First Baptist Church of Hanover in Etna, NH and First Congregational Church of Hanover in Hanover Center, NH
www.etnahanovercenterchurch.org

Background and Introduction

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:29-30

Our parish is located in an area rich with history, natural beauty, cultural amenities, and a strong sense of community. We are a yoked congregation which includes members from two rural churches: the First Baptist Church (American Baptist Church) of Hanover in Etna, NH and the First Congregational Church (United Church of Christ) of Hanover in Hanover Center, NH. Both of these churches were established in colonial times and their historic buildings have been in continuous use for services since the early 1800s. The small, rural congregations were combined in 1964 to share one pastor and eventually one worship service. It is a testament to the harmony and nurturing environment within our combined congregation and to its effective leadership that we have grown with only four pastors since the yoking commenced over 50 years ago.

This profile has been prepared by the Search Committee to provide potential candidates an overview of our church as we seek new pastoral leadership to keep our church active in worship, education, and mission. Our website gives further information about us, including photos.
The Upper Valley Community

Etna and Hanover Center are small unincorporated rural villages within Hanover, New Hampshire, a picturesque and prosperous college town. As such, the Etna/Hanover Center villages share access to many amenities usually found in a larger city but within a lifestyle of a beautiful, friendly, small rural community. Hanover is a town of approximately 12,000 residents on the Connecticut River, bordering Vermont and New Hampshire and is part of the “Upper Valley” of the Connecticut River with a combined population of 70,000. Hanover is home to Dartmouth College, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (New Hampshire’s largest employer) and numerous smaller engineering and manufacturing firms, retail and service businesses.

Hanover, NH (photo courtesy of Dartmouth College)

Education is highly valued in our community. Hanover has a top-ranked public school system with considerable resources, and several quality nursery, pre-school and day care programs. In addition to Dartmouth College, the Upper Valley has two community colleges (River Valley Community College and Community College of Vermont) and is within driving distance of two state universities (Plymouth and Keene).

The area is known for its emphasis on families and community and its high quality of life. Nestled on the Connecticut River with numerous large ponds and lakes between the Vermont Green Mountains and the New Hampshire White Mountains, the Upper Valley has a variety of outdoor activities including kayaking, fishing, bicycling, sailing, and a multitude of summer camp opportunities; hiking, hunting and “leaf-peeping” in the colorful New England fall; and both downhill and cross country skiing as well as ice skating and ice fishing in the winter months. Outdoor team sports also play a large role across the population. The region has substantial cultural, educational, and art opportunities atypical of a rural community (e.g., the
Montshire Museum of Science, the Hopkins Center for Arts, Northern Stage, Opera North, AVA Art Gallery, City Center Ballet, Vermont Institute of Natural Science, Lebanon Opera House).

The intersection of two major interstate highways makes travel easy: Boston is about two hours away; Lebanon, NH has a small airport with several daily flights to both New York and Boston; Manchester, NH (about 1.5 hours away) has a larger airport with numerous flights to major airports; and Burlington, VT is 1¾ hours away. Convenient regular bus service is available to both Boston and NYC.

**Church Facilities**

We have one congregation, but two separate historic church buildings which are about 2.5 miles apart.

During the school year, worship takes place in the First Baptist Church of Hanover (FBC) in the lovely, small village of Etna which is located about 3 miles east of Dartmouth College and downtown Hanover. In addition to the 120-person sanctuary, the FBC has a small library and pastor’s office and is adjacent to a small playground and soccer/baseball fields. The attached parish hall is used for both church and community events and has a large kitchen, gathering hall with a stage, and five Sunday school classrooms.
There is also a spacious 4 bedroom/2 bath parsonage with two-car garage across from FBC on approximately two acres of land which has been recently completely renovated and is located in the Hanover School District.

The 150-seat sanctuary of the First Congregational Church of Hanover Center (United Church of Christ - FCC) building hosts summer worship and special holiday (Easter and Thanksgiving) services and is located on the beautiful village green in Hanover Center with a view of Moose Mountain. The FCC also has a vestry and kitchen. Each church has a strong commitment to preserve and maintain its historic building.

