections: The Board held six drives in 2023, with an estimated total donation value of approximately \$12,000. Many thanks to members of UCR's Anchors group who often assisted with the various drives.

- Undie Sunday
- Easter basket drive
- Spring food drive
- Summer backpack drive
- Thanksgiving food drive
- Christmas toy drive

Outreach and Volunteer Opportunities: Following a hiatus for construction/remodeling, Norwalk's Open Door Shelter began receiving volunteers again in their kitchen late in the year. The Board restarted its monthly volunteer opportunity for the UCR community in December.

Emig Fund: The Emig Fund was established in 2019, as a separate fund used to allocate grants up to \$10,000 each year to local agencies and individuals to support special projects that fall within BOCO's mission and purpose. The fund is independent from BOCO's annual benevolent fund budget. In 2023, the Board decided to disburse four grants of \$2,500 each to four local agencies. The recipients will be announced in February.

Education: The Board hosted one Mission Moment in 2023, with The Carver's CEO speaking to the congregation about their mission.

Respectfully submitted,
Melanie Lynch, co-chair

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN OUTREACH

| BOCO BENEVOLENCE 2023 | | | |
|--|--------------|--|--------------|
| HEALTH | | SOCIAL WELFARE | |
| (medical services and treatment, patient and family support, and medical rehabilitation) | | (aimed at alleviating distress and poverty and/or helping the marginalized with housing, income maintenance, and personal welfare) | |
| Appleby School-based Health Clinics | \$ 1,500.00 | Elder House | \$ 1,000.00 |
| Keystone House | \$ 900.00 | Person to Person | \$ 1,000.00 |
| STAR | \$ 1,000.00 | Malta House | \$ 750.00 |
| Visiting Nurse and Hospice of Fairfield County | \$ 1,000.00 | Norwalk Senior Center | \$ 1,000.00 |
| TOTAL | \$ 4,400.00 | TOTAL | \$ 3,750.00 |
| PERCENT OF ALLOCATIONS | 18% | PERCENT OF ALLOCATIONS | 16% |
| FOOD AND SHELTER | | CHILDREN/EDUCATION | |
| Filling in the Blanks | \$ 1,000.00 | Child Guidance Center | \$ 1,000.00 |
| Food Rescue US | \$ 750.00 | The Carver Inc. | \$ 1,000.00 |
| Meals on Wheels | \$ 1,000.00 | Family & Children's Agency | \$ 2,500.00 |
| Thanksgiving gift cards | \$ 1,500.00 | Norwalk Grassroots Tennis and Education | \$ 1,000.00 |
| | | Silver Lake | \$ 900.00 |
| TOTAL | \$ 4,250.00 | TOTAL | \$ 6,400.00 |
| PERCENT OF ALLOCATIONS | 18% | PERCENT OF ALLOCATIONS | 27% |
| HUMAN RIGHTS | | | |
| Domestic Violence Crisis Center | \$ 2,000.00 | | |
| Family ReEntry | \$ 1,500.00 | | |
| Triangle Community Center | \$ 1,500.00 | | |
| TOTAL | \$ 5,000.00 | | |
| PERCENT OF ALLOCATIONS | 21% | | |
| Total Allocated 2023 | \$ 23,800.00 | Budget | \$ 23,800.00 |

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” **Proverbs 22:6**

We had a wonderful year filled with student participation in services as readers, fun children’s moments, increased attendance in Sunday School, Anchors and Confirmation. The children especially appreciated being involved in the Pastor search, being offered the opportunity to express the qualities and characteristics they’d like to see in our next settled pastor to the Search committee. We welcome Pastor Sal and look forward to developing more youth involvement with him as we move into the second half of the students’ academic year.

Highlights of 2023:

February 5th - Fourth graders attended their Communion Class in preparation for celebrating their first Communion.

February 19th - BOCE sponsored Pancake Breakfast - Huge success. 60+ attendees enjoyed pancakes with Mike Harden’s secret berry sauce and bacon, bacon and more bacon. Thanks Mike and to all who volunteered.

February 22nd - Ash Wednesday was well attended by the Anchors and the Confirmation classes.

March 5th - Our first communion class enjoyed their special day with their families and the congregation. They each graciously received their personalized Bibles gifted to them from the BOCE.

