

First Congregational United Church of Christ

Partners in Christ's Service

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October 20, 2023

Dear Members and Friends,

It is the time of year when our thoughts turn toward ensuring the financial support of our church in the coming year through stewardship. We reach out today with an invitation to give. Our theme this year is ***“What Moves Your Heart”***. Our scriptural inspiration is from Matthew 10:8, “Freely you have received; freely give.”

It is our hope that you will make a new or renewed pledge to support our church in 2024. Your annual pledge that is made by **November 5** will be blessed as part of our worship service that day. Your pledge allows us to prepare the 2024 budget with confidence as we seek to be Partners in Christ's Service in our community and beyond. An envelope is enclosed and our website has an on-line form for your use (<https://bit.ly/Pledge2024FCUCC>).

While many do not like to discuss money at church, it seems rather natural to me. Our financial decisions are a clear expression of what we value. We pay our gas bill because we value being warm and safe. We pay our cell phone bill because we value communicating with people near and far. We pay the tuition bill because we value the potential of an educated mind.

We donate at church because we value spiritual health. We believe in the teachings of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Love of God. We have witnessed miracles in our own lives and the world around us. The birth of a child, the love of a pet, and the wonders of nature. We practice our faith to keep it alive and church is a physical place set aside for that very purpose. It costs money to run our church - and it costs more with each year.

It has been explained to me in different places and ways that the core mission of the “Church” in society is simply put: Healing. The world is broken in so many ways it's impossible to count. In October so far, the brokenness has been particularly clear to me. The deep pains of aging, suicide, physical illness, and death too soon have entered my personal world. This combined with the horrific news of today's world produces real pain and fear for me, and I know I'm not alone. Living this life is tough and places of healing and restoration, like our church, are absolutely essential.

I write to you today as Chair of the Board of Trustees, responsible for developing our annual budget. We are a small, self-supporting church blessed with a large, mortgage-free, tax-free building where we can gather. We are also blessed with long time tenants and an endowment fund that are our single greatest financial givers, essentially paying for our building costs. *This means that your contributions pay for our wonderful staff and creative programming, which bring LIFE into the building.* Basically, 0% of your gift goes to building overhead and administrative costs - your gift is so important and impactful! Please give as generously as you are able.

In 2018, we made the decision to sell part of our parking lot and use the net proceeds to fund improvements to our building. Some projects are visible like the beautiful refresh to our Parlor this summer. Most projects cannot be seen such as those involving heating & air, flood

remediation, masonry, roofing, plumbing, and electricity. For many years prior to the parking lot sale, we operated with an “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” mentality. Today, we need to repair/replace things that are breaking. We are working hard to ensure that the building where we gather and worship is clean, safe, and welcoming. We are careful stewards of our funds and we are extremely grateful that we have the resources to take action.

The past couple of years we have been searching for a settled pastor without yet finding the comforts of a good match and an expected outcome. Our Search Committee faithfully continues to serve, looking for a part-time or full-time pastor in a diminishing candidate pool. At the same time, your church leaders are thinking creatively about how to fulfill the pastoral needs of our community in today’s world.

During this interim period, a “team model” has emerged as our approach to providing a pastor in the pulpit for Sunday Worship each week. Martha Mendoza, our Associate Pastor and Director of Christian Education, has stepped up during this time to fill the pulpit with inspired pastors each Sunday who have become treasured members of our community. We have received positive feedback about this variety of prophetic voices in the pulpit.

We appreciate Martha greatly for her leadership in this and many other areas, and recognize the additional work and responsibilities that have resulted for her. Even so, we intended for this “team model” to be temporary. Yet, we find ourselves wondering if our lived experiences have created the foundation for something new. We are actively engaged with this question and ask for your prayers as we continue to chart the path forward.

In closing, *we need your financial support.* Participating in church life with your financial pledge is different from charitable giving. Our gifts combine to provide faithful witness that God is at work in the here and now - TODAY. With our pledges to First Congregational Church, we commit to making God’s Healing Love available in this place. We hope that creating and supporting God’s Kingdom here on earth is a task that *moves your heart!*



With Love,
Carrie Stone, Chair, Board of Trustees and
2023 Stewardship Committee

“Freely you have received; freely give.”
Matthew 10:8



Scan QR code to go directly to
our online pledge form.