

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

SENIOR PASTOR



*"To equip the saints for the work of ministry,
for building up the body of Christ."*

Ephesians 4:12

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF NATICK
NATICK, MA
SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

FEBRUARY 2023

CONTENTS

Position Posting **3**

Who Is God Calling Us To Become? **8**

Who Are We Now? **11**

Who Is Our Neighbor? **33**

References **43**

Our Closing Prayer **44**

Consent and Validation **45**



Position Posting

SUMMARY MINISTRY DESCRIPTION:

Our Pastor will inspire us.

Our Congregation has shared that they feel the presence of God in their lives, they work to connect their faith to other aspects of their life, and they feel spirituality is the basis of their whole approach to life. We feel called to generously live our faith in action by embracing and hearing the cry of our neighbor - nearby and in the wider world.

Our Pastor will play a vital role bringing the Congregation back together for in-person worship experience that is mostly traditional and open to new ideas and changes.

Our Congregation is a joyful bunch who love to get together for worship and in community. However, there is a sense many in our community are still struggling with how to get back together post COVID and are longing for a deeper connection with one another.

Our Pastor will be willing to take risks and make connections with other community leaders.

They will be a listener, a diplomat and conflict solver and will work with our congregation for social justice and in a community where everyone can feel they belong.

Our Pastor will unleash our potential and equip us for service.

Our Congregation is active with charitable organizations near and far - helping those needing food or housing in our community, assisting asylum seekers nearby, and helping native people of Guatemala - and has stepped up to help those and other programs. We feel these efforts could do even more with a strong leader, communicator, and teacher.

CONTACT

Jill Ford
(she/her)

Search & Call Associate
Southern New England
Conference, United
Church of Christ

Phone: 860-761-7112
Email: fordj@sneucc.org
searchcall@sneucc.org

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF NATICK

- Street Address: 2 East Central Street, Natick, MA 01760
- Website: <http://www.fcc1651.org>
- Ecumenical Affiliation: United Church of Christ
- Conference: Southern New England United Church of Christ
- Association: Central Massachusetts
- Membership: 186
- Language used in Ministry: English
- Position Title: Senior Pastor
- Position Duration: Settled
- Compensation Level: \$150-165K, based on experience

PURPOSE

To support the Congregation of the First Congregational Church in living out its mission “to express the love and welcome of Christ through word and action in our community and the wider world” through worship leadership and preaching, visitation and pastoral care, adult faith formation, leadership, and administration.

SCOPE

Collaborate with the Coordinating Council, the Director of Spiritual Vitality & Congregational Care, the Music Team, and other leaders or groups as appropriate to provide spiritual and pastoral care to the First Congregational Church community.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Worship Leadership

To preach and provide vital Sunday worship services in collaboration with the Worship Team, the Director of Spiritual Vitality & Congregational Care, and the Music Team. (Currently, this involves a hybrid worship service that includes both in-person and livestream options with visual slides to be shared in both settings.)

Pastoral Care

- To visit those who are homebound or in the care of nursing homes, rehabilitation facilities, or hospitals
- To meet with families preparing for baptism, weddings, memorial services, or funerals. (In our practice, these life celebrations are not restricted to church members but serve as extensions of our philosophy of extravagant welcome.)

Faith Formation

To collaborate with the Director of Spiritual Vitality & Congregational Care to promote the spiritual growth of participants of all ages.

Outreach

To develop and support programs on diversity awareness, racism, white privilege, immigration, environmental action, mental health awareness, and social justice for members of FCC and the broader community.

Staff Planning and Administration

- To oversee day-to-day staff management and facilities issues
- To support the Coordinating Council and church officers in the development and implementation of programs and policies

CORE COMPETENCIES

We desire a Pastor who will "equip the saints for the work of ministry." Months of discernment have revealed that we are a congregation motivated by the Spirit. We desire to put into practice our Mission Statement "to spread the love and welcome of Christ in word and action." There is a sense, however, that we have not fully achieved our potential. Many in our Congregation try hard to live out our Mission Statement. But as a predominantly white, middle class, suburban community, we acknowledge that, however sincere our intentions, our response to those in need comes from a place of detached privilege. We long to be close and real. We are ready to do more. Our next Pastor must guide, encourage, and care for the members of FCC so we can reach out and serve our community in more authentic ways.

Therefore, the core competencies we seek in our next Pastor are that they are, above all:

- **Caring**
- **Organized**
- **Outgoing**
- **Leaders**

In short, they should be "COOL."

Caring:

Whether due to the stressors of the pandemic or the political atmosphere in the country, our Congregation and the Natick community in general feel disconnected, separated, and lonely. We are looking for pastoral Care to heal the tears in the fabric of our church and the wider community. Recovering wholeness is the first step in our path to authentic service and will be needed to sustain us.

Organized:

FCC is an incubator congregation. We encourage members to pursue mission initiatives in a variety of areas. While rewarding to those people involved and helpful to the communities they serve, those individual efforts, taken as a whole, can seem disparate, uncoordinated, confusing, and diluted. We believe that an **Organized** missional approach would help to prioritize efforts, focus energies, and provide a better vehicle for meaningful, impactful service.

Outgoing:

Many members of FCC are active in the Natick community. We serve on town boards, volunteer for various charities, coach youth sports, and participate in Town Meeting. While we interact with the same self-selected groups and organizations with whom we have become comfortable, perhaps there are new causes that could benefit from our efforts. Our next Pastor should be **Outgoing** in connecting us with individuals and groups in Natick and beyond with whom we might build new and important relationships of care and service.

Leader:

Overall, we desire a Pastor who will Lead our Congregation wherever the Spirit may take us. We have undertaken a deep discernment process* to identify who we are and where we want to go as a congregation. We aspire to be more authentic servants in our community and the wider world.

We seek a Caring, Organized, and Outgoing Leader who will shepherd us toward that goal.

COMPENSATION & SUPPORT

- **Salary Basis:** \$150,000 - \$165,000 inclusive of housing allowance and benefits
- **Expected Living Situation:** Living in Natick or surrounding areas. We expect that our next Pastor will be an active member of our town and community.
- **Incentives:** We will offer reimbursement for relocation expenses.
- **Peer and professional supports available for ministers in your association/conference:** Clergy Communities of Practice, Interfaith Clergy Association of Natick.
- **How we will adopt part-time adjustments in the pastoral schedule to support a minister's bi-vocational employment:** N/A

MINISTRY GOALS AND VISION

Based on the congregational survey and affirmed by leadership, we seek a Pastor who will:

- Teach, mentor, empower, and collaborate with our Congregation as a whole and as individuals.
- Be present and active in the greater community both to represent us in important collaborations and to identify needs which we might help to address as a Congregation.
- Empower us to be a servant church by amplifying the needs of the greater community and by coaching us in our service efforts.
- Expand our commitment to social and environmental justice.
- Engage us in faith conversations and encourage spiritual growth.
- Expand Faith Formation opportunities for all—youth, adults, and seniors.
- Lead inspiring and inclusive worship.
- Model risk-taking and encourage members and lay leaders to take risks as well.

*In order to gather feedback from our Congregation for this profile, our team distributed a churchwide survey developed and administered by The Presbyterian Church USA Research Services. Sixty-eight members responded. In addition, we facilitated discussions at nine Cottage Meetings, small group gatherings with members and friends of the Congregation, intended to elicit honest feedback on all aspects of our church.

*“God has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of You?
To do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”*

Micah 6:8

MINISTRY CULTURAL REQUIREMENTS

We are an English-speaking Congregation. While we do not have additional specific language requirements, the words we use are important to us. Our Congregation is an open one, and so we prefer inclusive language (i.e., God is not identified as one gender). We are a justice-driven and LGBTQ-affirming Congregation. We desire a Pastor who is like-minded. Ideally, they will have specific experience that equips them to shepherd us toward intentionally and authentically embracing, welcoming, and engaging with diverse neighbors.

AREAS OF EXCELLENCE FROM THE MARKS OF FAITHFUL & EFFECTIVE AUTHORIZED MINISTRY

Our Congregation is filled with thoughtful people who desire to improve on how they show up for others and who are excited about the possibilities a new Pastor will bring to our Congregation. From our Cottage Meetings and survey results, we are able to distill great potential for a Congregation that is committed “to do justice and walk humbly with their God.”

It is in that spirit that we seek a Pastor who will continue to support us and equip us in the following areas of excellence:

- Understanding the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the elements of Christian worship to nurture faith.
- Exhibiting a commitment to the core values of the United Church of Christ by continuing testament, extravagant welcome, and changing lives.
- Working collaboratively with intercultural awareness and sensitivity.
- Encouraging leadership development of self and others through continuing education and lifelong learning.
- Bringing to life sacred stories and traditions in worship, proclamation, and witness.
- Providing hope and healing to a hurting world.
- Practicing the radical hospitality of God.
- Respecting the dignity of all God’s people.

Who is God Calling Us to Become?

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your mind."*

Matthew 22:37

WHO GOD IS CALLING US TO BECOME AS A CONGREGATION?

73% of respondents to our all-church survey see God as calling the church toward an outward, community-oriented focus. Our Congregation believes we are called:

- To be welcoming.
- To be a loving connection.
- To offer spiritual renewal and support.
- To do good works.
- To follow the Spirit's call.
- To join with others.



"Share the kindness and support in the local community. Natick's front porch." -FCC Member

"My image of this church is that it is already so perfect, and it is I who is inadequate in not being able to do more, but perhaps I am not the only one who feels this way." -FCC Member

We are called to serve others and "to facilitate greater understanding." We are called to reach out in authentic ways to neighbors who are different from us. In our recent church survey, members responded to the question "What do you think God is calling us to be in the next 2-3 years?" A majority emphasized a call to focus on our neighbors with an orientation toward social justice.

EMERGING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The following are specific examples which illustrate the kinds of challenges and opportunities our Congregation presents to our new Pastor. At FCC, we view every challenge as an opportunity for new growth.

Dream Catchers

When the Pastoral Transition Team first convened, we wanted to call ourselves something catchy. After reviewing name submissions, we landed on “The Dream Catchers.” We knew that we would be “catching the dreams of the Congregation” about whom we should call as our next settled Pastor. We assembled small dream catcher tokens for members of the Congregation to take home, and the Transition Team Leader made a 2 ½-foot-wide macrame dream catcher wall-hanging, which was displayed in the sanctuary to inspire and remind worshipers to participate in our information-gathering efforts.

Then, as part of our COVID to Community worship series in the fall of 2022, our Interim Pastor invited members of Natick’s Native American community to join us for worship and to present a reflection. We were excited about the opportunity to build connections between our communities and to learn from one another. In preparation for their participation in our service, several members of the Natick Native American community toured our church sanctuary and saw the large macrame dream catcher hanging up front. The visitors engaged in a very gracious conversation with our Pastor and pointed out that the use of this traditional Native American art form by our church was likely an example of “cultural mis-appropriation,” i.e. using or adopting something from a culture not one’s own.

Members involved in the conception and implementation of the dream catcher theme found inspiration in Maya Angelou's quote: “Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better.”

They thoughtfully and prayerfully responded to the situation by:

- Removing the large macrame dream catcher from the sanctuary.
- Changing the Transition Team name to “FCC Dreamers.”
- Communicating their learning and responsive actions to our church community.
- Removing images of dream catchers from all materials going forward.

As one of our congregants eloquently stated, this experience was “a reminder of all the work ahead of us to build our understanding about what colonialism took from the Indigenous people of our area and how we might engage in restitution rather than continuing the injury.” At FCC, this moment wasn’t only an embarrassing problem to be solved. It was also a gift of urging us toward ongoing awareness of our privilege and the unintended impacts our actions can have.