April 9th - Easter was very well attended with at least 40 children attending and 14 downstairs in the infant toddler care. All the Easter eggs (300+) were collected at our annual Easter Egg Hunt by a crowd of 30 - 40 children and their families. Thanks to all the volunteers who hid the eggs and who helped out with child care and crafting!

April 23rd - Earth Day. The Sunday School students enjoyed creating art over several previous Sunday classes to decorate the Sanctuary and especially the altar for Earth Day, calling attention to their concerns about our Earth and what we can do better to be good stewards of God’s creation and His children.

May 7th - Congratulations and Blessings to the 7 Confirmation students in the class of 2023, celebrating their Confirmation with Pastor John.

May 14th - Mothers Day. The Sunday School students celebrated all mothers in this annual tradition of handing out carnations during the children’s moment.

May 21st - What used to be called “Teacher Appreciation Day” developed into “Faith Formation Day” acknowledging and honoring the efforts of the students, their parents and guardians and the

whole congregation as active participants in the collective Faith Formation of everyone in our Church family.

September 10th - Rally Day was a great kick-off to the academic year 2023-2024. Thanks to the Board of Christian Education members for all their help in making it a success. The traditional “build your own Sundae” ice cream and topping buffet returned!! and was a big hit!!

November 29th - The Confirmation students shared a fun holiday tradition with the Anchors group (first time including them), working together in teams to shop for toys for the children and their families who are assisted through Person to Person. They spent their funds perfectly within the budget — Once again pulling off another small Christmas Miracle!

The Annual Christmas Tree Lighting will return Dec 2024 followed by our traditional pasta dinner.

December 17th - Living Nativity - The production directed by Sky Livingston was flawless and stellar once again. For the second time the Anchors joined the confirmation class as shepherds in this joyful Advent Season production. They received so many compliments for their performance. Many in the congregation were especially impressed by the sheer number of students! Can't say enough about our awesome students.

The students continue to respond well to the transition period of interim pastor; motivated to participate in classes, read at services, team up for UCR's charitable endeavors, and enjoy singing and ringing bells. We are very lucky to have our youth programs enriched by music led by Ellen Dickinson. The students love it!

Class participation:

Sunday Service Infant-Toddler Child Care - attendance ranges from 1 - 10. Led by Emily Zerega.

Sunday School - attendance ranges from 2-13. We have outgrown our single combined age class and have moved the class from the undercroft to the meeting house classrooms. Led by Val Harden. BOCE members and parent lesson leaders express interest to be involved. I am grateful for their support and look forward to reintroducing the two-class model soon.

Anchors - 6-7 regularly attend. Led by Val Harden

Confirmation Class of 2024 - This 2023-24 academic year we combined the 9th and 10th graders together. 15 registered. Led by Val Harden. Pastor John continued to provide curriculum guidance. We look forward to working closely with Pastor Sal for the remainder of this academic year and to celebrating Confirmation on May 5th.

The congregation's involvement in the Christian Education program is vital. We, the BOCE, appreciate your continued support and effort through this year! You are instrumental in strengthening the faith experience within this Church family for now and in the future.

Sincere and heartfelt thanks also go to Pastor John (Emeritus) and Judi, the Deacons, and the Council for their guidance, support, and faith in me and the BOCE to continue efforts on behalf of our students.

Kris, Bill Peltz, Bill Sarr, Dileep, Ellen and all the volunteers - Your work is invaluable!

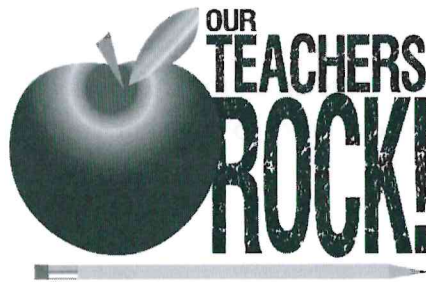
Pastor John and Marsha, we are deeply grateful for the time you had with us and wish you rest, relaxation and all the best.

With gratitude,

Val Harden, Christian Education Director

Emma Sykes, BOCE Chair

BOCE Members: Sarah Sykes, Leslie Borum, Jennifer Nelson



COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE 2023

Our digital presence is growing. Engagement on our social media platforms is increasing and the number of followers on Facebook and especially on Instagram is growing steadily. The number of people viewing our website has increased 62%! Even the number of people listening to Pastor John's messages on our podcast has grown this year.

