

First Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

837 Main Street, East Hartford, CT 06108

Organized in 1699



Annual Report 2020

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

United Church of Christ
East Hartford, Connecticut

Organized 1699

2020

ANNUAL REPORT

of

CHURCH OFFICERS * BOARDS * COMMITTEES * ORGANIZATIONS

Cover: Christmas Eve singing "Silent Night" by candlelight on Zoom
Cover Photo by C-J Caesar

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PASTOR

Sometimes the most stunning flowers are those who bloom through sidewalk cracks. Such has been the spiritual blossoming of First Congregational Church of East Hartford in 2020.

The cold concrete of the Covid pandemic put severe restrictions on in-person, in the building gatherings from Worship to the Holiday Fair to Committee Meetings. The isolation was a heavy burden for many in the congregation, especially those who did not connect frequently online or by calling into worship and virtual church programs. The relentless uncertainty of the pandemic awakened anxiety and exhaustion in many members, especially those working on the front lines as essential workers and those who love them dearly. The constant changes between online and in-person, along with “zoom fatigue”, drained those whose lives required online work or virtual learning, such as teachers and students. Everyone had to learn new ways.

Amid uncertainty and change Paul counseled the early Christians to, “hold fast to what is good” (Romans 12:9). As such, I cherish the blossoms that have sprung through the cracks in 2020:

- The beginning of a Bible Study with a consistent group of thoughtful, inquisitive, and faithful church members and visitors. We looked at the historical context and modern-day implications of Genesis, Job, Revelation, the creation of the biblical canon, Gospel of Thomas, and the birth narratives of the four Gospels.
- The beginning of a vibrant and active Ministry for Racial Justice with the highest attendance of any church program outside Sunday Worship. (p. 17) The forming of the group took place during the summer as Black Lives Matter protests swept the world and our worship featured a two-month sermon series on “Race and the Bible”, a theme voted upon by members of the congregation.
- Online Worship and Programs yielded some unexpected blossoms:
 - o Visitors and church members joined in online worship and weekday programs from across the country, including Maine, Massachusetts, Colorado, and Florida.
 - o Zoom allowed church members to socialize before worship, often with those they may not have otherwise.
 - o Snow storms, distance, and evening darkness were no longer deterrents from participation in church activities.
 - o Worship slides featured images to inspire, challenge and deepen our faith.
 - o Online surveys offered an anonymous way to participate in worship.
 - o Enjoying the gifts of national and conference staff and musicians in worship.
- The first four months of the pandemic included weekly Thursday evening zoom “check-ins” which not only helped to share information and make church decisions, but provided valuable time to reflect and connect to one another in a chaotic world.
- Christmas Card Home Delivery effort of half a dozen delivery elves, plus the organizing efforts of *Candy Guastamachio*, brought holiday cheer to many in the congregation.
- The golfers of the Annual Golf Tournament discovered they rather enjoyed the more informal outdoor BBQ, required due to Covid restrictions.
- Some in-person offerings showed limited interest, such as the in-person Prayer Meetings and outdoor Spirit Walks, but nonetheless supported some sweet and refreshing spiritual connections. The second Spirit Walk included mostly non-church members!

- Some in-person offerings were enthusiastically embraced, such as the Women’s Retreat (p. 3) and Thursday evening “meet and greets” of the Woodward House residents (p. 26), and gave some socially distanced opportunities to interact in small groups outdoors.
- In January, before Covid, we had “Soup for the Soul” presentation and discussion about God’s gender. Many of the roughly fifteen participants were surprised and grateful to learn about the history of female imagery and pronouns for God, from the Bible through the Middle Ages and blossoming in the late 1900s.
- Before Covid we had a very successful “Friendship Tea” in February featuring 3-courses prepared by Chef *Candy* and matched with tea selections by myself. Church members and visitors conversed about faithful friendships.

Many of the blessings of 2020 were greatly facilitated by members of our newly formed Technology Committee (p. 23) and the Safety Committee (p. 20). The church staff, *Louise Holmes* and *Jerry Scheinfeldt*, church officers, and lay leaders have been phenomenal in terms of their adaptability, wisdom, and peaceful patience during the most chaotic and uncertain year our world has seen in decades. A crisis can lay bare the weakness of a community, it can also, as it is in our case, reveal the deep strength and resilience of a community.

Some more personal pastoral blossoms of 2020 include:

- Partnering with my generous husband, *C-J Caesar*, in designing the technology infrastructure for worship and programs in the early months of the pandemic, as well as providing 1-1 technology support and guidance for many members of the congregation. I have learned more than I ever thought I would when it comes to technology!
- Participating in numerous webinars and educational opportunities offered by the wider United Church of Christ to aid pastors in ministering during the pandemic. Our wider UCC contributions were certainly being put to good use this year!
- Mentoring two new “Members-In-Discernment” (MIDs) as they discern their call to ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ. This year I began serving as their advisor from the Hartford East Association Council on Ministry.
- Beginning an internship in Spiritual Direction with the Spiritual Life Center. The first semester of this two-year program has re-awakened my passion for spiritual practices and contemplation while teaching deep listening skills and methods of providing spiritual companionship to individuals of various religious backgrounds. An extra bonus of this program has been the support of a spiritual community. Part of the program involves providing individual spiritual direction, working with a supervisor, and continuing to meet with my own spiritual director.

My hope is that some of the blossoming flowers of 2020 can be transplanted into more permanent homes. Meanwhile, some of the flowers were beautiful during covid, but need not thrive once the pandemic has subsided. Our task in the next year is to select the flowers we wish to nurture going forward. I have every confidence we will do so with grace, wisdom and love.

Rev. Kelly Jane Caesar

DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION **MINISTRY PROGRAM ASSISTANT**

The role of Ministry Program Assistant merged the Director of Christian Education with the Office Administrator. I provide administrative support as needed for the various events and activities in our church, whether in-person or through Zoom.

When Covid-19 closed the church in March, our usual way of doing things changed. We could no longer be in the church building. I worked from home for the rest of the year, going into the church once a week. The sermon and prayer concerns were sent to those who cannot connect with us, through Zoom, on Sunday mornings.

It takes a different strategy to plan for Sunday Morning Worship on Zoom and has been an interesting and successful journey. I have returned to presenting a Children's Moment on Zoom during Sunday Worship.

