

Request for Pastoral Leadership for our Time of Transition

Church Name: Meriden Congregational Church, U.C.C.

Street Address: P.O. Box 187, Meriden, NH 03770 (5 Mitchell Drive, Meriden, NH 03770)

Web address (website, Facebook page): Meridenucc.org; www.facebook.com/MeridenUCC

**What circumstance has caused your congregation to enter into a time of Transition?
(for example, resignation or retirement of settled pastor, change in Compensation for Pastor, premature termination of the minister's service to the congregation, etc.)**

After a long-term pastorate of almost twenty-nine years, our Co-Pastors (1.25 FTE) are retiring from the Meriden Congregational Church, effective June 2, 2024.

What do you think is most needed by your congregation during this time of Transition?

- Strong worship that both nourishes and engages the congregation, spanning all ages, with an emphasis on love, compassion, justice, and the relevance of faith in today's world, and is inclusive of a variety of music, and possibly an expanded role for congregants in worship leadership and facilitation (scriptural and other readings, music, and more).
- Compassionate pastoral care for community members facing hardship, illness, aging, grief, etc.
- Consistent, transparent, three-way communication between our interim, leadership, and the congregation.
- Support and encouragement in helping the congregation articulate and celebrate who we are "as church" after the co-pastors' retirement – and in moving from "loss" to possibility.
- Support in helping us identify, value, nurture, and communicate our current strengths in terms of our existing capacity for "autonomy/self-regulation/self-navigation" – i.e., our ability to carry out and sustain already-prioritized activities and groups, even in the face of the retirement of the long-time co-pastors.
- Support in articulating what "our best selves" would want for this church– our vision for this next season of our lives together.
- Encouragement in building excitement about the future of the MCC – combined with special sensitivity to those who may be feeling a significant sense of loss upon the retirement of the co-pastors and who may need additional care.
- Reinforcement of the collective strength of our leadership to guide our congregation in our work and ministry during this transitional time and as we create our Church Profile and eventually call a new settled pastor.
- Support to focus on our organizational stability and sustainability so that we are healthy and forward looking when we welcome a settled minister, including guidance to keep us on track to identify our goals and priorities for the future.

What special skills, training, or gifts might be important in a Pastor who covenants to serve you during your time of Transition?

- An excellent verbal and written communicator who is curious, patient, compassionate, and skilled at interacting with people of all ages and abilities.
- Someone who possesses strong facilitation skills and diagnostic listening skills, including the ability to hear and help us reflect on what we are saying and also observe, analyze and give feedback on “what we may not be saying.”
- Someone who welcomes diversity (in all forms) in the pews and who values all members, worshipers, and other seekers, no matter where they are on their faith journey.
- Someone who embraces the role of a UCC pastor as both a prophet and a shepherd (i.e., exhibits both a faith-based commitment to advocacy for a just world for all and also possesses solid skills in providing pastoral care).
- Someone who values music as part of worship.
- Someone who has awareness of and interest in teaching our congregation about other faith traditions and their major holidays.
- Someone who encourages our vibrant impact and activities outside of worship.
- Someone who fully understands the role of a transitional pastor (whether or not s/he is an “intentional interim”) and can serve as a skilled facilitator in helping us to identify our church’s unique needs and keep the pastoral search process moving forward expeditiously and effectively with healthy transparency for the full congregation.
- Someone who can enthusiastically make the same commitment that is currently made by new MCC members as part of their being received into church membership – i.e., “I commit to co-creating Beloved Community with the Meriden Congregational Church through choosing love as my response to every person and to all creation, and through embracing compassion, inclusion, affirmation, peace, and justice as the goals of our shared ministry of healing and collective liberation. And I commit myself, my time, my skills, and my resources to sharing in our church’s ministry of ‘transforming lives as a compassionate community’ both locally and throughout our world.’ ”
- Someone with the experience to support leadership in improving our church's operations and sustainability, especially with enhancing financial management and facility planning.
- Someone who is a strong team player and supports our staff, including our part-time secretary, sexton, and pianist.

