



Annual Report 2023

Jesus said, "You will also do the works that I do and, in fact, you will do greater works than these!"

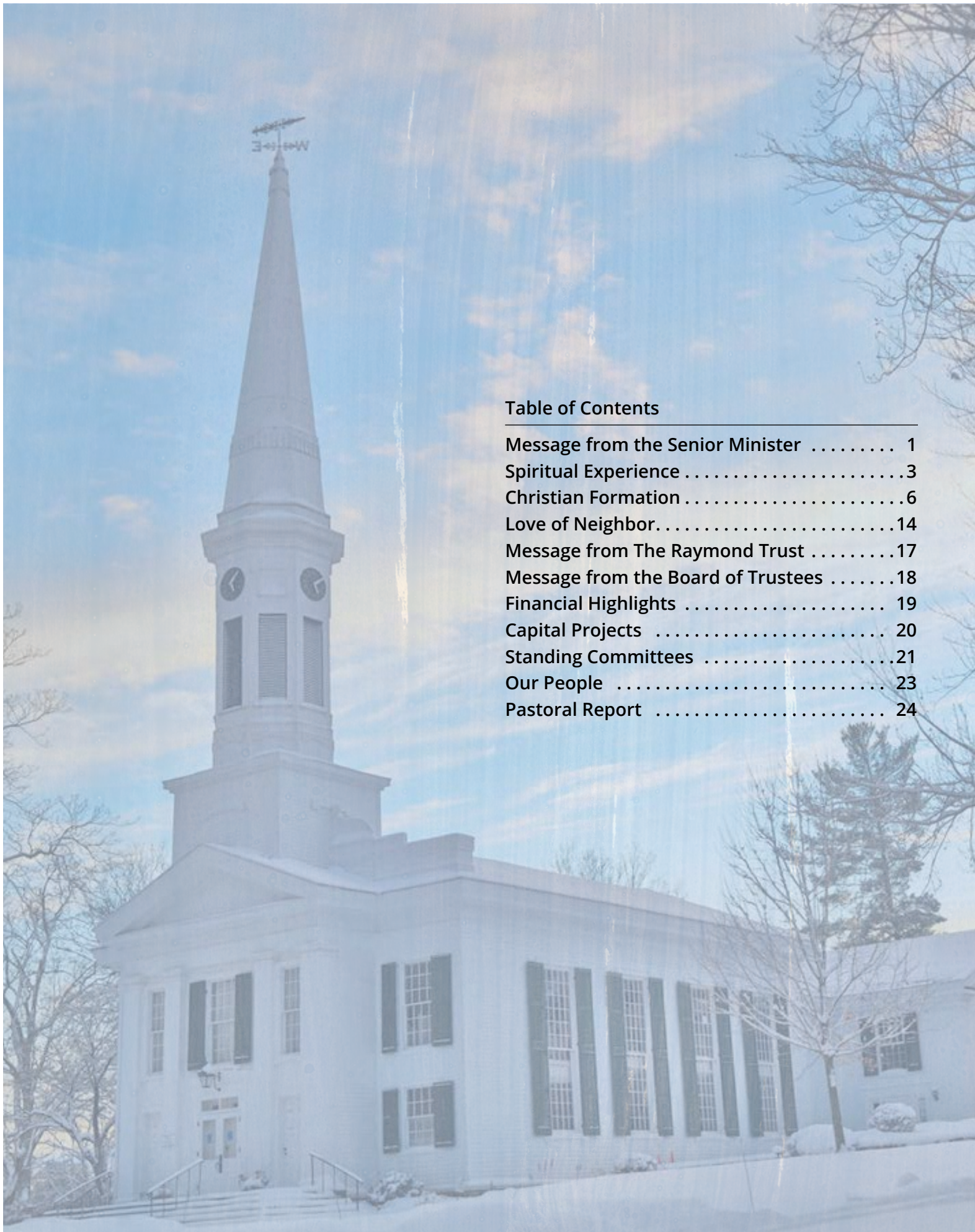


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Dear Church Family,

Our Annual Meeting is six weeks before the ninth anniversary of my candidate weekend at God's Acre. It's hard to believe we have been in ministry together for nearly a decade! It's been quite a remarkable experience, in my opinion. For those of you who know me well, you know I don't obsess about numbers because I don't believe numbers capture spiritual growth particularly well. How does anyone quantify or qualify the experience had when one of our eighth-grade confirmands really begins to catch the joy of the Christian faith? How do we represent the gratitude experienced and extended when someone ailing in body, mind, or spirit receives a prayer shawl that wraps them in our love, care, and prayers? How do we represent the deep connections between church members, young and old, when they work together for a week of service on one of our YG or OG mission trips? How do we measure success when it comes to the movement of the Spirit in our community and the deepening of faith among our people?

With that said, data has its purposes in the world and in the church. So here are some numbers to consider. Nine

years ago, we averaged 327 people in worship, and now we average 567, thanks in no small part to our virtual community. Nine years ago, we were budgeting \$1.4M in pledge income; this year, we will hopefully hit our target of \$2.2M in pledges. One of the more exciting numbers is the increase in youth involvement in our mission trip from pre-pandemic to post-pandemic. In 2019, we had 74 kids attending our mission trip; this year, we

have 108. I attribute that growth, as I do, to so much of the growth we've witnessed as a church, to the grace and provision of the Holy Spirit, really hard work from our staff and volunteers, and a willingness to keep our programs running throughout the pandemic. I also believe we have seen remarkable advancement in so many of our ministries that serve children, youth, and adults. While I suspect these are not the

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you.

— Philippians 1:3-4a



exponential growth numbers that get many of our Wall Street types excited, in an age and in a region of our country where maintaining a degree of stability is a success, what is happening

at God's Acre is nothing short of extraordinary. I know we will face challenges in the future, but there is no group of people I would rather face those challenges with than you!

The Apostle Paul often wrote of his affection for the people he served. He also mentioned continually praying for the people in his churches. The spirit with which he wrote was always one of gratitude toward God. I share a similar affection and gratitude —

and I am so grateful to God for the years we have already served. As you likely know, I pray for you regularly, and I look forward to many more years of service to come!

Thank you again for another wonderful year, and glory be to our God!