I send a weekly email keeping everyone informed of the workings of the church, the upcoming meetings, calendar, fundraisers and holiday information.

We were able to have a Family Retreat at Silver Lake in February just before everything closed down. Our theme was "Who is First Church?" where we explored the different aspects of our church that are important and memorable to us.

"Teatime with Friends" was an online get-together in the spring to share the positives of the pandemic.

In October, *Candy Guastamachio* graciously lent her backyard for a socially distant Woman's Retreat. Our theme was "God is My Rock". We had some insightful conversations around multiple campfires.

Louise Holmes

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The Board of Christian Education supports children and family-focused activities throughout the year. Many thanks to our wonderful teachers who have served our Sunday School children year after year. They are *Kathy Cattanach, Patricia Andrulot, Maggie Sanzo* and *Louise Holmes*. Our Confirmation Class is led by *Rev. Kelly Jane Caesar* and *Louise Holmes*.

The year began as any other, with Sunday School on Sunday mornings for Toddlers and Preschool through Grade 5. Middle School and High School, including our Confirmation Class of four, attended worship.

In March, when Covid -19 restrictions came, we met through Zoom. Sunday School was held in a Breakout room on Sunday mornings before Worship.

We did several things to keep our children connected. We had an Easter morning scavenger hunt, and the children were pen pals, coloring and sending pictures to each other. Summer activities were delivered, and Christmas fun came in the mail. It is challenging for the children because they spend so much time with school online, but we do our best and have fun when we can.

Louise Holmes

BOARD OF DEACONESSES

The Board of Deaconesses duties were altered in 2020 due to a medical pandemic. The Church was closed and we were no longer able to greet members and visitors. We also no longer made visits.

However, the Deaconesses continued to make telephone calls and send card and letters to their assigned members in an effort to keep them informed about the Church's activities.

There were eight active Deaconesses and four inactive. We look forward to the Church's reopening and being able to return to our ministry of greeting and welcoming.

Gerry Rozie

BOARD OF DEACONS

We had several Board of Deacons meetings via Zoom during the year. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, group meetings could not be held in the Church building.

The Deacons ensured that early on in the pandemic the handful of church members who did not choose to attend worship online or by phone were mailed the sermon, the weekly prayers and were regularly contacted via phone. Efforts were made to encourage and help members navigate the new technology.

Several of the Deacons assisted the Pastor with three Special Prayer Meetings in the sanctuary during the year: Praying Through the Senses, Thanksgiving Prayer, and Christmas Eve Worship. Attendance at the prayer meetings ranged from zero to fifteen, with many also attending the zoom services. Deacons participated in the Sunday Zoom Church by assisting in reading the Scriptures and offering feedback and ideas on the services. Communion during the year was given by *Rev. Kelly Jane* every month during the service, with members invited to supply their own bread and cup at home.

The Deacons sought to ensure a special Advent and Christmas season by purchasing and setting up a nativity scene in the front of the Church building, sending Advent Calendars, graciously created by *Louise Holmes*, to all church members, and supporting two Christmas Eve Services. The in-person Christmas Eve service included recorded music, prayers, and individual candles for Silent Night. The online Christmas Eve service featured the same sermon as well as special music, a “fireside” children’s message, and many attendees from the church’s extended family and friends.

Many special meetings are being held with the assistance of the Technology Committee. The Board of Deacons thanks the Committee for their experience, expertise and help.

Worship will continue with Zoom in 2021 as the pandemic continues on. Church Services are well attended and allow distant members and friends to participate. Church Committee Meetings are varied and well received. The Spiritual and Mission work of First Congregational Church of East Hartford is stable and well.

Dave Gaston

BOARD OF MISSIONS

What a year. WHAT A YEAR! I am not talking about the Covid -19 virus. I am not talking about the turmoil in our nation. I am talking about our congregation and how they stepped up to the situation and made the best lemonade from the lemons they were given. The Missions Board uses money given each year to support many worthy causes.

With the “shut down” of the in-person services we assumed there would be a slowdown in giving. But that was not the case. With the kindness of the congregation and much prayer the Board was able to continue funding many benevolent missions. The largest portion of our giving goes to Basic Support of our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM). We also supported other causes with contributions to:

Friendship Center

East Hartford Interfaith Ministries

YMCA

Silver Lake Conference Center

Garden Club

R.I.P. Fund

Emergency Local Mission Support

We participated in special mission collections in addition to our basic support of the United Church of Christ (UCC). They are One Great Hour of Sharing, Neighbors in Need, Strengthen the Church and The Christmas Fund. We are a “5 for 5!” UCC church. Also, in June we received donations for the Blanket Fund to assist those in need in times of disaster.

The ‘Souper’ Bowl Sunday in February was a success with proceeds being donated to the Soup Kitchen. We were able to hold one of two Lenten Luncheons before “shutting down”. *Megan Gaul* presented a very informative and fun talk entitled Sugar Shack. This program is presented at the elementary school she teaches at and it was certainly informative for us. Thanks *Megan!*

The Community Garden on our front lawn continues to be a beacon for the community’s needs. With help from many church members throughout the season, the garden is a big success with donations to our Food Bank and area residents.

Due to social distancing the Town of East Hartford did not hold a Toy Drive this year that we could support. However, WEB still had a family in need for which we were able to support with food and clothing store gift cards.

The Missions Board would like to thank the entire congregation for the many ways you have supported our programs and greater world missions.

Darrell R. Basler

BOARD OF MUSIC

2020 was a great year! Not! But we adapted! In some ways, the music and services were better, but we all missed singing hymns together and having the choir enhancing our worship services.

The Senior Choir did sing until mid-March, but thereafter, our choir "community within a community" was only able to support one another through Zoom break-out rooms, telephone and other social media.

Your music director is especially appreciative of the music videos of various individuals, including both choir members and talented musicians in the congregation. These videos added greatly to the on-line services throughout 2020 and now continuing into 2021.

Rev. Kelly Jane Caesar, C-J, and others have been quite amazing in putting together visuals to bring a quality worship service to the First Church family. *Louise, Kelly Jane* and *Jerry* work closely each week to provide integrated, coordinated and (hopefully) thought-provoking services. We hope that some degree of normalcy will be restored later in 2021, but we will definitely keep some the best aspects of on-line services as we march forward into the future!