Capital Campaign

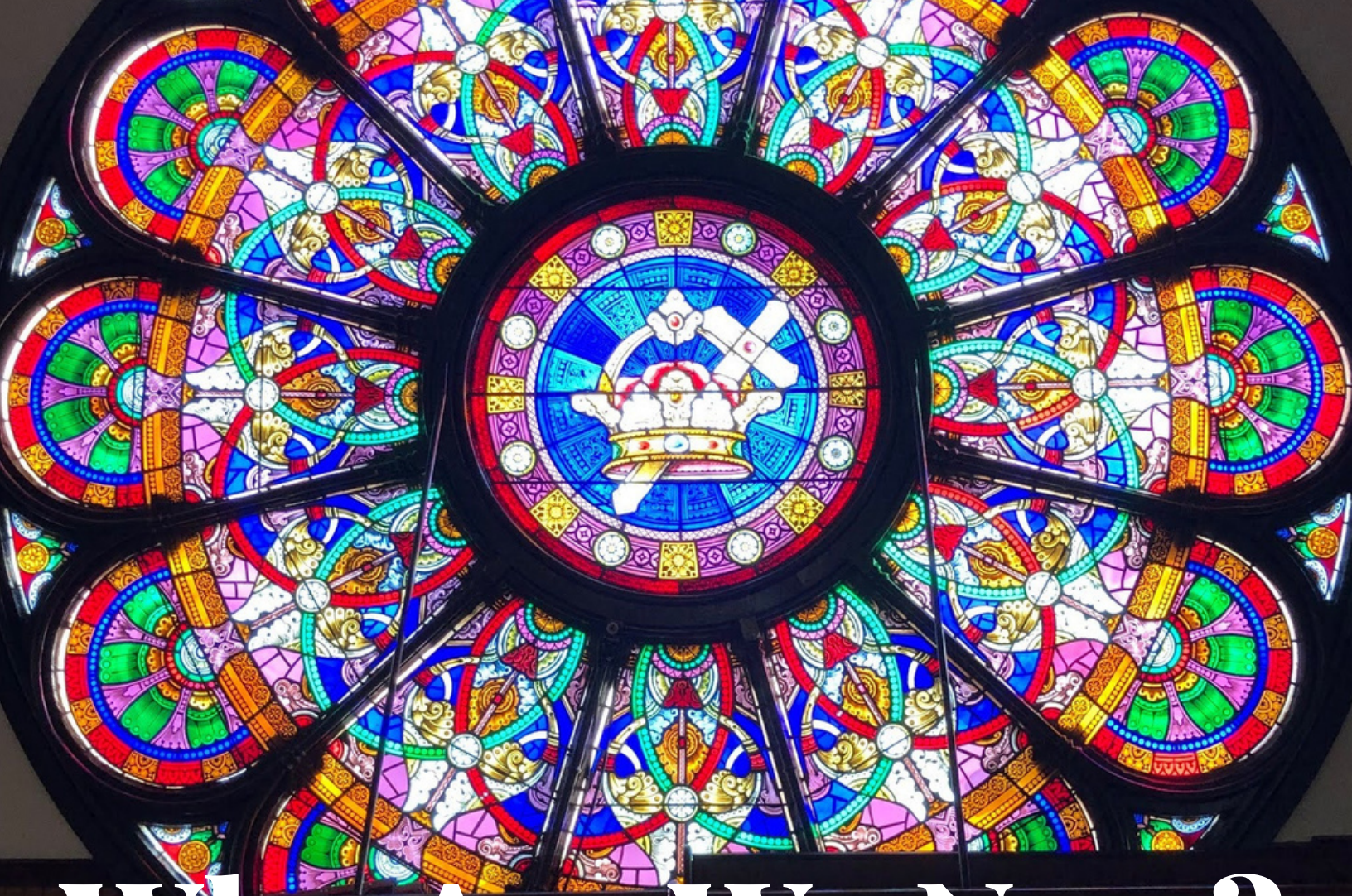
We are blessed with a beautiful and historic church building. Along with this gift, however, comes great responsibilities. Taking care of the necessary repairs to our church building, making the physical space more accessible to differently abled people, and making the space more attractive, flexible, and usable for the greater community has been a longstanding challenge.

In the summer and fall of 2021, FCC undertook a Capital Campaign to address the needs of our physical building. We set out to raise \$750K, knowing it might be challenging. The COVID pandemic was ongoing. Many in our Congregation had not yet ventured back to in-person worship. People in our community had and were continuing to face challenges not limited to illness, loss, and financial difficulties. Still, the Spirit called to us to move forward. In the end, our Congregation raised approximately \$1,200,000!

We are excited to know that our steeple has been refurbished, that our sanctuary will have new accessibility and improved lighting and audio-visual capabilities, and that our kitchen will be completely remodeled. We are excited for our Congregation to engage in activities in renewed and refreshed spaces. We are even more excited to welcome others from our community into accessible and enhanced spaces for a variety of uses.

In our Annual Report dated January 2022, our former Interim Pastor Jonathan New addressed the challenge of a Capital Campaign during a pandemic:

“To me, one of the most obvious proofs of this Congregation’s vitality and resilience is the amazing results from our Capital Campaign. I suspected that FCC was an unusual Congregation when I heard you were considering taking on a Capital Campaign during an interim period. Conventional wisdom is that it’s a less than ideal time to do something of the sort. Yet I saw signs of your faith in yourselves as you remembered your previous campaign success two decades previously. Then, having had to put thoughts of a campaign on hold due to COVID, when you returned to the idea during the continued interim time and the extended pandemic, I began to marvel at this faithfulness.”



Who Are We Now?

CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS

Our Life of Faith

From our congregational survey, we found that FCC worshipers have a strong life of faith. Of the 68 people who responded, 75% say they experience the presence of God in their lives. That said, 34% do not agree that spirituality is the basis of their whole approach to life.

Responses from the Congregation indicate members generally profess a theologically liberal faith focused on social action. Beliefs about God tend towards One that loves everyone, accepts everyone, and calls us to ministries of justice and peace. This finding is also reflected in the fact that members ranked serving our neighbors as a higher priority for the church than serving the Congregation's own members.

On the occasion of a recent Confirmation and welcoming to full membership in the church, the pledges taken by the confirm aptly express our vows and beliefs as a Congregation.

The candidate pledged to:

- Enter into an honest and open relationship of mutual support and nurture with the membership of the church.
- Maintain this body through personal efforts and talents.
- Further the work of God's realm and the church universal by studied and prayerful efforts to serve all humanity following the example of Jesus Christ.
- Challenge the limits of personal faith by continuing to question through education, prayer, reflection, and examination.

Also included in the rite was our credo:

"We believe in God the Creator of the universe who calls each of us into a relationship with God and with one another. We believe in Christ as the revealing expression of God's love come to dwell among the human family. We believe in the Holy Spirit as the force by which we are brought into closer harmony with the will of God."

Liturgy and Worship

For many in our Congregation our view of God has expanded beyond gender and anthropomorphic qualities. Therefore in our worship we tend to use gender-neutral terms, such as "Divine Parent," "Creator of all," and "God" instead of "Lord." Inclusive language is important to us along with the idea that God is the embodiment of love, peace, justice, grace, generosity, and forgiveness.

The Spirit in Our Midst

"At a recent Sunday service, I felt a strong presence of the Spirit during the blessing of our offerings. The minister had her hands raised, her eyes closed and a look of joy on her face. Her words flowed... it nearly brought me to tears. I felt the God of Love and Fullness with me, with us."

-FCC member

The presence of the Holy Spirit can be seen among members of our Church Family during projects such as the recent Capital Campaign. The ideas and inspiration appeared to flow and the energy was palpable as we gathered—never doubting that we would reach our goal to fund improved accessibility and participation in our church service and other events."

-FCC Member

OUR POSITIVE QUALITIES

One of our greatest strengths is our positive attitude about the church, its mission, administration, and pastoral leadership. We care about this church. The detailed written responses to our congregational survey confirm that the members of our church are engaged in what we are about. Many respondents provided well-thought-out responses explaining why they felt the way they did. A vast majority (92%) believe that there is a lot of positive energy in the church. More significantly, 72% believe that the church can be further improved. These results demonstrate that we care about what the church does for its members, our community, and the wider world and that we expect to do more and to do better.

We are a Congregation that loves art, music, humor, and coming together. Our sanctuary is filled with works of art. In addition to the soaring stained glass windows, there are needlepoint cushions on altar chairs, fabric hangings that reflect seasonal worship themes, dancing mobiles, handmade creches, and a Peace Dove mosaic made collaboratively by members of the church.

Over the years we have been blessed with talented, dedicated, and knowledgeable organists, choir directors, and guest musicians who have filled our sanctuary with music that, at times, has rivaled that heard in some concert halls. We are also opinionated about our tastes in music with calls for more contemporary selections, fewer traditional hymns, and even more rock selections. We celebrate music not only during service, but at social events as well. In the past, FCC has hosted two long-running benefit coffeehouses in our vestry. More recently, an annual silent movie night focuses on the inspiring live piano performance that accompanies each film.



"The music program needs to have more alternatives—music that is more progressive, less traditional classical, more modern, more representative of other cultures and traditions"

-a Cottage Meeting response



"Bring back the flamingos."

-a Cottage Meeting response

FCC has a deep appreciation for humor. For many years, we have celebrated Holy Humor Sunday on the Sunday following Easter. These joyous services have been punctuated by planted and impromptu joke tellers who inspire laughter throughout. We have also produced several humorous videos to celebrate special anniversaries, promote fundraisers, or simply to entertain. (For some reason, many of these videos feature flamingos.) Those laughter-filled services and comedic videos are representative of our Congregation. We do not take ourselves too seriously, and we worship and serve humbly.

Today we are recognized as a cornerstone of the town. Of course we are a spiritual center of Christian worship and celebration, but we are also a place where residents come together to heal from racial and antisemitic trauma, to mourn those who have been lost to the opioid epidemic, or merely to rest from a weary day in one of the colorful Adirondack chairs on our “Front Porch.”

WHAT WORSHIP IS LIKE WHEN FCC GATHERS

FCC seeks to extend welcome and put worshipers at ease as early as their arrival to our building. Worshipers may notice a sign inside, near the entry: “No need to check your brain at the door.” Immediately, there is assurance that wondering and questioning are encouraged activities here. Smiles and “Good mornings!” are shared during staggered arrivals. Both the worship bulletin and the Pastor remind all who gather: “No matter where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.”

The sanctuary with its vaulted ceilings, tall stained-glass windows, and dramatic woodwork provides a wonderful environment for the worship of God. Prior to the service, some enjoy quiet reflection, while others engage in friendly conversation with each other. Our members have stated that the sanctuary “makes one feel good” and “feels like home.”

Much of our worship service follows traditional routines, but informal and more modern elements are sprinkled throughout. Video displays near the front of the sanctuary enhance the service. Nestled among several pews there is a “Pray Ground” with figures and objects from Bible stories that can be accessed at any time during the service by children who want to explore while their caregivers participate in worship.

We worship God through scripture and listen to hear God speaking to us through the sermon. The message contextualizes the scripture for the current day. Members of the church describe the sermon as powerful. It speaks to you, gets you thinking, and leaves you wondering.



Children are always welcome at worship, and our Congregation believes they come to us perfectly just as they are. At a recent baptism, a toddler, her fathers, and the Interim Pastor gathered around the baptismal font. The child was enchanted by the baptismal water. After the ceremony, she splashed in it and flitted about the sanctuary. The Congregation, unbothered, delighted in her spontaneity and joy.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM/FAITH FORMATION VISION

Children & Youth

Our Spiritual Vitality programs have something in common. Whether they are geared for children, youth, or adults, our programs encourage the practice of extravagant welcome and love. We never forget that we are a covenant people, and we expect the Holy Spirit to show up when we are gathered together.

