

**The First Congregational Church of Wakefield, New
Hampshire**

United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Church

Gathered and established September 22, 1785



Constitution and Bylaws

**The bylaws of the First Congregational Church of Wakefield, United Church of
Christ, are meant to reflect a structure that is fluid and changeable as times
call for change.**

**As Amended and Approved by the Congregation, June 14, 2015, June 25, 2017,
October 28, 2018, August 11, 2019, and November 12, 2023**

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Article I. Name

The name of this Church shall be The First Congregational Church of Wakefield, New Hampshire. (Our incorporation number is 60525.)

Article II. Faith and Covenant

Section I. Statement of Faith

This Statement of Faith is not a test, but an expression of the spirit in which the Church interprets the Word of God.

We believe in you, O God, eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we testify:

You call the worlds into being, create persons in Your own image, and set before each one the ways of life and death;

You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin;

You judge people and nations by Your righteous will, declared through prophets and apostles;

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, You have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death, and reconciling the world to Yourself;

You bestow upon us Your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races;

You call us into Your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be Your servants in the service of others, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at His table, to join Him in His passion and victory;

You promise to all who trust You forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, Your presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in Your realm which has no end. Blessing and honor, glory, and power be unto You. Amen.

Section 2. Covenant of the Congregation

We covenant with one another to seek and respond to the Word and the Will of God. Our purpose is to walk together in the ways of the Lord, made known and to be made known to us. We hold it to be the mission of the Church to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in all the world, while worshipping God, and striving for truth, justice, and peace. As did our forebears, we depend on the Holy Spirit to lead and empower us. We pray for the coming of the realm of God, and we look with faith toward the triumph of righteousness and eternal life.

Section 3. Inclusivity

“The first {commandment} is this . . . ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’. There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Mark 12: 30 -31 Holy Bible New Revised Standard Version

The First Congregational Church of Wakefield is an Open and Affirming Congregation. We celebrate the diversity of our membership and affirm that every person is a unique creation made in God's image. We invite all persons to join in the full ministry of this Church and to share in its joys, privileges, and responsibilities. We embrace diversity in race, gender, ability, age, spiritual belief, economic status, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, and sexual identity or orientation, and we celebrate human relationships that are based on love, responsibility, mutual respect, and trust.

Section 4. Mission

Hearing God's Call. Growing in Love and Care.

Section 5. Vision

We believe that God is calling us to do serious leadership development work among lay members, in order for us to walk together in faith with a strong core of spiritually formed persons with leadership gifts, potential, and experience.

We believe that God is calling us to make a shift from the attitude of paying dues/taking collection to that of learning the deeper meaning of intentional giving, offering, and stewardship as the spiritual practice of growing in generosity.

We believe that God has called us, in a fully dimensional open and affirming way, to deepen our practice of children, youth, and adult Christian formation in order to provide opportunities for growth in faith, both to those who are new to the First Congregational Church of Wakefield, New Hampshire, United Church of Christ, and those who have been involved over time.

We believe that God is calling us to many forms of service and outreach, and the practice of radical hospitality in the spirit of Christ; we therefore seek to grow as faithful servants, reaching out in service and love to one another and to people beyond our congregation in the wider world.

Article III. Polity (Organization)

Section 1. Entrustment of Governance

The government of this Church is vested in its Members and recognizes no head but Christ. As an incorporated body under the laws of the State of New Hampshire, this Church is competent to hold title to its own property and manage its own business affairs, and will undertake to do so without the intervention or assistance of any other entity.

Section 2. Autonomy and Association

We believe in the freedom and the responsibility of the individual, and the right of private judgment. We hold to the autonomy of the local church and its independence of all ecclesiastical control. We cherish the fellowship of the churches united in Associations, the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ, and the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, and we value their counsel and cooperation in

matters of common concern. We gladly acknowledge our membership in the Carroll–Strafford Association of the United Church of Christ.

Section 3. Church Unity

While affirming the liberty of our churches, and the validity of our ministry, we hold to the unity and catholicity of the Church of Christ, and will unite with all its branches in hearty cooperation. We will earnestly seek, so far as in us lies, that the prayer of our Lord for His disciples may be answered, “that they may be one.”

Section 4. Institutional Commitments

We agree to maintain the institutions of the Gospel, to submit ourselves to the orderly administration of the affairs of the Church, and to walk together in love.

Article IV. Meetings for Worship

Section 1: Worship Services

Worship services will normally be held on the Lord’s Day. Special services may be held as determined by the Diaconate in consultation with the Pastor.