We are never too old to adapt and learn new things!

Jerry Scheinfeldt

BOARD OF STEWARDSHIP

The Board of Stewardship continues to be proud of the wonderful people in our congregation who have invested so much time and effort into our Church.

The Church's mission is primarily the spiritual growth of our congregation, and with everyone's help, to keep the church fiscally balanced. We have met both of these goals this past year in excellent fashion!

Because of Covid-19 we only had two fundraisers this year. The Golf Tournament was moved to October. It had a different look, but we still exceeded the budget by \$900! The golfers were very thankful that they were able to play in our tournament.

Our Holiday Village Fair had to be online this year. Our thanks to *Julie Wittenzellner* and *Britt LaFleur* for stepping up and creating online shopping. It was certainly a great idea. Read more about our Fair on page 14.

We extend our gratitude to our congregation for their continued support with their pledges and donations.

Jackie LeBrun

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

2020 began as a typically busy year for the Trustees. But with the Covid virus and resulting shut down in mid-March, the Board was no less busy, although priorities were different. The focus this year was on basic maintenance, periodic inspections of the building and addressing any issues that came up at both the Church building and Woodward House.

Building Use

From mid-March through the end of the year, the building was effectively closed. The YMCA Day Care and Scout Troop 1, briefly attempted to return to the building part way through the year, but eventually decided to not use the building until things start to return to normal. The Food Bank was the only activity to remain in the building throughout the year.

With the reduced use, operating expenses were lower. However, the lawn still needed mowing, snow needed to be cleared, repairs needed to be made, and the building still needed to be cleaned, although the frequency was scaled back.

Projects

The following projects were completed this year:

- Repaired and painted the front doors to the Sanctuary.
- Replaced 2 broken windows in the attic at the back of the meeting house.
- Repaired and painted balcony walls in the Sanctuary which had suffered water damage from a leak that was previously fixed.
- Replaced vinyl siding on the exterior of the meeting house that was lost/damaged in windstorms.
- Replaced gutter along the back of the chapel that had been damaged in a windstorm.
- Painted sections of wall in the YMCA Day Care area.
- Painted the trim and sections of wall in the basement hallway.
- Painted Woodward House porches and front door.
- We started a major cleanout of the church building, going through every room and getting rid of items that we either no longer need or do not have significant historical or sentimental value to the church. Once this is done, we can use our space more efficiently and/or find new ways to use the space we have. Significant progress was made before the shutdown and this project will be continued when the building is back at full use.

I would like to thank the Board members, *Connie Holmeen, Carol Joly, Dick Stevens, Gail Saunders, Erin Cattanach, and Pam Scheinfeldt* for all of their efforts this year. Also, thank you to the many members of the church who have pitched in to help maintain our property over the course of the year.

Howard Satalino

FOOD BANK

Another year has passed, and if I may paraphrase Mark Twain, perhaps “The rumors of our demise were premature”.

The Food Bank ended our 39-year partnership with Foodshare on June 31, 2020 and we have gotten our food supplies from local stores since that time. Amazingly, we have approximately the same financial balance now as at the beginning of 2020. Our purchases at Foodshare during March, April and May were “no charge” due to a Covid-19 grant. Two generous donations from the Rotary Club of East Hartford, one from the Town and very many generous donations through our church provided \$3,950.00 in income.

Knowing that we would not be able to provide the usual Thanksgiving Dinner due to Covid-19 restrictions, I declined any donation from the Town at Holiday time, instead asking them to disperse our portion to the other food banks in town.

I am seeking new persons to come forward to take the Food Bank forward into the future, either in its present format or in some new direction. We have traditionally scheduled appointments midday to best accommodate the volunteers, but if working persons came forward, they might want to schedule appointments during evening hours or on weekends. This could be a benefit to clients who are employed, yet need food assistance, as well as those whose means of transportation is not available during workday hours. The average age of the current crew is north of seventy and a change would be refreshing, to say the least.

We will continue on and have faith that circumstances will improve in 2021.

Abbie and Rich Beebe, Co-coordinators

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

YOUNG ADULT GROUP

The Food for Thought group, for young adults under 40 years old to explore spiritual matters, saw its most creative year yet. We started the year giving a gift of kitchen tools to the church in gratitude for the space, resources and pastoral leadership the congregation provides to a demographic which often struggles to feel at home in institutional churches. Gatherings usually consist of social time to check-in and then an open discussion on a topic of faith, jumpstarted with a handful of prepared discussion questions or an interactive game or activity. People participate relatively equally in the conversation and also in food preparations (when safe to do so).

The group explored the “Fruits of the Spirit” over January’s “breakfast dinner”, February’s chocolate fondue fountain, and March’s enchiladas by Woodward House resident, *Megan Gaul*.

When Covid struck, we gathered on zoom for some fun and games, including faith-filled Jeopardy, Scattergories, Pictionary and Family Feud. Many thanks to *Brittany LaFleur, Tracy Lynn Mozley, and Erin Cattanach* for preparing these online games.

As covid rates decreased, we had a few in-person, socially distanced gatherings at Camp Neipsic, including programs on “Heaven and Hell” and “Holy in Nature”. The year ended with a festive private viewing of the “The Star” movie at Cinemark.

Some participants preferred online gatherings, especially those who live further away. Many were eager for in-person gatherings. All are ready for Covid to be over.

Rev. Kelly Jane Caesar

GARDEN CLUB

The Community Garden, here at First Church, has completed its sixth year of operation. We are a committed group of volunteers that grow vegetables that are distributed through our Food Bank. In the spring, we clean up the garden beds to get them ready for planting. We gather to decide what to plant and where to plant it. Seeds and seedlings are planted throughout the spring months.

During the summer, our volunteers water the garden and pick vegetables that are ready for eating. We clean the produce, package it in plastic bags or baskets and place in the Food Bank refrigerator. We weed the garden beds and keep them looking nice and neat.

In the fall, we clean out all the garden beds, store all our equipment for the winter, and place tarps on the garden beds to keep out snow, salt and sand from the street and sidewalk.

