

Annual Report 2025



The Congregational Church of *New Canaan*

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Dear Church Family,

I always welcome the opportunity to pause and reflect on the life of our church and to offer a few thoughts in the form of an annual report. What follows is not a comprehensive accounting of everything happening among us, but rather a series of snapshots—reflections that I hope capture something essential about our shared life at this moment in time.

This year, I'd like to frame those reflections around three interconnected realities that are all essential to a healthy congregation: our past, our present, and our future. Each grounds and informs the others. When held together faithfully, they orient us toward meaningful, Spirit-led ministry.

The Gift of Our Past

One of the things I love most is when our church's structure genuinely facilitates ministry as it was intended to enable. A wonderful example of this has emerged through the work of our History Ministry Team.

During the COVID years, as we cleaned out long-overlooked closets, crawl spaces, and drawers throughout the church, we discovered a remarkable—and concerning—collection of historical documents. Many were poorly stored, unsecured, and largely forgotten. Recognizing both their value and vulnerability, the Deacons discerned a need for focused care. Steve Case, then serving on the Board of Deacons, felt called to help form a History Ministry Team—a calling the Deacons affirmed. A dedicated group of church members and friends stepped forward, eager to explore, preserve, and honor our historical record.

One of the most notable discoveries to come from their careful work concerns the very founding date of our congregation. Most of us have long identified 1733 as our year of origin—a date engraved on plaques and memorial stones, and used in our hymnals. However, the team uncovered that 1733 actually marks the conclusion of Reverend Robert Eells' nine-month probationary preaching period and his call as our first settled minister—not the church's beginning.

Our Congregational tradition teaches that the church takes shape whenever two or three gather in the name of Christ. In our case, that gathering occurred earlier. In 1731, a small group—likely four to six individuals—petitioned the General Assembly in Hartford for the charter of a new town and a new church: Canaan Parish. Many churches of our era mark their founding by this very act of recognition, not by the calling of a minister or the completion of a building.

As a result of the History Team's diligent research—shared with our Leadership Team, Deacons, and Trustees—we now understand 1731 to be the most faithful expression of our congregation's inception.

I find this deeply exciting—not because of a date change, but because of how it came about. A need was identified. Faithful people stepped forward. A ministry team was formed. Careful work was done. And as a result, our understanding of who we are has been clarified and enriched.

There are, of course, practical implications: signage must be updated, findings carefully communicated, and our upcoming 300th anniversary now draws nearer than expected. But these are small matters compared to the gift we have received—a clearer sense of our origins and our purpose. Knowing who we are and why we were formed helps orient us toward the future God is inviting us to walk into together.

The Gift of Our Present

As I turn to the present, I do so with deep gratitude—and with earnest responsibility. I am profoundly grateful to serve a thriving Congregational church in New England—one of the few remaining of its kind in our region. Whether through the financial strength of our congregation, the breadth and depth of our ministries, or the way we continue to grow together in faith and community, it is hard not to stand in awe of the goodness of this moment and the graciousness of our God.



At the same time, I am mindful of Jesus' words in Luke's Gospel: "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required." That truth is both inspiring and sobering. Even on our most challenging days, I think we would agree that we have been entrusted with much.

I often say of my own life that I am owed nothing — I have received far more than I deserve. One of the things I cherish about this congregation is that I believe we share that awareness collectively. We take seriously our call to give back—to invest our time, resources, and energy in the world for the good of others. Our consistent commitment to generosity and service is, I believe, one of the reasons we remain a vital church in a region where sustaining faith communities is increasingly difficult.

Preparing for the Future

Which brings me to the future. As we edge closer to our 300th anniversary, we are given a rare and meaningful opportunity for reflection and discernment. While dates and anniversaries may not matter much to God, they can matter deeply to us. They invite us to pause and ask: *How are we preparing the ground for those who will come after us?*

The founders of our church could not have imagined the world of 2026—let alone what the church might face 20 or 50 years from now. And we, too, cannot see clearly what lies ahead. But that uncertainty is not a weakness; it is an invitation.

What I do know is this: one pastor sitting alone, trying to imagine an anniversary or dream up a future, is not how a Congregational church discerns the will of the Holy Spirit. Our tradition insists that when we gather—praying, listening, studying, and trusting—Christ is present and the Holy Spirit speaks. Sometimes, even through the minority of one voice.

For that reason, beginning with this annual meeting, we will launch a churchwide discernment process as we prepare for our 300th anniversary and the fourth century of ministry on God's Acre. We have invited Ken Siladi—our Pastor-in-Residence and former Conference Minister of the Southern New England Conference of the UCC—to guide us through this process. Together, we will study, pray, and imagine what the Holy Spirit may be calling us to become.

This is not about advancing personal preferences or preserving familiar patterns at all costs. It is about listening—deeply and collectively—for the mind of Christ. Holding onto the past too tightly is rarely the path to a faithful future. At the same time, honoring our history can help resource and guide the next generation.

Who are we being called to be?

What are we being called to do?

What might we need to release for the sake of those who will follow us?

These questions are wide open—and that is precisely where faithful discernment begins.

Living Faithfully Across Time

Personally, I love history. I value the way identity is shaped by shared memory. I am deeply grateful for the present, believing—as we say each Sunday—"*This is the day the Lord has made, and we will rejoice and be glad in it.*" Every breath, every interaction, every moment is a gift from God.

And when it comes to the future, I have no desire for a crystal ball. What I hope—both for myself and for our congregation—is that we continue to trust the God who gives us our daily bread. Not only what we need for today, but a vision of who we can become together, in ways that are faithful, fruitful, and pleasing to God.

I am profoundly grateful for this past decade of ministry with you. I thank God for every new day we share. And I am excited—truly excited—to venture into the future together, seeking to live ever more fully into our covenant: *We covenant with the Lord and one with another, and do bind ourselves in the presence of God, to walk together in all His ways, according as He is pleased to reveal Himself unto us in His blessed Word of truth.*

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, fellowship, 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

I am blessed and delighted to share with you some of the highlights from the work of the Deacons.

The Deacons continue to be thoughtful discerners of and servants to the spiritual life of this church. We are grateful for the opportunity to support the practical, compassionate, and communal needs of the church so that our whole church family can flourish in faith and ministry. Through our Deacon

Liaisons within committees and ministry teams, we work hand in hand with Music, MSA, Fellowship, Pastoral Care, and Children and Families to ensure each program has the support and resources it needs to thrive.

Our most thoughtful discernment this year has centered on the future, specifically our church's upcoming 300th anniversary. At the writing of this report, our anniversary would be in 2033, but by the time you read this, it will be in 2031! Thanks to the amazing work of our History Ministry Team (a ministry born from Deacons), our team of archivists and historians discovered that our original founding year is actually 1731!

