



The Congregational Church of Salisbury
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



The 280th Annual Meeting, Part II • Sunday, 27 April 2025

Reports to the Congregation

Mission of the Church

The purpose of this Church shall be to bind together followers of Jesus Christ in the love of God and of neighbor through the worship of God in Christ, the development of Christian character and fellowship and the extension of the principles of the Christian faith. (*Church Bylaws, Article II*)

Covenant Prayer

Dear God,

As we gather to discern your will,
Let our church be a place where we learn about love
and practice it, in keeping with our Covenant;

Where we envision peace,
and work through open
and honest communication to build it;

Where we strive to find harmony
and uphold the dignity of all,
while benefiting from our differences.

May we listen without judgment,
use words with care,
and exercise patience as we deliberate.

May your Spirit grant us
the courage, power and grace we need
to make decisions for the good of all.

It is in Christ's name that we pray:
Amen.

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Call to the Annual Meeting

The 280th Annual Meeting, Part II, of the Congregational Church of Salisbury, UCC will be held following the worship service on Sunday, 27 April 2025 for the purpose of:

1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the 280th Annual Meeting, Part I, of 27 October 2024
2. Presentation of Reports from Boards and Committees
3. The Election of Officers, Boards, and Committees
4. Other business that may appropriately come before the Congregational Meeting.

Agenda

1. Prayer
2. Call to Order
3. Minutes of the 280th Annual Meeting, Part I
4. Moderator's remarks
5. Acceptance and Discussion of Reports
6. Election of Officers and Committees
7. Other Business
8. Pastor's remarks
9. Prayer
10. Adjournment

Minutes of the 280th Annual Meeting, Part I

The 280th Annual Meeting, Part I, of the Congregational Church of Salisbury, UCC was held following the worship service on Sunday, 27 October 2024.

1. Call to Order: Moderator Charlie Noyes called the meeting to order. A quorum of the membership was present.
2. Opening Prayer: all gathered read the Covenant Prayer.
3. Presentation of the Minutes from 279th Annual Meeting Part 2 on 4/28/24.
 - a. Pastor John Proposed to waive reading the minutes. Seconded by C. Noyes, accepted by all.
 - b. Charlie & Pastor John motioned to approve the minutes. Seconded by Betsy, accepted by all.

4. Moderator's Remarks:
 - a. Charlie Noyes expressed gratitude to Betsy Beck for being the previous moderator for the past 6 years and for being a role model: direct, concise, clear, and humorous in her communication.
 - b. Charlie reflected on the Vision Statement of the Congregation and he and the congregation shared examples of how we are embodying the Vision.
 - i. Meeting in Grace (examples): Pastor John's words of welcome at the worship service each week, participating in the Crop Walk, Board Meetings, the first Zoom sessions of 2020.
 - ii. Transformed by Love (examples): David's music, the ability and willingness of covenant members to share prayer concerns, coffee hour and Emily's presence at hospitality hour, Fall Festival, Sarah and the youth group, Holly & the Sunday school.
 - iii. Serving with Joy (examples): Board of Christian Action, welcoming in the community, the Green Team, Light of Service donations, Choir, Volunteers, Nourish Bridgeport, Friday Music, Bell Choir, Coat Drive & Giving Tree, Ushers.
 - c. Charlie reflected on the Action Plan and how it is sparking enthusiasm for change within our congregation.
 - d. Accessibility Project:
 - i. A poster board was presented outlining the proposed Accessibility Project.
 - ii. Sarah and Joe Lesch have donated their architectural services for the accessibility project.
 - iii. There will be many opportunities in the future to help with this project.
5. Proposed Budget for 2025 - presented by Janet Offensend.
 - a. The budget has been developed to ensure fiscal responsibility and to help us deliver on our Vision Statement. It is balanced but calls on the congregation to support expanding programs and our staff.
 - b. Q/A Session with Janet Offensend:
 - i. (Ann)
 1. What is the current number of Covenant Partners?
 - a. 170 individuals (many are inactive but still members).
 2. Where are we in the 2024 budget YTD?
 - a. The bottom line: net Income of \$29,962. That number will decrease, however, because of upcoming expenses.
 - i. The church is in a stable place. We have a large Endowment that has grown in the last 5 years. The Endowment ensures the church will be here in perpetuity.
 - ii. (Dean)
 1. Where do the beginning of the year funds go?
 - a. Money Market Account at National Iron Bank.
 - b. The capital reserve fund is separate from the Endowment.