Our Congregation welcomes children of all ages. On Sunday mornings, babies and toddlers are invited (but not required) to spend time in our church nursery, a staffed space outfitted just for them, while their caregivers attend our worship service in the sanctuary. The sanctuary itself offers a “Pray Ground” where busy youngsters can playfully engage with materials meant to bring Bible stories to life.

Children ages three through grade 4 are invited to attend Godly Play where they are introduced to Bible stories making meaning through story, wonder, and play. This program was adopted by FCC about 20 years ago and nurtures children’s spiritual lives by honoring the centrality, competency, and capacity of children.



Children’s programming continues with the Connect program for children in grades 5 and 6. This program strives to engage youth in reading and group discussions centered on the Bible.

Since 2010, FCC has embraced the Our Whole Lives (OWL) Curriculum developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association in collaboration with the United Church of Christ. OWL affirms the importance of having a positive sense of self-worth. It emphasizes healthy, safe relationships. It teaches making responsible sexual choices and strives to be inclusive of different races, sexual orientations, and gender identities. In contrast to the abstinence-only stance of many religious-based programs, OWL coaches teens that delaying sexual intercourse is a healthy choice. It does not demand or expect that they will say “no” to sexual activity altogether.

During the middle and high school years, two Youth Groups offer a combination of spiritual curriculum and time for socializing. Here, teens are encouraged to raise the questions they care about. They are assured that they don't have to come to any specific theological conclusions. Doubts and uncertainties are embraced. Questions of faith are connected to the teens' real lives at school and to their friendships and other relationships. Recent topics for members of the Senior group have been: Spiritual Development, Compassion, Forgiveness, Balancing Digital Life with Real Life, and "What's Your Friend Potential?"



Adult Faith-Building

The church offers regular adult Bible Study on Sunday mornings. The Adult Group has most recently reflected on the book "We Make the Road by Walking" by Brian McLaren. Past groups have centered on the UCC "Listen Up!" Series and the Massachusetts Bible Society Curriculum.

Each year our Lenten Soul Sabbatical draws members together to focus on a different weekly topic, such as The Lord's Prayer, Forgiveness, or Racial and Environmental Justice. These small groups, which match each participant with a prayer partner for the Lenten season, have been transformative for many.

Our Pub Theology sessions, held monthly, connect members in an informal, social discussion group. Conversation centers on how our faith intersects with the issues of our secular lives. Discussion topics have included Our Faith and: Nonviolence, The Vote and Democracy, and Ethics in Technology. Beverages of choice change with the seasons.

FCC has offered multiple Short Justice Series to draw people into conversation about issues of our time. Due to the brevity of the groups (about 3-4 weeks), these series sometimes attract participants who might not join groups requiring longer commitments. These groups have covered topics such as: Gun Violence, Mass Incarceration, and Interrupting Racism.

A Continuum of Faith Formation Opportunities

Program	Age Range Served	Frequency
Nursery	Infant - 3 Years	Weekly
Godly Play	3 Years - Grade 4	Weekly
Connect	Grades 5 - 6	Weekly
Jr. Youth Group	Grades 7 - 8	2X/month
Sr. Youth Group	Grades 9 - 12	2X/month
OWL	Grades 7 - 8	2X/month (every other year)
Confirmation Class	Grades 9 - 11	Monthly (every other year)
Sunday Morning Worship	All are welcome	Weekly
Midweek Connection	Adults	Weekly (via ZOOM)
Centering Prayer	Adults	Weekly (via ZOOM)
Bible Study	Adults	2-3X/month
Pub Theology	Adults	Monthly
Lenten Soul Sabbatical	Adults	4 - 6 week session annually
Short Justice Series	Adults	3 - 4 week sessions vary

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Describe how your congregation is organized for ministry and mission

Ministry Teams include: Worship, Faith Formation, Welcome, Finance, Building & Grounds, Mission & Outreach, and Trustees. These teams meet as often as deemed necessary by the group itself—typically once per month. Team meetings generally run 1 to 2 hours, depending on the agenda items.

The FCC Coordinating Council (CC) includes the Team Leader from each of our Ministry Teams. CC meets for 1 ½ to 2 hours each month, except for two months during the summer. CC is authorized to make non-financial decisions for the church. Actions that require the borrowing of money, the expenditure of the principal of Trust Funds of the Church, or the sale or transfer of real estate require a 2/3 majority vote of the Congregation at a Congregational Meeting.

Important decisions of the Coordinating Council are shared in a variety of ways, including: the weekly online Link Newsletter, a “special edition” Link, printed announcements in the Sunday Bulletin, and live announcements at the start of the church service. When the group wants to ensure the awareness and involvement of all church members, a targeted letter or email is sent.

When it comes to decision-making, how many hours are spent in meetings per month?

Our Pastor attends all monthly meetings of the Coordinating Council as well as meetings of the various Ministry Teams on an as-needed basis. This means that time spent in meetings can vary greatly. On average, monthly meeting time is about 6-8 hours. This might include the Coordinating Council meeting and meetings of any specific Ministry Team requiring the Pastor in attendance. Additional communication with CC and other teams may be conducted by email.

Think of a time when action had to be taken quickly, for example when a crisis or disaster occurred. How was that accomplished?

In 2020, FCC faced an issue that went beyond our inability to gather in person due to the COVID pandemic. The preschool FCC had operated in our church building for decades to serve the wider community and to offset building operations and maintenance costs was unable to continue business as usual. Efforts were quickly put in place to continue the school year online and to obtain government grants to keep the preschool director and teachers employed. Ultimately, parents and teachers alike agreed that, while not an optimal model of early education, the online program did offer a best-case alternative to usher the school's students and staff through the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Looking toward the fall of 2020, the church was faced with another dilemma: Should we continue to operate the preschool with lower enrollment, higher costs, and unclear COVID requirements? With so much uncertainty ahead, members of the CC made the difficult decision to close the preschool permanently. Following the preschool closure, church leaders quickly leveraged connections with the Natick Public Schools District to identify a new use for our recently vacated space. We now rent the space to the ACHIEVE Program, a highly individualized, public, separate day program for 18- to 22-year-old students who are entitled to services beyond grade 12 due to their special needs. The program emphasizes functional academics, career readiness skills, independent living skills, social skills, travel training, and community integration. We are proud that our relationship with ACHIEVE is at once a financial partnership and a missional partnership.

“ACHIEVE is the Natick Public Schools’ response to provide 18-22 youth services for those students with disabilities. While other towns bus students out of district for extended services, our students are given an amazing opportunity to stay right here in Natick, thanks to FCC. The large space allows for specialized learning and programming in a safe and comfortable environment. The spacious kitchen supports the students’ goals to learn to cook for themselves under supervision. The convenient location in the heart of Natick Center gives access to many organizations and restaurants for the students. From visiting the police station to watering the plants on the Natick Common to practicing taking public transportation, the location has been a wonderful part of the program. We are grateful for this opportunity to work together and be part of the extension of the FCC Congregation.”

-Jody Robie, parent of current ACHIEVE student, Natick resident since 2000

Can you provide the next minister with a copy of an organization structure, bylaws and/or annual report to further explain the patterns of the church’s activity and governance?

Yes.

11 YEAR REPORT

Below is a copy of the 11-Year Report developed with the help of conference staff, UCC Data Hub, and MissionInsite.

United Church of Christ: Eleven Year Church Profile based on Data Reported in UCC Yearbooks

Year	Members	Avg Weekly Attendance	Chr Ed/ Faith Form	Confirmation	Confession	Transfer or Reaffirm	Deaths or Trans Out	Other Losses	Net Membs +/-
2011	276	110	92	0	15	0	8	0	7
2012	206	95	203	6	5	0	5	3	3
2013	211	96	165	0	13	0	6	2	5
2014	201	96	165	10	11	0	6	25	-10
2015	178	107	172	0	13	0	1	35	-23
2016	179	101	164	9	11	0	19	0	1
2017	182	101	164	0	0	0	0	0	0
2018	190	91	160	6	9	0	4	3	8
2019	189	102	68	0	10	0	4	7	-1
2020	189	102	68	0	0	0	0	0	0
2021	189	102	68	0	0	0	0	0	0

Year	Current Expenses	Capital Payments	Basic Support	Tot. Other OCC Giving	Total OCWM	Other Gifts	Wider Mission	Basic Suppl% Curr Local	Total Expend	Pledges & Offerings
2011	\$414,000	\$58,844	\$10,000	\$18,038	\$28,038	\$7,600	\$35,638	2.42	\$508,482	\$248,360
2012	\$425,000	\$58,800	\$10,000	\$6,108	\$16,108	\$3,000	\$19,108	2.35	\$502,908	\$24,055
2013	\$278,625	\$58,844	\$10,000	\$16,755	\$26,755	\$8,000	\$34,755	3.59	\$372,224	\$236,725
2014	\$278,625	\$0	\$10,000	\$5,242	\$15,242	\$0	\$15,242	3.59	\$293,867	\$0
2015	\$435,683	\$58,844	\$0	\$38,650	\$38,650	\$0	\$38,650	0.00	\$533,177	\$259,242
2016	\$438,100	\$58,218	\$13,697	\$9,042	\$22,739	\$13,697	\$36,436	3.13	\$532,754	\$291,237
2017	\$438,100	\$0	\$14,000	\$832	\$14,832	\$0	\$14,832	3.20	\$452,932	\$0
2018	\$450,179	\$56,834	\$14,280	\$805	\$15,085	\$18,983	\$34,068	3.17	\$484,247	\$283,980
2019	\$454,537	\$56,834	\$14,680	\$1,541	\$16,221	\$18,569	\$34,790	3.23	\$489,327	\$275,904
2020	\$454,537	\$0	\$14,056	\$863	\$14,919	\$0	\$14,919	3.09	\$469,456	\$0
2021	\$454,537	\$0	\$5,800	\$0	\$5,800	\$0	\$5,800	1.28	\$460,337	\$0

% Change	Members	Avg Weekly Attendance	Chr Ed/ Faith Form	Total Additions	Total Removals	Curr Local Expenses	Total OCWM	Total Expenditure
2016-2021	5.59	0.99	-58.54	-100.00	-100.00	3.75	-74.49	-13.59
2011-2021	-31.52	-7.27	-26.09	-100.00	-100.00	9.79	-79.31	-9.47

Please note: Zero values ("0" or "\$0") may reflect missing information in some years.

Christian Education/Faith Formation refers to Church School Enrollment for all figures before 2007.

CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

(All values are estimates.)

Church Participation by Membership Status

Membership Status	# of Participants
Active Members	186
Active Non-Members	91
Total	277

Church Participation by Age

Age of Participants	# of Participants
0-11	30
12-17	35
18-24	12
25-34	13
35-44	52
45-54	29
55-64	57
65-74	37
75+	12

Church Participation by Length of Participation

Length of Participation	% of Participants
More than 10 years	61%
5-10 years	33%
Less than 5 years	6%

Church Participation by Household Type

Household Type	% of Participants
Households with minors	36%
Joint households with no minors	38%
Single adults under 35 years old	0.7%
Single adults 35-65 years old	0.7%
Single adults over 65 years old	0.9%

Church Participation by Educational Level

Educational Level	% of Participants
High school:	9%
College:	32%
Graduate School:	47%
Specialty Training:	2%
Other (please specify): Associates	4%

Church Participation by Employment Status

Educational Level (Adults)	% of Participants
Employed	61%
Retired	33%
Not Fully Employed	1%

Congressional Demographic Reflections

Occupations

Anecdotally, the occupations represented in our Congregation include: executives, retail workers, educators, public servants, scientists, medical professionals, technologists, and paraprofessionals.

Ethnicity

While we represent a mono-cultural congregation (predominately white), our members do differ in our religious, economic, and cultural backgrounds as well as in our sexual orientations and political leanings.