Yours in Christ,
Chapin

Our Vision

As a community moved by God's gracious gift of flourishing life, we gather to share transforming spiritual, educational, and service experiences and to love God and our neighbor as servants of Christ. The church supports each member's journey of transformation by providing meaningful opportunities for enrichment through:

- **Spiritual Experience** in worship, music, prayer, meditation groups, retreats, and other means of grace;
- **Christian Formation** for all ages through Bible Study, Church School classes, and small groups;
- **Love of Neighbor** through caring ministries to fellow parishioners in need, as well as local service projects, mission trips, and provision for the needs of God's children around the world.

In this resolve, we join ages of Christians in all parts of the world, and we trust that God will bless our efforts as God has blessed theirs.



Board of Deacons Report

As we reflect on the past year, we are reminded of the words from Psalms 32:8, “*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you,*” and Proverbs 3:5-6, “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*”

This has indeed been a year of transition for our church. We have experienced changes in leadership and ministry roles, and through it all, we have seen the faithfulness of God in providing for our congregation. As our beloved former senior minister, Lidabell Pollard, always said, “God will provide,” and we have witnessed this truth in action.

Despite declining church attendance across the country, we are grateful to report a steady increase in in-person church attendance and the continued expansion of virtual participation. This is a testament to the dedication and commitment of our congregation to stay connected and engaged in our faith community.

The transitions that began this past summer have been significant for our church. We said farewell to some dear members of our staff, including our Youth Director, Erik Burns, and our Associate Minister, Kibbie Laird. However, we have been blessed with individuals like Emma Garner, Barb Clayton, Beth Baker, and Rev. Kent Siladi, who have stepped in to continue the important work of our church.

We also celebrated the retirement of our long-time Director of Music Ministries, Dr. Jody Davis, and welcomed Michael Burnette as our Interim Director of Music Ministries. The search for a permanent Director of Music Ministries is underway, and we are committed to filling this important role by the end of the church year.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

– Proverbs 3:5-6

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you
– Psalms 32:8

In addition, we are preparing for the transition of our Senior Youth Minister, Kelly Antonson, upon her graduation from Divinity School by constituting a Youth Ministries Search Committee.

We have seen a resurgence in our Youth Group participation, and it is a testament to the strength of our youth programs that we have seven junior deacons this year who have chosen to serve our church in this meaningful way.

We are excited to announce the trial of Contemporary worship will be held on the first Sunday of the month at 6:00pm in the chapel, and we have initiated new Ministry Teams to address the mental health challenges of our youth and to document the history of our historic church for future generations.

Our church continues to have vibrant committees hosting a variety of events and activities, and we encourage all members to join a group that interests them. We are also open to new ideas and initiatives, so please reach out to the deacons if you feel a call to start a new group.

The annual meeting signals board transition time, and I would like to express my gratitude to Sara Bakker, Steve Case, Susanna Nichols, and Doug Simpson for their faithful service to the deacon board these past three years. It has been a pleasure and honor to serve with each of you, and I look forward to welcoming and working alongside our incoming deacon class.

As we move forward into the new year, let us continue to trust in the Lord and seek His guidance in all that we do. May His wisdom and grace continue to lead us as we serve and worship together as a congregation.

In Our Lord's Service,
Dionna Carlson
Senior Deacon

Spiritual Experience



Music Ministry

Music proclaims the theology of the church with rich traditional music blended with contemporary music. Hymns, choral selections, solos, handbells, and keyboard music are offered. The choirs sang and rang for worship services, with over 200 pieces offered over the year. The Chancel Choir's special presentations included Kickoff Sunday with a brass quintet, "I Was Glad" by Sir Charles Parry; *The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass* (October 1) with a 5-piece Bluegrass ensemble, A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols (December 3), and Daniel Pinkham's *Christmas Cantata* (December 17) with brass, timpani, organ, and guest conductor Dimitrie Lazich. Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Christmas Eve 6:00pm, 7:00pm, and 11:00pm services were specially prepared for the seasons. The eighteenth annual benefit concert for the Mary Bradley Clarke Fund provided funds to support guest musicians, such as jazz saxophonist Ken Gioffre and Pivot House Men's Chorus. Section leader Anneliese Klenetsky (soprano) and choir scholar Olivier Zerouali (baritone) joined the choir with ease. Anne Maguire, Darren Anderson, Bryan Griffin, and Hans Tashjian section leaders continue to support the Chancel Choir, bring inspiration with their solos during the 8:00am services, and lead in the summer services.

The handbell choir, Joyful Ringers, added special sounds and involved additional people in music. The four children's choirs flourished with the leadership of Sydney Anderson and Jody Blaine Davis. Sydney resigned in June and we are grateful for the recent leadership of Greer Lyle, former soprano section leader. Children's choirs sang regularly in the services MSJYG (grades 5-8), Joyful Noise (grades 3 and 4), Spirit Singers (grades K-2, and Cherubs (ages 2-4). Their exuberant presentation of *100% Chance of Rain* by Walter S. Horsley included singing and acting. The Children's Nativity Pageant involved



over 50 children of various ages and was a wonderful experience as they learned the Christmas story.

Our Director of Music Ministries, Dr. Jo Deen (Jody) Blaine Davis retired December 20. Her tenure of over eighteen years has seen the music program expand to a vibrant ministry. Her Recognition Sunday (December 10) featured former and present Chancel Choir members singing glorious anthems. In gratitude for Jody's talents and leadership, she was awarded the title of Director of Music Ministries Emerita. Dr. Michael Burnette began as Interim Director of Music Ministries in November and shadowed Jody. We are grateful for his leadership as the music program and services continue masterfully. A Search Committee was formed in the early fall to evaluate the music program and eventually to hire a successor.

Music heard in the church is a gift from the musicians to God and God's listeners. Choirs are more than just singing and ringing music: each choir is a small group united by sharing their talents through sacred music. All are welcome to join these musical groups.



Christian Formation

Children and Families Ministry

2023 was a year rich in faith formation and fellowship among the children and families of our church. We came together throughout the winter and spring for annual events like family BINGO night and our Easter Egg Hunt—with a special section added for our ever-growing youngest population of egg collectors this year! We culminated our year of learning in June on Celebration Sunday. Children presented spiritual milestones beginning in our pre-K grades all the way through our eighth grade confirmands. It was a beautiful representation of the impactful trajectory of the church-school journey at our church—followed by food trucks, bounce houses, and festivities galore!