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CONGREGATION

Current Membership: 118 **Non-Members Active in the Congregation:** 25

Membership 5 yrs. ago: 120 **Membership 10 yrs ago:** 120

No. Attending Weekly Worship Services: 15-30 in person and 2-20 on zoom

No. Participating in Weekly Education Programs: 10

No. Participating in Youth Programs: 8 Our Whole Lives Programming: 15-20

Describe the Main Mission Emphasis of your Congregation.

We seek to be a UCC congregation that is “transforming lives as a compassionate community” through pastoral support and prophetic witness both within and beyond our church family (from our Mission Statement). Our prayerful action is to “choose love” in all ways including through our personal interactions with one another and how we engage in the wider world.

We offer spiritual/emotional support of our children, youth, and young families, our elders, and all adults in between at the core of our congregational life, along with an active commitment in our community and beyond to racial, economic, immigrant, and climate justice, and justice for our LGBTQIA+ kin, locally and nationally.

We are blessed to do this humbly by the generous grace of God and with the skilled support of our Leadership Ministry Team and small, active congregation with a long history of being a little beacon of light in the village of Meriden, NH.

Give examples of the way your Congregation offers mission and ministry to your community and the world.

MCC is especially committed to uplifting our community, particularly our youth. Every day, we seek to embody more fully each of the UCC’s “Be the Church” statements. Examples of our recent activities include:

- Serving monthly community meals at Claremont Soup Kitchen; bimonthly meals at the Listen Community Dinners in Lebanon.
- Periodic food drives to benefit the local pantries; Christmas Smiles (clothing) Ministry for local families in need (thirty years).
- Use of the parish house for community youth programs (4H, Girl Scouts, etc.) and other community meetings.
- Two annual community suppers (Harvest Dinner and Lenten Pancake Supper).
- Monthly Women’s and Men’s Spiritual Companion Gatherings
- Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education programming for children/youth in the wider community.
- Spiritual formation programming for children and adults, including Sunday morning Children’s Messages, Church School (currently for a small group), monthly Young Parents/Families Discussion Group, Confirmation (Faith Odyssey), Senior Seekers Group (high school; currently small group), and adult book groups and monthly film series on critical contemporary topics and themes.

- Opportunities for contemplative spiritual practice through Taize worship services, Centering Prayer Circles, Spiritual Companions groups, and weekly Lenten morning and evening prayer gatherings.
- Pastoral/emotional/social support, as requested, for community families and students at the Plainfield School, Lebanon High School, and Kimball Union Academy.
- Weekly Black Lives Matter Vigils (nine years).
- Church member representation on the Plainfield School and Cornish School DEI Committees; local public witness to racial justice.
- Offering and housing a seven-week community summer day camp for fifty children and youth (ages 3-12) per week—now for twenty-one years.
- Active involvement in the Granite State Organizing Project (an affiliate of the national Faith in Action), and a local predecessor the United Valley Interfaith Project (UVIP).
- Church makes annual budgeted financial contributions to area agencies:
 - shelter and pantry serving people who are unhoused (Haven),
 - kitchens for food insecure (Listen and Claremont Soup Kitchen),
 - clinic for those lacking dental and medical care (Good Neighbor Health Clinic)
 - agencies offering care for those experiencing intimate partner and domestic abuse and violence (WISE and Turning Points).
- Regular testimony by parish clergy and church members at the NH State House on vital topics.
- Encouragement to all members to vote and voice opinions on state and federal legislation.
- Extensive ministry of our Worker Justice Minister (Licensed Minister, Rev. Dr. Gail Kinney) and other church members on issues of workers' rights, the critical needs of immigrant workers, and support for the unionization of Dartmouth College student workers (dining hall and graduate teaching assistant positions).
- Active advocacy and support in local, state, and national efforts to address anti-apartheid for Palestine. We are one of five local churches sponsoring the UCC General Synod Resolution in 2021 on a Just Peace for Israel and Palestine).
- Support for various initiatives for the critical needs for climate, racial, economic, and immigrant justice. Our church community has a long history of active commitment and involvement in local, state, and national issues—ever seeking to contribute, as we can, in bringing about God's Beloved Community in our world.