Throughout this program year, we prayerfully considered the many ways we might visualize a Fourth Century here on God's Acre. To that end, we have been considering ministerial talent streams via the Raymond Fellows and other sources. We've also increased transparency around Deacon roles and responsibilities, in hopes of reaching more church members who feel called to serve. In addition, we've discussed how we may physically improve our space on God's Acre, as our church family continues to grow vibrantly each year (a very good challenge to have!).

We continue to be encouraged by the growth in our in-person worship attendance, which has had a steady upward trajectory since the pandemic. Our online reach continues to grow, with several church members continuing to worship virtually from across the globe.

I would be remiss if I did not highlight all the incredible "invisible labor" of the Deacons this year. We have been working behind the scenes on many worship-related matters, from the major (improvement of our audio/visual systems) to the mundane (securing adequate shade for summer worship). As my mom would say, "Those communion plates do not polish themselves!" It is humbling to work alongside eleven Christians who truly embody the definition of servant-leader.

We lift up gratitude for our Junior Deacons, whose input and service have become an invaluable part of who we are. We are deeply thankful to Chapin, Kelly, the Leadership Team, and the church staff for their tireless efforts in making this all look so easy! Most of all, we are grateful to you – the congregation – for your trust, support, and commitment to our church. It is a blessing to be part of a community where faith is lived out in love, service, and care for one another.

Yours in continued service,
Dawn Doak, Senior Deacon

Spiritual Experience

Music Ministry

To God be the Glory!

We have been blessed with another successful year in Music Ministries at God's Acre. As we entered this new liturgical season, we have implemented several changes aimed at enhancing our musical offerings. With the addition of new section leaders, we felt equipped and encouraged to move forward with fresh ideas and renewed purpose.

In September, we "Kicked-Off" with a Spirit-filled and inspiring Sunday service. Our Chancel Choir offered a powerful rendition of *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, accompanied by organ, brass, and timpani. The combination of instrumentation and the choir's angelic voices gave us a true sense of God's presence. The Chancel Choir remains to be a devoted and consistent group of singers. We rehearse weekly, and the choir remains open-minded, flexible, and enthusiastic about the diverse repertoire and musical styles presented throughout the year.

In the spring and again in December, the Chancel Choir headlined concerts. Alongside beautiful solos offered by our section leaders, our combined children's choirs, under Greer Lyle's leadership, sang with joy and confidence. We were also encouraged by the strong attendance, particularly at the Christmas Concert, and it was evident that those present were truly blessed by the musical selections. We were honored to



welcome Robenson as our guest conductor while our music director served as organist.

In addition to concerts, Music Ministries hosted both Lenten and Advent Musical Moments on select Wednesdays, featuring our Section Leaders and our Director of Music Ministries, Nerva Altino.

It remains a blessing to serve alongside our wonderful pastor in Chapin and the dedicated staff who make up our church community. Our meetings never feel burdensome; instead, they reflect the warmth, unity, and family-centered atmosphere we cherish. Plans are thoughtfully discussed and faithfully executed, and we are grateful for the support extended whenever assistance is needed. Such generosity and teamwork are never taken for granted.

We are also deeply grateful for the joy of serving with Greer, who continues to demonstrate exceptional leadership within our children's and youth music ministries. Her rehearsals are fun, lighthearted, and full of humor, yet still productive and focused.

We extend heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed to Music Ministries at God's Acre, whether through words of encouragement, prayer, or financial support. *Little becomes much when placed in the Master's hands*, and no offering to this ministry is ever too small. We also express tremendous gratitude to our music committee, whose ongoing support allows us to serve more effectively. While much of their work happens behind the scenes, its impact is felt widely and deeply. Thank you for your dedication and service.

Serving God's people is among the greatest honors of being part of Music Ministries, and we remain profoundly grateful for the opportunity to serve this loving congregation here at God's Acre.



Children's Music and Drama Ministry

Children's Music and Drama Ministry was truly blessed this year! Our many Children's Choirs consisting of Cherubs (ages 4- grade 1), Spirit Singers (grades 2 and 3), Joyful Noise (grades 4 and 5), Junior Worship Team (grades 5-8), and Youth Worship Team (grades 9-12) sang regularly in our 10:00am service. Our focus this year was to take time to understand the spiritual meanings behind all our songs. In doing so, our children sang their hearts out! We were delighted with messages from families sharing that their young ones are singing our church songs on their own in joyful worship at home. Children's music also shared their gift of singing for various community engagements. Our children's choirs sang a spring program and Christmas carols for our friends both at the Inn at Waveny and downtown, while bell-ringing, our Youth Worship Team joined the music leadership for our monthly contemporary evening service, and all our programs joined forces for our spring concert. A highlight of this season was our spring children's musical, Faith is a Rainbow, written and adapted by our very own director, Greer Lyle, where children's choirs acted, shared bible verses, and sang about color symbolism in the Bible and our spiritual calendar. This year, our Nativity Pageant was one of our biggest, with almost 60 children and youth coming together to tell the story of Jesus' birth. We moved the pageant to during church on the

second Sunday in Advent to support families' busy schedules and share the pageant with the entire church. That Sunday was hit with a blizzard, but everyone came to praise God and support our kids' hard work- Mrs. Greer called it a "Christmas miracle!" With the addition of new set pieces, our children shone like stars. We look to the new year in excitement and hope. We pray that this ever-growing ministry continues flourishing and sharing God's abundant love through our precious young voices.



Christian Formation

Children & Families Ministries

The year 2025 was marked by meaningful faith formation and a deepening sense of community among the children and families of our church. Throughout the winter and spring months, we gathered for cherished annual traditions, including Family BINGO Night and our Easter Children's Chapel and Egg Hunt, which again welcomed more than 100 children. Our program year culminated in June with Celebration Sunday, a joyful worship service in which children from Pre-K through eighth grade as confirmands shared important spiritual milestones. This meaningful service beautifully reflected the impact of the church-school experience and was followed by a spirited outdoor fellowship celebration enjoyed by all.

Summer began with Vacation Bible Camp, where more than 60 children participated in our "Camp VBS" program. Together, we explored biblical stories centered on wilderness and discovery through hands-on activities, crafts, shared meals, and joyful fellowship. As in years past, our older youth played an essential role, serving as junior and senior counselors and modeling leadership and service. Building on a newer initiative, children also had the opportunity to attend six weeks of combined church school classes during summer worship services.

In the fall, approximately 160 children enrolled in our 2025–26 church school program, and our weekly attendance averages 65 children, an over 20% increase from attendance last year. We continue to offer banded classes for nursery-aged children, Preschoolers, Kindergarten and First Grade, Second and Third Grade, and Fourth and Fifth Grade. Each Sunday, children engage in faith-filled learning through classroom lessons, chapel services, outreach projects, storytelling with Mrs. Grogan, and music with Miss Greer. Our Sixth and Seventh Grade students participate in worship through the sermon



before gathering in the parlor for a guided discussion, where they reflect on scripture and the sermon and explore how these teachings apply to their own lives.