This summer we offered six weeks of combined church school classes during our summer worship services. Close to 70 children joined us for a week of Vacation Bible School in August, increasing our camp numbers by over 50% this year. We enjoyed a week of fun exploring “Stories from the Sea” and benefitted immensely from the leadership of our older youth who served as junior and senior counselors. We ushered in the change of seasons with a back-to-school chapel service, a formal blessing of our new playground, and Blessing of the Backpacks at the end of the summer.



Approximately 130 children enrolled in our 2023-24 church school program in the fall. On average, around 50 children attend church school each week, which indicates roughly a 30% increase in average weekly attendance. To accommodate the large concentration of children in our youngest cohorts, three additional teachers were hired to join our amazing team of church-school educators by supporting in our nursery and opening a “threes classroom”. Children learn and grow each Sunday through classroom lessons, chapel services, outreach projects, storytelling with Mrs. Grogan and music with Miss Greer. We also continue to offer Clementine’s Playdates to our youngest church and community members each week. Outside of Church School, our Children and Family Ministry Team orchestrated many wonderful events in the last few months of the year—including several playground playdates, a family Halloween party, a blessing of the animals ceremony, and our annual Thanksgiving service project. We rounded out our year piloting a new family fellowship offering and invited families to a Christmas Craft Fair, at which they created and wrapped Christmas presents for loved ones and embraced the spirit of giving in the holiday season.

The church continues to be a space where children and their families can access and embrace formative experiences of God’s love and goodness through learning, service, and fellowship and we celebrate our many blessings as a collective family of faith.





Christian Formation

Youth Ministries

In the grace-filled journey of our Youth Ministries, the past year unfolded with a renewed sense of purpose and collaboration. We were elated to rekindle our partnership with Blueprint Ministries in San Antonio, Texas, for yet another youth mission trip. Witnessing God's continuous work through this cherished partnership, we rejoiced in returning to Blueprint for the fourth time with our Youth Group (YG).

During our time in San Antonio, the energy of our youth was contagious as they worked on seven different homes alongside our dedicated advisors and contractor teams. Some focused on installing handicapped entrances, while others directed their efforts toward roofing or interior enhancements. Our youth were driven by the shared vision of ensuring that our brothers and sisters in need could dwell in dignified conditions.

Reflecting on the mission week, the transformative power of service manifested not only in the lives of our youth but radiated into the community we served. Galatians 5:13 reminds us to "Serve one another humbly in love." This ethos echoed through our collective efforts, creating a ripple effect of love throughout our youth, staff, and those we had the pleasure of learning from in San Antonio.

Our Middle School Youth Group (MSYG) collaborated once more with Mountainside Treatment Center in Canaan, CT, engaging in trail-clearing activities for those on the path to sobriety. The 7th and 8th-grade participants had a unique opportunity to hear firsthand from individuals in recovery,



challenging and reshaping any preconceived stereotypes they may have brought about those suffering from addiction. As a result, our youth returned with a renewed perspective on healthy decision-making and a deeper appreciation for God's creation and its role in the well-being of all.

MSYG also celebrated the success of a wonderful Winter Weekend retreat this year. We ventured away from New Canaan and immersed ourselves in faith and team-building experiences at Camp Silverlake. These experiences, ranging from mission trips to retreats, continue to define our commitment to fostering faith, personal growth, community service, and spiritual development among our youth.

Our youngest fish continued to grow in their faith through our weekly program offerings! All of our Minnows, Guppies, and JYG fish patiently wait for their time to serve on mission trips in due time!



Christian Formation

Fellowship

Our Fellowship Team had an amazing 2023! We kicked off the new year with our always-entertaining Chili Paddle Night in January. Despite the wintry weather, we had over 75 adults enjoying friendly games of paddle and warm bowls of chili. With so many delicious varieties, we gave out several “wooden spoon winners” for the best chili! In March, we had a wonderful evening of fellowship with our Supper Club night - with several dinner parties happening simultaneously in member’s homes. We ended our church program year with a beautiful sunny Celebration Sunday in June. Along with Children and Family Ministries, we enjoyed fellowship with one another, complete with fun and games (and Super Duper Weenie!). Over the summer, we connected with one another

through a concert picnic at Waveny Park, which was a casual way to catch up with those in town. We had our popular Kickoff Sunday Brunch this September, with Wendy’s famous eggs and lots and lots of bacon! At the end of September, we threw a fantastic BBQ and Bluegrass night at the Parsonage - attended by over one hundred of you! And no Fellowship update would be complete without a word of thanksgiving to all who have hosted Fellowship Coffee Hour! We are so grateful to the scores of families and individuals who volunteer to host each Sunday after the 10:00am service. Your Fellowship Team is Lesley Cousley, Laurel Carr, Linda Twombly, Linda Williams, Martha Burnham, and Dawn Norris Doak, and in September, we welcomed our newest member, Nancy Burges.



History Ministry Team

During 2023 the Deacons authorized the formation of a new History Ministry Team focusing on comprehensively compiling, in an accurate and objective fashion, the history of the Congregational Church of New Canaan. The goal is to document the circumstances influencing our Church's founding, significant events in its history, its role and influence in the community and the world. A group of faithful individuals are meeting monthly to discuss the different research paths they are taking individually to uncovering interesting and useful historical facts surrounding our church and its broader impact. All are welcome to join the monthly gatherings and assist in any manner they feel capable of fulfilling.



Adult Formation

In the Bible Studies of calendar year 2023, The Gospel of John led us through Lent, an exploration of Abraham enlightened our spring, and the Gospel of Matthew engaged us through the fall, with the characters of Jesus' family, John the Baptist, Mary and Joseph, rounding out the year during Advent. Chapin's Bible Study continued to be of immeasurable value in informing the messages to be preached each week.

A group of probing minds met each Friday via Zoom to dig deeper into the meaning of their faith through the books of theologians and mystics. The group, Merton and Friends, read *No Man is an Island* by Thomas Merton in the first half of the year and in the latter, *The Divine Dance, The Trinity and Your Transformation* by Richard Rohr. In Small Groups, men and women met monthly to discuss their lives of faith and became ever closer in the process.

A group of kindred souls got together in Lent to probe the meaning of the table, which is so central to our faith, and then wrote essays around the topic in the This I Believe Lenten Workshop. The finished products were among the most popular items printed in the monthly newsletters.