This year we grew: tomatoes, scallions, bell peppers, Cubanell peppers, spinach, lettuce, pole green beans, yellow beans, broccoli, radishes, onions, carrots, cabbage, potatoes and peas.

I would like to thank the small but dedicated group of volunteers from the Garden Club for maintaining this important mission of the Church. We take care of our neighbors. I am looking for more volunteers to help with watering during the summer months. Please contact me if you are interested.

Brenda Murdzek

HOLIDAY VILLAGE FAIR COMMITTEE

The Holiday Fair Goes Virtual

The Holiday Fair is one First Church's biggest fundraisers of the year. In 2020 there was not a way to safely have the fair in the traditional way. Not wanting to miss out on this event, the Fair Committee decided to have an online Holiday Fair! *Britt LaFleur* and *Julie Wittenzellner* took the leadership of moving the fair to Facebook and figuring out logistics for organizing, listing, confirming orders, making invoices, bagging items, and having in-person pickup of items.

Organizing:

It was decided to sell items in the following traditional categories: Boutique, Handicrafts, Angels, Grandma's Attic, Baskets, Pictures, Candy Bars, Knives (Rada), and Holiday Boxes. Each item was given a unique identifier, recorded in a spreadsheet, bagged, and labeled with the item number and price.

Listing and Confirming Orders:

After all of the items had been organized and photographed, *Britt* uploaded the pictures to Facebook albums in our online fair group. Then community members could "claim" items by commenting on the picture of the item with the item number. We confirmed that the item was claimed and recorded the name of the buyer in the spreadsheet. The sale was active from November 7, 2020 to November 21, 2020.

Invoicing and Bagging:

Britt created invoices for each buyer with a list of their items, the prices, and their total amount due. After printing the invoice, the items were "picked" from the different categories and bagged together with the invoice attached. The bags were organized by last name in the dining room to make it easy for the pickup days.

In-person Pickup:

November 21st and 22nd were the days designated for in-person pickup of the items that were sold during the Online Fair. We had over 25 volunteers help with the pickup days. Some people helped with traffic while others relayed names using walkie talkies. We also had runners bring the pre-bagged items to the cars. *Brenda Murdzek* collected payments (cash, check, or card) during all of the pickup hours. In addition, *Candy Guastamachio* led a Christmas Card Collection during the fair pickup times, to later be distributed to church members. Leftover fair items were packed away for future fairs. Overall, many hands made light work!

Thank you to everyone who crafted, donated items, constructed Holiday Boxes, bagged items, compiled orders, organized orders, directed traffic, ran bags to cars, collected money, and donated their time and money to make this year as successful as possible. Overall, we raised \$4,185.57 after selling well over 400 items and collecting many thoughtful donations.

We could not have done it without all of you!

Submitted with gratitude,
Brittany LaFleur and *Julie Wittenzellner*

HUMAN RESOURCE COMMITTEE

2020 is a year that we all will remember for quite some time. The Human Resources Committee met in February and some of the discussion centered around *Rev Kelly Jane*'s option to take a sabbatical. *Rev. Kelly Jane* indicated that she had not found any sabbatical that interested her at this time. During a follow-up meeting with *Rev. Kelly Jane*, she indicated that she was interested in entering a two-year Internship Program for Spiritual Direction given through the Spiritual Life Center located in West Hartford. The Human Resources Committee enthusiastically encouraged her to apply and she was accepted into the program. *Rev. Kelly Jane* started the internship program in September and she is finding the program to be very satisfying even with it being online.

Starting in March, when in-person worship was suspended, the church quickly transitioned to worship services completely online via Zoom. The church staff has been instrumental in setting up a truly fantastic online worship program. The online services have been outstanding and there is a lot of behind-the-scenes work that the staff provides in making sure those services function as smoothly as they do. Additional special thanks go to *C-J Caesar* for providing outstanding technical assistance for the Zoom online worship and committee meetings. *Rev. Kelly Jane*, *C-J* and others patiently worked with anyone in the congregation that have needed technical access help. In order to provide some "bench strength" technical help, a Technology Committee was formed to allow *C-J* to have some time off from the technical parts of the online services and committee meetings.

In late 2020, the Human Resources Committee recommended, and the Finance Committee and the Trustees approved, to move the unused 2020 substitute clergy funds and the unused 2020 substitute organist funds to be paid to *Rev. Kelly Jane* and *Jerry* as a special recognition and thanks for their efforts for online worship in 2020. With the exception of one or two weeks, they both did not take any time off during 2020. The Human Resource Committee is working with the Technology Committee and the Deacons in order to establish a process to allow *Rev. Kelly Jane* and *Jerry* to take time off in 2021 and to allow worship to continue when one or both are on vacation and when *Rev. Kelly Jane* is on maternity leave.

Joe Murdzek, Assistant Moderator

Allen Apel

Mary Mourey

Rev. Kelly Jane Caesar

INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

In 2020, a global pandemic swept the world, leading to the “Great Lockdown Recession”, and the U.S. into the sharpest recession, and fastest recovery, in our history. Covid-19 left an incredible toll, with almost 21 million cases and more than 350,000 deaths in the U.S. alone, according to the CDC website. Unemployment skyrocketed, especially in areas like service, hospitality, travel, and leisure, and those areas remain at devastated levels. Between late February and late March, the S & P 500 Index was down approximately 34%. * The Government responded with unprecedented stimulus in an attempt to get the economy moving again, and by late July, the S & P 500 was back to where it had started the year, but not all stocks and industries had recovered. The economy bifurcated into “Work from Home”, which was relatively unscathed, and “Recovery”, which suffers tremendously still. Our thoughts are with everyone affected by Covid, both from a health and economic perspective.

Large Cap stocks, represented by the S & P 500, were up 18.4%. The Russell 2000, a measure of small-cap stocks, was up 19.96%, and the MSCI EAFE index of International stocks, was up 7.82%. The Barclays Capital Aggregate bond index was up 7.51%.

As of December 31, 2020, the total value of the First Congregational Church portfolio was \$1,906,557.17. That amount is up from the December 31, 2019 value of \$1,613,869. The Church withdrew \$27,394.10 from the portfolio this year. Total return was up 20.45% in 2020. Currently, the portfolio asset allocation is 64.6% in stocks, 18.3% in bonds, 12.8% in alternatives, and 4.3% in cash.