Section 2: The Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper will be celebrated at such regular dates as the Diaconate may from time to time determine and, unless otherwise ordered, upon the first Lord’s Day of each month.

Article V: Church Membership

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12: 4-7 Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version

Section 1. Expectations of Members

- a) Members and Associate Members are expected to be faithful to the Christian life, to attend the services of this Church, to give to its support and its charities, to share in its organized work, and to always seek the spiritual welfare of the Church. Members will strive to enhance their own spiritual practice and development, and support others in doing so.

- b) The life and work of the Church are endeavors to be shared by the whole Membership in covenantal relationship with the Pastor and with one another. All Members of the Church are encouraged to offer their spiritual gifts and particular talents for lay ministry in areas of their interests and strengths.

Section 2. Membership Qualifications

- a) Members of this Church shall be persons who are baptized (unless exempted because of conviction, on recommendation of the Diaconate), who have been recommended by the Pastor in consultation with the Diaconate, and who have made public acceptance of the covenant of the Church. They may join either by presenting satisfactory letters of transfer from other churches, or by confessing or reaffirming their faith.
- b) Applicants under the age of 18 shall satisfactorily complete a series of Confirmation studies prescribed by the Diaconate.
- c) All Members shall be received into fellowship at a church service. In case of urgency, the Pastor may admit a person to Membership and extend its hand in fellowship. In such event, the Pastor shall report this action to the Diaconate and Membership at the first opportunity.
- d) Associate Membership may be granted to persons who are members of another Christian church, but for personal reasons may not desire to sever membership with that church. Such persons shall submit their names to the Diaconate and shall make public acceptance of the covenant of this Church. An Associate Member shall be afforded all rights and privileges to which a Member is entitled except the right to serve as a Church Officer and the right to a letter of transfer to another church.

Section 3. Discipline

If a case of discipline arises and kindly approaches of the Pastor are unavailing, the matter shall be referred to the Diaconate for its investigation and disposition.

Section 4. Termination of Membership

The continuance of Membership shall be subject to the principles and usages of the United Church of Christ, and especially as follows:

- a) Upon written request of a Member, the Diaconate shall authorize the Clerk to grant a letter of transfer to any Christian church of the Member's choice. This action shall be reported by the Clerk to the Membership at its next meeting. The right to vote shall be suspended when a letter is granted.
- b) Members whose addresses have long been unknown or who have not communicated with this Church or contributed to its support for a period of two years in spite of kindly approaches, may, on recommendation of the Diaconate, be transferred to an inactive list. From the date of such transfer, such person shall cease to be reported on the active Membership roll.
- c) In case a Member desires to terminate Membership for personal reasons and efforts at dissuasion are unavailing, the Diaconate shall declare that such person is released from Membership, and such person shall cease to be reported on the active Membership roll.

Section 5. Restoration of Membership

Any person whose membership has been terminated may be readmitted to membership by the same procedures as a new member; See Section 2 above.

Article VI. Officers

Section 1. Expectations of Officers

Officers of the Church will respect the Covenant of the Congregation and its Mission and Vision and will be guided by them as they carry out their leadership activities.

Section 2. Church Officers

The Officers shall include the Pastor, Clerk, Moderator, Treasurer, and Assistant Treasurer, and will be Members of the church. Each officer shall submit an annual report to the Membership in writing of the work of his or her office. Procedures relating to the duties of the Officers will be described in the Procedures Manual.

Section 3. Pastor

- a) The Pastor shall be recommended by the Pastoral Search Team and called by an affirmative vote of not less than two-thirds (2/3) of the Members present and voting at a meeting of the Church whenever a vacancy occurs. In the written covenantal call agreement, the terms of the relationship shall be stated in detail. The Pastor, the Church, and the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ shall each receive a copy of the Call.
- b) The Pastor shall:
 1. Comply with the provisions of Article VI, Section 2, above, Church Officers.
 2. Have in charge the spiritual welfare of the parish, seeking and cherishing the advice and assistance of the Diaconate.
 3. Preach the Gospel, have in care the stated services of public worship, and administer the sacraments.
 4. Seek to enlist people as followers of Christ.
 5. Provide leadership and guidance to Ministries as they seek to carry out the Church's interdisciplinary mission and vision.
 6. Represent the Church in meetings of the denomination, at ecumenical gatherings, and in community and regional affairs.
 7. Serve as a member ex-officio, without vote, of all Ministries and organizations of the Church, except the Pastor shall have a vote on the Leadership Council.
- c) The Pastor shall become a member of the Carroll–Strafford Association of the New Hampshire Conference, United Church of Christ, at the first opportunity. Upon agreement of the Pastor and the Church, the Association may be requested to arrange for a service of installation.
- d) To terminate the relationship of Pastor and Church, two months' notice shall be given by either party, but in the case of loss of ministerial standing on the part of the Pastor, the relationship shall cease at once. When either party decides to terminate the relationship, the termination shall be by action of the Church, and notice of such termination shall be sent by the Moderator to the New Hampshire Conference, United Church of Christ, for appropriate action. Discipline of the Pastor shall be in conformity with the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ and in consultation with the New Hampshire Conference, United Church of Christ.