Conversation about Welcoming Diversity

Our ONA statement, in its 20th year of existence, is very clear about welcoming diversity beyond sexual orientation:

"The First Congregational Church of Natick affirms the dignity and worth of every person. We are called to express the love and welcome of Christ. We celebrate the diversity of God's creation and the gifts, talents, and resources of all who strive to build a church that is faithful to God.

We, therefore, covenant to be an open and affirming Congregation. We embrace and support those who experience rejection and find themselves in exile from spiritual community. We welcome people of every ability, race, culture, gender, economic circumstance, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation."

~ Adopted October 26, 2003

Revised in 2014 to include "gender expression."

Results from the Welcoming Diversity Inventory, taken by the Transition and Search Teams in November 2022, reveal that we still have much work to do. We would like for our next Pastor to guide us to be a Congregation that intentionally welcomes and embraces diversity in our midst.

PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING

The table below lists the many ways that members and friends of FCC Natick gather for worship, education, fellowship, and service.

Ways of Gathering	Estimated Attendance		Organizer/Responsible Team
	Now	Pre-COVID	
Adult Groups (Bible Studies, Book Clubs, Pub Theology, etc.)	12	18	Director of Spiritual Vitality & Congregational Care (SVCC), Lay Leaders
Baptisms (number last year)	1	varied	Pastor
Children's Groups or Classes	15	30	SVCC, Faith Formation Team
Christmas Eve and Easter Worship	190	250	Pastor, SVCC, Worship Team
Church-wide Meals	25+	60+	Congregational Care Team
Choirs and Music Groups	9	12	Minister of Music
Church-based Bible Study	5	15+	SVCC
Communion (1/month	50	100	Pastor, Worship Team
Confirmation (number confirmed)	1	8	SVCC, Youth Leaders
Christmas Pageant Participants	15	30	SVCC
Funerals (number last year)	1	varies	Pastor, Director of Music
Intergenerational Groups: West VA Work Camp	N/A - Cancelled due to COVID	18	Lay Leaders
Intergenerational Groups: Lunch Bunch	15	20+	SVCC
Prayer or Meditation Groups	6	15+	SVCC, Lay Leaders
Public Advocacy Work (environmental social & racial justice, substance use prevention, etc.)	6	15+	Pastor, SVCC, Lay Leaders
Retreats (annual)	0	20	Pastor, SVCC
Weddings (number last year)	0	varies	Pastor, Minister of Music
Worship (in-person and virtual)	50+ in-person 20+ virtual	100	Pastor, Worship Team
Youth Groups or Classes	12	25	SVCC, Youth Leaders
Youth Pilgrimage	0	15	SVCC, Youth Leaders

Members Who are Ordained, Licensed, or Commissioned Ministers

Name	3- or 4-Way Covenant?	Ministry Setting	Type of Ministry Role	Retired?
John Weagraff	No	Hospital	Chaplain, Pastoral Care, Preaching	No
Elaine Gaetani	Yes		Bridge Minister when called, Preaching	Yes

Current Staff

Staff Position	Name	Compensation	Supervised by	Length of Tenure
Lead Interim Pastor / Head of Staff	Rev. Andrew C. Burr	Full-time	Coordinating Council	1 year
Dir. of Spiritual Vitality & Congregational Care	Sarallyn Keller	Part-time (6yrs) Full-time (6yrs)	Pastor	12 years
Minister of Music	Tom Foster	Part-time	Pastor	7 years
Outreach Minister	Rev. Dr. John Weagraff	Limited Volunteer	Pastor	14 years
Administrator	Randal Divinski	Part-time	Pastor	1 year
Financial Assistant	Cindy Williams	Part-time	Pastor	1 year
Soloist	Beth Canterbury	Per diem	Music Team	3 years
Sunday Nursery	Grace Seiche	Per diem	Pastor	2 years
Housekeeping	Temp service	Part-time	Pastor	1 year

Participation and Staffing Reflections

Though the number of participants in FCC worship and activities has, in general, declined since the onset of COVID, our programming has remained fairly broad-based. FCC has a strong core group of dedicated and faithful members who serve on our Ministry Teams to make things happen at the church, and in-person participation numbers have been slowly rising in recent months. In addition, people are routinely participating in newly developed online options such as the Meditation Group, our midweek Check-In Prayer Group, and Post Worship Zoom Fellowship. Our Sunday service, available via livestream and both live and re-broadcast on the local public access television station, also reaches an unknown number of participants who do not attend in person.

Funded by our hugely successful Capital Campaign of 2021, church building renovations are being undertaken with an eye toward facilitating new partnerships and greater community use of our facilities. We anticipate welcoming a variety of groups into our refreshed spaces for a wide range of spiritual and secular uses once our renovations are completed in the fall of 2023.

According to our survey, FCC’s Faith Formation Programs for children and youth have been important factors that drew people to join and have kept people engaged with FCC through the years. Though the numbers of children enrolled in programs have not rebounded to those pre-COVID, we remain optimistic about regrowing this facet of our ministry and continue to reflect on old practices and new ideas that could promote greater participation.



FCC seeks to foster deep social connections intergenerationally too. People consistently show up to social events for shared meals, games, and music. A recent Bring-a-Friend to Breakfast buffet before our annual children’s Christmas Pageant saw participation numbers creeping toward our pre-COVID attendance levels and welcomed about a dozen new visitors of all ages to the church.

Members of our FCC community engage in public advocacy work for a range of town-wide entities, including Natick is United, Natick 180, and environmental justice groups. Many more have expressed that they are involved with and concerned about environmental and social justice issues, per our survey and Cottage Meeting conversations.

FCC Natick is committed to fostering new faith leaders. We have had ten student ministers serve and learn with us over the past 20 years. A Member Support Team composed of at least four church members provided orientation, feedback, and evaluation to each. In addition, six members from our church have been called to ministry themselves.

CHURCH FINANCES

Current Annual Income (2021 Annual Report)

Source	Amount
Annual Offerings and Pledged Giving	\$277,838
Endowment Proceeds	\$0
Endowment Draw	\$0
Fundraising Events (Fundraising, Special Missions)	\$14,431
Grants: PPE Grant (US Government)	\$55,405
Rentals of Church Building (building space, parking lot rentals)	\$48,306
Other (specify): Antenna Fund (from cell phone companies)	\$140,098
Other (specify): Miscellaneous Income	\$2,503
TOTAL	\$538,581

Current annual expenses (dollars budgeted for most recent fiscal year, 2021): \$528,425

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

Pastoral Ministerial Expenses for 2021 total \$140,081 or 26% of total budget.

Has the church ever failed to pay its financial obligations to a minister of the church?

Not to the knowledge of decades-long members.

Is your church 5-for-5, i.e. does it include each of the following contributions during the church year?

- Yes Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM – Basic Support) and One Great Hour of Sharing
- No Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need and Christmas Fund

At Christmas, it has been our tradition to collect an offering and split it between two organizations. In 2022, it was Daniel's Table (provides food security services to our neighbors-in-need) and the Metrowest Workers Center (Casa).

At Easter, we split the offering between OGHS and a local organization. In 2022, we sent to A Place to Turn which provides emergency food, diapers, and personal care to our neighbors.

In what way is OCWM (Basic Support) gathered? If calculated as a percentage of operating budget, what is that percentage?

OCWM is included as part of the operating budget. The budget for 2021 was \$11,600.

What is the church's current indebtedness?

- Total amount of loan debt: \$688,057
- Reason for debt: Mortgage (refinanced in 2021)
- Are capital and other payments current?: Yes

Current Building Project

A large building project is underway to restore and update our beautiful church building that was constructed in 1875. The project began in 2021 and is expected to be completed by fall of 2023. Renovation includes roofing and masonry work on the steeple (completed), maintenance work on stained-glass windows, and improvements to the sanctuary and kitchen.

The total budget is \$1,850,000 including \$430,000 from our endowment funds, \$420,00 from a mortgage refinance, and \$1,200,000 from our Capital Campaign.

Capital Campaigns

Year(s)	Purpose	Goal	Result	Impact
2021	Building maintenance and updates. Renovation of sanctuary and kitchen.	\$750,000	\$1,200,000	Addressed aging maintenance concerns on the exterior. Will renovate sanctuary and kitchen spaces for better accessibility, functionality, and flexibility.
2000	Building addition, elevator, concrete floor in basement.	\$600,000	\$400,000	Made sanctuary accessible via elevator construction. Added office and classroom space.

Mission Component of Recent Capital Campaign

Included in the renovation are improvements to access for mobility-impaired people, enhancements to visual and auditory infrastructure, and other changes that will improve function for church and community programs.

Does your church have an endowment?

Yes

What is the market value of the assets?

\$3,065,959 (combination of unrestricted and restricted funds and includes donations to the Capital Campaign)

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

Regularly (e.g. scholarships, pilgrimage funds) and as needed (e.g. maintenance fund)

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

Year	Operating Budget	Unrestricted Endowment Funds Used for Operating Budget	Total Unrestricted Invested Funds at EOY	% of Unrestricted Invested Funds Used
2017	\$557,296	\$12,500	\$1,166,084	1.07%
2018	\$557,422	\$31,000	\$1,071,251	2.89%
2019	\$571,535	\$25,000	\$1,196,081	2.09%
2020	\$567,939	\$33,000	\$1,319,286	2.50%
2021	\$518,504	\$-	\$1,382,385	0.00%

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

The endowment is expected to last indefinitely through careful monitoring, use, and diversified, conservative investment of funds. The financial data is from FCC Annual Reports as compiled by Church Trustees and Finance Team.

Other Assets

- Reserves (checking/savings): \$50,379 in the general operating fund (exceeding liabilities)
- Investments (other than endowment): \$0
- All investments are included in the endowment funds monitored by the Church Trustees.

Does your church have a parsonage?

No

Buildings Owned by the Church:

- The church building (>500-person capacity) is the only property owned by the church.
- All church building floors, which include the sanctuary, vestry, classroom, and choir room are wheelchair accessible through a ground-level entry and an elevator. The pulpit is currently not accessible to a wheelchair, but the planned improvements include a lowered pulpit with a wheelchair ramp.

Reflection on Finances

The finances of the church, in particular the endowment and recent Capital Campaign demonstrate a strong tie to our long history and obligation to past, present, and future generations of members and visitors as well as a commitment to the larger Natick community. The large number of members and friends working on the campaign and tremendous financial support for preserving and updating our 1870’s building is an example of the willingness of the Congregation to offer their time and treasures for their church and community.

The fact that this was done during a period of continued concern regarding COVID and during the tenure of an Interim Pastor also underscores the leadership abilities of many in our Congregation.

The church budget is not the only source of mission support from our Congregation. There are many collections taken throughout the year that go directly to support local food banks, programs for the homeless and immigrants, and communities in need outside the USA. Many church members also volunteer their time for these programs.



The budgeting process begins each fall with a Stewardship Campaign and is directed by a small group of volunteers under the guidance of the Pastor. The leader of the group often has experience serving with previous stewardship initiatives, but the group also typically includes new members each year. Following the time of stewardship and the ingathering of annual pledges, the Finance Committee proposes funding levels for each item on the budget. The final budget is approved by the Coordinating Council, which consists of the Pastor and the Leaders of seven different Ministry Teams. The budget is adopted by a vote of the Congregation at Annual Meeting.

FCC enjoys strong financial support from its Congregation. One year, the Coordinating Council brought a significantly unbalanced budget to the Sunday service prior to our Annual Meeting hoping to find support for church programs and ministry. By the end of the brunch prior to the meeting itself, new and increased pledges far exceeded the projected deficit. It was truly an inspiring moment for the church.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Important Events in Life of Church in the Last 20 Years

Refashioning Faith Formation Programs

Changes to our Faith Formation Programs demonstrate our Congregation's commitment to children and youth and our confidence in young people to learn and act with integrity when given the right tools. In the early 2000s, our church adopted the Godly Play curriculum to educate and empower our younger learners. It provided a child-centered, hands-on, creative model for sharing sacred stories and promoted the kind of wondering we encourage over a lifetime.