The Investment Committee is a sub-committee of the Board of Trustees and its members include *Allen Apel*, *Rev. Kelly Jane Caesar*, *Randy Holmeen*, and *Jerry Scheinfeldt*. The advisor to the Investment Committee is *Brett Cavalieri*. For any questions, please do not hesitate to contact *Randy Holmeen* at 860-275-0771, and thank you for the trust you have placed in the First Congregational Church Investment Committee.

Brett Cavalieri, Financial Advisor

MINISTRY FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

After the brutal killing of George Floyd, May 25, 2020, like many Americans, I was appalled. During a phone conversation with *Rev. Kelly Jane*, I told her I was experiencing a flood of emotions. Sadness, concern and anger were some of those feelings. Over my lifetime I had understood much about racism but maybe because it never hit me directly. I didn't do or say much other than, this is not right. This time felt different. My most pressing emotion was that I wanted to do something, get involved. *Rev. Kelly Jane* asked me what I thought we should do. I said maybe a meeting to see if there was any interest.

June 2020 we had a couple of meetings to discuss what I had experienced and see what others thought and felt. People were definitely interested and felt the need to do something. *Joanne Powell* and *Candy Guastamachio* readily agreed to co-chair the group.

Our main goal was to educate and inform ourselves. Other goals included:

- An immediate action to bring attention to the Black Lives Matter cause.
- Support local black owned businesses.
- Attend marches, rallies and events.

The group voted on the name Ministry for Racial Justice First Congregational Church East Hartford.

Through a very generous anonymous donation we were able to meet our immediate goal. Two banners for the church and lawn signs were purchased. The lawn signs have been given away to church members, family, friends and people who saw the signs and asked where they could get one. A Black Lives Matter Fund was established as some people wanted to make a donation to the church. From that fund we have made a donation to the Dream Support Network run by one of our speakers. When we are able to meet at church in-person, the ice cream truck will come to our parking lot after a service so we can share our dreams for an ice cream.

Some members of the group have attended marches, rallies or events. This has been a little more difficult, secondary to the Covid pandemic.

We have a list of black owned businesses and individual members have supported some of them. This list can be found at www.shopblack.com. Businesses are listed by town.

After a sermon by *Rev. Kelly Jane* in July, an anonymous donation of \$600 was made to the church to see if we could get diversity books into the East Hartford Public Schools. We challenged the congregation to match the \$600. Our very generous congregation exceeded our goal and \$1450 total was raised. Books were delivered to the East Hartford Elementary Schools and our Church Children's Library. Book plates honoring our speakers were placed in some of the books. The books highlighted all types of diversity.

MINISTRY FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

(continued)

Our main goal of education and information has been accomplished by a wide range of excellent volunteer speakers, speaking on subjects and personal experiences related to race. Subjects have included anti-racist practices, growing up black and female in East Hartford, race relations, white privilege, health disparities, racism and slavery.

In October we had a meeting to discuss what we had learned, what we would like to learn, if any of our views had been changed, and how to proceed. Almost everyone participated in the discussion. We voted to continue to meet twice a month.

We have a core group of about 15 dedicated people. Depending on the subject matter or speaker, that number increases. Members have participated in so many ways: ordering and delivering signs or books, suggesting speakers, informing us about events, sending thank you notes, sending me articles and more. This is why this six month old group has achieved so much and has so much more to do. It has been a team effort. It has been an interesting, informative and educational six months. The group is very warm and welcoming, speakers have even commented on this. No pressure is ever put on anyone.

A heartfelt thank you to all who have attended one or all of the meetings. Racism is not okay. We will do our part to fight it. Equity is our goal.

If you are at all curious, please join us on this journey. Meetings are via zoom at 7:00 pm on Tuesdays. Dates can be found in the announcements or on the church calendar.

Joanne Powell

LIBRARY COMMITTEE

The goal of the Library is to provide religious and inspirational books as well as other materials for the use of the Congregation, Sunday School and Staff of the Church.

The Library is a rich resource for inspirational and devotional reading, open to the entire congregation. The Children's Library, across the hall, also has many books for a variety of ages.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Church and its Library were only open in January and February. January's theme was Martin Luther King, Jr. and February's theme was The Season of Lent.

In October, the FCCEH Ministry for Racial Justice group donated books to help diversify our Children's Library. The following books were donated.

“All About Friends” by Felicity Brooks

“All are Welcome” by Alexandra Penfold

“Celebration of Sisters” published by Usborne Books

“It's OK to be Different” by Todd Parr

“Julian is a Mermaid” by Jessica Love

“Keeping Us Healthy” by Fotini Tikkou

“Prince and Knight” by Daniel Haack

“Red: A Crayon's Story” by Michael Hall

“We're Different, We're the Same” published by Sesame Street

“When God Made You” by Matthew Paul Turner

Nancy Tomlinson

SAFETY COMMITTEE

The Safety Committee is comprised of people from Deacons, Trustees, Christian Education, Ushers, and nurses. This committee was formed to discuss safety concerns within the church and Woodward House. From this discussion, an Emergency Plan was developed.

The Church Emergency Plan contains information about procedures for building emergencies such as medical emergencies, fire, building evacuation, severe weather emergencies and intruder emergencies. The Woodward House Emergency Plan contains information about procedures for medical emergencies, fire, and severe weather emergencies.

The purpose of the plans is to ensure that key people know what to do and who to call for help during emergencies. The Safety Committee meets at least once a year to review and update the plan.

This year, the Safety Committee also was responsible for discussing and developing a plan for Covid-19. The Committee met monthly to develop guidelines for groups to use the Church building. We considered guidelines from the CDC, the UCC Conference, and the Governor's office to create our plan.

All Covid-19 guidelines will remain in place until the CDC and the Governor lifts all restrictions that were put in place at the beginning of the pandemic.

We appreciate that everyone took our plan seriously and followed all in-person guidelines. Thank you for caring for each other.

Brenda Murdzek

SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE

The Scholarship Committee awarded college scholarships to these worthy applicants:

Raymond Clark

Allison Gunter

Angela Gunter

Ryswick Innocent

Stuart Pike

Logan Satalino

Hailee Guglielmi

The awards were mailed to the recipients because we were not able to award them in Worship.