We also remain committed to welcoming our youngest church and community members through Clementine's Playdates, offered weekly. Beyond Sunday mornings, the Children and Family Ministry Team coordinated numerous events throughout the year, including playground playdates, a family fall Harvest meal, our annual Thanksgiving service project, and a parent social held during our third annual Christmas Craft Fair.

Perhaps the greatest testament to the impact of our Children and Family Ministry is the ease, comfort, and joy with which our youngest members come together in fellowship and service, openly and thoughtfully exploring their faith. A genuine sense of connection exists among the children of our church and the families who nurture them, and we are deeply grateful to reflect on this community of love, belonging, and shared faith.





Christian Formation

Youth Ministries

2025 was a year filled with growth, change, and abundance for our youth ministries. We grew as a community, welcoming both fish of all ages and new leadership. As our dear Kelly Antonson was called to lead our youth in a new capacity as the Associate Minister of Children and Families, our youth minister search began. We found God's provision close to home, appointing Greer Lyle as Director of Youth Ministries and Children's Music, and Kimberly Dyrvik and Khanisha Denise Moore as YG Co-Leads. Our youngest youth groups saw an influx of participation as we focused on engaging programming that, most importantly, centered on scriptures and Bible stories. Activities like care packages for alumni and our friends at the Inn at Waveny, making "blessing burritos" for Inspirica, ringing Salvation Army bells, and having late-night games of sardines were highlights of our year.

Our middle school youth group, MSYG, saw continued engagement as we spent our spring together, and resurged in energy this fall. The car wash, one of our annual events held in May to raise funds for our annual Mission to Mountainside Rehabilitation Center, was a highlight of the year. Over Mountainside weekend, our fish spent a weekend learning about addiction from residents of the center while enjoying activities like hiking, team-building exercises, and making s'mores. Our yearly lock-in this fall brought new fish and a renewed energy that has carried through the program into 2026.



The past YG year unfolded with a renewed sense of purpose and community. We continue to admire the ways our high school fish remain committed to their faith and each other as they participate in the various commitments offered throughout our calendar year. This past year, 105 of our YG fish embarked on a mission to Waco Texas, to work with our partner, Mission Waco, in its ministry to end homelessness in the region. Our mission sponsors ambitiously banded together far and wide, raising \$100,000 to build three tiny homes for Creekside Community Village, a transformative community combining permanent supportive housing with life-giving community engagement. This Community exists to empower our brothers and sisters who are coming out of homelessness and long for a permanent place to call home. During our time in Waco, the dedication of our youth was unwavering, as teams built tiny homes, helped build accessible entryways for residents' homes, met with local underserved youth to provide after-school programming, and worked diligently to clean, paint, and redecorate an emergency homeless shelter. We were led by the scripture from Philippians 2:3, which reads,

“Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”

This scripture continued to guide our high school group as we connected with each other in new ways and experiences this year! Our Senior Freshman retreat involved heading into Manhattan to feed our brothers and sisters experiencing homelessness, who are closer to our own doors. As we sought

to see Christ in others and be Christ to others, we formed new bonds with Pivot Ministries by hosting a bingo night and serving dinner to our Pivot brothers.

A big highlight of our 2025 program year was Quest! This smaller youth group has seen a resurgence of engagement as we moved to a monthly schedule of dinners, Bible study, and contemporary worship sessions. Our quest fish enjoy trying new cuisine while thoughtfully reflecting on scripture relevant to them. With a resurgence of emboldened spirit and seeking scriptural truth within our fish, we decided to update our logo to better reflect our ambition to be more Christ-centered.

QUEST



Christian Formation

Adult Formation

We began in the beginning with a winter Bible Study of the first book of the Bible, Genesis. With a history dating back to the 9th century BCE and written by four different authors, the literature of Genesis is where we trace our Judeo-Christian roots. In spring, we read The Minor Prophets and, in the fall, transitioned to the very major evangelist, Paul, in his challenging Letter to the Romans. Romans was read not only by our longstanding Monday groups but also by the brand new Early Morning Men's Group, led by Sean Kelley.

Men's and Women's Small Groups continued to flourish, feasting on the scripture of the week and the sermons preached on it.

Friends of Merton, a contemplative reading group, meandered through the new and noteworthy Backpacking with the Saints, Wilderness Hiking as a Spiritual Practice by Belden C. Lane, and a classic, Bonhoeffer's Life Together.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world but, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.
– Romans 12:2

Men's Fellowship

During 2025, the Men's Fellowship Ministry continued to provide numerous meaningful and impactful ways for the men of our church to gather in fellowship. Standout MG events include the Men's Christmas dinner, breaking bread with our brothers from Pivot at our annual breakfast, and the 'Baker BBQ', which brought many into fellowship settings throughout the year. Additional highlights included a monthly M4 breakfast gathering with a discussion focused on balancing work and faith, hosted by Dirk Dunlap, and a quarterly men's book group hosted by Jim Clayton. Approximately 100 individuals, divided into 5 Small Groups, meet monthly to share their faith journeys. MG's strength comes from our strong communal desire to share our individual faith journeys within a community of peers.



Fellowship

Our Fellowship Ministry created joyful, welcoming opportunities for connection in 2025. We began the year with our always fun Chili Paddle Social in January, featuring a little competition on the courts and a hearty selection of chili! Everyone left with a smile and a customized award.

Throughout the year, the weekly Fellowship Coffee Hour remains the key connection piece in our life together, offering space for us to be in relationship with one another after worship. In the spring, Fellowship Dinner Parties brought members together in homes across town for a beloved evening of shared meals and new friendships. We also enjoyed a lively Ballroom Dance Class, adding music, movement, and laughter to our fellowship offerings.

We closed the program year with a festive Celebration Sunday Picnic in June, held in partnership with Children and Family Ministries. The afternoon included games, fellowship, and delicious food from Super Duper Weenie, followed by treats from the Ice Cream Emergency Truck.

In September, we welcomed everyone back from summer with our Kickoff Sunday Brunch, filling Smith Hall with egg sandwiches, fresh fruit, and lots of energy for the year ahead. Later in the fall, the Fellowship Paella Party at the Carriage Barn offered a memorable evening of good food, conversation, and community in a beautiful setting.

Finally, a Fellowship update would not be complete without heartfelt thanks to all who hosted Fellowship Coffee Hour. We are deeply grateful to the many families and individuals who volunteer their time and hospitality each week.

Your Fellowship Team included Allison Boeckmann, Nancy Burges, Laurel Carr, Lesley Cousley, Ally Dunlap, Liz Keogh, and Liz McClave.



Christian Formation

Women's Fellowship

The Women's Fellowship Ministry enjoyed a meaningful and vibrant year rooted in service, connection, and hospitality. We began the year by serving together at Filling in the Blanks, packing backpacks for children and families experiencing food insecurity in our region. In November, we partnered with Inspirica in Stamford, joining with our sisters in Christ to sort and box food for Harvest for Hope, a Thanksgiving effort that provided meals for more than 2,000 local families.