*For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge
and understanding.*
– Proverbs 2:6

A final highlight was the continuation of the Circle of Friends series. In February, we welcomed the Reverend Laura Everett, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Council of Churches, and our former well-loved pastor, the Reverend Eric Dupee, Senior Pastor of First Parish Church in York, Maine, in September. Both were followed by engaging conversations in the Chapel.

Men's Fellowship

During the past church year the Men's Fellowship Ministry continued to provide strong and meaningful ways for the men of our church to gather and share faith journeys. Standout MG events such as the Men's Christmas dinner, breaking bread with our brothers from Pivot at our annual breakfast and the "Baker BBQ" brought out many in fellowship settings throughout the year. Other highlights included a monthly breakfast gathering with discussion focused on balancing work and faith hosted by Dirk Dunlap and a quarterly men's book group hosted by Jim Clayton. Over 80 individuals, broken into 5 Small Groups, regularly participated in monthly gatherings designed to provide deeper conversations focused on sharing life highlights and obstacles. MG's strength comes from our strong and growing community's communal desire to grow in faith together from our spiritual base at CCNC.



Christian Formation

Women's Fellowship

Last spring, Lee Memorial Garden was the perfect setting for an educational walking tour and light lunch, organized by co-chair Debbie Raymond and led by Faith Kerchoff of the New Canaan Beautification League. Guests were treated to azaleas in peak season and experienced the gift of this hidden gem in New Canaan.

The Women's Fellowship team hosted a lovely Spring Luncheon in late May at The Country Club of New Canaan, honoring our Women of Wisdom. In addition to a yummy salad buffet, we were treated to a performance by the Director of Music Ministry, Jody Davis.

Our Christmas Gathering this year was at the Carriage Barn Arts Center, which was festively decorated for the holidays for their "Deck the Walls" exhibit. Simply Delicious provided a large charcuterie table and passed hors d'oeuvres, and everyone brought a wrapped ornament for an ornament swap.



Welcoming Ministry

This was a big year for our church! The Welcoming Committee added an additional new member session into our 2023 year and welcomed even more families during this winter class! During these sessions, winter, spring, and fall, we helped shepherd in 50 new members and 27 new families! We held three sessions this year; each one met four times over one week. During these sessions, the new members learned about our church's history and the role of ministries such as Trustees and Deacons, Music, Children's Education, Youth Groups, Fellowship, and Missions & Outreach. We had church members share a testimonial of their journeys through our church. The goal is to help our new members envision themselves as active members of our community in whichever way works for them. We also discussed opportunities for engagement. Lastly, we shared our faith stories, bringing each group closer to one another through this sharing. Our team hosted a social event the evening before membership Sunday, where church leaders and staff had an opportunity to meet our new members. It is a wonderful way to enter into our church family!



Our Welcoming Ministry continues to greet congregants on Sunday mornings on the front steps and direct new visitors. We deliver welcome bags to every person or family that visits the church. The bags include a handwritten note from one of our team members, a sweet treat, and information about our offerings. We are in the process of adding members to our Welcoming Team as we continue to grow as a church family!



Love of Neighbor

Missions and Outreach

The adult mission trip never fails to be a highlight for Missions and Outreach, and the trip to Rio di Pedras, Puerto Rico, was far from an exception. The adults who journey there were treated to the beauty of the island, the beauty of the local partners, and the beauty of Nelly and Umberto, our homeowners, who fed us and loved us to the life that is really life as Timothy has it. One house and one family on the mend made many of us whole.

Another yearly highlight was the backpack collection for our friends at Filling in the Blanks. This wonderful group served 1,000,000 meals to children in the school lunch program on weekends in 2023. We are so glad to have been a part of that.

And when HomeFront Day, when we rehab the home of a local neighbor in need this year in Norwalk, was cut short by a tropical storm, our intrepid crew regrouped and added to our numbers. We came back a few weeks later to finish the outdoor paint. Our homeowner was thrilled, having worried it would be yet another year undone.

We are blessed by these and many other ways God leads us to serve.

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, 19 thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.
– 1 Timothy 6:18-19



Pastoral Care

Our Pastoral Care Ministry is based on connection, love, and compassion. We are blessed to have our Senior Minister Chapin shepherding and inspiring us this way. In addition to Chapin's leadership, our Ministers of Pastoral Care, Barb Clayton, and Beth Baker, provide further support by offering their time, empathy, and spiritual guidance. We are blessed to have many people serving on our many flourishing ministry teams. Pastoral care takes many forms in our church. Stephen Ministers provides Christ-centered, individualized, and confidential care. Our Pastoral Outreach Team makes visits and phone calls along with flower deliveries. Our Prayer Shawl Ministry lovingly knits prayer shawls that provide warmth and comfort. Our Card Ministry writes notes of sympathy, encouragement, and celebration of milestones. Our Flower Ministry uses its talent to bring us beauty and joy. And the power of prayer is made possible through our Prayer Chain Ministry. It is truly a blessing that we have one another to lean on as a family of faith. Together, we fulfill God's commandment to love one another as He loves us.



For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.
 – Matthew: 18:20



*A new command I give you: Love one another.
 As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*
 – John 13: 34

Love of Neighbor

Flower Ministry

Our mission remains steadfast—to spread joy, friendship, and comfort throughout our worship services, community, and amongst each other. Week after week, we enhance our worship experience with delightful floral arrangements. Our floral endeavors extend far beyond the confines of our sanctuary. Each Sunday, our displays are transformed into smaller arrangements distributed by the designated Deacon of the Month to those in our community who may be recovering, grieving, or celebrating. Collaborating closely with the Pastoral Care team, we ensure that approximately 75 plants from our cherished Christmas and Easter displays find their way to community members who may feel bereaved or confined to their homes during these significant holidays. We frequently unite with the Fellowship and Music ministries to orchestrate various church events, including the Women of Wisdom luncheon, the Fellowship Social, the Mary Bradley Clark Benefit, and the cherished Lessons and Carols service. Our ministry team continues to thrive, expanding both in size and skill. Seasoned members graciously share their expertise, nurturing the growth of newer members. Though our work often unfolds individually, we come together over lunch or coffee, exchanging insights, brainstorming ways to enhance our efforts, and simply enjoying each other's company. We extend an open invitation to anyone interested in the art of floral arrangement or simply eager to learn.