We should remember to continue contributing to the Scholarship Fund as opportunities arise.

SUNDAY BULLETIN COMMITTEE

Members of our church and various groups within the congregation donate the weekly bulletin for our church services. It is given in memory of someone special, or in celebration of family members or special events. The choice is up to the person donating that particular week. The Benjamin J. Callahan and Newkirk and Whitney Funeral Homes donate the bulletin during July and August.

A BIG thank you to all who donated.

Unfortunately, the Pandemic hit, and our church was not able to hold in-person services beginning the middle of March 2020 and we no longer needed the weekly bulletins. Once we start in-person services again, we will need donors again. With your help, the work of our church will continue to grow.

Pam Scheinfeldt

TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

The FCC Technology Committee was created in 2020 during the Covid shut down in order to address the technology dependencies of the Church. Although the Church has been technology dependent before the pandemic, the move to Zoom for worship and meetings made the need all the more urgent to manage. The members in 2020 were *Joe Murdzek* (Chair), *C-J Caesar*, *Allen Apel*, *Howard Satalino*, *Brittany LaFleur*, *Robin Clark*, *Erin Cattanach*, *Chris Basler*, and *Lauren Basler*.

The first order of business was to build up bench strength for running Zoom worship services. The committee developed training materials and a roster of back up “ZJs” (zoom DJs) who are capable of stepping in for *C-J* to run Zoom Church. Although the roster is short, we have been able to give *C-J* some much needed time off during 2020 and early 2021. If you are interested in becoming a backup “ZJ” for Sunday mornings, please contact anyone on the Technology Committee to get more information.

Another major project in 2020 was adding a Google Calendar to our church web page (churchcorners.org) so that all members could see, in real time, the events in the life of the Church. As a committee, we defined the problem and brainstormed solutions. We finally settled on a free Google Calendar add-in as our solution. *Allen Apel* was instrumental in getting this implemented. Now, members of the church can log onto the web page or even have their personal electronic calendars synchronized to the church calendar in real time!

We discussed what features of worship were essential, and how they were being covered on Zoom. We also discussed what worship will be like in a post-pandemic world. Part of that discussion included identifying the elements of worship that were precious to our members; the most important element we found was interactivity, which includes socializing, prayer concerns, and being part of a live service. We will continue to have these discussions as we look forward to being able to worship once again in-person. We also established norms and a cue sheet for morning worship in order to make the addition of ZJs a smooth, predictable process.

We had some discussion with the Fair Committee about online Fair sales, but ultimately *Britt LaFleur* and *Julie Wittenzellner* delivered a robust solution that was successful beyond our expectations. We also had some discussion about using Facebook for promoting events like the Fair, which was led by *Robin Clark*. In 2021 we look forward to working with *Rev. Kelly Jane* and *C-J* to devise a technology plan for parental break later in 2021.

I am grateful for the enthusiasm and creativity of the members of the Tech Committee, and for the patience and open-mindedness of the congregation during this time of great challenge, change, and opportunity.

Joe Murdzek

USHERS REPORT

The ushers are a dedicated group of men and women who serve our church in many ways. They escort persons to their seats and lend a helping hand to anyone in need. They serve at all church services including holidays and Christmas Eve. The ushers collect the offering and record attendance at all services. At the completion of events, they are responsible for the tidying up of the sanctuary. At all times they keep a watchful eye for the security and safety of our membership and guests.

During the year of January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020 the attendance was as follows:
March through December Worship was online on Zoom.

	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2017</u>
Regular Sunday Service	2905	2892	3050	3068
Ash Wednesday	25	23	16	21
Maundy Thursday	54	35	SCC	54
Easter Sunday				
7:00 AM	---	16	21	15
10:00 AM	104	118	112	142
Children`s Sunday	---	80	91	95
Carol Sing	22	20	24	19
Christmas Eve	76	59	64	68
<hr/>				
Total:	3186	3243	3378	3482

SCC – Worship at South Congregational Church

Chuck Holmes

W.E.B.

WOMEN EMPOWERED AND BLESSED

Women Empowered and Blessed are women of the Church who meet on the third Thursday of the month from September through June for socializing, dessert and a program. We support the church whenever possible.

As a result of the pandemic, our meetings have been somewhat contained. We enjoyed two programs in 2020. In February, *Debbie and Ted Mosebach* spoke about their Mission Trip to South America. In October, *Kim Sirois Peta* spoke on Zoom, about Mental Health.

We have had our meetings on Zoom since September. In November, WEB, Missions and others contributed to compile a Gift Basket of games and gift cards for clothes and groceries to an East Hartford family in need for Christmas. Thank you to those who helped!

The Game Day and Teacup Auction, normally held in April, and the June Ladies Lunch at Savvi's were both canceled due to the pandemic.

We hope to get back together soon, in person. Zoom has been a big help in keeping connected but meeting in person is very much missed!

Anyone interested in joining us is welcome.

Sharon Walters

WOODWARD HOUSE EDUCATION PROGRAM

We are in the third year of the Woodward House Education Program! We continue to provide housing and utilities to recent college graduates, supporting their desire to use their skills in support of a nearby urban school system. In exchange for this support, the residents complete 8 hours per month of service to the Church and/or wider community. Church members continue to support the program through the Capitol Campaign that supports the initial costs of repairing the Woodward House, as well as the expenses related to building maintenance.

For the second year, the program again includes AmeriCorps FoodCorp volunteers. *Megan Gaul* was invited to return to the East Hartford School System and has spent the current year working at Goodwin School. In July, *Maggie Toczko* joined us, with an assignment to work in the Meriden School System. *Megan* returned from her home in Arizona, joined *Maggie* (who grew up in Tunkhannock, PA), both girls immediately bonded over a serious interest in running and a wonderful friendship blossomed from there!

Covid definitely altered the way we interact with our Woodward House residents. *Rev. Kelly Jane, Candy Guastamachio, Brenda Murdzek* and *Kathy Cattanach* served as mentors for this year's residents, but weekly meetings needed to follow social distancing guidelines. For many weeks during the summer months, the residents socialized on Thursday evenings with small groups of church members. These informal, outdoor gatherings provided a comfortable way for all of us to get to know each other in a safe setting.