In April, we gathered for a morning coffee at the home of Eileen Thomas. This relaxed time of fellowship offered space to reconnect over homemade treats and conversation, and we remain deeply grateful to the volunteers who generously open their homes to the women of the church.

Our Spring Brunch remains our cornerstone event. This year's gathering, held on a Friday morning in early May at The Country Club of New Canaan, featured fellowship, delicious

food, and words of wisdom from cherished church members. We tried a new format—an earlier start time with a brunch menu, and it was enthusiastically received.

In the fall, we were welcomed back with cake and coffee in the church parlor, sharing summer stories and reconnecting with church life. As the holidays approached, we leaned into hospitality with a wine-and-cheese evening at Linda Twombly's home, featuring hosting tips and wine pairings from Justin Miller, owner of Craftbottlz.

We closed 2025 with our beloved Women's Christmas Open House—always a highlight of the year. Nancy Burges and Liz McClave planned a beautiful evening at the New Canaan Field Club, offering a joyful space to celebrate the season together. We are deeply thankful for our dedicated team and for the wonderful congregation with whom we shared such a rich year of Women's Fellowship.



Welcoming Ministry

This spring, we were delighted to host our New Member Class in March, welcoming a wonderful group into a deeper connection with our church community. The class combined meaningful fellowship with an overview of our history, theology, governance, and ministry opportunities. Participants had the opportunity to meet church leaders, build relationships with one another, and reflect on what membership means within their own faith journeys. We were grateful to celebrate this class of 15 new members, along with their families, and mark their commitment with a formal welcome during worship.

In the fall, we also had the joy of welcoming 26 new members into the life of our church. As part of that class, we refreshed our New Member format, placing renewed emphasis on fellowship and shared meals to foster early and lasting connections. These gatherings created space not only to learn about the church's mission and ministries, but also to build relationships around the table.

Our Welcoming Team continues its faithful ministry each Sunday morning, greeting guests and delivering small bags of honey to first-time visitors, a simple yet heartfelt expression of hospitality and gratitude.



Love of Neighbor

Missions and Outreach

March saw twenty-four members of Adult Missions and Outreach (AMO) depart for Kenya as friends and come back as family - with each other and with our longtime and well-loved Maasai partners. With funding from this generous congregation, we helped build a clinic to serve local families who previously walked miles for treatment or had not sought treatment at all. The clinic will be especially useful for prenatal care and childhood vaccinations. Our group was able to see projects we have funded over our twenty-plus-year partnership, feast with our friends, and work in a bit of safari. The long journey was made worthwhile by the transformation and connection experienced along the way.

Other highlights of the year were making a Norwalk foster mother incredibly happy with a follow-up renovation at her home after HomeFront Day. Her new stone path was courtesy Chapin's masonry crew. And a day of sorting and packing Thanksgiving meals at Inspirica, which Women's Fellowship chose as their November offering went a long way toward a big goal.

...if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, th'en your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.
— Isaiah 58:10



Pastoral Care at Our Church: A New Chapter for 2025

At our Church, Pastoral Care thrives on the principles of connection, love, and compassion. Under the guidance of our Senior Minister, Chapin, and with the dedicated leadership of Associate Minister Kelly Antonson and Pastoral Care Minister Barb Clayton, we are committed to walking alongside our members in every season of life.



Our ministry teams create countless opportunities to connect—both with those we serve and with one another as we serve side by side. Every act—whether offering a prayer, making a visit, or sending a simple note—become living expression of God’s love, Jesus’ love, and our love of one another. In these moments, bonds are formed not only through caring for others but also through shared purpose and faith, as team members encourage and uplift each other in the work of love.

Helping Hands, launched in 2024, provides meals, rides, errands, and support to members celebrating joys or navigating illness, transitions, difficult times, and moments of great joy.

Stephen Ministers offer confidential, Christ-centered one-to-one care for those who need a listening ear and spiritual encouragement.

Our **Prayer Shawl Ministry** lovingly creates shawls that wrap recipients in warmth and God’s love.

The **Card Writing Ministry** sends notes of sympathy, encouragement, and congratulations, reminding members they are never alone.

The **Flower Ministry** brings beauty and joy to worship and beyond—arrangements from our altar are shared with members at home, extending the spirit of Sunday into the week.

And through our **Prayer Ministry**, the power of prayer remains accessible to all, connecting hearts in faith and hope.

*Carry each other’s burdens,
and in this way you will fulfill
the law of Christ.*
– Galatians 6:2



These ministries remind us that we are truly blessed to be a family of faith, united in God’s commandment to love one another. Every meal delivered, every prayer whispered, every card sent is a thread in the fabric of care that binds us together.

We invite you to join us in this sacred work. If you feel called to serve—whether by delivering a meal, writing a card, praying for others, or offering a listening ear—there is a place for you in Pastoral Care. Your gifts can make a profound difference in someone’s life.



The Flower Ministry

Throughout 2025, the Flower Ministry has continued to be a true gift that keeps on giving. Several church members who wished to learn the art of floral arranging joined together with more seasoned members of the ministry and are now actively arranging for the church and events.

Our creative team of twenty members enhances weekly worship services and church events with stunning floral arrangements. After each service, these arrangements are broken down into smaller arrangements and given to the deacons, who then deliver these flowers to members of the community who could use a lift in spirit.

Following Christmas and Easter services, more than 120 plants used in holiday displays were delivered with letters from the Pastoral Care Ministry, bringing comfort, encouragement, and holiday cheer to many.

Finally, the flower dedication program – honoring loved ones or marking special events – continues to thrive. Through these dedications, we remember not only those being honored but the families who cherish their memories or support our community.



The Raymond Trust and Preaching Fellows Program

The Raymond Trust was established in 1883 under the Will of Deacon William E. Raymond with the purpose of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those in Connecticut who might not otherwise have access to worship. In generations past, the Trust employed eleven successive Raymond Ministers who served nearly 100 churches in diverse contexts.

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

The Raymond Preaching Fellows Program

With this authority, the Trustees established the Raymond Preaching Fellows Program. The program provides fellowships to divinity school students committed to deepening their focus on the art and craft of preaching, while offering free pulpit supply to churches and pastors in need of support. During the academic year, each Raymond Fellow has two primary responsibilities:

1. Participate in a bi-weekly *Sermon Studio*, a collaborative space for theological reflection, sermon development, and peer feedback.
2. Prepare and preach eight to ten sermons at their host congregations.

The program is supported by a Raymond Fellowship Committee, tasked with recruiting and supporting students, managing the program effectively, and connecting with local churches and church bodies. The committee includes Sara Bakker, Marianna Kilbride, Kelly Morrisey, William Picard, and Richard Williams.

While our Church operates on a calendar year and the Trust operates on a fiscal year ending June 30, the Program itself follows an academic year. Accordingly, activities within one fiscal year of the Trust often overlap with the academic year of the program.