- c. Endowment principal in 2020 (when we hired F.L. Putnam) was \$6,896,000 and now it is \$7,808,000.
 - 2. Have there been trends with the Endowment?
 - a. It goes up and down. The peak years were 2016/2017. COVID years were challenging but we're building back.
 - iii. (Bruce)
 - 1. Is there an appreciation of the Endowment?
 - a. In 4 years we have accumulated \$1 million with Putnam and we've taken out \$2 million.
 - 2. How much cash does Putnam keep?
 - a. Unknown.
 - 3. Could we do more for community service from the Endowment?
 - a. This is a decision for the trustees.
 - iv. (Tom)
 - 1. Can we consider going outside of the endowment allocation to help with the recent natural disasters?
 - a. (Pastor John) Light of Service has contributed to these.
 - b. Trustees can discuss this further.
 - v. (Dean)
 - 1. How are salaries determined?
 - a. We discuss salaries with other local churches and strive to offer competitive salaries.
 - c. Motion to approve the proposed budget for 2025 made (A. Williams), seconded, and adopted by voice vote.
6. Charlie presented the 2025 nominating committee.
- a. E. Elliot will chair the 2025 nominating committee.
 - b. B. Collins will be the Deacon representative.
 - c. Motion to accept the Nominating Committee made (T. Carroll), seconded, affirmed by voice vote.
7. Pastor's Remarks
- a. The Congregational movement is led by the Holy Spirit which is found amongst the gathered people who are a vessel of the Holy Spirit. It matters that people show up.
 - b. Gratitude:
 - i. For gathering;
 - ii. For the colleagues on the church staff: Jenn Oberto, David Baranowski, Holly, Mary, Rich, and all church staff, officers, boards, and committees;
 - iii. Our mission is robust and unfolding because of how people serve.
8. Closing: All participated in the Responsive Sending prayer.
9. Meeting Adjourned: Moved by T. Carroll, seconded by John, accepted by all.

Respectfully submitted,
Liz Wing, *Clerk*

Reports to Annual Meeting

Pastor's Report

TL;DR: Grace and peace to you in the name of Christ Jesus, Love's Own Self. May God's richest blessings fill you, sustain you, and guide you!¹

What a beautiful and faithful year we have had, in a tumultuous time! You remind me of a treasured insight (paraphrased) from the Rev. Jim Wallis: "Faith means believing in God's goodness in spite of the evidence — and watching the evidence change." Does this mean that in our hearts and minds we are utterly convinced of such goodness, with no shadow of doubt? Not at all! **To believe means to act as though goodness is real, and God is in charge, and Christ Jesus leads the way.** We do so while carrying all our certainty and our doubts with us. By the grace of God, when we act as though goodness is real, and God is in charge, and Christ Jesus leads the way, we build beloved community.

So thank you, beloved community builders. In the context of a world that has great trouble along with great beauty — and knowing that many of you have experienced personal troubles along with beauty — I see and cherish your commitment to creating a faithful community of compassion and delight.

I give thanks for you, continually. Thanks to you for your attention to the Word of God: in worship that binds us together; in Bible studies that dive deep into the Word and our world; in the extraordinary music ministry that reaches us where words cannot, and carries us to realms of wonder; in joyful service to our neighbors.

Thanks to the talented ministers who are beloved and stalwart colleagues as we labor in God's vineyard:

- David, whose gifts at the keyboard are matched by his gifts as a teacher and guide;
- Jenn, whose graceful presence and skilled administration of the church is a daily blessing;
- Holly and Stephanie, whose care with the young ones of our church are both a weekly treasure and a formation for lives of curiosity and generosity;
- Sarah and Dan, who lead the youth group with creative thoughtfulness and exceptional hospitality;
- Rich, who delivers both steadfast care for our building and concern for the church community;
- Betsy, Charlie, Janet, and Liz — church officers who have given both exceptional skill and deep heart to their leadership of our congregation;
- the 45+ church members who have faithfully given their time and talents to service on our boards and committees.

¹ For those of us (like me) who are still learning the ways of 21st century communications, TL:DR stands for "Too Long; Didn't Read," and serves both to summarize and acknowledge that not everyone will read the whole of a report.

You have called me to preach and teach the gospel and to provide pastoral care. I hope that you have heard the preaching and received the teaching, whether in formal or informal settings. I pray that the pastoral care I have given has been adequate for your needs. I trust that you will let me know when preaching, teaching, and care reach you, and when they do not, that I may learn to serve you more effectively.

I close with a story of Anthony De Mello, the late Jesuit priest and teacher. It comes to mind in a time when communities like ours keep learning the challenge and preciousness of practice of *agape* love — enthusiastically inclusive, welcoming, affirming — and in a season when a certain common burst of yellow will soon signal the arrival of a tremendous growing season for the bees that I keep on learning to keep.

A couple who took great pride in their lawn found themselves with a large crop of dandelions. They tried every method they knew to get rid of them. Still, the dandelions plagued them.

Finally, they wrote the Department of Agriculture. They enumerated all the things they had tried and closed the letter with the question: “What shall we do now?”

In due course the reply came: “We suggest you learn to love them.”²

TL;DR: Again, and always: grace and peace to you in the name of Christ Jesus, Love’s Own Self! May God’s richest blessings fill you, sustain you, and guide you.

Christlove,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pastor John". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name "Pastor John".

Moderator’s Report

What does the Moderator really do, I wondered, when I took on this role almost a year ago. According to our bylaws, the Moderator “shall act, along with the Pastor, as a link between the Church Council and the congregation, and between the Church Council and the Pastor”. In other words, my primary job is to serve as a go-between that helps to build community, engaging thoughtfully with Pastor John, our committees, volunteers and members of the congregation to ensure that we all are informed, collaborating effectively and working sustainably to breathe life into our glorious *Statement of Purpose*: Meeting in Grace, Transformed by Love, Serving with Joy.

My two biggest challenges to date have been following in the remarkably large and compassionate footsteps left by my predecessor Betsy Beck, and working with our committees and congregation to weave all elements of our five-year Action Plan into the daily fabric of our church culture. In so many caring and people-centered ways, Betsy deftly transformed the role

² Adapted from Anthony De Mello, *The Song of the Bird* (1984).

of Moderator to lead us effectively through some very rocky years. Hers were the rebuilding years, if you will. When she handed the baton off to me in June 2024, I inherited a stable, thriving and highly regarded church community expertly shepherded by Pastor John Nelson. Do not underestimate Betsy's influence and compassionate leadership in pulling us back together.