Covid has also required the residents to be creative when completing their Service Hour requirements. Thursday evening gatherings and the fall Women's Retreat provided the opportunity to interact with many church members. They've also been regular attendees at Sunday morning Zoom services and Food for Thought. A painting project was completed in the Woodward House, Thanksgiving baskets were delivered to shut in members of the church and Valentine's Day packages were shared with the oldest and youngest members of our congregation.

Megan and *Maggie* will be leaving us at the end of the school year, but both of them are hoping to secure employment that focuses on service. We look forward to the arrival of new residents in the fall and continuing to grow with this exciting new ministry!

Candy Guastamachio

SCOUT TROOP 1

Troop 1 would like to thank First Congregational Church for their continued sponsorship of our troop by helping us continue to achieve our mission of preparing young men AND young women to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law. 2020 had some significant changes in BSA and for the Troop. There were financial changes and membership changes from BSA that trickled down to our Troop.

Troop 1 started to meet most Monday nights in the Church Dining Room, and as of 2020 is open to boys and girls ages 11 to 17. March 1, 2020, Troop 1 expanded with 5 girls, a female scoutmaster and several leaders with dual membership from Pack 61 and Troop 1 as well. This is a HUGE event in the history of 110 years of Troop 1. Due to Covid-19 all in-person activities were suspended starting in March 29. Currently, Troop 1 has 11 registered scouts and 21 registered adult leaders. *Tim Lynch* and *Pam Maragnano* are Scoutmasters of the Troop. *Chris Basler* is the Troop's Chartered Organization Representative, and *Gary Allen, Jr.* is the Troop's Committee Chairperson.

Some of the major highlights for the year were:

- In February, we had our last cabin camping trip, before the new Girls Troop would exist in the upcoming month of March. We cooked outside, hiked around Camp Webster, played some board and card games.
- In March we got the word no further camping or in person meeting due to Covid-19. We started every Monday on Zoom and still had our committee meeting and advancements on Zoom as well.
- Along with moving to meeting on Zoom, the girls had 2 meetings in person before we had to go 100% online in meetings. They did not have their first campout until later in the year.
- Mid-August came and the Trailer Graphics for our 110-year anniversary was completed. Curbside visits were made to scouts and they were given a certificate for still participating in Scouting during the Pandemic and pictures were taken with them and their family with the Trailer for 110-year Celebration. We then were allowed to start camping at Neipsic again! Many protocols were put in place for cooking and sleeping arrangements.
- 5 Girls joined Troop 1 in March and this would be their first camping with Troop 1. Plans were underway to follow guidelines set forth from BSA and our sponsor.
- We organized a drive-through contactless Bottle Drive in early fall. It was a success.
- Veterans Day came and BSA allowed Scouts to participate in placing flags at St. Mary's Cemetery, as they could not officially do this back in May for Memorial Day.
- The annual feast was in November and we could eat outside to maintain social distancing. Food was prepped, scouts went on a hike, made their own fire and cooked desserts in Dutch Ovens for the feast. This campout was a Success! NO Covid-19 cases reported in the troop or Webelos from Pack 61.
- We discussed the future of Zoom meetings on a bi-weekly basis until further notice.
- The last event for Troop 1 was the Recharter process.

2021 Membership for Troop 1 is: Girls - 5 Scouts, 8 Leaders. Boys - 10 Scouts, 14 Leaders.

Gary Allen, Jr., Troop 1 Committee Chairperson

EAST HARTFORD INTERFAITH MINISTRIES

HUMAN NEEDS FUND

The best way to describe 2020 for the clients, as well as your director, is bleak and challenging. Seeing clients in January was out due to health problems, but February had promise and clients were soon ringing the doorbell of First Congregational Church. It began as a usual caseload and then Covid-19 hit. Stunned by its impact, folks did not place calls right away. Some were swayed by hearing they would not be evicted or lose their utilities and could not imagine the long-term effects of not being able to pay their bills.

Administering the funds had to be dealt with in a far different manner. Clients could no longer come to the office with all their necessary paperwork and instead client intake was done by phone for both appointments and client intake. A new phone and answering machine was added to the director's home and calls were then transferred to an open available line in the home. It took a while for the impact of Covid to hit. Those hit the most were middle income folks never before being in this situation. The stories were sad, concerning job loss and not being able to pay rent, and utilities. But, landlord stories were sad, too. After all, with no rent money rendered, their mortgages were falling behind and their patience grew slim.

On the brighter side, donations and grants continued and included \$10,000 from Masonicare Foundation and \$4,500 from the Archbishop's Annual Appeal. Member churches are included in the list of generous donors. Filling the gap for food need were several donated grocery store cards for Stop and Shop and Shop Rite. These were a bonus to the clients that express this need when applying for rent or utility help. Yes, it was a different and difficult year, but without the generosity of all, so many would have suffered even more.

Human Needs Fund:

During 2020 there were eighty-six heads of households requesting assistance in order to prevent eviction from their housing. A total of forty requesting assistance with utility and fuel needs and a total of three other financial needs. Fuel stood out as the largest reduction in request and this is based on the legislature of "no turn offs" during this period.

A total of 131 heads of household were registered as intakes in 2020. The total amount of grants to individuals and households was \$19,559.91. The amount of \$14,562 was given for rental or mortgage assistance, fuel \$4,697.91 and other \$300.

Beth Harlow, Counselor, Human Needs Coordinator

THE MINISTRY OF THE SNEUCC CONFERENCE

Southern New England United Church of Christ

Your SNEUCC Board of Directors has been hard at work, seeking always to embody the four principles of our Conference vision statement:

- Forming disciples of Jesus
- Embracing adaptive change
- Living God’s love and justice
- Creating covenant partnerships

The Holy Spirit clearly knew what she was about when she snuck in that point about “adaptive change.” Indeed, in light of the still-unfolding Covid-19 pandemic and our national reckoning around racial justice, we have been called to adapt in ways we had never envisioned—as have our local churches, our clergy, our staff, and all our members and partners. The Board and staff of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ have showed up faithfully, meeting the challenges of such a time as this with grace, devotion, perseverance, and tremendous love.