2025 Fellows

During the Trust's 2025 fiscal year (corresponding to the Program's 2024-2025 academic year), the Trust funded three Raymond Fellows from Yale Divinity School:

- David Stuart (third-year student)
- Elyon Wells (second-year student)
- Eliana Cañas (first-year student)

2026 Fellows

For the Trust's 2026 fiscal year (the Program's 2025-2026 academic year), the Trust continues to fund three Raymond Fellows from Yale Divinity School:

- Elyon Wells (third-year student)
- Eliana Cañas (second-year student)
- Benji Suprice (second-year student)



Deacon William E. Raymond

Training Lay Preaching Fellows

To meet the growing demand for preaching services in Connecticut, and with the support of the Trustees of the Congregational Church of New Canaan, we continue to train lay preaching fellows. Marianna Kilbride, Tony Kiniry and Khanisha Denise Moore are being developed to serve in this capacity.

Administration of the Fund

The Raymond Trust continues to be administered by Trustees Danita Ostling, Seth Alvord, and Gabriella Kiniry, whose stewardship ensures the ongoing fulfillment of Deacon Raymond's vision.



Eliana Cañas



Benji Suprice



Elyon Wells



Marianna Kilbride



Tony Kiniry



Khanisha Denise Moore

Board of Trustees

Overview

The twelve-member Board of Trustees oversees the business affairs of the Church, raises money, disburses funds, accepts gifts for restricted or general purposes, oversees personnel policies, ensures appropriate record-keeping, and provides 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, as well as a budget for the current year. Consistent with these duties, the Trustees are pleased to submit this financial report.

2025 Church Funding

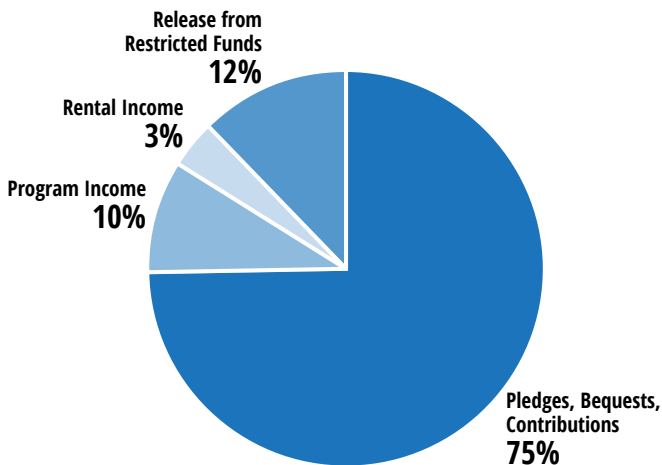
2025 operating funding totaled \$3,853,071. The Church received nearly \$2.4 million in pledges, reflecting the generous annual commitment of our congregation to support our program year, missions giving, and operating budget. In addition to pledges, the Church received \$495k in one-time gifts and bequests, including weekly plate offerings (all directed to mission work), disbursements from the Raymond Trust, and gifts made in memory or honor of members of our faith community. Together, pledges and gifts totaled almost \$2.9 million, accounting for 75% of our annual funding. Program Revenue was higher, in large part due to participant fees for the AMO service trip to Africa. Use of Facility income, primarily preschool rent, was received as expected under the lease agreements in place. The final category of funding, Release from Restricted Funds, came from the Pooled Investment Fund (CCPIF). Our investment policy provides for an annual calculated release to support designated areas of current spending, and the Trustees applied these funds in accordance with donor

intent. We are deeply grateful for the foresight and generosity of former members, whose legacy gifts enable us to fund an additional \$466,225 in programming today.

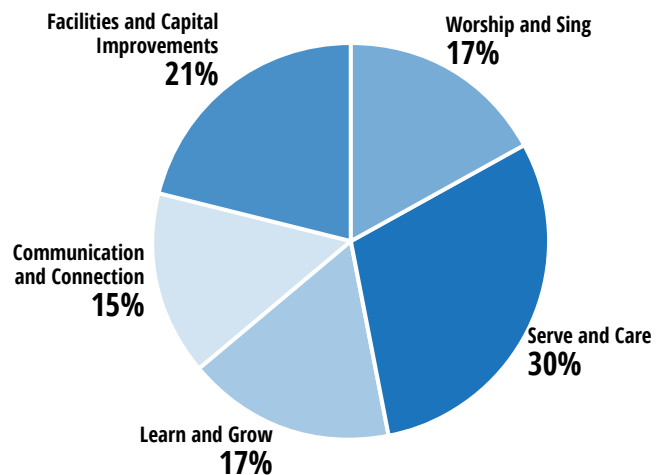
2025 Church Expenses

Total expenses were \$3,704,580 and aligned with the budget, though there was some variability across program areas. Year-over-year increases were seen in Salaries & Benefits, reflecting higher employment costs and the addition of key staff, including our new Associate Minister for Children, Youth, and Families. Increased participation in all children's programming joyfully warranted greater investment in Children's Christian Formation. Adult Christian Formation shows a significant decrease in spending, largely due to adjustments in timing and administrative costs associated with the AMO service trips to Africa (2025) and Honduras (2026). Our vibrant Music program expanded in both ambition and scope, supported by additional funding that enabled initiatives such as adding a choir section leader midyear and recording a wider range of music for our online and podcast worship offerings. Buildings and Grounds spending increased due to higher maintenance contract costs and improvements to the church school / preschool wing in preparation for opening the Preschool on God's Acre in August. Following substantial Capital Improvement projects completed the prior year on the parking lot and steeple, a few key projects were completed in 2025, including repairs to the flat roofs and replacement of the Library fire escape. Our core Missions spending, guided by the Missions and Social Action Committee (MSA), remained consistent with prior years and centered on our ongoing, faithful support of both new and long-standing philanthropy

2025 Sources of Income



2025 Expense Allocation



partners. As approved at the 2025 Annual Meeting, an additional \$28,338 from the 250th Fund supported capital projects at Pivot Ministries, Open Door Shelter, and Pacific House.

Missions spending exceeded budget due to increased plate giving and a one-time exceptional grant given to Mission Waco to support the building of three tiny houses as part of the 2025 YG Mission Trip, made possible by the overwhelming success of the YG Mission Sponsors Campaign.

Investments and the CCPIF

The CCPIF grew by 13% in 2025 and held \$13,213,341 in investment funds as of December 31. The authorized draw was \$466,225, determined by calculating 4.5% of the trailing 36-month balance invested in the CCPIF, which is overseen by the Investment Committee. In 2025, the Church transferred the full amount of the authorized release to fund programs according to the designation at the time the funds were established.