As far as the Action Plan is concerned, let me start off with some numbers. Of the 78 bullet-pointed objectives outlined in the plan, we are actively addressing and/or implementing 50, or 64% – and we are just eight months into our five-year cycle! What appeared to be a daunting responsibility for the Church Council, the group made up of a committee representatives charged with implementing said plan, is now part and parcel of our scheduled meetings. In the following paragraphs I will elaborate on several of these plan objectives, highlighting just some of the ways we are walking our walk and making elements of our shared vision for this vibrant and affirming church community a reality.

Meeting in Grace

- One of my primary goals is fostering meeting protocols that are vibrant and inspiring. The Church Council has developed an extensive list of meeting Do's and Don'ts. We are all experts at enduring boring, ineffective meetings. Now we are working to be more intentional about meeting in grace and always leaving a meeting feeling competent and valued. Such community-building work is never "finished", but taking these steps forward across our committee spectrum remains a delightful pursuit.
- As I write this report, we have just conducted our first in a series of Public Conversations of Consequence. A major objective of our Action Plan is to have our church serve as a gathering place where our congregants and the broader community can come together to reflect on and discuss topics of interest and import. The theme of this first public conversation was forgiveness. We hosted over forty people, most of whom were first time visitors to our church space, and it was truly magical. Future conversations will revolve around other topics that you, the congregation, prioritized in the early stages of our strategic visioning process. They include: affordable housing; food/nutrition security; youth engagement & support; and ongoing support for our senior population.

Transformed by Love

- How can I spotlight this element of our purpose statement without celebrating the time, love and energy that have helped bring the young Afghan women Yalda & Basira safely to our community. When it was first announced that Yalda had landed in the states, and then Basira a few days later, I was flooded with emotion. The commitment and compassion of the Henderson-Fischer, Tierney-Thettayil, and Lesch families have been truly remarkable. And the ongoing spiritual, emotional and financial support of this church community have been inspired and inspiring.
- I have never been what one would call a "churchy" person. And though I have been involved with this congregation for over 35 years, I still feel like Pastor John is speaking directly to me when he welcomes us all each Sunday morning, whether we are "believing

or doubting, or a little bit of each”. But when one steps back to consider the core tenants of our purpose statement – Grace, Love & Joy – please tell me, where is the downside? Even though I still question, even though I’m still searching, I honestly feel love for this church family. I love that we are an open, affirming community of faith & hope. I love that we are constantly looking for ways to serve the needs of our wider community. And I love that we are ever seeking to do the next right thing without being righteous.

Serving with Joy

- Given that my list is long, where do I begin? I’ll start with a shout out to David Baranowski. He is a remarkable blend of musical genius, joyous choral leader, and unstoppable good humor. David and the choir devote hours each week so that we might enhance every Sunday service with beautiful music. But David’s ability to make learning and practicing music together so outrageously inspiring and fun, we always leave with both our hearts and our souls brimming. That is his magic. Yes, he gets compensated with a salary, but his joyful service to our church community transcends dollars & cents.
- Jenn Oberto, in addition to having the voice of an angel, has gone above and beyond in her role as Church Administrator. It is clear to all who know her that Jenn loves this place, and she has happily and professionally embraced the challenges of her expanded job description and the unexpected responsibilities that crop up weekly. Whoever enters Jenn’s office, reaches her by phone or collaborates with her on a church initiative encounters a warm, respectful and wholly competent human being. Jenn has brilliantly redefined what our church administrator can and should be. She will be sorely missed when she and her family move on to other pastures.
- For the sake of brevity, let me acknowledge but not elaborate on a few other examples of individuals and groups that exemplify serving with joy.
 - Emily Elliot has breathed new life into the Hospitality Committee this year. Her willingness (and capacity) to give give give, always with joy and creativity, is astounding. Whether she’s rallying trail angels for the AT, singing both soprano and alto in the choir, or deftly leading the work of the Nominating Committee, you will always be greeted with a smile and a can-do attitude.
 - Those among us who devote their time and energy to addressing food and nutrition insecurity, whether at the Lakeville Corner Pantry or through our affiliation with nOURish Neighbors in Bridgeport, are passionate, committed individuals who often prefer to fly under the radar. Their quiet and compassionate efforts resonate profoundly within and across our broader community.
 - Holly Tierney is a gifted educator who brings this church to life for all of the children in her care. Her church school updates, which only a handful of us get to see, are consistently rich and joyful. Whether she is shepherding just Mari or a passel of curious, sometimes cautious youngsters, each Sunday we are witness to the kindness and patience with which she embraces her service to this church.
 - Sarah Lesch and Dan Baker continue to guide a creative youth group, devising new opportunities to serve and connect with others here at church and further afield. In addition, Sarah and Joe Lesch, both professional architects, are donating their considerable time and expertise to the design and construction of our main entrance

Accessibility Project. Their good work will not only aesthetically enhance our facade, but also allow visitors of all abilities to enter our front door with dignity and grace.

Even as my thoughts are darting to other beloved friends who are giving skilled and gracious service to our church, I won't strain your patience further. As you might imagine, working closely with Pastor John is a gift; I am humbled and grateful. And as I continue to grow into this role of Moderator, know that I welcome your feedback.