Does your Congregation have a Mission Statement?

Yes! Please see our Mission and our Vision Statements attached.

Is your Congregation Open and Affirming?

Yes! Our congregation became Open and Affirming in 2000, as the third UCC congregation in NH at the time to make this commitment. Each year, on the anniversary of our O&A Vote (All

Saints Sunday), we renew our commitment to being an O&A congregation and seek to live out this commitment in all that we do.

Our congregation also made the commitment to be a Sanctuary Congregation in 2017 (moving toward readiness to house those threatened with deportation), voted to support the Green New Deal in 2021, and our Leadership voted to be a UCC Apartheid-Free Church in 2023. Our small Anti-Racist Ministry Team has been working toward helping us become an Anti-Racist Church.

Does your Congregation have a Welcoming Statement that is available to visitors and the community at large?

Yes! ***“We Welcome YOU!!! We are a Spiritually Progressive, Open & Affirming, Sanctuary Congregation dedicated to Transforming Lives as a Compassionate Community, extravagantly welcoming EVERYONE, celebrating diversity, cultivating awe & wonder, and seeking Peace with Justice for all Creation!”***

Does your Congregation join other congregations in the community for worship and/or service? If so, please describe some of these activities.

Although this had been the case in years past, we are not currently sharing worship in any regular sense with the four other churches in our community. However, we do regularly engage in loving, collaborative, and meaningful memorial services for community members/families who have had connections over the years with our collective church communities.

In terms of service, our church and the Plainfield Community Baptist Church occasionally collaborate on wider community needs and projects, particularly through initiatives of the Plainfield Community Resource Director, the Plainfield Community Pantry, the Plainfield Elementary School, and the Meriden Community Camp.

Please give examples of how your Congregation involved in the wider United Church of Christ? (For example, does your congregation send delegates to meetings of the Association or Conference? Has anyone from your congregation attended General Synod? Do your members take advantage of the Conference’s Outdoor Ministry Program (Horton Center) or attend educational events (for example, Prepared to Serve, Boundary Awareness Training, ONA Celebrations, National Youth Events, etc.) sponsored by the United Church of Christ?

- Our congregation has several members who regularly attend the Grafton Orange Sullivan (GOS) Association meetings, the NH Conference Annual Meetings and the annual Prepared to Serve education and training gathering. A long-time church member has served for many years on the Committee on Ministry of the GOS Association.
- Our congregation is well connected to the GOS Association, the NH Conference, and the national UCC, also makes regular and generous financial contributions to the Neighbors in Need and One Great Hour of Sharing offerings.

- One or both of our Co-Pastors attended each of the General Synods during their tenure.
- One of our co-pastors and our Worker Justice Minister regularly lead justice-oriented Prepared to Serve workshops and training sessions and share leadership responsibilities for the NH Conference's Economic Justice Team.
- Church members lead an annual Pride month Sunday worship service and make announcements during services concerning LGBTQ+ and trans awareness issues.
- Ten to twelve members (mostly youth) attended General Synod 2007 in Hartford, CT.
- Although our Co-Pastors regularly attended Boundary Awareness Trainings, members of our congregation have not yet received this training.
- Our church has been holding a yearly fall weekend church retreat at Horton Center since 2004 (with 15-50 in attendance, more recently 15). A small number of youth have attended summer programs at Horton Center.

Current Expense Budget: \$270k with \$35.5k in one time expenses (Current Year)

Our Church's Wider Mission: \$6,200 (Current Year)

Number of Pledges: 62 (Current Year)

Average Pledge Amount: \$2,190

Does the Church have an Endowment? Yes. We have two permanently restricted funds set aside to support our operations and facilities.