*The Lord will guide you
always... You will be like a
well-watered garden, like a
spring whose waters never fail.*
— Isaiah 58:11



Raymond Trust

The Raymond Trust was established in 1883 under the Will of Deacon William E. Raymond to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those in Connecticut who otherwise would not have access to such worship. In generations past, the Trust employed eleven successive Raymond Ministers who served nearly 100 churches in widely divergent situations.

In 2019, the Trustees petitioned and received approval from the Norwalk Probate Court to employ new approaches which meet the needs of the 21st-century church community while continuing to honor Deacon Raymond's wishes.

Raymond Preaching Fellows Program

Raymond Preaching Fellows Program With the requisite authority received, the Trustees established the Raymond Preaching Fellow Program. Fellowships are given to divinity school students who will focus more intensively on the art and craft of preaching and provide free pulpit supply to churches and pastors who both need and welcome that support. During the academic year, each Raymond Fellow has two requirements to fulfill. The first is to participate in a bi-weekly Sermon Studio. The second is to prepare and offer from eight to ten sermons to hosting churches. The Program is supported by a Raymond Fellowship Committee to recruit and support students, effectively run the preaching program, and connect with local churches and church bodies. The five-member committee includes Sara Bakker, Marianna Kilbride, Kelly Morrisey, William Picard, and Richard Williams. While our Church operates on a calendar year, the Trust operates on a fiscal year ending June 30, and the Program operates on an academic year. Accordingly, activities for one fiscal year of the Trust include activities for the corresponding academic year of the Program. During the Trust's completed 2023 fiscal year (the Program's 2022-2023 academic year), the Trust, combined with a generous donor contribution, funded three Raymond Fellows who were Yale Divinity Students: Kelly Antonson (second-year student), Terrance McQueen (second-year student), and Natalie Owens-Pike (third-year student).



Deacon William E. Raymond

During the Trust's current 2024 fiscal year (the Program's 2023-2024 academic year), the Trust is funding three Raymond Fellows who are Yale Divinity School students: Kelly Antonson (third-year student), David Stuart (second-year student), and Antonio Vargas (second-year student). Lastly, John Crum and John Banigan resigned as Trustees in June 2023. We thank them for their years of service and faithful stewardship of the Raymond Trust. Danita Ostling, Seth Alvord, and Gabriella Kiniry serve as the successor Trustees.



Kelly Antonson



Terrance McQueen



Natalie Owens-Pike



David Stuart



Antonio Vargas

Board of Trustees

Overview

The twelve-member Board of Trustees ("Trustees") oversee the business affairs of the Church, raise money, disburse funds, accept gifts for restricted purposes, oversee personnel policies, ensure appropriate record-keeping, and provide for an independent audit each year. At the Annual Meeting, the Trustees are tasked with submitting an accounting of Church income, expenses, and other relevant information from the prior year and a budget for the current year. Consistent with these duties, the Trustees are pleased to submit this financial report.

2023 Church Funding

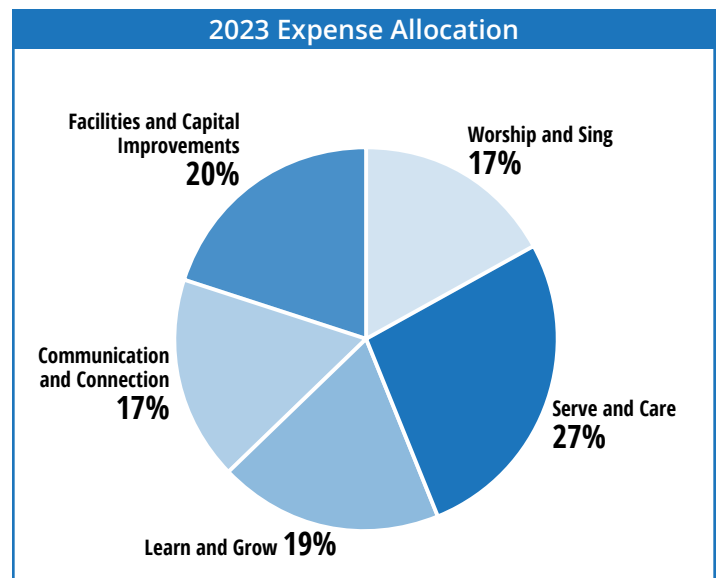
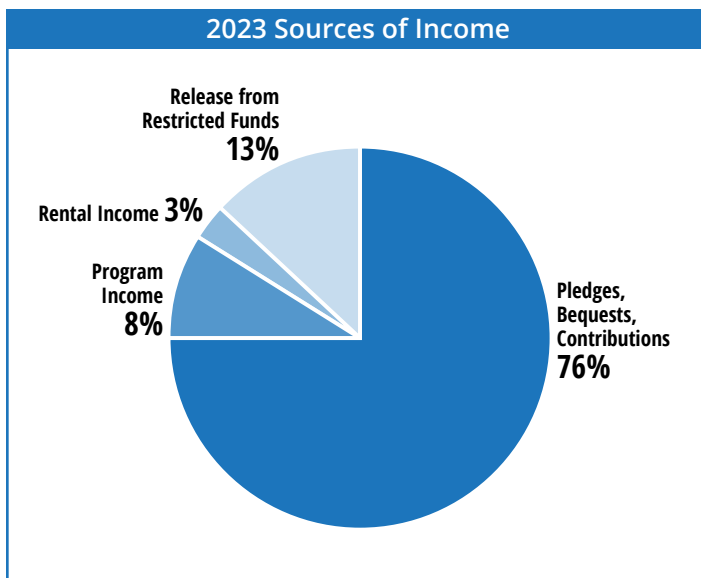
The church received \$2,241,249 related to 2023 pledges: \$1,685,454 was received by year end 2023 and \$555,795 was received in early 2024*. Seventy-six percent of our funding comes from Pledges, Bequests, and Contributions ("PBC"). Compared to last year, gifts and bequests declined, as the church was blessed with the extraordinary Kennedy/Baggins gift in 2022. Program revenue, which is primarily fees paid in support of YG and AMO mission trips, was 8% of income last year, a \$87,900 increase from the prior year due to increasing participation in our programs. Rental income is derived primarily from Toddler-Time Preschool, which is approximately 3% of income. Our last category of income, release of restricted funds, comes from the Church's pooled investment fund (CCPIF). The authorized draw was \$444,742 which is determined by calculating 4.5% of the trailing 36-month balance invested in the CCPIF. The transfer from the CCPIF represents approximately 13% of total income.