We saw a similar approach to sexuality education in the Our Whole Lives (OWL) curriculum, which our church adopted for use with our teens in 2010. Like Godly Play, OWL shows respect for the learner and engages them in activities, conversation, and reflection. Both the Godly Play and OWL curricula honor the learner as fully capable of engaging with new ideas, questioning deeply, and coming to sound and personal decisions about their beliefs and lives. At FCC we believe that our children and youth are capable of actively constructing their own faith.

Engagement with Family Promise Metrowest

In 2008, our church, along with other area congregations and synagogues, was instrumental in forming this local affiliate of Family Promise Network, a network of 200+ community-based organizations which provide shelter, education, and comprehensive support to families experiencing housing insecurity. Our partnership with FPM became embedded in the routines of our Congregation during the 2010s. We welcomed up to 5 families for one week each quarter, providing shelter, sustenance, and social connection in our church building during the evening and overnight hours. A whole volunteer team would transform spaces in our building into welcoming bedrooms and plan for breakfasts and dinners throughout our designated host week. This ministry was an intergenerational ministry which drew singles, couples, families with children, and seniors into service.

Since 2021, FPM has acquired a building that includes on-site shelter space for its client families. Our service model has changed, but our commitment as a Lead Congregation has not.

Transition of Preschool to ACHIEVE Program

Over 50 years ago, FCC responded to the need for affordable, quality early education in Natick by opening a preschool in our building. This was a respected and cherished program in the larger community for decades. Recently, challenges presented by the COVID pandemic as well as declining enrollment caused the Coordinating Council to examine the efficacy of continuing this longtime project. Ultimately, the CC made the decision to close the school but quickly leveraged a budding relationship with the Natick Public Schools. A new partnership was forged, and the ACHIEVE program, a public day program for young adults with special needs, found a home at FCC's ideal downtown location. Community need and ministry intersected once again.

COVID Response

When the pandemic prevented us from meeting in person for worship, we quickly learned how to livestream services to our members' homes via ZOOM.

Later, when conditions allowed a limited number of staff to return to our sanctuary, we partnered with the local cable access company, Pegasus, to broadcast our services live. This COVID pivot enabled all of us to connect when physical proximity was not possible, but we are happy to maintain our remote worship option into the future. We continue to offer livestream worship as an extension of welcome and inclusion to any who may face obstacles to joining us in person.



Capital Campaign

Undertaken in the early fall of 2021, our most recent Capital Campaign was not a guaranteed success. We were still reeling from the health and economic impacts of the COVID pandemic and faced related delays in our search for a new settled Pastor. The campaign's subsequent success—we far surpassed our financial goal—is evidence that our members are truly committed to preserving our church building and expanding the missions of our Congregation. The campaign raised money for needed building repairs and refreshed spaces but also for a redesign of our altar area which opens worship leadership opportunities to those with physical disabilities. Enhanced lighting and acoustics along with a renovation of our kitchen will make our physical spaces attractive to outside groups and will pave the way for new partnerships with missionally aligned neighbors.

Specific Change in the Recent Past

The retirement of our longtime Pastor Vicky Guest in November 2019 followed by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 presented us with the need to make many emotional and practical adjustments in a short period of time. Lay leaders have stepped up to ensure continuity and to innovate in the face of new challenges and initiatives, including:

- Onboarding and collaborating with two Interim Pastors.
- Reinventing worship and faith formation program delivery in the face of COVID barriers.
- Closing a longtime preschool operated by the church and subsequently identifying a new partnership with the Natick Public Schools for use of the recently vacated space.
- Conducting a significant Capital Campaign to make needed repairs and improvements to our building and to expand accessibility in our sanctuary.

How We Resolve Conflict

At FCC, we strive for consensus when there is disagreement. Over the years, our lay leaders have drafted and implemented policies and procedures to address and respond to challenges with compassion and fairness. In those instances where a consensus could not be achieved during a Coordinating Council or Annual Meeting, bodies have typically tabled the controversial topic in order to pursue resolution via smaller group discussion. The smaller group later returns to the larger body to present and explain their agreements.

Not all disagreements have been resolved to everyone's satisfaction. In some instances, members have elected to leave the church and worship elsewhere. In these unfortunate situations, opposing viewpoints have been listened to, noted, and prayerfully considered, but those viewpoints were ultimately understood to be counter to the direction that the church had elected to follow. An example of this was when a small number of members departed upon the adoption of our Open and Affirming Covenant in 2003. We regretted losing members we cared for, but we could not compromise on the stand for inclusivity that the great majority of our Congregation desired to take.

Sometimes, longtime active members have disproportionate influence in our decision-making processes. New participants on Ministry Teams may automatically defer to these strong leaders, and we know that this may squelch new ideas, causing previous practices to be maintained without careful examination of their merits. We look to our next Pastor to help identify issues in this area in order to establish a healthy balance between any person's consistent involvement on a Team and their direct influence on policies and practices.

Ministerial History

(Including all previous ministerial staff for the past 30 years)

Staff Member's Name	Years of Service	UCC Standing (Y/N)
Rev. Andrew C. Burr (Interim Pastor)	2/22 - present	Yes
Rev. Elaine Gaetani (Bridge Minister)	1/22	Yes
Rev. Dr. Jonathan New (Interim Pastor)	2/20 - 12/21	Yes
Rev. Elaine Gaetani (Bridge Minister)	12/19 - 2/20	Yes
Rev. Victoria Alford Guest (Settled Pastor)	1999 - 2019	Yes
Rev. Summer Finnel Shaud (Associate Pastor)	2010 - 2015	Yes
Rev. Dr. John Weagraff (Outreach Minister)	2008 - present	Yes
Rev. John Lilly (Part-time Minister of Congregational Care)	2003 - 2006	Yes
Rev. Peggy Wallace (Interim Pastor)	1997 - 1999	Yes
Rev. Richard Giragosian (Settled Pastor)	1989 - 1997	Yes



What We Have Learned About Our Congregation and Its Relationship with Ministerial Leadership

The service of two Interim Pastors and the transition period, which coincided with the COVID pandemic, have demonstrated that lay leaders in our Congregation are more capable of leading and managing the church's activities than previously recognized. Both the absence of a settled Pastor and the impacts of the pandemic created natural opportunities for people to step into new roles, but we also note that needs arose due to the loss of our previous Pastor who filled many gaps in the busy life of our church.

Vicky Guest was an extremely competent and inspiring leader who contributed to nearly all aspects of church life. She was extremely efficient, effective and ran a tight ship. If she needed anything, she would ask for help, and almost no one said “no.” Virtually everyone was willing to lend support to keep things running smoothly under Vicky’s leadership. We realize now that Vicky’s high level of effectiveness may have come with an unexpected cost. Fewer lay leaders participated at high levels of involvement under her because fewer lay leaders were needed. As she began the slow transition into retirement, Vicky initiated gradual changes to encourage people to take on more responsibility within the church, but the true scope of her work was not fully understood until we faced the challenges of COVID.

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


No.

Has your church been involved in a Situational Support Consultation?

No.

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

No.



“Your new Pastor has the opportunity to be the voice of reason, the voice of understanding in the community, raising up issues that need conversation.”
-Natick Community Leader

Who is Our Neighbor?

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Matthew 22:39

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

We value our town and our community

Natick is home to a thriving public school system with administrators committed to diversity and inclusion. The town engages people of all ages in programs offered through the Community-Senior Center and Recreation and Parks Department. Natick is home to more than 200 working artists, two libraries, and many independently-owned restaurants, businesses, and cultural organizations—all contributing to a busy year-round schedule of arts, cultural and community events.

There is a strong sense of civic responsibility among residents, and people are actively engaged with organizations whose visions and missions encourage kindness and advance equity as well as racial and climate justice.



**NATICK,
MASSACHUSETTS**

natickma.gov

“Visitors to Natick Center can expect an intimate, friendly experience and the rich heritage of a classic New England town, while celebrating a vibrant, contemporary fusion of art, culture and business. Against the backdrop of the quintessential New England town center, a passionate group of committed individuals and organizations work, through businesses and studios, to create a dynamic and diverse community.”
-Natick Center Cultural District



**NATICK PUBLIC
SCHOOLS**

natickps.org



**NATICK SERVICE
COUNCIL**

natickservicecouncil.org



**NATICK
IS UNITED**

natickisunited.org



**SPARK
KINDNESS**

sparkkindness.org



**FAMILY PROMISE
METROWEST**

familypromisemetrowest.org



**SOAR
NATICK**

soarnatick.org



**NATICK
180**

natick180.org



**NATICK CENTER
CULTURAL DISTRICT**

natickcenter.org



**THE CENTER FOR THE
ARTS IN NATICK**

natickarts.org



**THE NATICK
COMMUNITY FARM**

natickfarm.org



**BROADMOOR
WILDLIFE SANCTUARY**

[massaudubon.org
/get-outdoors/wildlife-
sanctuaries/broadmoor](http://massaudubon.org/get-outdoors/wildlife-sanctuaries/broadmoor)



**NATICK
MALL**

natickmall.com

“A recent survey done by the Morse Institute Public Library in Natick showed that respondents are greatly interested in diverse, multicultural programming and services, including materials and programs in languages other than English.”
-Natick is United website

We value our proximity to Boston and the greater New England region.

Each Patriots’ Day in April, runners traverse the Boston Marathon course from Hopkinton to Boston, hitting Natick a little before the halfway point right in front of FCC’s “Front Porch.” The greater Boston area, which is a global pioneer in innovation and entrepreneurship with nearly 5,000 business startups, also boasts:

- More than 118 colleges and universities.
- World-renowned research institutions and hospitals.
- Vast cultural assets, including the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Boston Ballet, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Berklee School of Music, and Huntington Theatre Company.
- The beloved Boston sports franchises—the Boston Red Sox, Celtics, Bruins and the New England Patriots and Revolution.

We love being close to all that New England has to offer outside the Boston metropolitan area as well. As a church community, we have conducted pilgrimages to the remote and rugged Monhegan Island off the coast of Maine, held retreats in old farmhouses, ventured on beach excursions to Cape Cod and Gloucester, and hiked in New Hampshire’s White Mountains. The whole region is a place for our mission, connection, worship, and reflection.



COMMUNITY VISION

Congregational Engagement in Service and Advocacy

The scope of our mission and outreach activities over the past two years was narrowed due to needs that arose during the pandemic.

In the spring of 2020, we recognized an immediate need to feed local immigrant families whose incomes were impacted by business shutdowns connected to COVID. We therefore directed more than 60% of our outreach budget to local food banks and immigrant support organizations. In 2021, as social isolation lingered, we recognized a growing need for youth mental health services and directed a large portion of our budget to local organizations providing those services.

Prior to and since the pandemic, the FCC Congregation has extended helping hands and supportive funds to address a variety of needs in our community.

FCC serves our local neighbors.

As we are slowly returning to in-person mission activities, members of the church have resumed volunteering with meal preparation, service, and support at the Family Promise Metrowest (FPM) facility in Natick. FPM has recently acquired and renovated a building that provides temporary housing for its families on site. FCC continues to work in partnership with FPM as a Lead Congregation.

Members of our church also provide support locally to Metrowest Workers Center (Casa). Casa's main focus is helping immigrant workers to recover stolen wages and secure relief when injured on the job. Additionally, the organization arranges for white citizens to accompany immigrants to court hearings. Members of our church have participated, and the church has hosted accompaniment training.



FCC serves our wider neighbors.

The West Virginia Work Camp has been an active mission of the church for more than 30 years. This mission provides youth and adults alike in our community the opportunity to spend a week in the hollers of West Virginia. Campers share meals with WV families experiencing poverty and get to know members of the local community while performing repair and restoration work to make their homes warm, safe, and dry.