What is the approximate size of the Endowment? MCC is the beneficiary of 2 trusts totaling \$1,441,633.05. We do not administer these trusts. Recent Church earnings on these trusts were \$32,954 specified for Pastor's salary or maintenance.

The Church also has \$636,936 in liquid assets. All but \$167,060 have a stated purpose or restrictions. The church is currently reviewing these restrictions and considering upcoming capital/repair needs.

CONGREGATIONAL CONCERNS

What are the most significant concerns of your congregation, concerns or issues that you hope will be given attention during this time of Transition?

- The interim pastor will be taking the place of two beloved pastors who have led our congregation for nearly three decades. One person will be moving into a role held by two people with distinct philosophical orientations and preaching styles.
- We will need someone to help us to clarify what is imperative for us to carry forward, and what aspects of our church we may need to let go of, or let lay fallow for a time, as we recognize that this transition will inevitably bring change.
- We are experiencing a small but steady increase in new members, including young families and those from our wider community of the Upper Valley seeking a warm and

engaged spiritually progressive church community. We are excited to foster their continued engagement.

- That said, like so many churches, we have fewer people attending Sunday services since the pandemic began. We appreciate additional energy, ideas, and support to encourage more Sunday attendance, in addition to the many ways our wider community engages in activities that reflect our collective effort to “Be the Church.”
- Our leadership is also focused on two critical management initiatives to advance our mission: (1) improving our financial operations and planning; and (2) engaging in external assessment of our buildings and grounds to determine priorities for future structural, mechanical, and architectural changes. We need to continue to make progress on both of these efforts.

Is there unresolved Conflict in Your Church? Yes No

Please describe the nature and intensity of the Conflict, and any efforts that have been made to bring resolution of the Conflict. *If necessary, please attach an explanation to this form.*

Not applicable.

Are there any other factors that you feel prospective ministers should know about your Congregation? *Yes If so, please list them below or attach a description to this form.*

We are a spiritually progressive congregation, embracing inclusivity in spiritual and theological beliefs, celebrating the diversity of our human family, and committed to making our love visible in the world, in compassionate and effective ways.

MCC has an excellent pianist and a long, rich history of choral music. While we have been without a music director for a few years, we are fortunate that the choir does perform under guest directors on Christmas, Easter, and other holidays and special occasions.

Although we are a small church in terms of Sunday worship attendees, we are a vital church with many meaningful ministries including engaging worship, inspiring instrumental/choral music, a commitment to using inclusive language, and warm hospitality; an active Caregivers Team; spiritual growth groups; and multiple spiritual formation programs (e.g., Our Whole Lives, Young Parents Support Group, Confirmation, adult book studies; monthly film series).

Beyond our relatively small core group of church members who are engaged weekly, there are larger numbers of church members and community friends involved in many activities, events, vigils, witnesses at the State House, community service, and social justice work associated with our church community. We are unique in terms of having intentionally called a “Worker Justice Minister” to our leadership ranks. She is an authorized UCC pastor, and is generally available to serve as a substitute worship leader.

Our church is actually known and respected by many, statewide, for role-modeling a dynamic faith witness in the public square. We are known as a “brave little church on the hill.”