2023 Church Expenses

Total expenses were \$3,291,687, which was \$189,978 below budget and \$362,768 higher than 2022 expenses. Year-over-year increases were attributed to Salaries and Benefits, Parish Administration, and Missions. Spending on our buildings, grounds, and capital improvements was \$265,519 below the budget, with little change year-over-year, due to the deferral of capital projects to 2024. The new playground was completed in 2023. The MSA Committee supported a long list of charitable organizations. As approved at the annual meeting, the MSA also funded an additional \$60,000 from the 250th Anniversary Fund to support Open Doors' Affordable Housing Initiative, and bathroom improvement projects at both Pivot Ministries and Inspirica's residence halls.

Investments and the CCPIF

The CCPIF grew by 11.5% in 2023 and held \$10.5 million in investment funds as of December 31. The CCPIF is segregated from the church's operating funds. In 2023, the approved 4.5% draw of \$444,742 was transferred from CCPIF to operations. Over the past three years, the Church under-spent the approved draws by \$471,567.



Concluding Comments

We are blessed by the gifts and talents of the many new families which is reflected in the continued year-over-year growth in Sunday worship and other programming.

Finally, my gratitude goes to the Trustees who rotate off the board this year – John Stichter, Steve Busby, Chris Baker, and Polly Morrow. The expertise, advice, and counsel from each of these members who served the Church was invaluable to the Board as we navigated through another year of growth.

Thank you.

Chris Baker
Chair, Board of Trustees

Restricted Funds		
	12/31/2022 Total Fund	12/31/2023 Balances
1201 General Fund	\$4,376,739	\$5,032,036
1304 Hall Balance over original 2500	\$22,375	\$26,046
1306 Garden	\$128,668	\$143,329
1301 Luckhurst	\$3,841,322	\$4,167,843
1302 250th	\$587,640	\$601,227
1303 Williams	\$272,563	\$311,403
1305 Bangham	\$228,775	\$252,661
	\$9,458,082	\$10,534,545

Note: Figures based on Vanguard Investment account and Bank of America operating cash account balances as of calendar year end 2022 and 2023.

2023 Budget and Unaudited Actual vs. 2024 Provisional Budget

	2023 Actual	2023 Budget	2024 Budget
Sources of Funds	\$3,373,386*	\$3,455,499	\$3,348,972
Salaries & Benefits	\$1,529,621	\$1,545,664	\$1,556,062
Parish Administration	\$472,372	\$404,295	\$391,309
Children Christian Formation	\$303,109	\$270,207	\$279,710
Adult Christian Formation	\$45,569	\$47,600	\$48,800
Deacons and Pastoral Care	\$7,129	\$6,820	\$10,500
Music	\$105,784	\$121,447	\$117,450
Missions	\$396,338	\$390,383	\$396,300
Buildings and Grounds	\$204,773	\$267,935	\$258,241
Capital Improvements	\$226,992	\$411,148	\$290,600
Total Expenses	\$3,291,687	\$3,465,499	\$3,348,972
Surplus (Deficit)	\$81,699		\$0

*Includes 2023 pledges received through 2/12/24

Capital Projects

2023 Capital Projects Completed – Building and Grounds

2023 had large projects in store for Buildings and Grounds. A landscaping project occurred at the 1 Park Street parsonage following damage from a Christmas Eve 2022 storm, including new trees, flowers, and an extension of the irrigation system. The new flowers and trees restored privacy to the property and added beautiful color to the grounds. The carpet was replaced in Smith Hall, introducing a brighter and softer feel to the fellowship room. Interior painting was completed at 1 Park Street parsonage. The phone systems were upgraded throughout the church offices while painting, carpet replacement, and electrical updates were done to the office above Smith Hall. The largest and most exciting project of the year took place in the summer as we broke ground on the new playground, including the stone wall expansion, new surfacing and play structure, improved entryway into the school, and a handicapped-accessible sidewalk entrance and playground gate. By summer's end, the playground was complete and open for all to enjoy.



Investment Committee

The Investment Committee is responsible for managing the Church's Investment Portfolio (endowment) and reports to the Trustees. Seven unique funds, each established under various agreements and bequests, comprise our endowment.

Each year, the Investment Committee recommends to the Trustees an appropriate level of income to be distributed for expenditures. These expenditures are used in accordance with each fund's directive. The pooled investment accounts generated a net gain of 16.4% in the calendar year 2023. This represents a net increase in the value of the Investment Portfolio of \$1,081,207 during 2023. The increase is attributed to market gains of \$1,278,072, dividend and interest income of \$247,875, and withdrawals of \$444,742. The blended expense ratio for the pooled investment fund was 0.063% (6.3 basis points).

The Investment Policy of the Church has a recommended guideline of a 4.5% annual draw from our endowment funds. This is based on a rolling three-year average balance of the funds. This implies an amount of \$445,000 of potential funding for church operations.

Leadership

The Leadership Committee is made up of the Chairs of the Board of Trustees, Deacons, Nominating and Governance, Personnel, and the Senior Minister. The Senior Minister acts as the Chair of the Leadership Committee. The group meets bi-weekly to assist in managing the day-to-day activities of the Church and carry out the duties and functions as requested by the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees. In the ordinary course of business, substantive matters of the Church are taken back to the Boards of Deacons and Trustees. Still, the Leadership Committee has the authority to act on items that cannot wait until the next scheduled Board meetings.



Missions and Social Action (MSA) Committee

The Mission and Social Action Committee (MSA) is honored to engage with the nonprofits serving our community and around the world. We direct charitable giving from the church, considering the mix of local, regional, and global needs. In 2023, we welcomed Brian Werner, Lindsay Tucker, and Karen Wilson to the committee. We are so appreciative of the past service that Tom Robey and Susan Garifoli offered in our work. The demands for financial support were significant this year – both in terms of the impact of inflation on our local partners and the urgency around major conflicts in Ukraine and Israel/Gaza. This year, we provided support to a Christian Palestinian church that stands at a major crossroads in the West Bank as they seek to support their local community through increasing violence. We also initiated conversations with potential new partners that focus exclusively on supporting women after the closing of a past partner, Re-Entry. From supporting domestic violence survivors to addressing trafficking in CT, there are a range of organizations having significant local impact that we look forward to better understanding next year. As a church, our commitment to crises, both global and local, is a core tenant of how we seek to build God's kingdom. The MSA committee is privileged to carry out this work.