Respectfully Submitted,
Charles D. Noyes

Clerk's Report

Total Membership as of 1 April 2024: 156

Covenant Partners added: Julia and Brent Barbato
Myra Brandt
Gretchen Mol, Tod Williams, and Ptolemy Williams
Sarah Stapleton Rees and Trevor Rees
Holly Tierney
Liz Wing

Transferred or withdrawn: Bill Kellett, transferred to Center Church on the Green, New Haven

In Memoriam: Jano Bell Fairservis
Deborah Merwin

Total Membership as of 1 April 2025: 163

Treasurer's Report

Last year was a good one for the church from a budget perspective, and our financial operations have run smoothly as a result of the special help provided by Jenn Oberto. She stepped into the newly created position of Church Administrator with vigor and smarts. It's deeply sad to contemplate her departure later this year, but I am particularly grateful that her approach to her work has enabled the church administration to move forward in a most positive way. She has created a model we can now replicate with a new person in the position.

Operating Budget

Operating Revenue

Contributions: While total operating revenue was slightly underbudget for 2024, the good news is that income from Pledges grew to \$196,000 and exceeded the budgeted figure of \$187,000, helping to offset a shortfall in other regular donations. The steady growth of Pledges is crucial to the church's ongoing financial health, particularly in a time when the magnitude of the draw

from our endowment is threatened by declines in the financial markets. We thank *everyone* who makes an annual commitment—at any level—to support the ongoing programs and benevolences of the church.

Not included in Operating Revenue, but a highlight of 2024 was the truly remarkable \$250,000 bequest that the church received. The Trustees have invested these funds temporarily at National Iron Bank, pending a final decision on how much to spend now (on the accessibility project) and how much to invest through the endowment in the church’s future.

Although not a part of the Operating Budget, the Light of Service program again contributed powerfully to the church’s benevolences, bringing in \$22,594 over the course of 2024. Similarly, Fall Festival raised in excess of \$3,000 for distribution to worthy local causes.

In total, the church raised more than a quarter of a million dollars for church operations and benevolences throughout the world—without even counting the magnificent bequest of another quarter million. We are grateful to all for this accomplishment.

Draw from the Endowment: In 2024 withdrawals from the endowment provided \$305,000, as budgeted. This represented a draw of 4% of the three-year moving average of the endowment’s total value. The endowment totaled \$ 8,121,282 at the close of 2024. With the guidance of the Investment Committee the church draws upon the endowment in a manner that ensures it will be available to future generations of the Congregation. As we see many other congregations in the US struggling financially today, we are exceptionally fortunate to have our endowment, the legacy of generosity and prudence throughout our long history.

Bottom line: Operating Revenue came in at \$538,495 versus the budget of \$545,750.

Operating Expenses

The church continues to run a lean and careful operation financially, as reflected in the fact that expenses came in underbudget for the year at \$508,468 versus \$545,445. In addition, some timing differences contributed to the underspending: work on the new website was more modest than expected, and certain insurance payments had been paid at the end of 2023 for 2024. But we also spent less than expected on our accounting services, payroll and repairs and maintenance. Modest overspending in utilities and music were easily accommodated.

As a result of the above, the church ran a surplus of \$30,000 in 2024. The Trustees made the determination that \$25,000 of these extra funds would go into the Benevolence Fund.

Operating Checking Account **Balance as of 12/31/24: \$151,826**

Capital Spending Reserve **Balance as of 12/31/24: \$94,515**

As the Green Project finished up in 2024 with the installation of the EV charging station, draws on our Capital Reserve have slowed dramatically. Our historic building is in good shape with sound, refreshed major systems and an outer envelope that is secure. However, historic buildings demand continuous attention, so the Trustees have agreed to continue to gradually increase the amount we contribute from the Operating Budget to the Capital Reserve each year,

to ensure we can meet whatever expenses arise. In 2024 we added \$35,000 to the reserve and in 2025 we are adding \$40,000.

Benevolence Fund **Balance as of 12/31/24: \$51,829**

Funds available through the Benevolence Fund continued to provide support for individuals in need in 2024, carefully and discretely stewarded by Pastor John and the Benevolence Fund Committee. This past year the Fund received \$955 in donations and distributed \$5,814.

Souper Supper Fund **Balance as of 12/31/24: \$1,944**

The church continues to support this volunteer-organized project to prepare and serve healthy meals to the community on a regular basis, providing the use of our facilities and bookkeeping resources.