This program has, at times, provided a spontaneous opportunity for our church members to participate in advocacy. Our church, along with two other Massachusetts-based churches who also attend the West Virginia Work Camp, have been strong supporters of LGBTQ youth on the trip. Many of the other churches who participate in the program profess a more conservative faith than our open and affirming UCC beliefs and practices. Over the years, participants from our church have witnessed to the humanity of our fellow LGBTQ campers in the face of sometimes hostile ignorance, and we have been called to model the love and welcome of Christ outside of our own community.



FCC serves our global neighbors.

Last year two church members traveled to the Guatemalan village of Santa Maria Tzeja (SMT) for a mission trip, and another delegation will be traveling there in February 2023. We held an educational materials drive for a local school and volunteers delivered them when they visited. Many church members are pen pals with the villagers of SMT, and FCC financially supports the SMT middle school. Our involvement with the people of SMT seeks to support a resilient, educated, safe and cohesive community where residents do not feel the need to flee in search of safety or income.

Last summer, one of our members traveled to the Mexico-California border to visit two shelters in order to learn more about the challenges faced by migrants and the relief work there. This member was instrumental in bringing back a firsthand report which could inform our continued work to ease this humanitarian crisis. We stand with our immigrant brothers and sisters at the border and in our community and oppose the injustices that they endure.

Participation in UCC Programs

The Congregation has been active for many years in meetings, relationships and activities connecting the wider United Church of Christ at the association, conference, and national levels. This participation has included the following:

- SNEUCC Conference: Delegates regularly participate in debating and voting on issues relevant to the conference.
- Super Saturday: A number of FCC congregants attend a wide variety of workshops.
- Synod: Our former Pastor and her spouse have attended.
- WISE Conference: Delegates have attended and the church participates in the WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged for Mental Health) program.

In addition to those mentioned in the Reflection on Witnessing to Wider Community below, members of our congregation have also been active in these UCC-promoted programs:

- God is Still Speaking
- Just Peace Players

REFLECTION ON WITNESSING TO WIDER COMMUNITY

Much of our work to see, celebrate, and embrace those in our wider community centers on justice:

Disability Justice

Over 20 years ago, an elevator was built as an early effort to provide more equitable access in our church building. Funded by our most recent Capital Campaign, we continue that work to make our sanctuary more inclusive for persons of all abilities. Currently the pulpit sits atop a three-foot riser only accessible by stairs. By lowering the pulpit and building a ramp to it, we will invite people with diverse abilities to positions of leadership in our services. We are also updating the audiovisual system and lighting to enhance engagement for all. We conducted an Accessibility Audit with Candace Low in 2021 and hope to seek Accessible to All (A2A) certification in the future.

Creation Justice

FCC has upgraded the heating system and undertaken several initiatives such as composting, recycling, and switching our electric supply to renewable resources to reduce our carbon footprint. In 2010 we achieved a Level 3 Green Team designation from the UCC. On December 11, 2022 we welcomed Rev. Emma Brewer-Wallin, the Minister of Environmental & Economic Justice for the SNEC UCC, to our pulpit. After worship she led our Green Team in identifying new actions that we can take to further improve our stewardship of the environment.

Economic Justice

We continue to support FPM as a Lead Congregation since it has transitioned to new facilities with on-site shelter, and we collaborate to develop innovative ideas for increasing the supply of affordable housing in our area.

Immigrant Justice

We are active supporters of the Metrowest Workers Center (Casa), an organization that advocates for immigrant workers in Metrowest Boston. We are increasing our support for the residents of Santa Maria Tzeja, Guatemala, with the goal of contributing to a safe, sustainable, and equitable community where residents can live healthy, safe, and fulfilling lives without the need to seek refuge elsewhere. In addition, church volunteers have gone to the US-Mexico border to witness firsthand and report back on the challenges there.

Social Justice

FCC adopted our Open and Affirming Covenant in 2003. We have engaged with WISE to offer training and information on mental health in order to widen our welcoming embrace and to broaden our understanding of those often marginalized by the church experience. As an extension of the spiritual growth we've experienced in exploring the experiences of our LGBTQ members/neighbors as well as people with mental illness, we have recently begun examining the complicated history of our Congregation and its relationship to the Native American population in the area. We seek to understand their experiences, to provide healing for their pain, and to form supportive connections with them. To that end, we have welcomed our Indigenous neighbors to lead us in worship and look forward to building upon this initial collaboration in the near future.

PARTICIPATION IN ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH ACTIVITIES

Natick has an active Interfaith Clergy Association. Our former Pastor was a driving force for the group. Our Director of Spiritual Vitality and Congregational Care has been participating during the interim period. The clergy meet monthly and coordinate town-wide ecumenical activities. The group collaborates annually with the Natick Public Schools to present the MLK Jr. Community Celebration. FCC also hosts an annual community-wide ecumenical vigil for families and friends who have lost loved ones to addiction.



REFLECTIONS ON MISSION STATEMENT

“Our mission is to express the love and welcome of Christ through word and action in our community and the wider world.” -FCC mission statement

For the past 20 years, we have been a Congregation that thoughtfully aspires to model the love, compassion, and inclusion of Jesus Christ. We have worked to make FCC a beacon of extravagant welcome in the community.

For a long time, our Congregation knew that our second-floor sanctuary was not accessible to those who were unable to climb a formidable staircase. We knew that an elevator was needed and launched a Capital Campaign to raise funds for construction in the late 1990’s. Once achieved, that elevator became a visible testament to our commitment to welcome. Construction funded by our most recent Capital Campaign (2021) will further our accessibility efforts. All will be welcome to witness, to perform, and to lead.

Our previous settled Pastor embraced our mission statement too, and she championed the theme of welcome during her tenure at FCC. Under her leadership, we came to see both our location and our Congregation as “Natick’s Front Porch.” Colorful Adirondack chairs were added to the landing outside our front doors and speak silently to our wider community: “Whoever you are, wherever you’re from, and wherever you’re headed, you are welcome here. Please. Sit. Chat. Rest here with us.”

In 2003, faced with an opportunity to embrace the LGBTQ community and to enfold them into every aspect of church life, our Congregation adopted its Open and Affirming Covenant. We recognized that we had friends, neighbors, and loved ones who felt left out and often downright excluded from the Christian tradition. They deserved to hear from us loudly and clearly that they belong, that they are welcome, that God loves them, and that we love them. This milestone in the life of our church was yet another effort to ensure we were walking the talk in our mission statement.

Today, we seek to extend this purposeful and extravagant welcome also to those with mental health issues. We’ve learned they are a group who can feel excluded from a church’s supportive embrace, and we are committed to exploring how we can best include them.

We recognize that extending the love and welcome of Christ also requires us to examine past practices, to scrutinize our history, and to redirect our efforts to ensure the inclusion of all. In recent years, our Congregation hosted a Christmas music event called Victorian Christmas. With our historical building as a backdrop, members would dress in costumes reminiscent of the Victorian era and gather with guests from the wider community in our decorated, candle-lit sanctuary for an evening of caroling and story.

Recently, however, some members prompted us to reconsider this seemingly innocuous tradition. They suggested that while a Victorian Christmas may seem a romantic and nostalgic notion for many in our predominantly white, able, educated, and financially stable Congregation, others may find it alienating.

The 1800's were not a time of comfort and joy for all people, and idealizing that time likely overlooks the suffering of many. We did not hold our Victorian Christmas event in 2022 and are primed to dive more deeply into conversations that challenge past notions and push us closer to the God of love we seek to emulate. Our Congregation is willing to reflect on our history and to grow from new understandings in order "to express the love and welcome of Christ in word and action."

"Natick is becoming a more diverse community. While the town is 77.6 percent white, demographic changes have resulted in an increased Latinx population. Natick's Latinx population has risen more than 26 percent since 2000. Natick has the second largest percentage of foreign-born residents among the immediate comparison communities. Further examining the town's 2020 census data, it is apparent that Asians are the most dominant minority across nearly all census tracts making up 14.2% of the population. While our demographics have changed, minority racial groups are significantly under-represented in town Meetings."

Natick's "2030+ Master Plan" and the 2020 Census

REFLECTION ON PASTOR'S SCOPE OF WORK

Our previous settled Pastor was very active in the community. Our Congregation was reminded of this strength at the celebration of her ministry when several local clergy and town officials lamented that they did not know what they would do without her leadership in the collaborative efforts of our community. We want our next Pastor to have a similar relationship with community leaders. Whether it is through worship, faith formation, outreach, pastoral care, or the administrative tasks of leading a congregation, we hope that our next Pastor can bring an outward-facing component to each of these roles. Most importantly, we hope and expect that our next Pastor will engage the members of this good and caring Congregation in the performance of those tasks. We are willing partners in the work of this church.

MISSION INSITE

The following are comments and reflections on the MissionInsite report for the Natick area. The town of Natick has shown a steady increase in population over the past 20 years. According to the 2020 Census, there are approximately 36,000 residents, and this is not expected to change much over the next 10 years. Over 80% of the population live in family households versus non-family households or group quarters. Of those employed, 82% work at white-collar jobs, while 18% are employed in blue-collar positions. More than two-thirds of those employed work in managerial, executive, or professional specialty jobs.

- Average household income is \$155,231 and, over the next 5 years, is projected to grow to \$181,509. (These numbers are well above the state average & median household income.)
- Diversity: Race and Ethnicity In 2021
 - 10.09% Asian (Non-Hisp)
 - 1.87% Black/African American (Non-Hisp)
 - 82.19% White (Non-Hisp)
 - 3.49% Hispanic or Latino
 - 2.36% Pac Is/Am Ind/Other (Non-Hisp)
- Projection for 2026: All population categories, except for White and Black/African American, will increase slightly. The percent of Asian population is expected to grow the most.
- Median age has been increasing (37 in 2000, 40 in 2010, 45 in 2021) and is projected to stay around 45 for the next 10 years)

Comparison of Congregation's Demographics with Adjacent Neighborhoods

Five communities surround the Town of Natick: Framingham, Wayland, Wellesley, Dover, and Sherborn. Natick sits near the median of most demographic indicators for these communities. The three largest are Framingham (72,800), Natick (36,000), and Wellesley (28,700).

Economically and racially, Natick is similar to its neighbors with the exception of Framingham, which includes a large Hispanic/LatinX population and reports median individuals' income of \$41,200. The median individuals' income for the other four neighboring communities is \$79,500. The majority of members of FCC reside in Natick. A handful of members reside in Wellesley, Framingham, Wayland, and Dover. Our members most resemble the demographics of the four wealthier communities surrounding Natick, especially in terms of education (predominantly college-educated) and race.

How Demographics Shape Current Ministry

FCC ministers to a Congregation and community that largely mirrors the demographics of the town of Natick and its similar town neighbors. Outreach activities and contributions do, however, extend to organizations which address immigrant issues affecting residents of Framingham. As a proud Open and Affirming Congregation we are recognized as welcoming to the LGBTQ community. We have also been working to extend our ONA umbrella to those with disabilities and mental illness.

REFERENCES

Reverend Matt Carriker

FCC Interim Assistant Minister

Phone: 774-270-2185

Email: agapeucc@gmail.com

Christine Guthery, JD

Community Leader - SPARK Kindness

Phone: 508-269-1127

Email: cguthery@sparkkindness.org

Dr. Anna Nolin

Natick Public School Superintendent

Phone: 508-647-6500, ext 0

Email: anolin@natickps.org

Chief James Hicks

Natick Chief of Police

Phone: 508-647-9511

Email: hicks@natickpolice.com

OUR CLOSING PRAYER

Awesome Parent!

Powerful and Gentle God,

You have guided us through the Holy Spirit and have seen us through discernment and decision-making.