Section 4. Clerk

The Clerk shall:

- a) Comply with the provisions of Article VI, Section 2, Church Officers, above;
- b) Keep a complete record of the transactions of all called Membership meetings and Leadership Council meetings;
- c) Keep a record of membership, baptisms, marriages, deaths, and transfers;
- d) Preserve on file all communications and written official reports;
- e) Give legal notice of all meetings when such notice is required;
- f) Place in safe keeping and have charge of all Church historical records and retired record books of all Officers, Leadership Council, Ministry Teams, and Delegates, until such time as these records are transferred to the Archivist;
- g) Perform such other duties as are prescribed by law.

Section 5. Moderator

The Moderator shall:

- a) Comply with the provisions of Article VI, Section 2: Church Officers, above;
- b) Preside at all called Membership and Leadership Council meetings, except as noted in item *d*, below;
- c) Be a member, ex-officio, without vote, of all Ministries;
- d) In the absence of the Moderator, the Coordinator of the Diaconate shall serve as Moderator pro-tempore.

Section 6. Treasurer

The Treasurer shall:

- a) Comply with the provisions of Article VI, Section 2: Church Officers above;
- b) Have charge of funds of the Church, paying all bills, keeping open and true accounts of all fiscal transactions of the Church under policies established by the Finance Ministry with the approval of the Church;
- c) Submit records for audits when required;
- d) Be included in the work of the Finance Ministry.

Section 7. Assistant Treasurer

The Assistant Treasurer shall:

- a) Comply with the provisions of Article VI, Section 2: Church Officers, above;
- b) Assist the Treasurer in all financial matters whenever needed.
- c) Be included in the work of the Finance Ministry.

Article VII. Structure, Ministries, Ministry Coordinators, and Team Synergy

The guiding element driving and encouraging our structure is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Section 1. Structure

The organizational structure of our Church is rooted in calling and discernment, recognition and expression of spiritual gifts, the valuing of interdisciplinary ministry, and the claiming of all forms of work and play in the life of the Church as ministries rather than tasks. We will endeavor to maintain a structure that is fluid

and changeable as times call for change. The Congregational Synergy group is designed to equip the leadership and congregation with philosophical, theological, and technological preparedness.

Section 2. Congregational Synergy

Synergy: The interaction of elements that, when combined, produce a total effect that is greater than the sum of the individual elements, contributions, etc.

Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 2003

Congregational Synergy shall:

- a) Oversee the integration of activities and concerns of the Ministries' areas of responsibility and oversight;
- b) Include all members of the Church, with expected attendance from all Church Officers, all Ministry Coordinators, and representatives of Standing Teams.
- c) Be coordinated by the Pastor and the Moderator(s).
- d) Respect the Mission and Vision of the Church, and will be guided by them. Lay ministries are entered into freely in the spirit of covenant following a process of deliberative discernment;
- e) Meet no less than quarterly.

Synergistic Relationship of the Calling and Discernment Ministries



Section 3. Leadership Council

The Leadership Council shall consist of the following: Moderator, Clerk, Pastor, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, a representative from Parish Helpers, Inc, and a Coordinator (or a designee) of each Ministry. A quorum of the Leadership Council shall be 10 members. The Leadership Council shall:

- a) Serve as the decision-making body of the Church, having the powers of the Church between duly called gatherings of the Membership. **The following decisions are reserved to the Membership of the Church:**
 1. Call of a Pastor;
 2. Budget Approval;
 3. Adoption of Bylaws (and revisions);
 4. Adoption of Policies of the Church (and revisions);
 5. Any alteration to decisions previously made by the Membership.