We initiated a chatbot prayer request service, which was well received, and we took out social media ads for Easter and Christmas. They were viewed by well over 3,000 people.

This year, we recorded baptisms and memorial services and made them available to the families. The control booth was completely renovated, so we will be able to live stream in the near future.

Press releases were issued for Rev. Sal Sapienza's call and Music Director Marsha Hall's retirement.

The Photo Booth was quite popular and provided many new and interesting photographs for our Directory.

Bill Peltz
Communications Director

2023 LAY DELEGATE TO THE SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND TO THE FAIRFIELD WEST ASSOCIATION

One of the great strengths of our denomination is that each local church is autonomous. As a business entity, we are not responsible to our national office. This makes so much sense. Ours is not a one-size-fits-all denomination. Each church is unique in how it responds to its community. This means that no two churches are quite the same. And yet, we share a common bond, a common way of doing things. When I walk into another UCC church, there may be what I think of as minor differences, but I immediately feel at home.

This is important. As Delegate, I attend meetings with members of the other 16 churches in the Fairfield West Association and with representatives of all the UCC churches from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Because we see what we all have in common, these meetings are delightfully effective.

The Southern New Conference of the United Church of Christ is beginning to offer many meaningful programs for its member churches. Rev. Margret Hofmeister became our new Area Conference Minister last March, and she and Search and Call Associate Jill Ford were instrumental allies as we searched for a new pastor. I'm pleased to report that the Association created a Grants program to help member churches grow and try new ways to serve their community.

Bill Peltz

♥ CAREGIVING MINISTRY ♥
Dedicated to listening and keeping in touch

MISSION STATEMENT

The Caregiving Ministry of The United Church of Rowayton is dedicated to utilizing its spiritual gifts in a shared ministry that provides for the well-being of God's people. Caregivers are caring Christian friends who listen, understand, accept, and pray for and with care receivers who are experiencing the joys and sorrows of life.

No matter how you say it – gracias, merci, grazie, danke, etc, you can never say thank you enough to our ministry caregivers: Diane Albano, Joanne Brown, Stephanie Close, Ann DiLeone, Debbie Douglas, Lynne Pratt, Caroline Robinson, Marcia Smith, Carol Soennichsen, Donna Wachnicki and Roger Wachnicki. We are so grateful for their dedication to our church family. We unfortunately, have to say goodbye to Donna and Roger who are relocating. We wish them the best!

On February 11th, Caroline Robinson gathered her Caregiving by Cooking group to prepare a chicken soup luncheon for senior church members. The Caregiving Ministry combined the luncheon with a program entitled "A Celebration of Kindness and Laughter." Our special guest author, Barbara Espinosa Occhino, shared uplifting readings and conversations about the power of kindness and humor with stories published in the Chicken Soup for the Soul books: Kindness Matters and My Wonderful Wacky Family. Barbara had stories in each of the books that and we were able to give copies to all who attended. She was a delightful speaker who stayed and chatted with everyone and signed copies of the books.

All of our work is strictly confidential.

Respectfully submitted,
Joanne Brown
Lynne Pratt
Co-chairpersons

Caregiving Ministry



MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

The Memorial Committee has received gifts for the year of 2023 in memory of the following:

Martha Cook
Tom Guarcello

MEMORIAL GARDEN COMMITTEE

The Memorial Garden, is for past and present members of The United Church of Rowayton, and their immediate families: spouse, partner, siblings, children and parents. Applications for a reservation are available in the church office and online. While the answers to many frequently asked questions are available on the Church website, any member of the Memorial Garden Committee will be happy to answer any questions that may arise.

In 2023 there were three new reservations and three interments. The Memorial Garden now has 265 members, with 148 interments. With the current Garden configuration, there are 11 available spaces as of the end of 2023. In addition, there are 24 spaces available with marker stones that are smaller than the standard size, so the engraving is limited.

All of the Memorial Garden funds have come from reservations of Church members and contributions specifically designated for the Garden. During the year the Memorial Garden transitioned the financial responsibility for maintenance and upkeep of the garden to the Church, while retaining oversight of the standards and style.

The Memorial Garden Committee thanks our Church Family for their continued support of this beautiful project.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Ackerly, Treasurer



NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Nominating Committee is responsible for enlisting the volunteer support of church members to serve on the various Boards and Committees that guide the operations of the United Church of Rowayton.