Endowment Investment Account **Balance as of 12/31/24: \$8,121,282**



BUDGET REPORT, as of December 31, 2024

	YTD Actual	2024 Budget	2025 Budget
INCOME			
Contributions			
Pledges	196,106	187,000	192,000
Donations--Other	29,522	45,000	48,000
Total Contributions	225,628	232,000	240,000
Rental Income & Z-rec	7,867	8,750	6,500
Draw from Endowment	305,000	305,000	310,000
Special Music Fund			2,000
TOTAL INCOME	538,495	545,750	558,500
 EXPENSES			
Compensation	215,971	220,345	234,136
Other Personnel Expense	107,567	108,725	113,381
Ministry Support	22,556	39,250	26,400
Maintenance & Repairs	14,060	16,000	17,000
Utilities	2,994	1,300	1,800
Deacons	378	2,750	2,900
Music	14,555	11,600	11,600
Religious Education	1,664	2,000	5,375
Hospitality	5,186	6,500	6,500
Insurance	18,615	24,725	29,670
Accountant & Prof Fees	6,947	15,000	8,000
Capital Reserve Contrib	35,000	35,000	40,000
Minister Sab-Ed Reserve	1,000	1,000	1,000
Benevolences			
OCWM	24,415	24,000	24,000
Christian Action	20,351	21,250	21,250
Bridgeport	4,622	4,000	4,000
Deacons Discretionary	831	2,000	1,000
Silver Lake +	10,000	10,000	10,000
Other	1,756		
Total Benevolences	61,975	61,250	60,250
 TOTAL EXPENSES	 508,468	 545,445	 558,012
 NET INCOME	 30,027	 305	 488
 LEGAGIES & BEQUESTS	 250,000	 -	

LIGHT OF SERVICE (not included above)	
Revenue	22,594
Benevolences	(22,043)

FALL FESTIVAL	
Revenue	6,638
Expense	3,590
Net Income	<u>3,048</u>

ENDOWMENT BALANCE	as of 12/31/24	as of 1/14/25
	8,121,281	8,060,583

CAPITAL RESERVE ACCOUNT 2024	
Opening Balance	169,117
Contribution for 2024	35,000
Incentives for Green Proj	69,000
Epiphany Fund from 2022	25,000
Available for 2024	298,117
Spent to date in 2024	
HVAC	(173,225)
Road Signs	(1,516)
EV Charging Station	(29,195)
New Office Computer	(1,900)
Interest Received to date	
Available	94,515
Account Cash balances 12/31	
NBT	
Main Checking Acct.	151,826
Pastor's Benevolence Func	51,829
Vanguard	
Capital Reserve	46,769
Special Music Fund	41,178
Natonal Iron Bank	
Bequest--temp	250,000

Music Director's Report

This year at The Salisbury Congregational church was another filled with good music and great people. I am blessed to be a part of it, and I hope to be for years to come.

We continue to be committed to our weekly choral music each and every week, blending the worship experience with selections old and new, integrated as closely as possible with John's reflections on the scripture. I feel we are fairly successful at this, sometimes unwittingly,

but mostly because of our openness and flexibility. We have utilized our piano more in services this year, partially to accommodate stylistic differences in anthems, but also to include folks who have difficulty navigating the stairs and unusual layout of levels in the loft.

We have seen some change in our choir this year, as several families have moved due to work changes and retirement. We will also be losing our soprano section leader Jenn Oberto this summer, who we have musically leaned on heavily in my years here. I do wish her the best, but we will miss her tremendously. In the upcoming years we will need to recruit new members to keep our choir strong and vibrant. Professional Tenor Steve Hoagland has joined us more regularly this year, and we hope to keep him coming in the future. Finding local professionals has proven difficult, but I will continue to look.

Any singers sitting on the sidelines reading this report: now is the time; your church choir needs you!

Coming into Holy Week and Easter, our choir will be joining with some old friends to sing a Lenten service and concert at the Church in Norfolk, invited by music director Elizabeth Allyn. I have had lovely correspondences with her to plan this service, and I hope we can do more in the future. We also had another showing of "A Charlie Brown Christmas", featuring a live jazz trio playing the iconic music of Vince Guaraldi. Our choir also contributed with several anthems accompanied by a string quartet and organ. Our Christmas concert continues to be well-attended and a joyous community event.

Our bell choir continues to ring with Mary Davidson at the helm, with good numbers and great rhythm. There are always vacancies popping up, so new ringers are always encouraged to join in. Talk to me or Mary to get involved.

I do think our church is a very special one, and I do thank you all for your love of music and your kindness towards me and my family. I hope 2025 is a great year in Salisbury.

Respectfully submitted,
David Baranowski, *Music Director*

Sunday School Coordinator's Report

It's been a year filled with growth, community, and a deep appreciation for the faith that binds us together. Our Sunday School children have explored stories from both the Old and New Testaments. We started with the creation story in September, then continued with the life of Moses, to stories of angels and saints. In recent weeks we have focused on the parables of Jesus, and we're currently delving into the rich tapestry of his life, from his childhood to his ascension at Pentecost.

The children's enthusiastic participation in our festive events has been a highlight. Having their presence in the Christmas Concert, pageant AND the Christmas Eve service brought a youthful joy to the holidays. Currently, they're crafting butterflies to adorn our church for Easter.

We've successfully altered our Sunday School schedule so that children can attend the multigenerational service from start to finish on communion Sundays, and we'll continue having Sunday school through the summer! We're calling this time our "Soulful Summer Sundays," welcoming families who are unable to attend during the academic year.

We welcomed Stephanie Tierney to our Religious Ed team as Sunday School assistant and nursery care provider. Her dedication has ensured consistent, loving care for our youngest church members, allowing more families to participate fully in our services.

The youth group has been working hard on community service projects under the care and guidance of Sarah Lesch and Dan Baker. They have created thoughtful care packages for nOURish Bridgeport and are eagerly anticipating a visit to their facilities, including their impressive hydroponic plant. Their work nourishes OUR community as well, with their delicious Sunday Suppers, pancake breakfast, town picnic and even managing the popular hot dog tent at the Fall Festival. Sarah, Dan, and the entire youth group truly know how to feed a crowd!