Nominating and Governance

The Nominating and Governance Committee identifies and recommends members of the church for election to these standing committees that you have just read about. These committees (Deacons, Trustees, Investments, Missions & Social Actions, Personnel) are additional ways for our members to connect with our church in a deeper, more meaningful way. At our Annual Meeting in March 2023, a full slate of nominations was presented - from our OG Mission Trip in Puerto Rico via Zoom - to the congregation and unanimously approved. In addition, two by-law amendments were approved. These changes to our by-laws allow for an additional member on our MSA Committee, bringing the total to nine. In addition, we now allow our Annual Meeting (and all special meetings called) to be published in print newspapers or digital media.

We are looking forward to a bright future with enthusiastic participation and strong leadership on all church committees, ministry teams, and programs.

Standing Committees

Personnel

The Personnel Committee works to support the Senior Minister with all church staff resourcing projects and concerns. The committee members participate in an array of activities, including but not limited to position description development, recruitment and interviews, performance reviews, personnel policy reviews and updates, compensation planning, and advice and counsel to staff on personnel matters. We welcomed wonderful new members to the church staff in 2023. Maria Stadnik started as our Director of Finance in January, replacing Shean-Mei Sheu following her retirement. Maria's help and experience are instrumental in the financial functions and

health of our church. Emma Garner joined us in June, participating in the Quest Holy Land trip before taking on the role of Youth Director. Barb Clayton and Beth Baker began as Pastoral Care Ministers this summer and have cared so well for these ministries and our congregants. Music Ministries experienced changes as Greer Lyle took on the role of Director of Children's Music & Drama while Michael Burnette began as Interim Director of Music Ministries ahead of Jody Blaine Davis' retirement in mid-December. We are so grateful to God that these incredible individuals have made their way to God's Acre!



Beth Baker and Barb Clayton



Greer Lyle



Emma Garner



Michael Burnette

Church Officers

Clerk (2027)

Anne Gunter

Treasurer (2026)

Laura Doscher

Assistant Treasurer (2026)

John Owen

General Counsel (2026)

Tom Hall

Board of Deacons

Class of 2025

Dionna Carlson*

Kirk Carr

Tammie Garner

Mike Rodgers

Class of 2026

Twée Haffner

Teri Reid

Michael Holland (Jr.)

David Beck

Class of 2027

Lauren Baker

Dawn Doak

Trey Laird

Carol Bayne

Board of Trustees

Class of 2025

Stephanie Douglas-Parkin

Colin Smith

Mike Sotirhos

Linda Williams

Class of 2026

Amy Werner*

Homer Parkhill

Jen Paterson

Dirk Dunlap

Class of 2027

Krista Murphy

Joel Armijo

Amy Sheffield

Chris McClave

Nominating and Governance

Class of 2025

Debbie Raymond

Class of 2026

Peter Wilson*

Anne Emson

Class of 2027

Steve Antonson

Laurel Carr

Investment Committee

Class of 2025

Derrek Metz

Class of 2027

James Thomas*

Bill Kennedy

Leadership Committee

Rev. Stephen Chapin Garner
(Senior Minister)

Amy Werner (Trustees)

Lonnie deMarco (Personnel)

Dionna Carlson (Deacons)

Peter Wilson (Nominating
and Governance)

Marianna Kilbride (Director
of Missions & Outreach)

Caroline Smittle
(Director of Operations)

Missions and Social Action

Class of 2025

Kathleen Abbott

Maria Hemmings

Janis Hennessy

Class of 2026

Brian Werner*

Lindsay Tucker

Karen Wilson

Class of 2027

Martial Pabon

Sindi Rusiecki

Starling Cousley

Personnel

Class of 2026

Dede Beck

Lonnie deMarco*

Amy Werner

Class of 2027

Julia Bognon

Raymond Trustees

Danita Ostling

Seth Alvord

Ministry Teams and other Small Groups

Buildings & Grounds

Card Writing

Children & Family
Ministries

Children's Music & Drama

Fellowship (Adult, Men's,
Women's)

Flower Ministry Team

History Ministry Team

Men's Small Groups

Middle School Ministries

Music

Pastoral Care Outreach

Pastoral Ministries

Prayer Chain

Prayer Shawl Ministry

Stephen Ministries

Welcoming/New Members

Women's Small Groups

Youth Group

Ministers and Staff

The Rev. Dr. Stephen

Chapin Garner

Senior Minister

Kelly Antonson

Senior Youth Director

Beth Baker

Pastoral Care Minister

Dr. Michael Burnette

*Interim Director of Music
Ministries*

Laurel Carr

Director of Communications

Barb Clayton

Pastoral Care Minister

Lindsey Daly

*Director of Children's
Ministries*

Emma Garner

Youth Director

Tracy Goldman

Community Life Coordinator

Sarah Haddad

Church School Coordinator

Anthony Jones

Sexton

Marianna Kilbride

Director of Spiritual Formation

Caroline Smittle

Director of Operations

Greer Lyle

*Director of Children's
Music & Drama*

Maria Stadnik

Director of Finance

Allison Wolter

*Administrative Assistant
for Youth*

* Chairperson

Pastoral Report

Membership

January 1 - December 31, 2023

Deaths (7)

Stuart Ainsworth	Robert Bailey Stewart
Thomas Gillespie Jr.	Meryl Vallar
John Hetherington	Denney Voss
Peter Jennewein	

United by Reaffirmation of Faith (36)

Allison Benenson	Valarie McLain
Jason Bennett	Lizzi Meadow
Sicily Bennett	Todd Meadow
Leslie Bisesi	Allen Miller
David Frame	Liza Miller
Malia Frame	Robert Mobley
Lauren Gargiulo	Megan Moreland Sherer
Emily Gourlay	Laura Novosel
Scott Gourlay	Michael Novosel
Polly Grube	Cheryl Ponzeka
Rob Grube	June Reinman
Jennifer Lindner	Jason Russell
Ryan Lindner	Jennifer Russell
Brynn Loboda	Ashley Simon
John Loboda	Scott Simon
Brian Marchiony	Charlotte Wilbur
Dana Marchiony	Jeff Wilbur
Mark McLain	Jason Wolter

