

The Spirit of the First Congregational Church

Wakefield, New Hampshire/UCC

1985-2018



Acknowledgements and Purpose of this Booklet

The purpose of this booklet is to capture the spirit, both past and present, of our church. When you enter the doorways on each Sunday, you can hear voices greeting each and offering love and support for the joys and sorrows of life. During the service there is time for us to share our celebrations and concerns with the entire congregation and then we offer prayers for the concerns.

Children are welcomed here with special pews equipped with books and toys to amuse them during the service. Their inevitable noise is either ignored or greeted with smiles.

Members share a strong sense of commitment to our church family, the hard work of running the church and the necessity to serve the world beyond our doors. Large projects are taken on that seem impossible but yield miraculous results.

What this booklet does not discuss is the daily hard work of running our church. Worship services must be organized and members who are sick or disabled visited. The building and grounds must be maintained, financial stewardship must be sought and special offerings supporting UCC charities and other causes encouraged.

My thanks to all the pastors and members who contributed their thoughts, memories and photos to this work even though they have all have very busy schedules.

The cover for this booklet was created by C. Richard Lundgren who is now 87 and lives in Peabody, MA. He is a related to Carol Lundgren, one of our most active church members. His image reflects the joyful, engaging spirit of our church.

Joining this church has strengthen my faith and enriched my life and I thank God that He led me to this church. – Linda Petkunas

Historical List of Pastors

The following is a list of settled and interim pastors who have served our church in recent times. They all shared their understanding of God and our relationship to Him and led us to where we are now as a congregation.

Rev. Richard Russell & Rev. Jennifer Russell
(Co-Pastors: 1984-1990)
Rev. Ben Andrews: 1991(Interim)
Rev. George Harvey: 1991-1996
Rev. James G. Pirie: 1996-1997 (Interim)
Rev. John Tamilio: 1997-2004
Rev. Dr. Peter Foss: 2004-2007 (Interim)
Rev. Mary James: 2007 – Present
(Her picture is shown below.)



Memories & Backgrounds of Our Pastors with Photos of Their Time Frame

Rev. Richard Russell & Rev. Jennifer Russell
(Co-Pastors 1984-1990)

Rick and Jennifer received their undergraduate degrees from the University of Washington. In 1982-1983 they went to India and attended the United Theological College in Bangalore under the auspices of the United Church of World Ministries. They completed their studies at Bangor Theological Seminary and were ordained in 1984. Husband and wife clergy teams were a new phenomenon in this era and reflected the evolution in the role of minister's wives. Rick is presently teaching at the University of Seattle's School of Theology and Ministry. His lovely wife Jennifer died recently. Here are the memories he shares.

"We are composed of members from many different backgrounds: Baptists, former Roman Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, Congregationalists and many more. Our church family has diverse life styles. Some were born and raised here; others live here and work elsewhere, others live and work here, others just vacation here."

It was my 35th birthday when my wife, Jennifer Russell, and I met with the Search Committee of the First Congregational church of Wakefield, United Church of Christ. They even had a cake to help celebrate. The committee was chaired by Al Amundsen (Our Pal Al) and had wonderful people representing young and old, people new to the community and long-time residents. I remember saying to Jennifer, as we got into our car and prepared to drive back to Jackman, Maine where we were serving a church as Interim Student Co-Pastors, "This is it!"

Jennifer and I were called as Co-pastors and began our service to the Wakefield church on July 15, 1984. There are too many highlights for a short piece like this, but I will mention a few. We began our ministry at Wakefield each preaching every other week. We attended most meetings together. We officiated at weddings and funeral together. It took us a while to realize this was not fair to the church or us, we began dividing the pastoral duties between the two of us and it worked out better for all.

In 1985 we helped the church celebrate the 200th Anniversary of its founding. Shortly after this we became a sponsoring church to resettle refugees from Cambodia and Ethiopia. The church stepped up to each challenge with spirit and determination. Jennifer and I continued to be nurtured in our ministry by the phenomenal support of energetic and dedicated lay leadership.

In 1988, Jennifer resigned to take on an Interim Ministry in Madbury and then Wolfeboro. We realized it was time for each of us to have more pastoral responsibility and that our covenant with Wakefield was for one full-time pastor until I resigned, effective January 6 (Epiphany) 1991. It was Jennifer's turn to lead our shared ministry and she was soon called to be the first female full-time pastor at the First Church of Christ, UCC in North Conway.

I will speak for myself, but I know Jennifer would agree were she alive. My time at Wakefield is replete with fond and profound memories. My ministry was forged and shaped by the opportunities given to me by church members and friends, community members, and clergy colleagues. I thank God for the honor and privilege of serving the Wakefield Church. In Christian Love, Rev. Dr. Rick Russell

200th Anniversary Celebration May 1985



Rev. Rick Russell Leading Worship



Summer Fair 1990



Rev. Jennifer Russell at Winter Fair 1990



Rev. George Harvey
(1991-1996)

George Harvey attended Bowdoin College and then Andover Newton Theological Seminary. He entered the ministry in 1959 and pastored several churches throughout New England before coming to our church. George still attends our church regularly with his daughter, Faith, and is our Pastor Emeritus. Here are his memories:

“A congregational style of church is remarkable and energizing when it is at its best. Committees meet, discuss, decide and act – all in response to the Holy Spirit and the church moves forward. This is our model, and although we move forward more slowly than we might like, we are responding to God’s presence. That is one of the joys of my ministry in Wakefield.