- b) Meet no less than quarterly;
- c) Provide oversight, guidance, and support to the work of the Ministries;
- d) Recommend to the Church Membership a proposed budget for the following year no later than the last Sunday in April;
- e) Appoint or approve additional Ministries and Teams as deemed necessary;
- f) Appoint a Pastoral Evaluation and Review Team
- g) Include a special honorary Member, if it so desires, to be appointed by the Moderator and to be known as the Sage, such person being of long standing in the Church, intimate in the knowledge of its history and workings, and serving without vote;
- h) Submit an annual report to the Membership.

Section 4. Ministry Coordinators

Each Ministry shall have a Coordinator or Co-Coordiators who will oversee the activities of that particular Ministry. The Coordinator is not expected to carry out all the responsibilities of the Ministry, but to encourage others who find interest in that Ministry to offer their gifts whenever and wherever possible or necessary. Actions taken by the Ministries will be in direct response to the needs, interest, willingness, and energy of the Congregation. The Ministry Coordinators shall:

- a) Oversee a specific Ministry as determined through their calling and discernment;
- b) Communicate with and assist other Ministry Coordinators to achieve overall Church goals;
- c) Explore opportunities for interdisciplinary ministry;
- d) Convene meetings of each Ministry as needed;
- e) Submit an annual report to the Membership listing the activities of the Ministry throughout the year.

Section 5. Ministry of the Arts

- a) Oversee integration of musical, dramatic, theatrical, visual, and decorative arts into the life of the Church;
- b) Recommend to the Ministry of Personnel a compensation package for the Music Director.

Section 6. Ministry of Building and Grounds

Oversee maintaining, repairing, and improving the Church building and grounds.

Section 7. Ministry of Calling and Discernment

- a) Oversee the process of identifying Spiritual Gifts and practicing prayerful discernment;
- b) Organize the process by which Members of the Congregation share their gifts by active participation in Ministries;
- c) Coordinate evaluation and changes in church structure and review of by-laws;
- d) In the case of vacancies in any Ministry, invite Members to discern a potential call;
- e) Maintain a complete list of ministerial activities undertaken in the past. This list is to be updated annually.

Section 8. Ministry of Christian Outreach and Wider Church

- a) Oversee opportunities for mission and benevolent giving;
- b) Educate and inspire the Church in regard to Christian mission in the community, state, nation, and world;

- c) Together with Calling and Discernment, identify a team of Delegates consisting of four (4) Members to include at least one youth or young adult if possible, to represent the Church at Carroll-Strafford Association Meetings and at the Annual Meeting of the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Section 9. Ministry of Communication

Oversee an open flow of information for and about our Church and its Ministries within the congregation and the community.

Section 10. Ministry of the Diaconate

The Ministry of the Diaconate shall consist of at least 8 members.

- a) Share with the Pastor in the oversight of the spiritual life of the Church;
- b) Assist in the administration of the Sacraments of the Lord's Supper and Baptism;
- c) Consult with the Pastor and, together with the Pastor, advise the Membership on matters of faith and morals when such become subjects at issue in the Church;
- d) Conduct a program of evangelism, reaching out to welcome and to invite new Members into the Church;
- e) Participate in the nurture, care, and discipline of Members, and in a ministry of visitation;
- f) In the case of a Pastoral vacancy, seek and recommend a proposed interim minister to the Leadership Council
- g) In the case of a settled Pastoral vacancy, consult with Calling & Discernment and Personnel in the calling forth of a Pastoral Search Team
- h) In the case of the settled or interim Pastor's absence (illness, vacation, or study leave for example), will arrange pastoral coverage.
- i) At its discretion, recommend to the Leadership Council the honorary appointment of a "Pastor Emeritus" to recognize a Pastor retired from the First Congregational Church of Wakefield, UCC.

Section 11. Ministry of Faith Formation

- a) Assure that a range of Christian education opportunities and faith related activities is offered to all age groups of the Church.
- b) Together with the Pastor, provide support and guidance for the Congregational Life Administrator as his/her duties relate to Faith Formation and Christian Education including Church School.
- c) Oversee, maintain, and promote the use of the Mary Cox Memorial and Children's Libraries.

Section 12. Ministry of Finance and Memorial Gifts

- a) Oversee the Church's finances and investments;
- b) Recommend investment goals to the Leadership Council for funds received by the Church;
- c) Invest Church funds and monitor the performance of those investments;
- d) Coordinate annual budgeting process working with the Treasurer(s), Assistant Treasurer, Ministry Coordinators, and Pastor.
- e) Assure that all signatories to church financial accounts are bonded.

Section 13. Ministry of Historian/Archivist

Oversee safe storage and preservation of historically significant documents and artifacts.