SCOPE OF WORK

Meriden Congregational Church, U.C.C. Scope of Work for a Full-time Interim/Transitional Pastor (40-50 hours weekly / 10-12 units)

- **Serve faithfully as a temporary pastor and resource** during this congregation’s time of pastoral transition from a previous long-term pastorate through the hiring of a new settled pastor. Shepherd this community as it seeks to grow through the dynamics of transition and change, while exploring and articulating a faithful and exciting vision for the future of this beloved community.
- **Prepare and lead Sunday worship** including prayerful preparation and shaping of liturgy and bulletin, planning of music in coordination with Worship and Music Co-coordinators, Pianist* and Choir Director,* planning of Children’s Messages in coordination with Spiritual Formation Coordinator for Children, Youth, and Families,* preaching, offering of prayers, and other engaging parts of worship leadership. (*part-time staff). Respond to requests for weddings, Baptisms, memorial services, and other ceremonies, as needed.
- **Support the ongoing ministries and lay ministers** of the congregation, specifically the Leadership Ministry Team and the Co-coordinators of Worship and Music; Spiritual Formation; Welcoming & Caring; Peace, Justice & Outreach; Administration & Finance; and the Worker Justice Minister – as they engage the congregation in their ministries through the church and wider community.
- **Provide pastoral care and spiritual support** to individuals, couples, and families in collaboration with the church’s Caregivers Team.
- **Offer healthy communication and support** to the Leadership Ministry Team and congregation, particularly in processing areas of growth, change, challenge, and conflict.
- **Serve as a resource for the work of pastoral transition**, including supporting the Leadership Ministry Team through the ministry of leading and engaging the congregation in examining our history, exploring desired directions for ministry, discerning our vision, writing our Local Church Profile (focusing on the U.C.C.’s three questions: Who are we now? Who is our neighbor? Who is God calling us to become?), forming a Search Committee, and engaging in a search for a settled pastor.
- **Receive ongoing education and professional accountability** for this specialized interim/transitional ministry.

- **Provide administrative and other leadership support**, including attending meetings on church programs, in collaboration with lay leadership; participate in wider church activities such as conference and association meetings; and administration responsibilities such contributing to and coordinating the monthly e-newsletter and weekly service bulletin with MCC's part-time secretary.
- **Typical term of 18 - 24 months**; an interim pastor is not eligible for the settled position; however a transitional pastor is eligible to apply for the settled position.

COMPENSATION AND SUPPORT

Is this position full time? Yes.

Cash Salary offered: \$48,400 to \$60,000 annually. The range is representative of years of experience and education level.

Housing Options:

Housing allowance only

Parsonage only

Would offer either for interim pastor only. Our parsonage, 4-bedroom Colonial on site, is the preferred option.

Housing Allowance Offered: \$24,180 annually (\$2015 per month)

Does the Compensation Package follow Conference Guidelines? Yes.

OTHER BENEFITS OFFERED

Pension Contribution (14% of Base Salary plus Housing Allowance/Parsonage Value)
Housing Allowance assumed to be 30% of salary

Social Security Offset (*Because clergy are treated as self-employed for Social Security purposes, churches are encouraged to pay 7.65% of the pastor's salary and housing allowance as it must do for regular FICA employees. The Offset should be paid directly to the pastor.*)

Health Insurance Individual Family

Dental Insurance Individual Family

Paid to UCC Pension Board or Medicare as applicable. The Church offers the "Plan B" from the Pension Board. The Pastor and Family have the option to choose Plan A with a payroll deduction for the difference. If Medicare eligible can discuss funding supplemental plan.

Reimbursement for Criminal Background Check
Would we want to do this ourselves? Our payroll company has this option.

Vacation (1 week per quarter is the recommended minimum)

Meeting Expense Allowance

X Business Mileage Reimbursed (IRS Rate) at \$0.67/mile for a max of \$1200

All benefits will be negotiated to find a mix of items that are beneficial to the individual involved. We offer up to \$3,200 for reimbursable expenses including mileage, education, books and preaching resources.

The initial term of the Covenant/Contract will be for:

 12 months 18 months 24 month X until a Settled Pastor is called

NHCUCC Staff Person support this Search: Rev. Sara Marean

Phone: (603) 225-664 ~ Email: smarean@nhcucc.org

It is understood that information contained on this form will be used by Conference Staff to discern what form of Transitional Ministry might be best suited to the congregation's needs (Intentional Interim Minister, Supply Minister, Designated Term Minister), and that this form may be shared with potential candidates.