Some of the accomplishments of the past year include:

- Finalizing organizational documents and filing appropriate paperwork to bring the Southern New England Conference into legal existence.
- Celebrating the January 1, 2020, launch of the new Conference with liturgical resources for use in our congregations.
- Building our organizational infrastructure by establishing policies to ensure that our operations are consistent with our values.
- Engaging in the ongoing work of learning, repentance, growth, and transformation around racial justice, asking questions about where white supremacy is embedded in us as individuals and as an institution, and seeking to participate in God’s transformation of our hearts, our church, and our world, moving always in the direction of equity and justice.
- Conducting a successful RIP Medical Dept fundraising campaign.
- Discerning how our Conference is called to adapt and serve in the context of the pandemic.
- Working with the Bridge Conference Ministers to develop our new staffing model, moving through several rounds of adaptation due to global and financial circumstances, and supporting the ongoing transition into the new model.
- Supporting the discernment of the Executive Conference Minister Search Committee and confirming the nomination of Rev. Darrell Goodwin, pending the affirmative vote of the Annual Meeting.
- Keeping our vision statement always at the forefront by identifying a “vision keeper” for each meeting, whose role it is to reflect on how we are embodying the four principles of the vision in our work together as a Board and hold us accountable to the priorities we have named.

Rev. Jocelyn B. Gardner Spencer, President, Southern New England Conference

REPORT OF THE CLERK

BAPTISMS

RECEIVED BY CONFIRMATION

RECEIVED BY LETTER OF TRANSFER

NEW MEMBERS

DEATHS

Vanessa Stevens	November 20, 2020
Gertrude Satalino	December 11, 2020

PLACED ON INACTIVE ROLLS BY STANDING COMMITTEE

REMOVED FROM ROLLS BY VOTE OF STANDING COMMITTEE

REMOVED FROM ROLLS BY REQUEST

TRANSFERS TO OTHER CHURCHES

<u>TOTAL MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHURCH – January 1, 2019</u>		159
Removed from Rolls	0	
Losses by Death	<u>2</u>	
Total:	2	<u>-2</u>
		157
Received by letter of transfer	0	
New Members	0	
Received by Confirmation	<u>0</u>	
Total:	0	<u>+0</u>
<u>TOTAL ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP – December 31, 2020</u>		157

Jayne L. Apel, Clerk

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Recommendation of the Nominating Committee for Church Officers, Boards and Committees as required by the by-laws of the Church for presentation at the Annual Meeting to be held on March 21, 2021, as well as recognition of the members serving as representatives to councils and conferences and members serving in other ways.

OFFICERS

Moderator	Chuck Holmes	(2) 2023
Assistant Moderator	Joe Murdzek	(2) 2023
Clerk	Jayne Apel	
Assistant Clerk	Elizabeth Harlow	
Treasurer	Allen Apel	
Assistant Treasurer	Brenda Murdzek	

BOARDS OF THE CHURCH

Board of Christian Education (8)

Lauren Basler	(2) 2022	Rosemarie Jones	(2) 2023
Elizabeth Roberts	(2) 2023	Cindy Woodman	(1) 2023
Joy Gaston	(2) 2023		

Board of Deaconesses (24)

Marilyn La Fontaine	(10) 2023	Nancy Tomlinson	(6) 2022
Shirley Foster	(9) 2022	Joy Gaston	(4) 2023
Ruby Passon	(9) 2022	Jessie Slade	(4) 2023
Jackie LeBrun	(7) 2022	Erin LaFontaine	(4) 2023
Joyce Wolk	(7) 2022		

Life Deaconesses: Thank you for your many years of devoted service!

Josephine Sale	Gerry Rozie
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Board of Deacons (16)

Dave Gaston	(3) 2023	Darline Balch	(2) 2023
Pat Sirois	(2) 2023	Nancy Tomlinson	(2) 2023
Kathy Cattanaach	(2) 2023	Sue Randall	(1) 2023
Elizabeth Harlow	(2) 2023		

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

(Continued)

Board of Missions (8)

Carol Callahan	(3) 2023	Debra Crockett	(1) 2022
Darrell Basler	(2) 2022	Al Harris	(1) 2022
Sharon Walters	(2) 2023		

Board of Music (2)

Christopher Basler	(3) 2023	Connie Holmeen	(1) 2023
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Board of Stewardship (8)

Robin Clark	(3) 2023	Julie Wittenzellner	(2) 2022
Jackie LeBrun	(2) 2023	Patricia Andrulot	(1) 2022
Brittany LaFleur	(1) 2022		

Board of Trustees (8)

Carol Joly	(3) 2023	Pam Scheinfeldt	(2) 2023
Connie Holmeen	(3) 2023	Gail Saunders	(1) 2022
Howard Satalino	(2) 2023	Dick Stevens	(1) 2022
Erin Cattanach	(2) 2023		

Human Resources Committee

Joe Murdzek - Asst. Moderator	Allen Apel	Mary Mourey
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Finance Committee

Chuck Holmes	Jack Ranney
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Investment Committee

Jerry Scheinfeldt	Randy Holmeen
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Flower Committee

Connie Holmeen	Jayne Apel
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Historical Committee

Howard Satalino – Archivist	Margaret Sanzo
Erin Cattanach	Barbara Stevens
David Gaston	Joy Gaston

Library Committee

Josephine Sale	Joan Peters
Gerry Rozie	Toni Fish
Nancy Tomlinson	Jackie LeBrun

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

(Continued)

Nominating Committee

Kathy Cattanach (2) 2022

Gail Saunders (2) 2023

Pat Sirois (1) 2022

Committees of the Church Required by the Bylaws:

Archivist

Howard Satalino

Auditors

Darrell Basler

Kathy Cattanach

Budget Committee

Jayne Apel (Member at Large)

Historian

Dave Gaston

Librarian

Nancy Tomlinson

Positions Required for Mission and Ministry:

Book of Remembrances and Scholarship Fund

Beth Roberts – acknowledgements and inscriptions

Sunday Bulletin Committee

Pam Scheinfeldt

East Hartford Interfaith Ministry

Kathy Cattanach

Hartford East Association

Beth Harlow

David Gaston

Joy Gaston

UCC Southern New England Conference

Chuck Holmes (moderator)

Kathy Cattanach

Brittany LaFleur

Erin Cattanach (alternate)

Ushers

Chuck Holmes

Audit page here - added separately