The good works in youth group and Sunday school have been a testament to the hard work of our entire Religious Education team, our supportive families, and, most importantly, the children and youth who bring such joy and energy to everything we do. I'm so very grateful for the contributions of everyone involved and look forward to another year of growth and fellowship.

Respectfully submitted,
Holly Tierney, *Sunday School Coordinator*

Youth Group Leader's Report

The Youth Group focused on community service projects in 2024, interfacing with the People's Pantry in Great Barrington, Cluster 13 Ministries (through collaboration with Norfolk UCC), and right here at home with our Salisbury UCC community through a number of initiatives at church, including the Fall Fest Hot Dog Tent.

I think it's safe to say the most meaningful project of the year for many of our kids was the Work Camp with Pastor Erick at Norfolk UCC. Thanks to the generous support of many in our congregation, Salisbury UCC sent six kids to upstate New York for a week of home-building and home-renovating in an underserved community.

We had a great time over the Christmas season putting together a number of support packages for Salisbury's sister ministries, Nourish Bridgeport and FISH. We're currently looking forward to visiting Nourish Bridgeport in May to learn about the many ways that organization serves its community by showing and sharing the love of Jesus through very tangible avenues of support.

Thank you to everyone who has expressed their support and appreciation of our youth this past year! We ask for your continued prayer, not only that we may thrive as a group, but that in the context of an increasingly messy and noisy world, each of the youth in our church

community would grow to see God clearly and embrace their true identities as God's beloved children.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah Lesch, *Youth Group Leader*

Board of Deacons Report

The church bylaws state that “the primary responsibility of the Board of Deacons is to provide spiritual oversight, guidance, health, and care of the congregation, working closely with the Pastor.” Those responsibilities have been met in a variety of ways in the past year. Either individually or collectively, Deacons have:

- Prepared and served Communion on the first Sunday of each month;
- Provided readers for worship services;
- Represented the church at weddings and memorial services;
- Sent cards of sympathy, get well wishes, congratulations, or just because;
- Called and visited in-care friends;
- Reinstated the Prayer Shawl Ministry;
- Prepared an Extravagant Welcome reception after worship to begin the new program year in September;
- Sent cards of thanksgiving to our in-care friends, marvelous staff, community leaders, and the recipients of our charitable giving;
- Sent Christmas cards and delivered poinsettias to in-care friends;
- Created and led worship on the Sunday between Christmas and the New Year, giving our extraordinary pastor and music director a well-deserved day of rest;
- Sent Valentines to in-care friends;
- Provided Lenten daily devotional booklets and created Lenten calendars;
- Helped lead the Ash Wednesday service and the Maundy Thursday Tenebrae Service of Shadows;
- Provided special cupcakes and gifts to those at Geer Nursing Home with birthdays in the month of March;
- Made annual calls to active covenant partners and friends as well as those we haven't seen in a while;
- Sent Easter cards and delivered Easter flowers to in-care friends.

It is our honor to serve as Deacons and we are always seeking new ways to care for those among us. We welcome information about those in need of a friendly call or a helping hand.

Serving with Joy,
Barbara Collins, *Lead Deacon*

Board of Trustees Report

From May 2024 to April 2025 the Trustees have focused on accomplishing aspects of the church's Vision Plan. Part of our job is maintaining and improving our historic building where we can worship God together and open it to the community to spread love and joy. To reduce climate change we have helped to make the building more carbon free by removing the old oil burners and substituting solar panels. Now we are having consultant Mark Robbins help us to identify batteries or a new generator to use when there is a power outage. With warmer weather we will be creating a ramp to make the front entrance of the meeting house accessible to persons of all ages and abilities. A two-port electric vehicle charger has been installed on the library side of the church where it is available to everyone in the community. The Green Team has planned and followed through with all these changes. They have sought and obtained approval from the town of Salisbury, thereby communicating our plans to the town.

Since the church hosts some outside groups and has congregational meals at times, our kitchen must be up to standard and in good repair. This year Lee Collins saw that a new freezer was purchased and installed to replace the old one that was beyond repair and warranty. Also to facilitate our music program, concerts, and the young people's recital, sexton Rich Tietjen removed a section of carpet and refinished the floor at the front of the church. The result is beautiful. Now the carpet does not get wrinkled and torn when the piano is moved.

Janet Offensend, the Church Treasurer, and the Investment Committee chaired by Roger Crain, have been faithfully managing the church's finances to keep us on budget, and to steward the Endowment with FL Putnam, our Investment Managers. The budget makes it possible to support the congregation's programs and outreach to charitable organizations and individuals in need. We thank the congregation for exceeding our goals with their generous contributions. Every deed counts. In fact, Lee Collins and Gordon Johnson count the offering each Sunday. Every Trustee plays a role in seeing that their responsibilities are carried out.

With Gordon Johnson's and my terms ending, three new Trustees will be elected. I thank the congregation for the opportunity to serve. I'm sure the new Trustees will bring fresh ideas and growth to the Board.