We are grateful for your presence and for your walking with us during these months of profile crafting.

We release this story we have woven with so much love and care out to the universe.

You search for us and know us, and we seek to do your will. We want to be obedient to your guidance.

You know our hearts' desires and what we need to truly be your church in the midst of pain and divisiveness, hopelessness and loneliness, in our world and in our town.

You have seen us in many different places, being your hands and feet and bringing your love to your people.

You have seen us in our town with Family Promise and with our immigrant siblings in Framingham. You have seen us serving your children in West Virginia, at the border of San Diego and Tijuana, and in Guatemala.

Yet, we would like to do more and be more.

We need your help in finding the minister that will guide us to become the Congregation of all the saints, equipped for building your kingdom of justice in the here and now.

We want to become more diverse, more inclusive, and we are ready to be pushed beyond our comfort.

We seek a minister who will open our hearts and minds to the possibility that another world is possible, that what we are experiencing as a town and as a society, with differences breaking us apart, can be transformed into a place where everyone is welcomed, everyone feels they belong, everyone finds in us a home.

We ask that you gently guide our next settled Pastor to us. Find in them someone who will walk with us and help us write our next chapter.

A compassionate, forward-thinking, and transformational minister, who will help us continue to be a beacon of hope and justice at the crossroads of our town.

Amazing God and Parent, it is all in your hands now, and we trust you.

Amen.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

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

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

Contributors to the contents of this Local Church Profile

- Janet Levesque, Transition Team Leader - FCC Member involved @FCC since 2004
- Myriam Hernandez Jennings, Transition Team - FCC Member involved @FCC since 2000
- Mindy Hoge, Transition Team - FCC Member involved @FCC since 2009
- Jeannine Keedy, Transition Team - FCC Member involved @FCC since 2014
- Lane McDonough, Transition Team - FCC Member involved @FCC since 1991
- Ken Pierce, Transition Team Member - FCC Member involved @FCC since 1999
- Judy Dixon, Profile Editor - FCC Member involved @FCC since 2001
- Reverend Andy Burr, Current FCC Interim Pastor @FCC since 2021
- FCC Coordinating Council 2022 @FCC for many decades
- FCC Congregational Survey participants @FCC for many decades - based on Presbyterian USA - conducted Spring 2022
- FCC Cottage Meeting participants @FCC for many decades - 9 in-person and virtual small group meetings conducted Summer 2022

VALIDATION BY CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION

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

Staff Comment:

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

Staff Comment:

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

Staff Comment:

My signature below attests to the above three items.

Signature: *Rev. Sam Houser*

Name / Title: *Bridge Area Conference Minister, North Central Region*

Email: *housers@sneucc.org*

Phone: *860-761-7198*

Date: *February 8, 2023*

"Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God!'"

Mark 11:22

Rev. Matt Carriker
agapeucc@gmail.com
cell: 774-270-2185

A reference letter that addresses the following prompts:

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

Rev. Vicky Guest was the most recent settled Senior Pastor at the First Congregational Church of Natick. Vicky was called to Natick around the year 2000, during my senior year of college. Thus, I didn't really get to know Vicky until I got back from my stint as a Jesuit Volunteer (in Belize and Haiti) and had made the decision to enter seminary. During my last two years at Andover Newton Seminary (2006-2008), I served as the Interim Assistant Minister at First Congregational Church (FCC) of Natick, working closely with Vicky, who was my supervisor.

Since my family joined the church when I was in middle school (in the early 90s), the various ministries of FCC Natick have thrived. FCC's children's ministry over the years has blossomed and grown, also incorporating the Godly Play curriculum in the mid-2000s. Youth programs have flourished. One of the highlights has been the "Journey to Adulthood" (J2A) curriculum that youth have gone through culminating in various pilgrimage sites. I was blessed to travel with the J2A group on its pilgrimage in 2007 to New Mexico for a powerful spiritual experience.

Even though I wasn't a fan of my parents being the leaders of FCC's High School youth group in the 90s, I must admit that we had lots of fun. That is what I remember most from those youth group events. Mission has been essential to FCC's identity for as far back as I can remember. In 2008, FCC became one of the Metrowest congregations to actively participate in the startup of Family Promise Metrowest (a ministry of local churches to housing insecure families). My first experience of mission at FCC was through West Virginia work camp (described more below). I was there when member Fay DeAvignon started the Angels of Hope Medical Clinics ministry in Uganda that FCC supported. In 2003-04 FCC went through the process and became an "Open and Affirming" church, which has helped the congregation truly live into an identity of living the love and welcome of Jesus for everyone.

Vicky had a gift and strength for nurturing ministry in new leaders. Many student ministers came and served through FCC over the years, myself included. This slowed down after Andover Newton moved to Yale Seminary in CT, as most of the student ministers were from Andover Newton.

I can speak from direct experience that Vicky was a mentor bar none (this was attested to at her goodbye from many other people who she had mentored). I learned so much from Vicky that I continue to hold dear in my ministry to this day. Vicky had the capacity to see and name the gifts and call to ministry that she saw in others, for example through Georgeanne Bennett and Saralyn Keller. Georgeanne was the CE Director who ended up going to seminary and later did Outdoor ministries with the homeless and housing insecure (she has since moved to the West coast). Saralyn Keller is a long-time committed member at FCC Natick who took over in the CE Director role after Georgeanne Bennett left, and has been an important, consistent presence at

FCC in the interim time, with her title now being Director of Spiritual Vitality and Congregational Care.

With so many ministers and ministries over the years, the congregation at FCC Natick has truly felt like a “priesthood of all believers.” So many committed members contribute generously to make everything happen. And talk about food! The congregation loves to make and bring food as a way of expressing love for others!

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

There are drawbacks to having an amazing, well-rounded Pastor like Vicky for 20 years- namely, that someone has to come after that will not be Vicky! Many Pastors do not have excellent organizational skills in addition to their unique ministerial skills. Vicky had both.

Nevertheless, the church has had a long interim period because of covid. Vicky retired in November 2019, and covid hit in March 2020, about a week after the new official Interim Minister, Rev. Jonathan New started. FCC Natick is now on it's second Interim Minister, Rev. Andy Burr. The loss of Vicky, plus the decline and losses from covid have been hard for FCC (though they are common for churches because of the pandemic). The church is ready for stability in a new settled Pastor after more than 3 years of interim time. My sense is that the church has been prepared by their Interim Ministers to hold open hearts for a new and different leader who will have a different skill set than Vicky and will help to guide the church in the direction/s it is called.

One growth area for FCC is that, although it has been strong in its work for peace, social justice, and social advocacy, it has struggled to bring the same emphasis to the contemplative side of its spiritual formation. This is not unique to UCC churches, as the 2021 General Synod “Becoming a Church of Contemplatives in Action” Resolution affirmed. There have been a few deeply committed church members to the work of prayer and contemplative practice, and Vicky was supportive of this ministry. Nevertheless, like many UCC churches, contemplative offerings were not always well attended, with notable exceptions. There has been slow growth in people's openness to spirituality and spiritual practices, particularly through programs like the “Spiritual Spa” or the “Discerning God's Will Together” programs. In that way, the seeds of contemplation that were planted by Vicky and other church leaders has begun to sprout, but like with all contemplative practice, needs constant nourishment to stay vital.

Another growing edge for FCC is its inclusion of diverse cultures in its worship services and life together. FCC, like many of the churches in surrounding towns, is composed primarily of white-identified persons. During Vicky's last Sabbatical (2018?) a dynamic African-American gay man was the Sabbatical Pastor of FCC for three months. This was a challenge being the first Pastor of color and the first openly gay Pastor at FCC (though there had been student ministers who identified as LGBTQIA). As a result of this experience, FCC has continued to ask important questions in order to grow in its inclusive welcome and witness.

Though the Open and Affirming process has continued to be a powerful way that the church explores its openness to diversity (not only in terms of LGBTQIA, but other identities like race, ability, etc.), there are still challenges that arise with white privilege. Like many churches after

the tragic deaths of George Floyd and other African-Americans in the spring of 2020, the church held some deep dive small groups into racial justice work and how to become anti-racist. That is a continuing process that the church is committed to.

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

As a youth at First Congregational Church of Natick, I grew up as many people in the mainline Christian church do- being confirmed, going to youth group activities, and then, falling away from church for a bit.

Yet growing up, there was one experience at First Congregational Church of Natick that kept me engaged and inspired. That experience was an annual work camp to West Virginia.

Though my first trip to the West Virginia work camp was to fulfill my high school's requirement of thirty community service hours, I was pleasantly surprised by the unexpected experiences I had. During work camp, I met and connected with young people from all around the country. I was touched by levels of devotion, service, and love that I had never seen before in community. Feeling inspired by my work camp experience, I travelled down to Appalachia every summer in high school to make homes warm, safe, and dry.

When I got to college, I drifted from church a bit. Weekly college parties became more regular for me than church attendance. Surprisingly, during this new college trend, I continued travelling to work camp every June during summer break.

Every year, work camp would close with a special Friday night worship service. Work campers would stand up and share how they had been touched by the people they met, the families they served, and the work they had done. The founder of the work camp would give an inspiring message, and the entire community would break bread together. At the end of the service, we would hold hands around the pavilion and sing "We Are One in the Spirit."

This worship service was always both joyous yet sad. By Friday night, everyone had completed their work site, finished their Bible study group meetings, and was preparing to head home the next morning.

One summer at this closing Friday worship, I felt more reflective than usual. I was already missing work camp: the community, the feeling of fulfillment, the great love that was shared. In my sadness, I remember thinking to myself: "What if, at the end of work camp, we were invited to stay? To do this work year-round. Would I stay? Would I do it?"

I didn't know my answer to that question, but the possibility of saying "yes" excited me. Amid a rebellious college stage, the West Virginia work camp provided much needed purpose at a time when I was hungering for something deeper and more meaningful.

During my college years, the inspiration I found at work camp ultimately led me to say "Yes" to new, more meaningful possibilities. By the end of my senior year in college, I had chosen to go abroad and serve as a Jesuit Volunteer for two years in Belize. As I left college, spirituality was taking an increasingly more important role in my life. After my experience as a Jesuit Volunteer, I made the decision to go to seminary.

Now, more than 20 years after college, I understand why the West Virginia work camp touched my life so deeply. Work camp was an embodiment of all that I saw as good, true, and beautiful in Christianity. The people at work camp "embodied" a faith that was lived out- a faith that modeled in so many ways the essential teachings of Jesus. As a community, the West Virginia work camp embodied love to a degree that I had never experienced before.

Every summer after returning from work camp, those people who had travelled to West Virginia to make homes warm, safe, and dry were given an opportunity at the Sunday morning

worship service to share about their ministry in the hills of Appalachia. Numerous times as a youth and now as an adult, I have cried when speaking about my experience at work camp. It has touched my life more deeply than I think any other aspect of church life did.

Now for many years, I have been an adult mentor to the youth attending work camp. Though my gifts are not primarily in construction, I appreciate being able to guide and offer support to youth through music, Bible studies, spiritual conversation, building connections and trust, and most importantly, letting them know that they are loved without condition.

Anything else you wish to share about FCC Natick.

First Congregational Church of Natick has a very special place in many people's hearts. It has powerfully impacted the lives of many, many people, as is evident by how many members of the church went on to seminary, and by the church's openness and receptivity to the spiritual gifts of many diverse student ministers. That spirit is still alive and active within the congregation. While the church knows and feels that spiritual vitality, it is eager for stability and consistent spiritual leadership to guide them into this next phase of its life and call together. The next Pastor will have a great opportunity at a beautifully unique congregation that has had a blessing and impact in the world and in the church far beyond its size.

Reference Letter for First Congregational Church Natick, UCC

Contact Information/Background:

Christine Fortune Guthery, J.D.