Here are some memories growing out of our church life during the 1990’s:

- Let’s start with the annual church retreats at Camp Brookwoods. They were both fun and inspirational and some will remember a mounted deer head poking itself up out of a toilet!
- Many will never forget the tiny cramped kitchen from which Parish Helpers reserved all kinds of delicious meals.
- We welcomed snowbirds to worship every spring making for a bigger congregation (and choir!) but, sadly, had to say goodbye again in the fall.
- Pairs and Spares used to hold a roast beef cookout every summer just for members served on the side lawn. About a hundred attended. Tables and chairs were passed out through the windows and meat was roasted on an improvised rotisserie set up in the church driveway.
- Mission outreach became especially real when Pat Amroskie Martin took her nursing skills to the tiny nation of Swaziland as a Christian missionary worker. Our mission awareness grew even more when the UCC Conference established a mission relationship with the UCCZ in Zimbabwe. This was the beginning of an exciting adventure that continues to invigorate our church family. The energy of Connie Littlefield and the Z-Team has inspired us to every-higher levels of enthusiasm and generosity.

- A particularly large change in the life of our church began with a telephone call one summer afternoon. A lawyer in West Virginia called to tell us that the church was the beneficiary of a generous gift through the will of Chesley Paul, Ann Paul Hatch's uncle. The gift led us to an ambitious program of renovation and enlargement of our facilities. The Paul Family Memorial Building for Sunday School classes and a host of other uses was added, an attractive kitchen and dining space was provided, office space was enlarged, and handicapped access was improved.

I will close with a special mention and tribute to Betty Crowe, church secretary and possessor of the best memory of any of us in the church family.

Church Welcomes Rev. George Harvey 1991



Family Retreat 1993



Our Church's Choir at
Faneuil Hall in Boston 1992



NH UCC Annual Meeting 1994



Church Picnic 1994



Rev. Dr. John Tamilio
(1997-2004)

John Tamilio received his undergraduate degree from Salem State College, his master's degree from Northeastern University and then his Master of Divinity Degree from Andover Newton. He came to our church just after his graduation from Andover Newton. At the time of his ministry in Wakefield, he was working on his Doctor of Theology Degree at Boston University. John is a talented musician and nationally published poet. He is presently pastoring a church in Canton, MA. Here are his memories:

There is an indescribable sense of warmth and that fills our sanctuary every time that we gather to hear God's Word and to feast at Christ's table.

The St. Pauli Girl beer had a famous advertisement years ago that included the slogan, "You never forget your first girl" – a play on the adage, "You never forget your first love." As a pastor, you never forget your first church.

I finished teaching a Saturday afternoon literature class at Salem State (then) College and made the hour and a half drive up Routes 95 and 16 to meet the search committee of the First Congregational Church of Wakefield. After seeing the sanctuary, which was confirmation enough, we met at Dr. Leif and Berit Johannessen's home. The smell of the cast iron woodstove provided the perfect ambiance for the gathering: it felt like home – as if I was gathering for dinner with old friends.

My five years in Wakefield were really an extension of that first meeting. From the farm house parsonage, to the streets of the Historic District where I took my children for evening walks, to the hundreds of sermons I preached in the simple yet elegant sanctuary, to the prayers at the bedside of the sick, to the meetings in the basement which eventually switched to the new addition – every aspect of my time as your pastor was a joy.

Countless memories and faces surface when I reflect upon my brief tenure as your minister. I recall sitting in my office with Titia Bozuwa to hear the history of the church – and to read her latest writing project. I vividly remember the enthusiasm of Connie Littlefield as she paved the way for a ministry with our sister church in Zimbabwe. I remember gathering in my living room with a host of regulars as we immersed ourselves in the study of Scripture. I can still hear the creak of the small door between

the choir and the chancel – the door I opened many times as I walked between the tenor section and my ornate chair after Cindy Eggleston accompanied the anthem.

There are two accomplishments that I cherish in particular, goals we achieved together. The addition (the result of a generous endowment and months of planning) is one of them. I stood on a bulldozer after worship one Sunday to offer a blessing as we broke ground. Recently, my wife Cindy and I drove past the church on our way to my parent's camp in Acton, Maine. The chandelier of the foyer, that can be seen from the front window, brought me back to that day.

One day I received a manila envelope in the mail from a church in Prairie Village, Kansas. To this day, I regret opening it. Suffice it to say, it came towards the end of our Open and Affirming process. We took the vote to become an ONA congregation the Sunday before my last day. That was over thirteen years ago. We were on the cutting edge of social change!

I cherish my time as Pastor of the First Congregational Church of Wakefield. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, "I thank my God every time I remember you" (1:3, NIV).

Wishing you our gracious God's – Peace & Blessings, The Rev. Dr. John Tamilio III

Rev. John Tamilio Leading Worship 1999



Dedication of Church Addition June 2007



Rev. Mary James
(2007 – Present)

What a privilege it has been to serve as Pastor to our beloved church! Prior to receiving the call to serve in Wakefield, I'd heard wonderful things about this congregation. At the time, I was serving as the Director of Spiritual Care at Portsmouth Regional Hospital, and I had begun to miss the parish setting. I remember saying to my husband, "When I return to parish ministry, I hope it will be at a church like that one in Wakefield people speak of so highly." How fortunate I feel that this is indeed what came about!

I came into ministry as a second career, having first earned a graduate degree in counseling and worked in the fields of education and social work for twenty-two years. My husband Bob and I were involved with our local UCC congregation in Amherst, Massachusetts when I experienced a call to ministry. I initiated my studies at Andover Newton Theological School in the fall of 1988, and it was quite a juggling act to complete my degree work in May of 1996, having done so as a working, commuting parent. During this time, we moved to Durham (NH) and had our third child. I was overjoyed to graduate with honors and as a member of the Jonathan Edwards Society, an academic honors group. My ordination into ministry took place at the Community Church of Durham (NH), UCC, on March 29th, 1997. My first call was to serve as Pastor to the Salisbury (NH) Congregational Community Church, UCC; I then served in the chaplaincy role mentioned above and am now approaching the twelfth anniversary as the Pastor in Wakefield, where I started on January 3, 2007.