United by Letter of Transfer (13)

Chris Carter	Jamie Loner
Mary Carter	Kim Loner
Jacquelyn Cook	Kimberly Quinn
Sue Cook	Steven (Steve) Quinn
Eric Denlinger	Mackie Spadaccini
Molly Denlinger	Mark Spadaccini
Katrina Hering	

United by Confirmation (29)

Eva Alexander	Caroline Haddad
Anna Marie Armijo	Anna Hering
Beau Belles	Joshua Herman
Nico Benett	Alexander Hill
Brooke Bisesi	Kaitlyn Knowles
Charles Burges	Roxanna Magratten
Leighton Busby	Stone Milligan
Nate Carr	Henry Oak
Boyd Cousley	Pierce Parkhill
Sienna DeKanter	Myles Petitjean
Eliza DeChristopher	Alexia Rees
Tilly Doak	Layne Resnick
Charlotte Doak	Nancy Skidmore
Hank Durfee	Molly Wolter
John Frisbee	

Demographics

January 1 - December 31, 2023

Total Active Membership at January 1, 2023. 1,255

Members Received During the Year

Reaffirmation of Faith	36
Transfer from other churches	13
Confirmation	29
Reactivation	1

Decreases

Due to Death	7
Transferred to other churches	4
Other removals	0
Net Change	68

Total Active Membership at December 31, 2023 1,323

Pastoral Record (includes all minister's activities)

Baptisms	
Children	20
Adults	3
Total	23

Marriages

Members	0
Non-Members	0
Total	0

Funerals, Memorial Services and Interments

Members	6
Non-Members	1
Total	7

Church Attendance Records (Average)

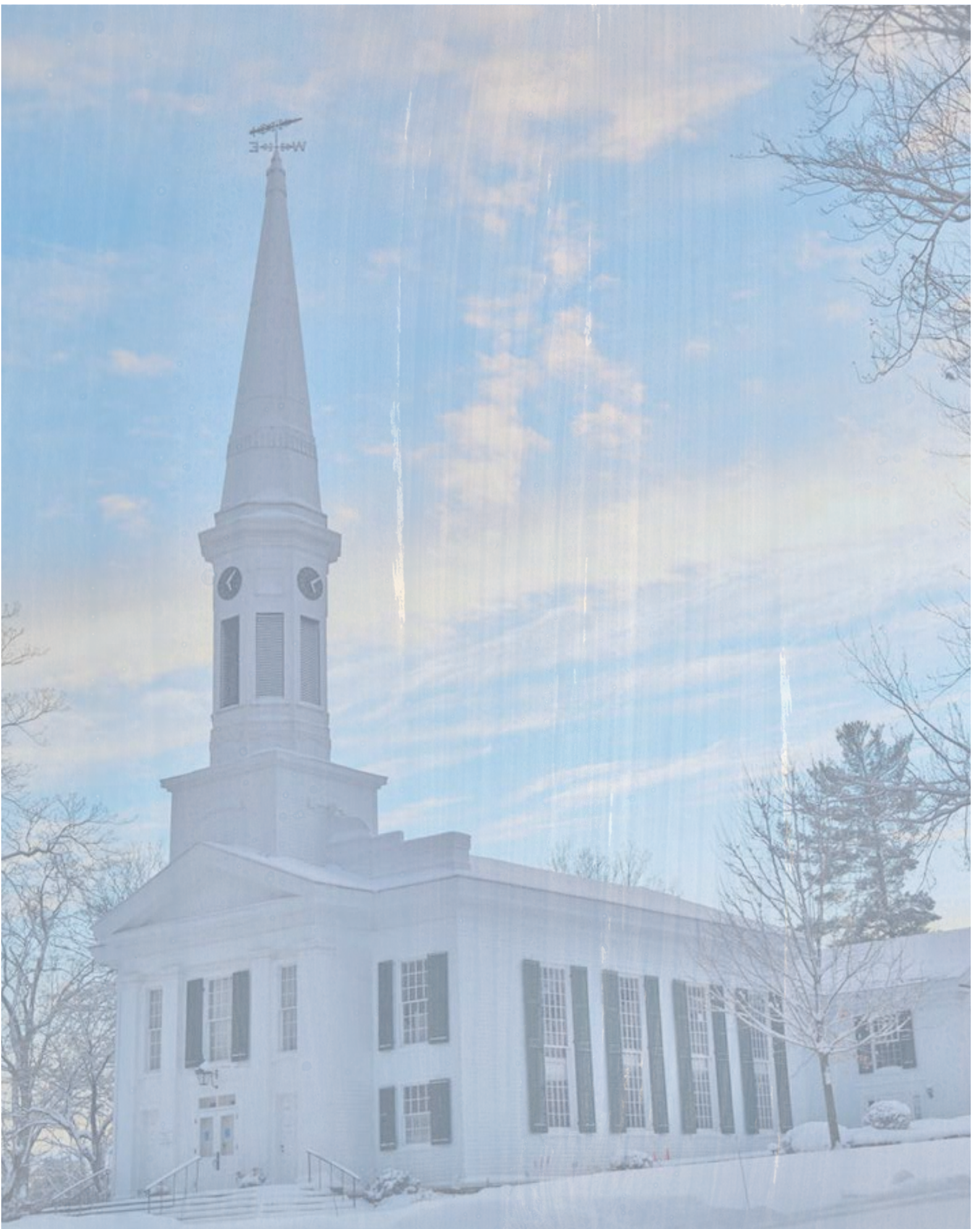
	2020	2021	2022	2023
Program Year				
8:00am	57*	46	42	41
10:00am	307	262	368	468
Average	360	308	410	508
Summer Months	283	168	229	313
Average by Sunday	347	249	375	504
			*Jan-Jun. only	

Church Attendance - Special Events

Easter Sunday	1401	708	1183	1313
Celebration Sunday	433	365	533	735
Lessons & Carols	114	112	100	108
Christmas Sunday	271	342	635	734
Christmas Eve	874	1099	1694	1766

Church School

Enrollment	n/a	103	131	130
Average Attendance	n/a	34	44	50





The Congregational Church
of New Canaan

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We are a Stephen Minister Church