Respectfully submitted,
Janet Accardo, *Chairperson*

Board of Christian Action Report

Distribution of funds for 2024 (distributed in March)

Chore	1,000.00
The Corner Food Pantry	2,000.00
Extras	500.00
FISH Shelter (Friends in Service to Humanity)	3,000.00
Greenwoods Counseling	500.00
Habitat for Humanity	1,000.00
Hispaniola Health Partners	2,000.00
Housatonic Child Care Center	1,000.00
Housatonic Youth Services	1,500.00
Northeast Community Center	1,000.00
Project SAGE (formerly WSS)	750.00
Salisbury Family Services	500.00
Salisbury Housing Committee (Sarum Village)	1,000.00
Salisbury Summer Youth Employment	2,000.00
Visiting Nurse & Hospice of Litchfield County	500.00
Salisbury Volunteer Ambulance	500.00
Salisbury After School SOAR	500.00
Simply Smiles	2,500.00
Souper Suppers	500.00
	TOTAL 21,250.00
UCC Bridgeport (Budget line 7012)	\$4,000.00

Our yearly donation to UCC Bridgeport, our sister church by covenant, goes directly to their nOURish Bridgeport program. There are four aspects of this program.

- A. The Food Pantry which distributes groceries to over 650 families
- B. The Baby Center which distributes diapers and wipes to 400 babies/month
- C. Feel the Warmth Hot Meal Program. This is the program that we participate in with volunteers traveling to Bridgeport three to four times a year.
- D. D. English as a second language. Peg Heck and Janet Kaufman organized several trips to Bridgeport to aid in the Feel the Warmth dinners. These meals are now packaged and distributed for folks to take home as space for seated dining is limited. We contributed to the large Christmas dinner distribution monetarily through Light of Service.

Other Christian Action Activities:

1. FISH (Friends in Service to Humanity) in Torrington – In the past we have done a Winter Coat Drive, spearheaded by Joanne Hayhurst. Folks from Salisbury Central took on this task this year so we chose not to compete with them. We have been supporting The Gathering Place, a day-time drop-in shelter for the houseless. At Christmas the Youth Group, led by Sarah and Dan, baked cookies and made care packages to take to the Children’s Party put on by FISH. Members of the congregation also contributed cookies. We chose to give additional funds (Fall Festival) to the Gathering Place this winter.
2. The 2024 Northwest CT CROP Walk raised a total of \$37,723.68. Salisbury Congregational Church raised \$5,261.40. A good portion of these funds are returned to the Northwest CT Food Bank, which distributes the funds to local food banks and food programs. Kudos to Pastor John, Joanne Taber and Pat Palmer, who were the Northwest CT CROP Walk Planning Team in 2024.
3. Food Pantry – Besides our monetary donation in March, Joanne Taber and Joanne Hayhurst organized at least one food drive last year. The congregation contributed bags and bags of groceries needed to restock the pantry shelves.
4. Light of Service –Each Sunday the loose change or designated checks in the offering goes to an organization that anyone from our congregation is invited to put forth. Many varied organizations have been supported through this program and the morning offering remains strong. We used funds from LOS service to help underwrite part of the Jane Lloyd Fund Annual Clam-bake, a local fund that helps support those dealing with cancer treatment.
5. Trail Angels –Emily Elliot organized this and was joined by about a half dozen others. The group volunteered for two Saturdays in July and August and spent the day greeting and feeding hikers along the Appalachian Trail in Sheffield. Organized by the Sheffield UCC.
6. Socktober happened in November for us. Janet Kaufman spearheaded this initiative to collect socks from parishioners. The collection was taken to Bridgeport for the December Feel the Warmth dinner. Folks were able to choose a new pair of socks - and all were distributed.
7. Christmas giving – We worked with NECC and their family outreach program to give requested gifts to families in the Millerton area. Our congregation chose gifts to purchase from the Giving Tree. 100% of the gifts were purchased and ready for delivery in one week!
8. Fall Festival monies (\$3128) were distributed:
 - \$359 — to cover the rest of the Jane Lloyd Fund Clam Bake sponsorship from last summer.
 - \$500 — for Salisbury Central School Eight Grade trip to Washington DC
 - \$769 — The Gathering Place in Torrington, CT
 - \$1,500 — to support fundraising to aid Yalda, an Afghan girl seeking education in the US.
9. We are grateful for the many unsung angels among us.

Thank you to Peg Heck, Kathy Mera, Karin Noyes, and Barbara Wiggins for their official work on this committee

Respectfully submitted,
Karin Noyes

Ushers Committee Report

Eight dedicated people have covered every Sunday plus special services for the past year. Each person works approximately two times a month. Their responsibilities include opening the front doors, putting out safety cones, filling the two water glasses and putting up the hymnal page numbers. They play an important role in welcoming everyone to church, being sure to offer crayons and a pad of paper to the children.

In bad weather the ushers are there to help people up the steps. In all weather we watch out for people crossing the street as the traffic can be hazardous. The ushers hand out bulletins as they greet people. An usher rings the bell at 9:45 and 9:57 signaling the beginning of the service. During the service the ushers take the collection. At the end of the service, they turn off the lights and lock the front doors.

I feel very fortunate to work with these ushers all of whom are enthusiastic and welcoming of people coming to the service.

Respectfully submitted,
Joanne Taber

Music Committee Report

Music is central to our worship services and to the broader outreach of our congregation. With a weekly rehearsal, the choir sings an anthem from a broad variety of musical genres at most Sunday services, Christmas Eve, Maundy Thursday as well as Christmas and spring concerts. The number of choir members has shrunk for a variety of reasons, and new members with any voice type and any or no experience would be warmly welcomed. Attend a rehearsal and see what a good time the choir has!