There are several remarkable things about our congregation! I would list them as an exuberant and palpable love of God and neighbor, generosity, flexibility, a willingness to try new things, empowered lay leadership, and possession of a faithfully adventurous spirit. Delightful humor and appropriate *gravitas* co-exist in balance; congregation members warmly care for and help one another. There is strong commitment to serve in God's love in the community and wider world. All who encounter our church in any setting are welcomed and addressed with kindness, for we know that each encounter holds the possibility of conveying God's love.

Over the course of our journey together as minister and congregation, we have covered a lot of holy ground. We have worked hard to keep the church vital and strong; to do so, we have actively sought to answer the question of where God calls us to focus in this time and place. Exploring a variety of approaches in worship, including chancel dramas, the use of decorative and visual arts, dance, intergenerational worship and welcoming "child-space" in worship, and the encouragement of lay preaching, we find that a sweet, sweet Spirit is expressed in this place! Having recently acquired the New Century Hymnal, we are making new discoveries in it all the time.

In church life, it is necessary to attend to the profound and the prosaic to strengthen the work of the church. We have renewed our Mission and Vision Statements. We have updated our organizational structure and made sure it is defined in such a way that it can nimbly change as conditions summon. The shift of our nomenclature from “committee” to “ministry” and of our meeting process from parliamentarian to that of discernment and consensus-building demonstrate our desire to put God and a prayerful spirit at the core of our shared endeavors. We continually strive to update policies and procedures as necessary. Budgetary literacy and stewardship awareness are growing; we no longer end the fiscal year “in the red.” Carrying out the first completed capital campaign in the church’s history, we have had the opportunity to make many needed improvements in the lovely building we maintain – and which we seek to share more widely for community use.

Our welcoming of children and young people, and our skill at integrating them into the life of the church continues to be strong; each child is precious to us. How wonderful it was to welcome 35 children to Music Camp this summer! Our 24 volunteers did a wonderful job combining teaching about the miracles of Jesus with many forms of musical learning and expression. It is thrilling to welcome the Hazel MacBrien Nursery School to make its home in our large classroom; we hope it will be a fruitful partnership.

Our historic women’s group is thriving! The Parish Helpers continue to grow in number and to do their widespread benevolent work. Our Wakefield Men’s Fellowship has sprouted up just recently, bursting onto the scene in strong numbers and enthusiasm, offering itself in service in a variety of ways in church and community life.

The use of social media to share the good news of God’s love has been expanded in this time. Our website, entirely volunteer run, is attractive and informative, with links to our YouTube channel, allowing the viewing of worship services at any time. We have created Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts for the church, and use online tools for information sharing and discussion. I have developed an online devotional “chapel” using Facebook called “Wakefield Wonder and Grace.” Our Sound Team is exploring all the uses of our new audio-visual system, creating fresh possibilities for the use of audio-visual media in worship and educational settings.

Reaching out robustly, we have devoted 10% of our capital campaign proceeds to contracting with the New Hampshire Coalition to End Homelessness to conduct a thorough needs assessment in Wakefield. This is the first step in creating a program to address homelessness. Our church has led the way in collaboration for the greater community good, establishing strong partnerships with service providers in the community and among the churches. We assist many in need with the Feddern-Diaconate Discretionary Fund, and our work as the point of intake, application, and fund disbursement for the George A. Wentworth Fund has made it possible for this previously underutilized resource for women in need to receive significant aid in hard times.

A most exciting recent development has been our engagement of a Vitality Coach, the Rev. Paul Nickerson, who has taught us crucial lessons for thriving as the church in this time. With Paul's insightful coaching, we have seen first-hand how a proactive, outreaching, community-involved stance transforms and strengthens the church. We now work on outreaching approaches from all our ministries, getting ever more "outside the castle" (as Paul puts it), and are increasingly intertwined with the community. The many new faces we have seen as a result are testimony to the joy and effectiveness of this approach in bringing out to the community God's word of hope, grace, and love. God's presence is felt so fully in our worship, our work, and our play as a community. One cannot help but feel the warmth and love of this congregation. May it ever be so!

Rev. Mary James Leading Worship



Wakefield Pride Day



Summer Music Camp



Free Lemonade Saturdays



Current Church Groups

Parish Helpers

Parish Helpers is a vital and active women's group which was first organized in 1857 and known then as the Ladies Sewing Circle. In 1899 the name was changed to Parish Helpers and it was incorporated as a separate entity. Membership in this organization is open to all women in the community.

They meet about once a month where there is coffee and dessert followed by devotions, a business meeting and a program. The meetings provide an opportunity for all to enjoy the congenial company of the members. Annual events include a luncheon in May, a picnic in July, a fair in August, and a Christmas party in December. About once a year there is also a "Field Trip" to an interesting local attraction. During the summer they operate a thrift store called the Treasure Shop. The money earned from the Village Fair and Treasure shop is donated to our church and many local organizations or causes. In an age when active church women's groups are rare, this group is still going strong averaging about 25 members every time they gather.



Wakefield Men's Fellowship

This group was formed in 2017 and is open to all men in the area who are interested in helping local people and our church. They have already hosted coffee hours, put flags on the graves of veterans, helped the Sunday School children make bird houses and worked to prepare Horton Center for summer visitors.