Preschool on God's Acre

The Church successfully launched The Preschool on God's Acre (PSGA) in August 2025, and thanks to the dedication of both Church and PSGA teams, the school is already financially independent and thriving in its inaugural year. As the owner of the school, the Church guided the creation of an independent PSGA Board, bylaws, and financial operations and governance with accountability to the Church Trustees. To support the startup effort, the Church utilized funds from an unrestricted gift, and PSGA has since repaid in full. PSGA also contributes rent to the Church under a formal lease agreement. Through its emergent curriculum, PSGA nurtures children in both mind and character, grounding them in the values of kindness, unity, courage, and respect. It has been a joy to watch this new school take root and flourish.

The 4th Century Vision and God's Acre Fund

As we approach our 300th anniversary, the Trustees have created the God's Acre Fund, an unrestricted cash fund dedicated to longer-term strategic planning, separate from the operating funds that support our annual needs. In 2025, the Church received \$1,500,000 in unrestricted gifts to seed this fund. As the 4th Century Vision takes shape in 2026, the congregation will help define how these resources are used. The God's Acre

Restricted Funds		
	12/31/2024 Balance	12/31/2025 Balance
1201 General Fund	\$5,606,611	\$6,345,801
1304 Hall Balance over original 2500	\$29,495	\$33,265
1306 Garden	\$160,655	\$184,354
1301 Luckhurst	\$4,659,497	\$5,252,320
1302 250th	\$662,311	\$762,032
1303 Williams	\$347,449	\$399,585
1305 Bangham	\$286,302	\$334,034
	\$11,752,320	\$13,311,391

Note: Figures based on Vanguard Investment account and Bank of America operating cash account balances as of calendar year end 2024 and 2025.

Fund will support long-term initiatives such as studying how best to use our campus, developing a leadership pipeline for future generations, and expanding the ways our church serves as the hands of Christ in our community and the world.

Concluding Comments

We are grateful for the generous pledges and gifts that enable us to extend our programming and missions giving. Our church is also blessed with an excellent staff who faithfully serve the people, programs, and physical assets of the Church. The Trustees are particularly grateful for the work of Caroline Smittle, Lonnie deMarco, and Maria Stadnik for their support.

As my term as Chair of Trustees ends, my gratitude goes to the terrific team of Trustees with whom I served, and especially to those who rotate off the Board this year: David Carlson, Dirk Dunlap, and Homer Parkhill. The counsel and expertise of each of these members were invaluable to the Trustees as we navigated through a year of growth. It was my pleasure to serve this community of faith. Thank you.

Amy Werner
Chair, Board of Trustees

Financial Highlights

2025 Budget and Unaudited Operating Actuals vs. 2026 Provisional Operating Budget

	2025 Actual	2025 Budget	2026 Budget
Sources of Funds	\$3,853,071	\$4,217,600	\$3,759,587
Salaries & Benefits	\$1,676,879	\$1,690,033	\$1,821,008
Parish Administration	\$410,480	\$436,000	\$435,338
Children Christian Formation	\$310,104	\$307,330	\$310,520
Adult Christian Formation	\$29,619	\$54,900	\$47,625
Deacons and Pastoral Care	\$15,003	\$28,000	\$28,000
Music	\$153,098	\$128,500	\$134,850
Missions	\$484,029	\$445,000	\$465,500
- Restricted Gifts towards YG Tiny Home Project	\$136,023		
Buildings and Grounds	\$287,159	\$297,924	\$315,113
Capital Improvements	\$202,186	\$304,000	\$270,000
Total Operating Expenses	\$3,704,580	\$3,691,687	\$3,827,954
Surplus (Deficit)	\$148,491	\$525,913	(\$68,367)

God's Acre Fund - Unrestricted Fund for Strategic Planning

Income

Extraordinary Gifts	\$1,500,000	\$500,000
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Capital Projects

2025 Capital Projects Completed – Buildings and Grounds

Several large capital improvements were completed in 2025. The aging fire escape off the Library was removed and replaced, repairs were made to the flat roof above the school wing to address leaks and improve HVAC access, and major refurbishment of the school wing classrooms and hallways was completed to prepare for the opening of the Preschool on God's Acre in late August. A speed bump was installed in the rear parking area to complete the prior year's resurfacing project. Signage was installed in the front circle, and repairs were made to the irrigation system servicing the area in front of the Meeting House. Interior painting projects and exterior carpentry repair work were completed at both parsonages, along with tree removal and replacement by the rear walkway to 7 St. John's Place and removal of a downed tree near the driveway. Extensive masonry repair work continued at the garden terrace area, the steps to the playground, and the walkways at the rear parking lot.



Standing Committees

Investment Committee

The CCPIF grew a very strong 13% in 2025, even after the annual disbursement, and held \$13,213,341 in investment funds as of December 31. The authorized draw was \$466,225, determined by calculating 4.5% of the trailing 36-month balance invested in the CCPIF, which is overseen by the Investment Committee. These returns were driven by strong performance in the equity markets. The CCPIF is managed in accordance with its Investment Policy, and the portfolio is rebalanced at least once per year. In 2025, the Church withdrew the approved \$ 466,225 to fund our operations and mission.

Leadership

The Leadership Committee is composed 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 regular operations of the Church, substantive matters are referred to the Boards of Deacons and Trustees. However, the Leadership Committee is empowered to act on urgent matters as the authority to act on items that cannot be postponed until the next scheduled Board meetings.

Missions and Social Action (MSA) Committee

The Mission and Social Action Committee (MSA) is privileged to direct the church's charitable donations to worthy causes locally and globally. We welcomed three new members to the board: Kirk Carr, Jenny Lindner, and Susie Swindell, and we greatly appreciate the past service of Kathleen Abbott, Maria Hemmings, and Janis Hennessy. We continued to actively support our core set of eight partners - each with a liaison on the committee - which we fund annually. The generosity of our congregation has directly contributed to their critical work, supporting the most vulnerable in our community. Food insecurity was a major issue for our partners locally this year, partially due to a combination of higher food prices and the impact of the government shut-down on food benefits. MSA directed additional funds to Open Door Shelter, Filling in the Blanks, Pacific House, and Inspirica to help address this urgent need.

In response to feedback from the congregation, we added several new local partners that focus exclusively on supporting women, addressing critical issues such as human trafficking, life skills education, mental health, and family reunification in CT.

Internationally, we helped provide our long-time partners in the Masaai community in East Africa with funds to help build a new health clinic and emergency food supplies to help them survive through recent drought conditions this winter.