Email: cguthery@sparkkindness.org

Phone: (508) 269-1127

January 16, 2022

To Whomever it May Concern:

I would be honored to serve as a reference in the search for a new Pastor for the First Congregational Church Natick, UCC. Though I am not a member of the church (I am Catholic), I have had significant experience with the church (both members and leadership) over many years. As a community organizer in Natick, I have seen first hand over the past 12 years how the First Congregational Church Natick, UCC ("FCC Natick") has been a central force in promoting social justice and creating positive change in our community. This church, located in the heart of Natick Center, has been a force in addressing the key challenges facing our community, including racial justice, bullying prevention, mental health, substance use disorder. In short, in my experience, FCC Natick has been unparalleled in their efforts to build belonging, equity, and love for all. I know that any future Pastor would not only have the opportunity to work with an incredible and diverse congregation, but also be able to engage the many transformative efforts of FCC Natick in the Natick/MetroWest Boston Community and beyond.

As background, I am an attorney and Founder/Executive Director of SPARK Kindness, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non profit organization based in Natick, Massachusetts with over 8700 members that serves individuals/organizations geographically located in more than 25 towns in MetroWest Boston, and beyond. The mission of SPARK Kindness is "to build a kind, resilient and welcoming community where no one feels alone, bullied, unsupported, or unconnected." SPARK's offers free programming that is grounded in research-based practices, and centers values such as kindness, justice, empathy, and resilience. While promoting compassion and connection, our work addresses issues that harm communities, such as bullying, mental illness, substance use disorder, and racism.

Areas of Strength

- **Community Engagement** - FCC Natick has been a driving force of positive change in the Natick Community. A brief overview of the efforts where they have been central:
 - Anti-Bullying/SPARK - FCC Natick were founding members of SPARK Kindness (see more below) as well as the Natick/Anti-Bullying Coalition.
 - Natick MLK Community Celebration - FCC Natick was a driving force for the annual [Natick MLK Community Celebration](#), now in its 18th year! This community event began as a collaboration between the Natick Interfaith Clergy (led by Pastor Vicky Guest of FCC Natick) and the Natick Public Schools. For many years, the FCC has taken the lead in planning the program, securing the speaker and musical guests and organizing the day. Over the past 18 years, it has grown to a full community event that includes a welcoming

fair and service opportunity. This important event showcases Natick's commitment to working for justice and equity for all, and features the voices and music of Natick students, as well as community leaders. The event was able to endure throughout the pandemic, and for the first time since 2020 will be back in person this year. SPARK has participated in the MLK event for the past 11 years, but it never would have been in existence without both the inspiration and the leadership of FCC Natick. Further, the Natick MLK Community Celebration has been replicated by other communities (such as [Westborough](#)) and FCC Natick has offered advice and support to the interfaith clergy in other communities aspiring to host such an event.

- **Natick is United** - FCC Natick were founding members of [Natick is United](#), a town wide network, "connecting people through advocacy, education, celebration and conversation to build a vibrant and safe community where we Stand Together and Stand Up for each other." Further, FCC Natick has been instrumental as a meeting place and convener of the Natick is United movement. In fact, one of the Co-Chairs of Natick is United (and vital to its success) is an FCC Natick member, the amazing Myriam Hernandez Jennings. Myriam has been an unrelenting (and loving) force for positive change in becoming a more welcoming, inclusive, and antiracist community for all.
- **Addressing Substance Use Disorder/Opioid Crisis** - Significantly, FCC Natick has been a visible and powerful force in promoting support for families who are experiencing substance use disorder, as well as those who have experienced loss as a result. Recently, we heard from one family who did not belong to the church about the fact that they asked to have funeral services for their son at FCC Natick after he died by overdose. They shared that they wished to do so because of FCC Natick's openness and support for individuals and families struggling with substance use disorder. I can't think of a more glowing recommendation for any church.
 - **Natick 180** - Saralyn Keller, Director of Spiritual Vitality & Congregational Care at FCC, serves as the Chair of the Steering Committee of Natick 180. [Natick 180](#) is an amazing community wide organization to address substance use disorder through education, prevention, and recovery. The Steering Committee meets once a month and includes the Chief of Police, Superintendent of Schools, Board of Health, etc. I also serve on the Steering Committee and we are indebted to Saralyn's/FCC Natick's wise leadership and service.
 - **Annual Vigil** - For 9 years, FCC Natick has hosted an Interfaith Vigil to honor those who have been lost to substance use disorder. This vigil has been organized by FCC Natick and has been a very important event for the community to show support for those who struggle with loss due to substance use disorder during the very trying times of the holiday season. SPARK and Natick 180 have participated each year.
 - **Purple Flags** - For a number of years, FCC Natick has allowed [SOAR Natick](#) to display flags on their lawn that symbolize those who we have lost due to the opioid crisis. I have heard from parents in the community about how much this has brought this issue out of the darkness of shame so that the whole community can talk about how to prevent substance use disorder and support families who have been affected.
- **Living Values of Inclusivity** - FCC Natick is known throughout the Natick Community as being an inclusive community that values diversity and belonging for all. They work very deliberately and intentionally to use their central location in Natick to promote welcoming, diversity, and social

justice. As an example, one of my friends, who is Black, told me how pleasantly surprised he was when he was jogging through Natick center (after having recently moved here) and saw a big “Black Lives Matter” sign in front of the FCC Natick Church. FCC Natick also visibly promotes LGBTQ+ belonging with rainbows around the church during Pride Month, as well as welcoming and supportive messages and programs re: mental health and substance use disorder.

- **Servant Leadership** - FCC Natick has had a history of leaders (both pastoral and lay leadership) who have modeled effective leadership through active listening and service to the community.

Areas of Improvement

FCC Natick has been a model leader in the community. At the same time, all organizations have opportunities for improvement. I think that there is always more work to be done to connect with new families and organizations. But to be honest, I think that they are already doing so! I think that having a permanent Pastor will assist them with this work even more.

My Personal Experience

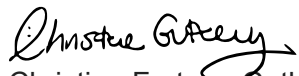
Twelve years ago, I was a stay at home parent with 3 children. A significant cyberbullying incident happened at my oldest child’s middle school, though she was not impacted (had no phone/social media). The response from the Natick middle school was robust. However, I truly observed for the first time the pain that is created when students (or people of any age) are bullied. In essence - bullying is a social justice issue, and is the right of every individual to be treated with dignity and respect.

Because this was an issue that impacted the whole community, it seemed to require a community wide response. Not knowing anything about community organizing, I asked to meet with Rev. Vicky Guest for coffee. That began a partnership with FCC Natick that has only strengthened to this day. FCC Natick immediately supported community action and served as a member of the Natick Anti-Bullying Coalition. Further, they were critical in our ability to form the grassroots organization of SPARK Kindness by hosting me as a speaker and allowing parents and students to speak directly to the congregation about working together to address bullying prevention. Rev. Guest and other FCC members have also served as mentors and supporters over the years to help SPARK grow in membership and experience. In short, FCC Natick was critical to the forming and sustaining of SPARK Kindness, which now serves over 8000 members in many communities today.

Conclusion

Please do not hesitate to call me to discuss the FCC Natick. Further, after a Pastor is named, I also commit to supporting that person’s success in the community in any way that I can. This is such an exciting search, and I (and SPARK) are ready to welcome FCC Natick’s new Pastor.

With gratitude,



Christine Fortune Guthery

Founder and Executive Director, SPARK Kindness, Inc.



Natick Public Schools
CENTRAL OFFICE
13 East Central Street, Natick, MA 01760

Dr. Anna Nolin, Superintendent
Timothy Luff, Deputy Superintendent
Dr. Peter Gray, Assistant Superintendent for Finance
Susan Balboni, Director of Teaching, Learning, and Innovation

December 12, 2022

To Whom it Concerns:

I serve as the Superintendent of Natick Public Schools. Over the years, I interacted with the former Pastor of FCC Natick and have engaged with church members in a variety of ways.

I had the opportunity to meet with the FCC Natick Transition Team on October 26, 2022. Herein are the summary comments from our conversation.

- “The church is the cornerstone of the town.”
- “Always display that portrayal of the core values of the church.”
- “The living embodiment of the core values of the church.”
- “The (Coordinating Council) has just been wonderful to deal with. It displays the singular vision of openness and healing.”
- “My perception is that the church has been in front of all the work of connection and belonging in town.”
- FCC Natick “has been in the front of healing the racial and antisemitic trauma in the town and school.”

What are the top three qualities you’d like to see in our next pastor?

- Ombudsman, conflict resolver and healer.
- Someone who embodies diplomacy.
- “There’s so much talking going on and so little listening.”
- “Listening. No throwing gas on things. You (former Pastor/Congregation) are the balm in our community.”
- “Counseling and conflict resolution.”

What are the biggest needs you see in the Town of Natick?

- During the pandemic and even as we move out of it, “People are so lonely even when they’re together. People are very lonely or think they’re alone.”
- FCC Natick is “painting hope for young people. Adults need that, too.”
- You should use demographics from our schools to determine what our community is becoming. Take a look at the youth of our community – did you know there are 75 different languages spoken in the Natick School System?

The former FCC Natick Pastor was shoulder to shoulder with the Town of Natick School Leadership to put forth our community core values and build a stronger, closer, healthier, inspired community together.

We aspire to a similar relationship with the next pastor.

Natick Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, age, gender identity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, pregnancy and pregnancy-related conditions, physical and intellectual differences, immigration status, or homeless status.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anna Nolin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a distinct 'N'.

Dr. Anna Nolin



POLICE DEPARTMENT
James G. Hicks, Chief of Police

20 East Central Street
Natick, MA 01760
Phone: 508-647-9511
Fax: 508-647-9509

December 30, 2022

To Whom It Concerns:

I currently serve as the Chief of the Natick Police Department. Over the years, I interacted with the former Pastor of FCC Natick and have engaged with church members in a variety of ways.

I had the opportunity to meet with the FCC Natick Transition Team on October 26, 2022. Herein are the summary comments from our conversation.

- "The church is an eye-catcher in the town. It's the magnet. I use the clock on your steeple to let me know if I am on time"
- "When FCCN has hosted the Opioid Vigils, the sanctuary felt like you were walking into a gathering place for the community. When you walked in, you felt like a member of the community. (Your sanctuary) feels like a living room."
- "The purple flags (Purple Flag Project) recalling the number of deaths from opioid overdose stirs conversation."
- "My first year in Natick there was a Christmas celebration at the church. I played the Grinch and had so much fun!"
- "(Your former pastor) came to me about putting a BLM sign in front of the church." "I used (her) words when I spoke with the members of the department to find a common starting place for a conversation."
- "Your new pastor has the opportunity to be the voice of reason, the voice of understanding in the community raising up issues that need conversation."
- "I love the Adirondack chairs in front of the church."
- "The church has had a big impact in town."

What are the top three qualities you'd like to see in our next pastor?

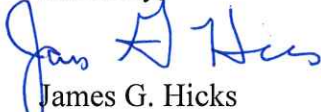
- Willingness to get involved in risky things.
- Someone who can say, 'This is who I am. This is who the church is.'
- Get out into the community and introduce themselves and make sure they say what they can do AND ask what we can do to build relationships, connections and community

What are the biggest needs you see in the Town of Natick?

- (During and post-Covid) “Mental health/illness issues. People feel they have no place to go. They (mental health/illness issues) are growing at a rate I thought I’d never see.”
- There needs to be better coordination of services in the community such as a Family and Community Engagement Center.
 - i.e. - Social services, ESL for community members who are learning English, playgroups for young kids, etc. group

I hope this information will assist as you move forward in your process to find a permanent leader. I want to thank you for the opportunity to participate and give my opinions. As I stated the position of Pastor for FCC Natick is important to the fabric of the community and I’m sure you will make a great choice for our community.

Sincerely,



James G. Hicks
Chief of Police