Pairs and Spares

Couples and those without spouses meet once a month to enjoy a pot lunch supper and enjoy each other's company. It started in 1952 and evolved into a very structured group with officers and organized programs. Over time membership declined and now it is strictly an unstructured social club.

Music Groups

There is a love of music in our church. We have a voice choir, a bell choir and a String Band. The bell choir plays during worship and offers a Christmas concert which draws large crowds from the community. The String Band meets once a week to just jam.

String Band Session



Bell Choir



Other Groups

Other groups that regularly meet include the Prayer Shawl Ministry, the Scrabble Group, the Bereavement Support Group, the Spirit of the Lakes and the Bible Study.

These groups all provide the friendship, support, healing and spiritual development and community outreach needed in a church.

Prayer Shawl Group Blessing



Memories of Long-Term Members

Ann Bilodeau

My first memory is going to Sunday School in the summers during the early 50's. Dr. Louise Paul would pick us up at the end of our camp road.

When my parents moved to Wakefield in 1974, my mother became a member of the First Congregational Church of Wakefield. She became involved in many of the groups of the church. I always heard about the caring folks there.

My father's funeral was held here in 1975. Rev. Esther Vodola was the pastor at that time.

When my mother became ill in 1985, she came to live with us in Somersworth. Every week without fail members of the FCCW came to visit her bringing communion and offering her prayers and love. This outpouring of love made my family very happy knowing how much she was cared for. My mother passed away in 1986 and her church family was there to help us all.

I moved to Wakefield in 1987 and immediately came to the FCCW. It was like coming home. Four of my grandchildren were baptized in this church. I became involved in the choir, Parish Helpers and many other areas of church life.

The biggest gift for me was being able to become part of the Zimbabwe team and going to Africa to visit our sister church in Birchenough Bridge and helping to the support the education of their children. The FCCW has been and will always be one of the best things in my life. It is a loving family made up of many, many people.

Titia Bozuwa

My husband and I moved into the "Roberts' Place" across from the Wakefield Congregational Church in 1958, a month after it was rebuilt from the devastating fire, thus my memories go back to the time before 1985, and it is hard to separate those early years from the years that followed. It is particularly hard, because of what happened in 1984. That's when a young couple, fresh from seminary, came to town: Rick and Jennifer Russell. They were our new pastors, and they were new in many ways. By then I had been part of our church for 26 years.

Our church was typical small-town New Hampshire, dominated by a few strong and prominent citizens, who pretty much did all the heavy lifting and decision-making. The ship of faith had been rocked in the early fifties by a vote to become part of the UCC. A few that didn't agree with that decision had left. But when disaster hit and the church burned down, there was great strength to rebuild and move on. The sixties with its hippies and anti-authoritarianism went practically unnoticed in this town and didn't have an impact on the congregants' Christian outlook on life. The seventies were more exciting with a beloved female minister, followed by a controversial minister, who was asked to leave.

In my mind, 1984 was an important year for the church, because Rick and Jennifer very quickly saw that the affairs of the church were in too few hands. With their insight and guidance, the by-laws were changed. New committees were formed. More people became involved with running "our" church. Even though the founding fathers had modeled the governing structure on democratic ideals, some of those had eroded. The reins were in the hands of a few.

I should add that by the early 1980's the church had seen a recent influx of younger couples that lived here year-around and found work in the area. People like Margie Galabrun, Harriet Wilson, Connie Littlefield, Jo Szirbik, to just name a few, were the new life blood of the congregation. They brought young children and new ideas and energy. With young ministers and new blood the life of the church became more vibrant. I have good memories of a church weekend in Maine where new and old got to know each other.

Rick and Jennifer also strove to make more women part of the church's leadership. After moderator Sam Paul died, they pushed for a woman to take his place. It was the start of domination in church committees by women. Look around the church of today and you can see that this has been a lasting shift.

Rick and especially Jennifer made us aware of refugees. At that time, they came from Cambodia. They pushed the congregation to adopt some of these stranded people. It didn't go over well with some people, and they turned in their membership. But it was an eye-opening experience. We learned to look beyond our own tight-knit community, and out of this focus came our commitment of support for Zimbabwe. Connie Littlefield is a good example of someone whose future was definitely shaped by this aspect of Rick and Jennifer's pastorate.

The eighties were also significant on a personal level. Our 29-year-old daughter passed away. It was a time in which my family felt carried by the compassion of not only Rick and Jennifer, but by the whole congregation. Having no family in this country, the church became our family, and I will never forget those days in which we learned what Christian love means. That sad episode was thirty years ago.

Since then, we've had the pastorates of Rev. George Harvey, John Tamilio and now Mary James, and in between we had some fine interim ministers like Rev. Pirie and Peter Foss. It was — and still is — a period in which the church emphasized social issues that dominated that era in our country and the wider world. The first thorny issue we tackled was the acceptance of minorities. Slowly but surely, our pastors led us to a vote for Open and Affirmed. Again, this controversial subject caused some members to leave our church. Each time we're confronted with applying what the Bible teaches us, it deepens our Christian faith. As members, we're forced to take a stand, and go deep into our beliefs. We are constantly challenged to be who we profess to be.

With the ministry of Rev. Mary James, we're asked to reach out to the wider community, to honor equality, to make people feel welcome and not in a superficial way. We are not an island unto ourselves. The response to this view has been that we see new faces in our pews, but aside from a growth in our membership, we have involved ourselves in local issues of importance, like homelessness. Rev. Mary's guidance is compassionate.