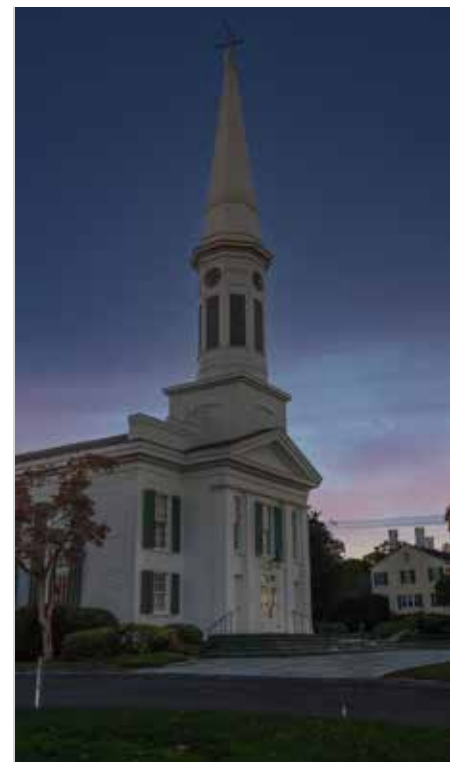
Additionally, MSA and the church continued the tradition of providing assistance to victims of humanitarian and natural disasters, specifically to those impacted by the hurricanes in Jamaica & the Caribbean and by the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza.

MSA is blessed to be part of such a generous Church community and honored to help implement God's will to treat our neighbors as ourselves.

Nominating and Governance

In consultation with the church committees, church staff, and outreach to the church membership, the Nominating and Governance Committee identifies and recommends church members for election to committees. Our church's committees include Deacons, Trustees, Investment, Missions & Social Actions, Personnel, and Music. In addition, the Nominating and Governance Committee nominates the General Counsel, Clerk, Treasurer, and Assistant Treasurer. At each Annual Meeting, the church membership votes on the committee slate and any other required matters pursuant to our bylaws. Committee services are excellent and effective ways for our members to connect more deeply with our church and mission.

Like so many others in our faith community, we are very grateful for the love and dedication with which our congregation works together to serve in the splendor of God and to the people of the world. The Nominating & Governance Committee is very thankful to all those who volunteer their time to serve on the committees of the church. With vision and purpose, the range of work our congregants engage in spans the key areas of our worship, devotional activities, outreach, fiscal management, personnel oversight, adherence to regulations, and celebration through music. Beyond the elected positions, there are countless ministry teams and small groups that further amplify our commitment to each other and our faith, and help us all find our place in the world.



Standing Committees

Personnel

2025 was a year defined by growth, excitement, and expanded leadership within our church staff. One of the most significant milestones came through the dedicated work of the Associate Minister Search Team, who unanimously recommended Kelly Antonson as Associate Minister of Children, Youth, and Families in Spring 2025. Their enthusiastic endorsement reflected Kelly's exceptional gifts and her deep alignment with our church's mission and spirit. Following her inspiring call sermon on June 1, the Congregation responded with overwhelming support, quickly confirming her appointment at a Special Meeting. Kelly's presence at our church continues to be a blessing, and we step into the future energized by her leadership.

This year also marked an exciting expansion of responsibilities as we welcomed Greer Lyle into a full-time role as Director of Youth Ministries & Children's Music. Greer now leads our K-8

youth programming with her signature blend of creativity and enthusiasm. Her ability to guide spiritual formation and ensure participant engagement has already enriched the lives of our younger youth in profound ways.

In addition, Khanisha Denise Moore, a longtime Youth Group advisor and beloved presence in our teen community, agreed to serve as Youth Group Co-Lead for the 2025-2026 program year. Serving alongside Kimmie Dyrvik, Khanisha brings deep relational wisdom and a nurturing spirit that our youth continues to appreciate.

These individuals, alongside the rest of our church staff, reflect the vibrant, Christ-centered leadership that makes our church such a life-giving place. Their dedication, talent, and joyful service have strengthened our ministries, and we celebrate each of them with gratitude and anticipation for all that lies ahead.



Kelly Antonson



Greer Lyle



Khanisha Denise Moore



Church Officers

Clerk (2027)

Anne Gunter

Treasurer (2029)

Marie-Ange Masters

Assistant Treasurer (2028)

Chuck Baker

General Counsel (2029)

Richard Gervase

Board of Deacons

Class of 2027

Lauren Baker
Hoyt Davidson
Dawn Doak*
Trey Laird

Class of 2028

Rebecca Brown
Will Flynn
Steve Quinn
Alex Reinman

Class of 2029

Andrew Dugal
David Haddad
Hope Hetherington
Ashley Simon

Board of Trustees

Class of 2027

Joel Armijo
Chris McClave
Krista Murphy
Eileen Thomas

Class of 2028

Dave Frame
Lindsey Heron
Derrek Metz*
Emily Uzal

Class of 2029

Eric Denlinger
Laura Herman
Terri Leopold
Jay Twombly

Nominating and Governance

Class of 2027

Steve Antonson
Laurel Carr

Class of 2028

Lesley Cousley*

Class of 2029

Kyle Keogh
Lindsay Tucker

Investment Committee

Class of 2027

Bill Kennedy
James Thomas*

Class of 2028

Danita Ostling

Leadership Committee

Rev Stephen Chapin Garner
(Senior Minister)

Diane Bailey (Personnel)
Lesley Cousley (Nominating
and Governance)

Dawn Doak (Deacons)
Marianna Kilbride (Director
of Spiritual Formation)
Derrek Metz (Trustees)
Caroline Smittle (Director
of Operations)

Missions and Social Action

Class of 2027

Starling Cousley
Martial Pabon
Sindi Rusiecki

Class of 2028

Kirk Carr*
Jennifer Lindner
Susie Swindell

Class of 2029

Michelle Crookenden
Beth Picard
Peter Wilson

Personnel

Class of 2027

Julia Bognon

Class of 2028

Roger Bolton

Class of 2029

Diane Bailey*

Raymond Trustees

Seth Alvord
Gabriella Kiniry
Danita Ostling

Music Committee

Class of 2027

Jim Doak
Michael Elliott
Anne Emson

Class of 2028

Melissa Baker
Lyn Chivvis
Nancy Upton*

Class of 2029

Carol Bayne
Erik Burns
Khanisha Moore

Ministries and Other Small Groups

Adult Formation
Adult Missions and Outreach
Buildings & Grounds
Card Writing
Children & Family
Ministries
Children's Music and
Drama
Fellowship (Adult, Men's,
Women's)
Flower Ministry Team
Helping Hands Ministry
History Ministry Team
Men's Small Groups
Mental Health Awareness
Ministry
Middle School Ministries
Missions & Outreach
Steering Team
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
*Associate Minister for Children,
Youth, and Families*
Nerva Altino
Director of Music Ministries
Laurel Carr
Director of Communications
Barb Clayton
Pastoral Care Minister
Lindsey Daly
*Director of Children's
Ministries*
Lonnie deMarco
Interim Director of Operations
Kimmie Dyrvik
Youth Director, Co-Lead
Tracy Goldman
Community Life Coordinator
Sarah Haddad
Church School Coordinator
Anthony Jones
Sexton
Marianna Kilbride
*Director of Spiritual
Formation*
Greer Lyle
*Director of Youth Ministries
and Children's Music*
Khanisha Denise Moore
Youth Director, Co-Lead
Caroline Smittle
Director of Operations
Maria Stadnik
Director of Finance
Allison Wolter
*Youth Ministries
Administrative Assistant*