At Christmas we hosted a wonderful concert by Chorus Angelicus. The church's Christmas concert for 2024 featured a showing of the 1965 TV special "A Charlie Brown Christmas" with the sound provided by Music Director David Baranowski's live jazz ensemble for the second year in a row.

Last year's spring concert featured a performance of Vivaldi's *Gloria*, Gjielo's *Dark Night of the Soul* and a marimba concerto by Ewazen performed by percussionist Andrew Thompson and a small instrumental ensemble. This year, the choir is collaborating with the Norfolk Church of Christ Congregational for a Palm Sunday concert in Norfolk.

The monthly First Friday Music continues to present a half hour of organ and/or piano music provided by David Baranowski with occasional guest performers. We are looking for ways

to improving publicity so as to attract a broader audience for what the regular attendees find to be an enjoyable and refreshing interlude.

The 43rd annual student recital took place in February. The churches' role is to provide the venue and publicity, and the musical organization is undertaken by teachers Judith Dansker and Kerstan Jensen. Most of the participants are from local private schools, and we encourage greater outreach to the public schools.

The Bell Choir, led by Mary Davidson, has been active on celebratory Sundays as well as the Christmas concert.

The Music Committee has devoted time and thought as to what steps can be taken in its purview in furtherance of the Action Plan and will continue to present its suggestions and wishes to the church council.

Respectfully submitted,
Louise Brown, *Chair*

Slate of Officers, Boards, & Committees, 2025-2026

Nominations are in bold type. Underscore indicates first term of service, where applicable.

CHURCH OFFICERS

Moderator: Charlie Noyes '26 *Treasurer:* **Janet Offensend '27** *Clerk:* **Liz Wing '27**
Pastor and Teacher: The Rev. Dr. John A. Nelson

CHURCH COUNCIL MEMBERS-AT-LARGE:

Bob Maxwell '26 Betsy Beck '27 **Theresa Carroll '28**

BOARD OF DEACONS (MODERATOR, PASTOR, AND ELECTED MEMBERS):

Theresa Carroll '26 David Heck '27 **Betsy Beck '28**
Don Mayland '26 Patricia Palmer '27 **Myra Brandt '28**
Barbara Collins '28
Dean Haubrich '28

BOARD OF TRUSTEES (MODERATOR, TREASURER, PASTOR AND ELECTED MEMBERS):

Lee Collins '26 Malcolm Brown '27 **Dan Edmundson '28**
Roger Crain '26 Susan Hassler '27 **Lorna Edmundson '28**
Carr Ferguson '26 Kerry Noble '27 **John Merwin '28**

BOARD OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (MODERATOR, SUNDAY SCHOOL COORD., PASTOR, AND ELECTED MEMBERS):

Julia Barbato '26 Wei Liu '27 **Peggy Hayes '28**

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN ACTION (MODERATOR, PASTOR, AND ELECTED MEMBERS):

Peggy Heck '26

Jane Capecelatro '27

Jeanette Weber '28

Kathy Mera '26

Leanne Larson '27

Karin Noyes '27

HOSPITALITY COMMITTEE (MODERATOR, PASTOR, AND ELECTED MEMBERS):

Ron Collins '27

Gretchen Mol '28

Emily Elliot '27

Winter Williams '28

Toni Ramcharran '27

Special Event Helpers: Roseanne Lamson, Sara Wardell, Nancy Baker

MUSIC COMMITTEE (MODERATOR, MUSIC DIRECTOR, PASTOR, AND ELECTED MEMBERS):

Emily Elliot '26

Mary Davidson '27

Louise Brown '28

Peggy Hayes '26

George Faison '28

Peg Heck '28

USHERS COMMITTEE (MODERATOR, PASTOR, AND ELECTED MEMBERS):

Becky Belcher '26

Janet Kaufman '27

Sarah Morrison '28

Allison Gray '26

Anne Williams '27

Sharon Tingley '28

Gordon Johnson '26

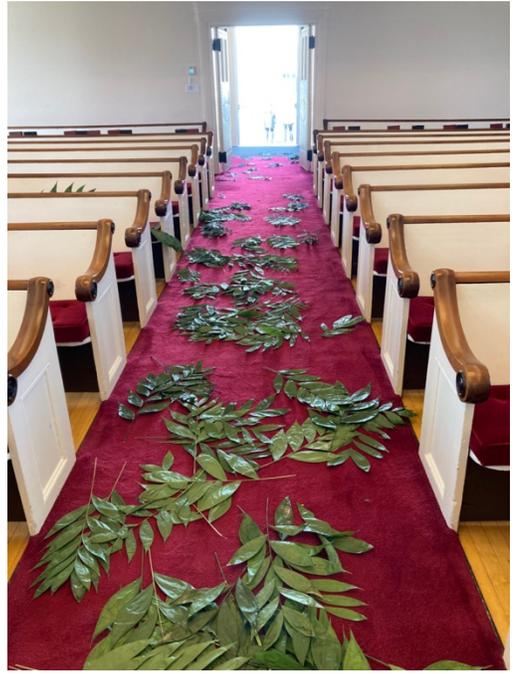
Kip Williams '28

Joanne Taber '26

Ptolemy Williams '28

Kevin Wolgemuth '28

Deborah Moore, *emerita*







The Congregational Church of Salisbury
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Meeting in Grace • Transformed by Love • Serving with Joy

Whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey: you are welcome here.

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