In this secular age in which parents and children are engaged in more worldly activities on Sundays, like sports, the traditional Sunday school has suffered. It is a trend that is not easy to reverse, but some progress is made by perseverance.

I have learned a lot of my association with the Wakefield Congregational Church. It has forced me many times to look in the mirror and wonder if I really lived up to my professed faith. The sermons, the Christian Education, the votes that need to be taken, the mingling with people I might not otherwise meet, all of that and more challenges me to be a better person. Having been part of the leadership at times gave me the opportunity to grow, to be confident in public speaking, to learn the ways of democratic rule, how to find consensus...all these things we are confronted with in daily life play themselves out in church life.

All in all, I feel blessed to be a member of this church community.

Margie Galabrun

Today we were driving our too large rental car through a village with too small roads gingerly picking our way along. There are several rotaries along the way and, inexplicably, none of them have the same rules of priority. Upon entering one particular rotary, we were confronted by a very aggressive young driver who, even though we engaged the rotary before he did, determined we had wronged him. It wasn't enough for him to blare his horn, he also had to follow us for some distance continuing to blare his horn.

What's this got to do with church? After he finally passed us so filled with rage, my church and my church family were the first things that came to mind, and I was filled with emotion. I was very grateful (thank you is always a great prayer), but I was also filled with sadness for people who don't have the same in their lives. It doesn't matter the country, we now live in a world with an increasingly angry population, and too few have been given the same gift of church that I have.

I'm so grateful for generations past who have carried forward our ever-evolving faith community, and I keenly feel my responsibility to continue our church into the future. This church has enabled me to grow as an individual. This church is where we raised our children to see and act on issues of injustice. This church is where I have been

taught to listen more and speak with greater love. (OK, that one doesn't always work.) This church is where my church family discusses values and learns behaviors based on the teachings of Christ. This church is where I will hopefully become equipped with appropriate strategies so to enable me to act in society in a way that would be pleasing to God.

So, I guess that's why, even when I'm on vacation supposedly taking a sabbatical from all the busyness of church life, I'm still constantly thinking about my church. It's become so important to me that I carry it everywhere I go.

Praise be!

Dave & Ginny Schweitzer

Dave and Ginny are Wisconsin natives growing up amid strong family and organized church traditions. We are both caregivers and enjoy being involved with our community and the churches where we were members.

We have been best friends for over 60 years having been high school and college sweethearts for 9 years before being married 52 years ago.

Ginny was an elementary school teacher and Dave a career IBMer who was transferred to its corporate headquarters in Armonk, NY in 1974. We bought a home in Ridgefield, CT where Ginny became a stay at home mom when our four children began arriving.

Since we grew up enjoying lake vacations in Wisconsin we began vacationing on the lakes of Wakefield beginning in 1974. Our retirement dream was to retire in a lakefront setting which we did when Dave retired in 2002 and we built our retirement home on Pine River Pond in Wakefield.

After visiting a number of the churches of Wakefield, we found the FCCW a most welcoming church and joined it in 2004 while Pastor John Tamilio was finishing his ministry at FCCW. In 2005 we lost our 34 year-old daughter Amy and with the help of our FCCW church family around us as, we grieved we experienced the church family love surrounding us to help us greatly weather our loss.

Pastor Mary James was called to lead our church after John Tamilio moved onto another church and her Pastoral leadership has resulted in a church family that has grown spiritually and ministerially through outreach ministries in our Wakefield community and with our sister church in Rufimiso Zimbabwe. We have become deeper involved in lay leadership during this time. Pastor Mary's ministry has resulted in a FCCW community that is learning to grow and minister to each other and within our

wider community that resolves differences of opinion by open and caring communications without interpersonal conflict. We find this attribute of FCCW the most important fulfilling component of our church community.

The church decided to bring in a UCC growth consultant named Paul Nickerson with deep experience ministering to many churches as both Pastor and Coach . This has resulted in the creation of a FCCW Vitality Team that has begun a new outreach ministry both inside and in our greater Wakefield community that has revitalized our church family and role in our local and world communities.

We look forward to continuous growth personally and within our caring FCCW church family.

Sermon by Max Gehring
(College Student)

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O God.

“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,...

God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;

God will help it when the morning dawns.”

What is significant about being a part of the United Church of Christ?

For much of my youth, I have asked myself, “Why do you go to church? Why does it matter?” From my grade school days to my confirmation around age thirteen to the end of high school, it was a question which I did not have an answer for, and was often asked with some ill will. Whatever answers there were, however, the common response I took was just to attend church when it was asked of me or when it seemed appropriate. I admit that, at the time of my confirmation, I was in a constant state of frustration and hardship, and I thought little of why I was affirming myself with the UCC, other than it seemed to be expected of me. After my confirmation, I unintentionally waited to become a regular participant of this church until the year after my Freshman year of college. I had taken the year off from classes, having many questions and harsh feelings, but I did find an answer to that old question from earlier; this church matters to me, and it matters to me because I am welcomed here by it, by its people. Not only am I accepted into this church body, but anyone is, regardless of any perceived difference of that individual. Acceptance, especially self-acceptance, is a lesson I have learned only just recently and which I have yet to fully indulge, one-hundred percent. Throughout much of my youth, I have had trouble accepting myself and my life experiences as they are; therefore, my younger self found it uncomfortable to even take a single step into a community where everything about myself was

accepted and affirmed. Church matters to me because I matter to the church and I go to church because the church will always come to me.

My experiences in Baltimore significantly reinforced my belief in belonging with the UCC. Amongst all approximately seven hundred delegates from churches all over the United States and nearly three thousand individual visitors from across the Earth, no one person was shunned by the church body. Every voice was invited to speak. Every person was welcome at the table. No one was turned away. At General Synod, I saw God taking all beings in to this refuge of Theirs, with Love and open arms.