During the school year the average attendance at worship services is about 70 people. The congregation includes a broad array of people who are involved with the yoked church. Membership includes 88 resident members in the Etna FBC and 31 resident members at the Hanover Center FCC. Approximately half of regular worshipers are not members but support the church both financially and in taking active roles in church activities. There are numerous Hanover Center and Etna residents who consider themselves part of the church and attend
special services or call upon the church for pastoral support. Much of our congregation is either retired (about 1/3) or working with adult children. There is potential in our community for active families with school age children to become more involved in the congregation.

One of the strengths of our congregation is its fairly diverse socioeconomic representation. This partly reflects the nature of the rural village population as well as its close proximity to Dartmouth College and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. The congregation includes trades people, town service staff, retail personnel, office administrative staff, doctors and nurses, college faculty, and a range of other professionals. The church is not diverse by race or ethnicity, which reflects the broader Upper Valley community (e.g., Hanover was listed as 85 percent Caucasian in the 2010 population census).

The church also has a very broad spectrum of church backgrounds. About 25 percent of the regular Sunday worshipers have grown up in either the American Baptist Church or the United Church of Christ, but the vast majority of the congregation have come from a variety of denominations and theologies (e.g., Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Southern Baptist, Presbyterian, and Bible churches). We have fared well by our unofficial motto, “unity without unanimity.” Our differences have not broken the bond holding us to the teachings of Jesus. Our congregation is truly a kind and caring community and the wealth of backgrounds and church experiences is both a strength and a challenge for a new pastor.

**Organizational Structure**

Under the yoking agreement we share one pastor in all aspects of ministry. The Inter-church Council is comprised of five members from each church and is responsible for the overall ministry of the combined congregation.

Each church has its own separate budget and officers. Active committees include: missions, Christian education, outreach, music, flowers, nominating and the Hanover Center Fair.

**Church Worship and Ministries**

Presently, our order of worship follows a traditional liturgy with a growing and active role played by willing and capable lay people in the church. We favor sermons with a biblical focus enhanced by a sensitivity to parishioners’ lives and an awareness of current events. Our pastoral prayers are also the prayers of the people and as such concretely respond to personal and wider world concerns. The “Time with the Children” during worship demonstrates our pastor’s appeal to the young, and is occasionally led by a lay person. Ushers and greeters step up spontaneously on any given Sunday. Readers are assigned by individuals from both churches. We would like our pastor to be creative in preparing and leading worship with an occasional role play, dialogue or visual and artistic aids and a healthy sense of humor.
We enjoy a strong music ministry with an adult choir led by an excellent choir director. Our worship is greatly enhanced by the beautiful organ and piano playing of our accompanist. We also have a country Gospel band which occasionally participates in worship services and visits nursing homes and senior centers. There is a strong commitment to continue the music ministry, which is considered by many to be an asset of our churches. We are blessed to have many talented musicians in our congregation willing to serve.

We hope our pastor will play a key role in the education of all ages, being aware of the Sunday school curriculum, supporting the teachers, and leading an adult class. During the school year, we have a nursery for infants to kindergarten plus grade-level classes for children ages K-8. Children age K-8 attend the first fifteen minutes of the church service until a Children's Message and then leave church to attend Sunday school during the remainder of the service. During the summer, we have Sunday school for children ages K-8.
In high-attendance weeks, classes emphasize Bible teaching, while for low attendance weeks, we hold Service Sundays where children focus on faith-inspired service projects that include Operation Christmas Child and assembling Thanksgiving baskets for community members who are ill or home-bound. The children and youth also run two of the services each year: the annual Christmas Pageant and "Children's Sunday" on the last Sunday of the academic year.

Adult education includes a weekly Bible study which is led by the pastor. Past sessions have included studies of specific books of the Bible as well as books with Christian themes.
Our congregation has a strong sense of family, and we serve one another in love. Both the deacons and the pastor visit hospitals and homes to care for people in need and families suffering with disability or illness. After Sunday church services, there is a well-attended time of fellowship with refreshments to catch up with personal happenings and offer mutual support.