Section 14. Ministry of Personnel

The Personnel Ministry shall consist of up to 5 members.

- a) Ensure employment and supervision practices are fair, uniform, and in keeping with State and Federal employment law and the bylaws of the Church;
- b) Facilitate the development and updating of job descriptions and contracts/covenants;
- c) Develop employment practices, policies, and procedures;
- d) Assist with salary/compensation packages and recommendations.

Section 15. Ministry of Stewardship

- a) Inspire giving of time, talent and treasure;
- b) Oversee and conduct the annual giving campaign;
- c) Promote and maintain an awareness of Earth stewardship.

Article VIII. Standing Teams & Auxiliary Organizations

Section 1. Pastoral Relations Team

The Pastoral Relations Team may be formed at the discretion of the Pastor. It may consist of up to 3 members, to be chosen by the Pastor, and will be an ad hoc committee of the Leadership Council. This Team shall:

- a) Be the Congregation's fundamental support group for the Pastor. Its goals are the professional growth and well being of the Pastor, and the promotion of mutual ministry between the Pastor and the Membership;
- b) Meet at least twice a year
- c) The participation of any member shall be open-ended, and can be terminated by request of either the Pastor or the member.

Section 2. Pastoral Evaluation and Review Team

The Pastoral Evaluation and Review Team shall consist of one Deacon and two people from other ministries or members at large, to be appointed by the Leadership Council, and will be the body responsible for the supervision, reporting, and accountability of the Pastor. This Team shall:

- a) Be familiar with the terms of the Pastor's Call and Contract
- b) Recommend the annual compensation for the Pastor
- c) Conduct an evaluation of the Pastor after a Pastor has been with the Church for six months, twelve months, and annually as directed by the Leadership Council
- d) Present a written report to the Leadership Council at least annually.

Section 3. Parish Helpers, Inc.

Parish Helpers, Inc. may have a voting delegate on the Leadership Council, such delegate to be a Member of the Church.

Article IX. Absences and Vacancies

Section 1. Absences

Chronic absences from Ministry meetings or demonstrated lack of interest in a position shall be referred to Calling & Discernment for review and possible action.

Section 2. Vacancies

Resignations of Officers and Ministry Coordinators shall be submitted in writing and accepted by the Leadership Council.

In case of a vacancy of the Pastor, a Pastoral Search Team shall be selected in consultation among the Ministries of the Diaconate, Calling & Discernment, and Personnel. The process of calling a Pastor shall be as described in Article VI, Section 3, items a) and b).

Vacancies of Officers (except the Pastor) shall be filled in consultation between the Ministry of Calling & Discernment and the Leadership Council.

Termination of the Pastor shall be as described in Article VI, Section 3, item d).

Article X. Meetings

Section 1. For Business

- a) The Moderator may and shall, when requested by the Pastor or the Leadership Council, issue a call from the pulpit for special business meetings, the particular object being clearly stated in the call.
- b) Special meetings of the Church shall be called by the Clerk upon written application of any five (5) members specifying the object thereof, which notice shall be read at the public service on the Lord's Day next preceding the day fixed for such meeting. No special meeting shall be held on the same day on which notice is given.

Section 2. Annual Meeting

- a. The Annual Meeting of the Church shall be held on a Sunday in June to be selected by the Pastor and the Leadership Council, at which time the annual reports of the Ministry Teams, the Pastor, the Moderator on behalf of the Leadership Council, the Standing Teams, and the Clerk shall be presented. A list of Members who have been named through the Calling & Discernment process to fill Officer, Ministry Coordinator, and Standing Team positions shall be presented for Membership affirmation. The budget shall be voted upon, and such other business transacted as may be specified in the call or authorized in these Bylaws.
- b. The Annual Meeting shall be called by the Clerk and be published in the manner specified in Section 1b above, For Business.
- c. The Treasurer's annual report shall be submitted by August 31.

Section 3. Quorum

At the Annual Meeting and all special meetings of the Church, ten percent (10%) of the Membership shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

Article XI. Amendments

Section 1. Bylaws. These Bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Members present and voting at any Annual Meeting of the Church, or at a meeting specifically called for that purpose. The proposed amendment must be included in the call.

Section 2. Faith and Covenant. No change shall be made to **Article II** entitled Faith and Covenant, except at an Annual Meeting and by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of all Members present and voting. The proposed change must be laid before the Church Membership in writing at a business meeting not less than one month before the time for the proposed action. The proposed change must also be read from the pulpit on the Lord's Day next preceding such proposal.