Now, three thousand people! Not only is this an incomprehensible number of persons, but it is also a kaleidoscope of diversity, with every little shape in the kaleidoscope reflecting a different wavelength, a different sensation, of light. From the individuals I met and spoke with to the speakers who stood before we spirited masses, I witnessed so many different cultures, abilities and disabilities, languages, life stories, genders, nationalities, and ethnicities – I witnessed the whole spectrum of human expression in that six-day timeframe. When we all were brought together to do business in this multifaceted setting, everyone could share without fear of being injured, discriminated, or persecuted. It was, to me, a glimpse of Heaven on Earth; the city of God, which is gladdened by the flowing river.

While there is so much diversity within the UCC, it can be easily believed and perceived that a significant part of the church's body contains white individuals. I often heard, from speakers and fellow visitors alike, that the church was founded in 1957 primarily by light-skinned folks. It was also said the church has diversified since then, but still has a "long way to go." In a day of growing separation, tribalism, and exclusive tendencies, the message that our church is primarily an open and affirming church, and looks to welcome all representations of life, matters.

It can be difficult, sometimes, to find these culturally diverse souls in our local communities. Even more difficult, once they are found, is to get them to visit and attend

church events. So many people have been scorned or attacked by church bodies over recent years. It is an important time for our church to be open and affirming, but we must do more, to make all people feel welcome. More outreach is necessary, I think, to tell individuals that they have a place where they belong here. I have met several people, within these past few months, who face much adversity within their community, within their own homes. It takes more than calling ourselves open and affirming and flying a rainbow flag outside to attract these individuals; we must engage the community and these individuals and consistently pronounce our accepting ways. Express our compassion and Love to all persons, not only within the confines of this church building, but out in the community. We must walk with the grace and humility that Jesus walked with. This behavior was often exhibited at General Synod.

A man, one day, came up to me on the sidewalk and engaged in asking me for directions. I told him I was not a Baltimore native, and he seemed to relax once I said so. He told me he was down on his luck; he had just recently been robbed and did not have the access to transportation to get home and had been sleeping outside for the past few nights. He asked if I was part of a convention, which I had no choice but to say, "Yes, I am" as I wore the credentials on me. He said the people of the conventions were so nice and compassionate, but the people of Baltimore itself barely gave him any notice. Indeed, just in the few blocks encompassing my hotel, I saw many individuals who seemed to be homeless or living in poverty. The first day I was there, a young lady walked up to me and asked me for money, just to buy fries from a nearby McDonald's. I often walked the sidewalks and saw people with all their possessions among them, or sleeping in the middle of the day on a stoop. And this man that I crossed paths with told me that the denizens of Baltimore had little to no time for anyone living on the streets, even a man who lost his wallet just a few days ago and only asked for someone to listen and some money to get him home.

Of course, I did recognize, after the fact, that this man may have construed this elaborate plan to get money for other purposes than what he said. But, from my

experiences in this church and in life, I doubt and mistrust people less and less. I accept them for how they express themselves to me, through our interactions. It is not my place to decide whether someone is telling their true story – it is their story, regardless of any perceived truth. They are coming to me to be, at the very least, heard and recognized for their humanity. And I refuse to deny them that, so I listen to them. Often times, I recognize that I do not have as much need as they do, so I give to them some sort of material or good. Sorry, Mom. I know I have many expenses, but I know that I have a job, where I earn my own income, and a community that can provide for me, so long as I ask. Some people do not have those luxuries, those privileges. I provide these people some reassurance in God and in our church, that we will be there for them. I go to church because the church will always come to me.

As a delegate, you are placed on a committee that faces a resolution presented to the church, via the General Synod. As the resolution is presented to the committee, the committee must work together to come to one of three conclusions: pass the resolution, as presented to the committee, to the General Synod; amend and pass the resolution to the Synod or; decline to pass the resolution. This year, no resolutions were declined to be passed on, for each committee, either as whole or a majority, believed in the message of their resolution. All resolutions were amended, but not to restrict or to lessen the message or call within the resolution; in most cases, the language was made more concise and clear, so there would be less of a chance for one to misunderstand the point.

All resolutions brought to the Synod totaled sixteen resolutions. Out of the sixteen, twelve were focused on inclusion and dialogue among parties within and without the church; these resolutions encourage communication about and with minority groups throughout the world and the suffering that they endure. One resolution calls the UCC to apply pressure to the Israeli government to humanely treat Palestinian children. Another requests the church and its members to support a national living wage, starting at \$15 per hour. A third calls the church to be welcoming and inviting toward all immigrants. A fourth resolution asks the church to witness and

support those living with disabilities by listening to their stories and supporting national and state legislature that directly gives aid to such members of society. There are eight more resolutions, just like these, that aim to lift, give aid, and support certain groups of people who are persecuted and subjected to harsh realities. This matters so much to me and the humanitarian ideals that I believe in.

From one perspective, these resolutions mirror our own congregation's outreach, not only to people within our hometown and local community, but to people across the world. Years ago, we began with a goal, perhaps a call from God, in our collective mind - let us help the people in Zimbabwe. Everyone may have not been ready and willing to provide, but those who could, did. With effort and care, this call has turned into a mission that is fulfilled, often on a yearly basis. We have exchanged emissaries with Zimbabwe, in the form of Connie Littlefield, the visiting Z-Team, and welcoming Zimbabwe pastors into our home. We provide goods and services to Zimbabweans in need. We listen to their plight and extend what Love we have. With our utter abundance of wealth and materials, we give to others in Zimbabwe and across the world so that we may receive Love and Grace. Our one, single, individual church in Wakefield, New Hampshire. We heard the calls and answered it; perhaps, not at the same time, but we do what we can, when we can. We are part of that river, the river whose streams make glad the city of God. The movements, started in the General Synod, are only springs and sources of streams that have yet to, but will, merge with the river and be one; as a vital motto for the UCC says, "That They All May Be One."