* Chairperson

Pastoral Report

Membership

January 1 - December 31, 2025

Deaths (7)

James D'Acosta	Charles Rose Jr.
Thomas Brayton	Suzanne Schlumpf
John Forlivo	Jeff Urstadt
Richard Hyde	

United by Reaffirmation of Faith (36)

Grant Cowherd	Oke McAndrews
Madison Cowherd	Paige McInerney
Austin Cox	Johannes Moller
Jane Cox	JC Pierce
Emily Crump	Kristin Pierce
Elizabeth DeMuth	Julianne Pinell
Tom Emson	Dasha Rettew
Diane Forlivo	Heidi Sandreuter
John Forlivo	Anne Skibitcky
Kristen Golubov	Daniel Skibitcky
Peter Harkins	Will Smittle
Laura Holden	Beth Snyder
Taylor Holden	Tere Stevens
Bridget Kelley	Drew Talarico
Sean Kelley	Lisa Talarico
Sam Lambiotte	Kate Tempesta
Alexandra Lewis	Alex von Ziegesar
Martha McAndrews	Cooper Westendarp

United by Letter of Transfer (5)

Carolyn Boling	Bill Hartman
Robert Boling	Khanisha Moore
Annie Hartman	

United by Confirmation (25)

Arden Alexander	Jack McInerney
Hudson Burr	Brooke Murphy
Tyler Buschmann	Lauren Murphy
Payce deMarco	Connor Oak
Jameson Flynn	Norah Salami
Avery Gargiulo	Ryan Schimmeck
James Hayes	Tyler Schimmeck
Elizabeth Herman	Charlotte Skidmore
Berkeley Holland	Delaney Smith
Henry Holland	Molly Stimpson
Ciaran Joyce	Tyler Thomas
Conor Joyce	Casey Tobin
Alex Knowles	

Demographics

January 1 - December 31, 2025

Total Active Membership on January 1, 2025 1,371

Members Received During the Year

Reaffirmation of Faith	36
Transfer from other churches	5
Confirmation	25
Reactivation	2

Decreases

Due to Death	7
Transferred to other churches	3
Other removals	208
Net Change	(150)

Total Active Membership on December 31, 2025 1221

Pastoral Record (includes all minister's activities)

Baptisms

Children	22
Adults	5
Total	27

Marriages

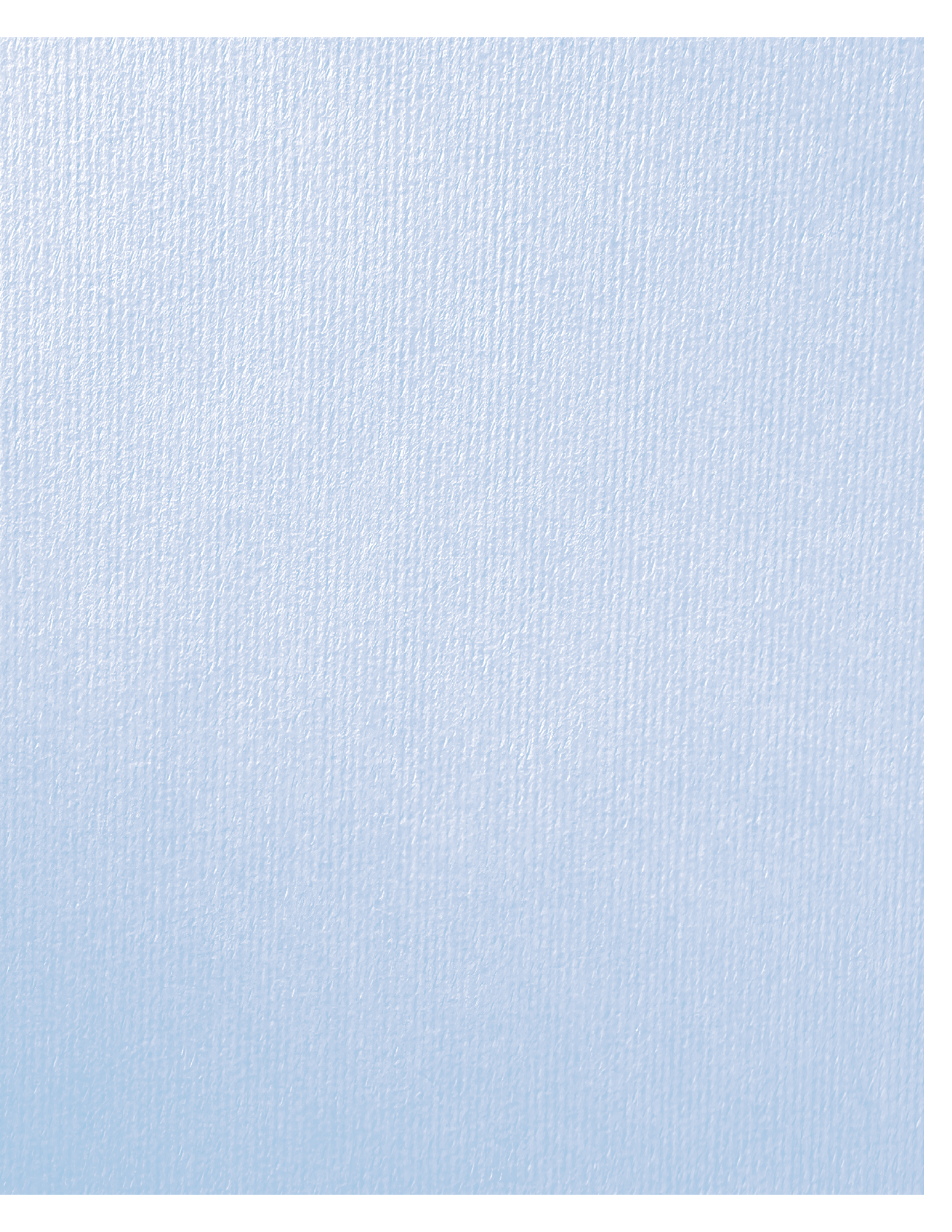
Members	2
Non-Members	2
Total	4

Funerals, Memorial Services, and Interments

Members	3
Non-Members	6
Total	9

Church Attendance Records (Average)

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Program Year				
8:00am	42	41	55	50
10:00am	368	468	491	508
Average	410	508	555	548
Summer Months	229	313	306	273
Average by Sunday	375	504	551	552
Church Attendance - Special Events				
Easter Sunday	1183	1313	1656	1402
Celebration Sunday	533	735	583	802
Lessons & Carols/Christmas Concert	100	108	175	150
Christmas Sunday	635	734	712	709
Christmas Eve	1694	1766	1669	1626
Church School				
Enrollment	131	130	130	160
Average Attendance	44	50	45	53





The Congregational Church
of New Canaan

23 Park Street
New Canaan, CT 06840
(203) 966-2651
www.godsacre.org

We are a Stephen Minister Church