The church has strong community traditions and is active in the life of both villages. For example, the FCC has hosted the Hanover Memorial “Muster” Day service as well as the Hanover Center Old-Timers’ Fair on the village green in June (the major fund raiser for the FCC) and the October Chicken Pie supper. Our Outreach Committee has organized the annual community talent show and the summer band concert on the Etna Green. There are several women’s groups which run their community activities within the church facilities, including the Etna Ladies Aid Society and the FCC Women’s Fellowship. These women’s groups are active in caring for the church and in responding to community needs. We welcome our pastor’s participation in events like quarterly neighborhood dinners, ball games on the field next to the church, as well as cultural and educational events. In the summer, we prepare luncheons for children’s care centers and are delighted when our pastor joins us for preparing and delivering meals.
Our two churches have long engaged in a number of service and mission projects, locally and in the wider church. Twice monthly, we send teams to cook and host a community dinner sponsored by a local social service agency. We support the Drug Court, Willing Hands food distribution, and the Good Neighbor Health Clinic. We participate in Operation Christmas Child sponsored by the Samaritan Purse each year. In recent years we have sent pastor-led teams to the Dominican Republic to assist local church folks in sanctuary and parsonage construction and to hold religious instruction classes for children. Our Missions Committee disburses funds to those dedicated to being God’s hands and increases the congregation’s awareness through presentations by visiting missionaries. Recent activities have included ways to support the church in China, a water purification project in the Dominican Republic, Bible translation, representatives of Cru Military and Cru campus ministry, a supplier of pediatric standing frames in Peru, and a local Christian camp. We see a good potential to involve children and youth in some mission projects.
**Financial Matters**

The yoked congregation has a combined budget of about $100,000 for pastoral and worship expenses for the two churches with 80 percent covered by the FBC and 20 percent by the FCC. Each church has a separate budget for building maintenance and missions/outreach (about $42,000 for the FBC and $14,000 for the FCC). Income for the FBC is about $90,000 from offering and about $15,000 from endowment income/gifts and rentals. The FCC gets about one-fourth of its operating income (about $12,000) from the proceeds of the Hanover Center Fair and three-fourths from offering ($26,000). The FCC has a capital reserve and the FBC has an endowment. Other than a relatively small temporary mortgage to finance the parsonage renovation, both churches are debt-free.

**What We Believe**

Both congregations own a covenant. While the language of expressing our faith may have changed, our belief in God the creator, Christ the redeemer and Holy Spirit is clear. We practice both Believers’ Baptism and Infant Baptism and serve communion once a month.

**Hopes and Aspirations**

We wish to remain a beacon of welcoming comfort, active outreach, and abiding faith in God within our larger community.

We offer opportunities for engagement and growth in mutual ministry. We are committed to appreciating our pastor’s gifts and skills and will work together for the well-being and continued peace and harmony of our diverse congregation. We hope that our future pastor can inspire involvement from the deep pool of talent and commitment that already exists within our congregation. We anticipate that together we can strike a healthy balance between the responsibilities of worship, pastoral care, education, mission, and administration.

We are seeking a pastor to provide leadership in the following areas of ministry:

**Worship**

- Leading weekly worship which includes readings, prayers, and sermons with a Biblical focus as well as reflecting an awareness of people’s lives and current concerns in the world.
- We are enriched as our order of worship follows the seasons of the church year.
Pastoral Care

- We need a pastor who can ably listen to us individually and as a congregation and is skilled to respond pastorally to our concerns. This facility will also be welcomed in hospital and home visits and in group settings.

Christian Education

- Strengthening our Sunday school programs for children and families.
- Planning adult education e.g. Bible study, study groups, and topical conversations.

Congregational Life

- Developing youth programs, including confirmation/baptism activities.
- Visitation of homebound and ill persons, assisted by members of the congregation, serving communion.
- Offering opportunities for fellowship and community building, including opportunities for intergenerational activities.
- Enhancing communication to reach both the congregation and greater community through our website, e-mails, church newsletters, worship bulletins and local media.
- Recognizing our various backgrounds and outlooks and joining us in engaging our faith according to our respective values.

Outreach

- Providing leadership for increased community outreach.
- Assisting the congregation in growing our mission outreach.
- Facilitating congregational participation in denominational gatherings of both the American Baptist Church and the United Church of Christ and raising awareness of denominational missions.

In Closing

We have a great capacity to love our pastor and our church. We want our pastor to love us and this ministry. We want to remind one another and to be reminded regularly that we are blessed. We strive to “Increase our love for one another, be of good courage, hold fast to that which is good and go forth into the world to serve God with gladness.”