In this gathering, both at General Synod and within my hometown, I have witnessed both the city of God and the river that feeds it. God shows Their being in all those present, while the streams flows with the thoughts, words, and actions of every individual. Whether it be several thousand people who attended the General Synod or the couple hundred who support our First Congregation Church of Wakefield, we gather to meet and experience God. This is the covenant, the body, of Christ. Not only am I one out of a million members of the international UCC, but I am also one out the

several scores of individuals who participate in our church community. The way our small congregation has helped others, has provided me with aid, and compassion, and Love. It has built me up and continues to build me up and reinforce my eagerness to give, so that I may receive Love. Not just Mine, but Our Church, Our God, provides for all of us. It might be in a funny way, or a deeply troubling way, but we are given, what we need and we recognize is it comes from God, and our community under God. This is what matters to me.

Zimbabwe Partnership Retrospective by Connie Littlefield

FCCW began a partnership with a church at Birchenough Bridge, Zimbabwe known as Rufumiso UCCZ in May 1997. We began with letter writing, Zimbabwean style dinners, and guest speakers as a way to get to know our new friends.

Over time FCCW commissioned travelers to Zimbabwe in 2005, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016. (One stayed on a semi-permanent basis beginning in 2014!) Over the years the travelers helped rebuild the church at Rufumiso including interior and exterior painting, began work on the Rufumiso parsonage, repaired an ECD classroom at nearby Goko Primary and painted the headmaster's office, provided school fees for more than 50 children at Rufumiso, renovated seven classrooms at Dzika Primary and erected a playground there, brought electricity into Dzika Village, provided goats for child empowerment (the original 25 expanded to 85 beneficiaries), repaired one well and drilled a new borehole at Dzika which is now used by three villages while first clearing a road so that drilling equipment could reach Dzika. Our Zimbabwe Team installed a cement floor at Southdown UCCZ, assisted with the construction of a home in Rimbi, completed the playground at the Daisy Dube Children's Home, provided food, clothing, athletic equipment, bicycles and more for the children there. We have provided school, medical, and athletic supplies, clothing, tools, bicycles, sewing machines and more via annual shipping containers since 2007. We began sponsoring a few children in 2009; our sponsored children now number 35.

We are in the process of building a medical clinic in Humani and establishing a borehole in Angus Village. We have a reusable sanitary pad project in the works so that young girls can remain in school and make small interest free micro finance loans available for income-generating projects. We will soon distribute Hipporollers, a very efficient way for villagers

to gather water. The renovation of an ECD classroom (roof, floor, windows) will also soon be underway. We have a vision of a mobile medical unit to prevent the ill from walking 30 or more miles to access medical care.

Most importantly we have established and nurtured significant relationships with our extended Zimbabwean family, sharing in one another's joys and sorrows and learning what it means to live a life of faith in unbelievably challenging circumstances.

Other trivia: We have had 27 travelers but some of us are duplicates, so this number is representative of 14 different travelers!

In addition to the service auctions, our early fundraisers were mystery dinner theater and variety show events held in the Fellowship Hall. So much work! We later opted for the pancake breakfasts beginning in 2010.

Friends of Orphan Trust (FOOT) Program



Visit from Rev. Mutzumbei & Rev. Mururu from Zimbabwe



Blessing Zimbabwe Travelers



Pancake Breakfast for Zimbabwe



Collecting Goods for Zimbabwe



Historical Timeline of Spiritual Gifts, Calling & Discernment & Church Structure

- 2009- 2011** Church Re-organization Committee studied re-organizing how we “do church” (8-10 people)
- Fall 2009** Jan Fairchild led study of book, *Deep and Wide: Hospitality and The Faithful Church*. 18 Participants introduced Spiritual Gift Inventories. Experience led to offering SG Inventories to More small groups and presentations at Cottage Meetings.
- _____ Cottage Meetings
- 2011** First Ministry Fair (Posters & Sticky notes in Sanctuary)
- 2012** Second Ministry Fair (Repeat Posters & substituted sign-up cards for sticky notes)
- 2013** Third Ministry Fair - Booths downstairs for each Ministry, designed/led by Coordinators
- 2014** Fourth Ministry Fair - Paper only, descriptions and sign up cards available for a month, Coordinators shared info during worship “Ministry Minutes”

- 2015** Fifth Ministry Fair - Modified booths/ co-ordinator led
- 2016** Sixth Ministry Fair - Paper only, Matrix introduced with Ministry descriptions and sign-up sheets (email & church postings)
- 2017** Seventh Ministry Fair - Friday Night Supper, Coordinators moved among tables discussing their Ministries; Sign up encouraged.

Major Initial Changes: Committees to Ministries;

Nominating Committee to Calling & Discernment

Emphasis on Spiritual Gifts, Call, Passion and Time

Available to serve.

Focus on Mission & Vision of the Congregation.

Changes in Structure over these years. (See charts)

Some groups added, some deleted/renamed or combined.

(ex. Outreach and Wider Church had been separate committees -
became one Ministry)

Resistance: to name changes i.e. Ministry.

Challenges: Finding Coordinators and instilling idea that Coordinator is named to "Coordinate" or be "point person" --- not do all the work.