The Committee also prepares an annual Proposed Slate of candidates for presentation and approval at the church Annual Meeting held each February. The members of the Committee wish to thank all those who currently serve and those who have agreed to serve new and extended terms.

The Committee welcomes all members of the congregation who wish to participate in service to our Church and Community. If you are interested and would like to serve or recommend someone for service, please contact one of the members listed below.

Currently serving on the Nominating Committee: Meggan Douglas and Julie Begos

Respectfully submitted,
Meg Douglas
203-803-9634

Julie Begos
203-858-0547

UCNS AT A GLANCE

Our Mission

The preschool program at United Church Nursery School guides children on their early childhood educational journey. Through active exploration alongside interaction with adults, peers and materials that are developmentally appropriate, our goal is the social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional growth of every child in our care.

Enrollment and Staffing

We are currently at our maximum daily capacity (50 students in building at one time) and have 62 students enrolled for the 2023-2024 school year: 12 in our Pre-K Fives; 16 in our Pre-K Fours; 18 in our Threes; 16 in our Twos.

We employ 14 staff, and all are part-time with some teachers serving in multiple classrooms. UCNS employs Gina Ely as Director and Sue Lue as Finance Manager/Pre-K Fives Head Teacher, with three (3) additional Head Teachers for a total of four (4) with this distinction (the State of Connecticut's Office of Early Childhood requires that one Head Teacher must be always on site when school is in session).

Our classroom teachers are as follows: Sue Lue (Head Teacher), Martha Meyerson, Teri Vineyard and Jenny Raymond (Head Teacher) in our Pre-K Fives Program. Elizabeth Haskell (Head Teacher), Annie Weibel, Jenn Friedrichsen and Jody Sattler in our Pre-K Fours Program. Jenny Raymond Sarah Craft, Teresa Cunningham (Head Teacher) and Mary Joyce in our Twos Program, and Jenny Raymond, Teresa Cunningham, Wendy Blattman and Christine Smith in our Threes Program.

Licensing

UCNS is fully licensed by the State of Connecticut's Office of Early Childhood. In October 2023, we recently passed our annual state inspection. Our license must be renewed again before December 1, 2026.

In addition to the annual licensing inspection, we are required to have yearly inspections completed by the City of Norwalk Health Department, the local Fire Marshall, and SNEW performs a lead water test.

Parent Board

UCNS has a five-person Parent Executive Board that oversees all nursery school operations, with a focus on fundraising and building our school community. The UCNS Director reports directly to the UCNS Executive Board.

UCNS is fiscally sponsored by the United Church of Rowayton, an official and legal sponsorship that was created three years ago in conjunction with the UCR's Board of Household Concerns.

UCNS BUDGET 2022-2023

Projected Net Income

| | |
|----------------------------|------------|
| Tuition | \$ 472,349 |
| Lunch & Extended Day, Camp | \$ 17,260 |
| Fundraisers | \$ 11,275 |
| Grants, other income | \$ 19 |
| | \$ 500,902 |

Projected Expenses Compensation

| | |
|--|------------|
| Payroll taxes | \$ 366,367 |
| Rent (not including camp month) | \$ 28,971 |
| Classroom Expenses | \$ 25,600 |
| Office | \$ 18,935 |
| Property Maintenance, Playground | \$ 35,029 |
| Legal, Consultants, Professional Development | \$ 9,500 |
| Family, Community Expenses | \$ 5,500 |
| Insurance | \$ 11,000 |
| | \$500,902 |

Ministers to the Community: *The Congregation*

Pastor: *Sal Sapienza*

Pastor Emeritus: *John Livingston* Founding Pastor: *Donald W. Emig*

Interim Director of Music: *Ellen Dickinson*

Director Handbell Choirs: *Rachel Dorset*

Director of Christian Education: *Val Harden*

Director of Communications: *Bill Peltz*

Office Manager: *Kris Jenkins*

Treasurer and Business Manager: *Bill Sarr*

Assistant Treasurer: *Jim Ackerly*

Premier Property Management: *Dileep Chandran*

Office Hours: Tuesday through Friday 9:00am – 12:00pm

210 Rowayton Avenue, Rowayton, CT 06853

Telephone: 203-866-1415 **Website:** ucrowayton.org

E-Mail: sal, ellen, rachel, kris, billsarr, billpeltz, val, jim or dileep

@ucrowayton.org