Bill Chappelle

MCC Leadership Chair

3/31/24

Date

MERIDEN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC
MISSION STATEMENT

*As people called to transform lives as a compassionate community,
we choose love as our response to one another and the world around us.
We practice love in our welcoming, our teaching, our shared ministry, and
our community.*

As seekers on life-long spiritual journeys, we seek to grow in love.

We delight in the joyous and inquisitive child within each of us.

We look to Jesus' example to guide our life and ministry together.

We welcome and embrace all people without exception.

*We make compassion, inclusion, affirmation, peace and justice the goals of
our work together.*

We unite to protect our environment.

We believe that these choices, lived faithfully, create Beloved Community.

VISION STATEMENT

(Adopted February 3rd, 2008)

MERIDEN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,
An Open and Affirming Congregation of the
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST,
is called:

TO BE A COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY

Believing that we are called as partners in God's ministry of healing and transformation, we seek to become the Creator's hands and heart in our world. We strive to extend God's extravagant welcome and boundless compassion in an all-encompassing community, recognizing that from our own privilege comes much responsibility. We support and encourage each other along our journeys of faith and life.

TO BE INTENTIONALLY INCLUSIVE

Rejoicing in God's infinite grace offered freely to all, we affirm and celebrate the uniqueness and diversity of all God's people. Trusting that the paths of faithfulness are many, we invite, welcome, and embrace all people of God's *kin-dom* no matter who they are or where they may be on life's journey. We strive to love and nurture each other in our differentness, as we meet and greet God's family in the faces of our children, youth, adults, and elders.

TO BE OPENLY SEARCHING

We are purposeful in our search for God and God's wisdom for our lives. As seekers on a lifelong spiritual journey, we find more grace in the questions than in dogmatic answers, more faith in the search for understanding than in doctrinal certainty. We encourage open questioning as we strive to educate children, youth, and adults throughout every stage of our lives. We embrace the Bible as the stories of the faith journeys of the ancient Hebrews and the early Christians, as we affirm our conviction that "God is still speaking!" We believe that our lifelong journeys are as varied as the ways of learning, and that our walk together strengthens our relationship with God, each other, and our world.

TO SERVE OTHERS JOYFULLY

We believe that the abundance of God's grace is exciting, liberating, inviting, and life-changing. Opportunities to share kindness and alleviate suffering are many, and as God's people in this world, we are invited to seize them enthusiastically. We join the generations who came before us to continue the circle of service to all people. And as joyful stewards of God's wondrous creation, we seek likewise to ensure opportunities for growth and grace for those who come after us as well.

TO PROMOTE GOD'S JUSTICE AND PEACE

We embrace our calling to help bring God's justice and peace to our world, recognizing that justice is the social form of God's love, and desiring to learn and live the ways that make for peace within our lives and throughout our world. Affirming the sacredness of all creation, we seek to live and love in ways that protect, sustain, and respect all creatures great and small, every aspect of our mother earth upon whose health and well-being our lives depend. Mindful of God's passion for justice especially for those without resources, privilege, or voice, we commit ourselves to mutual solidarity with all those seeking peace on earth and good will toward all. Where injustice and violence oppress and divide, we will work toward liberation and reconciliation.

TO SUPPORT GOD'S WORK CHEERFULLY

From the abundance of our blessings, we accept our responsibility to support God's ministry and presence throughout our world. We give generously of our time, our talents and energy, and our resources to sustain and renew both our local faith community and God's broader work in the world beyond our doors:

TO FOLLOW IN THE WAY OF CHRIST

We claim our voice as a progressive Christian community, welcoming the challenges and opportunities of approaching God through the life and teachings of Jesus. Together we seek to imitate Jesus' non-violent resistance to oppression and injustice, as well as his compassionate treatment toward those often marginalized and excluded throughout our world. Following in the way of Christ, we covenant with each other to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.