Structure assigns great freedom and fluidity to Coordinators and Ministry teams. Encouraged to meet as necessary and communicate their work to everyone and be informed of how their work can complement & be complemented by that of other Ministries. Communication continues to challenge --- even as greater communication is available: Web page, FB Team Synergy Page, All Church and All Leaders emails.

Prepared to Serve Presentations:

1) 2012 Presentation. By Mary James, Donna Ackerman, George Ackerman, Margie Galabrun and Jan Fairchild

Workshop ID #	Workshop Title and Presenter Name	E	G	NI
E51	Unleashing Spiritual Gifts with New Structure (Mary James)	9	1	

This is so needed to look at for churches to be viable into the future

A challenge to work through a similar plan completely, some good ideas for smaller churches

Great presenters, great info, great hand-outs; this workshop was the “wow factor” for me. It ran only 1 hour, and it could have gone for 2 to 3 more. Please, again next year and give us an update on this church.

Thoughtful, detailed, well-organized.

Cannot say enough about this learning experience. Please offer again for others. Offer a separate workshop at the Conference Center.

This topic may have been better suited for a 1 ½ hour slot instead of one hour slot

I presented with this group, I great appreciated the dialogue that resulted.

Fantastic presentation by the whole team! They really embodied the kind of process that shows great promise for them and for other churches; must have a one-year-later follow-up from these folks!

2) 2013 Presentation. By Mary James, Margie Galabrun and Jan Fairchild

“Progress Report: Second Year of Unleashing Spiritual Gifts with New Structure”

Enthusiastic responses led to requests/presentations to three churches:

1) Lee 2) Meriden and 3) Durham (also preached)

Timeline Reflecting Transitions, Initiatives, Outreach & Unexpected Donations

1984-89

New co-pastors Reverends Rick & Jennifer Russell

200th Anniversary Celebration

Church Library created

Shepherd Program initiated

Cambodian Refugee family sponsored by church arrives in Wakefield

Handbell Choir Formed

Handicapped Ramp Installed

Russell family takes sabbatical leave to India and Nepal

Ellen Lankhorst recommended for "in-care" status while attending Bangor Theological Seminary

1990's

Junior Bell Choir initiated

Justice & Peace committee formed to educate congregation on these issues

Rev. Ben Andrews interim pastor

Conflict Resolution Worship

Rev. George Harvey welcomed to church

Church has Service of Commission for Pat Amroski who decided to be a medical missionary in Swaziland in Africa

Ordination of church member, Ellen Lankhorst

Received \$290,000 from Chesley Paul Family estate

Received Citation of Recognition from NH Conference of the UCC

Memorial Gifts Committee formed to recommend church gifts

Pam Amroski welcomed home from Zwaziland

Rev. Pirie begins as our interim pastor.

Donation of over \$7,500 from Ninis Lamb's estate. She was not a member but did feel a connection to our congregation.

Three children from our congregation help rebuild burned churches.

Information session held on the UCC partnership between the UCC and Zimbabwe by Rev. Ben Crosby.

Family Sundays begin.

The congregation makes connections to Zimbabwe through letter writing, having a church supper serving African food and buying books and music about Africa for our church library.

Rev. John Tamilio, who was in his last year of seminary, was selected as our next pastor.

2000-Present

Diaconate initiates communion visits to shut-ins

Congregation approves spending on new addition

Pastoral Relations Committee formed to support and maintain better relationships between the pastor and the congregation.

SteepleViews begins monthly publication.

Church's new addition is completed

\$5,000 donation received from Ginny Wentworth for final landscaping and new church sign.

Position of "Pastor Emeritus" established and Rev. Esther Vodola and Rev. George Harvey installed to this position.

Church supports Wakefield Ecumenical Youth Group

Human Resources Committee established to write job descriptions, establish personnel policies and do performance reviews for church employees.

Church becomes an Open and Affirming congregation and by-laws changes to reflect this position.

Rev. Dr. Peter Foss becomes interim pastor

Capital Campaign Committee formed to raise money for the renovation of the sanctuary.

Rev. Mary James becomes our pastor

Parish Helpers donates \$20,000 to Capital Campaign.

City Reach intergenerational mission trip to Boston to help the homeless

Parsonage is repaired and then sold to David & Jan Fairchild.

Vacation Bible School started.

Parish Helpers donates new carpeting to sanctuary.

Church celebrates its 225th Anniversary in September of 2010.

First same gender marriage ceremony performed.

Angels and Mortals Christmas tradition begins. Angels offer secret presents and greetings to mortals. All participants are both angels and mortals.

Visit from Zimbabwe pastor Joseph Zibga.

Handicapped pews installed in sanctuary.

Jan Fairchild, a retired pastor, helps us begin to identify spiritual gifts of members to help them determine how to serve the church.

Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual written and adopted.

New church organizational structure formed based on the determination of spiritual gifts.

Brought in financial consultant, Tim Scott, to advise us on a Capital Campaign fund raising effort.

Host seminary student, Maureen Steer, from Bangor Theological Seminary.

Rev. Mary James on sabbatical leave for a few months and Rev. Albert Mhururu from UCC in Zimbabwe serves as pastor during this leave.

25th Anniversary of Bell Choir

Connie Littlefield begins missionary work in Zimbabwe.

Bereavement Support Group formed.

SteepleViews is e-mailed, weekly news is e-mailed, and church develops Facebook pages and website.

New audio-visual equipment installed for use during church services.

Hired church growth consultant, Paul Nickerson, to guide us in community outreach.

Church membership extended to Interfaith (Jewish) Members.