Union Congregational Church

July 2025 - June 2026 Annual Report

Loving God, Loving Neighbor, Building Community

176 Cooper Avenue, Montclair, NJ 07043 www.unioncong.org

Church Clergy and Staff

June 30, 2026

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Section 1. About the Church

Statement of Purpose

As Christians and as members of Union Congregational Church, United Church Of Christ, we believe it is our purpose and calling to:

- **grow** in relationship with God and neighbor through communal worship, fellowship, mutual respect, prayer, and service;
- **empower** each other, across generations, to discern Christian truth and meaning using a variety of sources;
- **welcome and celebrate God's people**, and **affirm the many images of the Divine** manifested in differing abilities and disabilities, ages, gender expressions, gender identities, sexual orientations, faith traditions, social and economic classes, ethnicities, colors, races, immigration statuses, and nationalities;
- **minister** to others using our spiritual gifts and financial resources ethically, mindfully, and creatively;
- work to **recognize and relieve systemic oppression**, individual suffering, poverty, and isolation, through dialogue, action, and partnership with other religious and secular organizations;
- **honor** the environment as God's sacred creation, worthy of praise and protection;
- **reflect the love and grace of God** in all that we do, joyous in Christ and grateful in the Spirit.

Open and Affirming Statement

We welcome God's people and celebrate the many images of the Divine manifested in differing gender expressions, identities and sexual orientations. Union Congregational Church welcomes and celebrates LGBTQ+ people into the full life and ministry of the church. In the United Church of Christ, our denomination, this is called being an "Open and Affirming" church.

Missional Priorities for the 2025-2026 Program Year

Building Renewal
Making our campus – especially the Main Building and Sanctuary – accessible, adaptable, and more welcoming for both our congregation and the wider community.

Children and Youth
Strengthen our programs for children, youth, and families to reflect our desire for people of all ages to grow in relationship with God and discern Christian truth and meaning.

Racial Justice
Build on existing learning and action foundations, and relationships with local organizations, to pursue deeper awareness and impact on racial justice through three initiatives:
1. A facilitated examination to clarify our church's strengths in challenging racism, as well as opportunities to better align our institutional/collective mindset, behaviors, practices, and policies with our desire to be inclusive and antiracist.
2. Deepen congregants' understandings of and commitment to racial justice as theologically grounded and consistent with our statement of purpose, through worship and complementary learning and engagement experiences.

3. Advocacy and organizing around affordable housing needs and opportunities in New Jersey, recognizing the ongoing legacies of racism and environmental racism, redlining, and zoning restrictions.

Section 2. Leadership Letters

Letter from the Lead Minister
July 30, 2026

Zora Neale Hurston wrote, “There are years that ask questions and years that answer.” The ’25-’26 program year was one in which the church answered a number of important questions, charting the course for our continued transformation into a church for the current and coming ages.

We enthusiastically answered “YES!” to the question of whether to call Rev. Leah McCullough as Minister of Pastoral Care and Faith Formation. Leah’s arrival has been a true blessing to our congregation, as we saw her gifts begin to shape our ministry. She has built a new team of leaders for our youth group, shared stories about her life as a farmer and minister for food justice, and quickly been received by the congregation with appreciation for her deep listening, spirit of play, and myriad gifts for ministry. It has been a blessing to work alongside Leah and feel that our clergy team is settled for the first time in a long time. Leah’s installation in May was overflowing with joy, reflected in the confetti blessing at the end!

The decision by the congregation in October to sell the lot adjacent to the Parsonage at 169 Cooper (my home, aka P2) to Cohome was not without disagreement and difficulty. But it was also a clear step that affirmed what many in the congregation felt was a missional opportunity to steward our resources with generosity to the wider community and faithfully align with our values, and settled a question that has been percolating in the congregation since the acquisition of the property more than 70 years ago. We look forward to welcoming Cohome as they build a single-family home for adults with and without developmental disabilities, and to the relationships and ministry which will unfold in time.

On Good Friday we answered the question “were you there when they crucified my Lord?” with a pilgrimage to Delaney Hall, demonstrating that following Christ means showing up for our neighbors even when the walk is long. Together with our siblings from across the UCC in NJ and ecumenical partners, over 300 people joined us for some portion of the walk, which continues to draw media coverage as the injustices at Delaney persist.

After more than a year of conversations and many years of discernment, the question of our future in the Vincent Building and for the Union Cong Weekday Nursery School was finally answered this year. We said goodbye to both the building and the program in June – with gratitude for the current and past leaders of the Nursery School, and hope for the future of the school’s traditions in the newly formed Cooper School, which is now leasing the Vincent Building from us.

Along the way, we have seen new folks say “yes” to Union as their spiritual home. We have heard kids answer the many questions posed to them in the Message for All Ages with astounding depth. And, many of you have continued to answer ‘yes’ to the call of Christ to serve the church, to love one another, and to love your neighbors and God.

As we live into where these answers will lead us in the years to come, I give thanks to God for the questions and the answers, and the good company of the people here at Union Congregational Church for the journey we are on.

Blessings,
Rev. Katrina Forman

Letter from the Minister of Pastoral Care and Faith Formation
July 2026

As I write this letter, I've been serving as the Minister of Pastoral Care and Faith Formation for not quite one year. Last August, as I prepared for my cross-country move, I received blessings for our new ministry together from First Congregational Church (Colorado Springs, that is!) and the sisters of Benet Hill Monastery. Two weeks later – excited, nervous, and road-weary – I arrived at P1 to a warm welcome and ample time to settle into my new home before starting work.

Rev. Katrina, who had been on sabbatical, returned on September 2. I joined her and the team a week later. We hit the ground running. On my first Sunday in worship ("Be the Church"), as Rev. Katrina read the names, I hustled around the sanctuary presenting commemorative pins to each person who has been a member at Union for at least 40 years. I remember wondering how I would ever learn all your names.

In my third week, we announced a congregational meeting to vote to sell the P2 lot and began the work of discernment together. (Not all clergy begin a new call quite like this!) I sat in meetings, some of them quite tense, with staff, lay leaders, and members as we wrestled with what God was calling us to do and be in this moment. Throughout the process, even when we disagreed, I witnessed members engage honestly, passionately, respectfully, and with a deep love for this church and for one another. During the closing prayer on the day of the vote, when I invited us to pray with our eyes open and while touching one another, I remember looking out at you—my new people—and feeling God's presence with us and among us. Experiencing who you are as a church family filled me with deep gratitude—for you, for what God is doing here, and for the opportunity to join you in this shared journey of ministry.

I have spent this first year getting to know you: meeting individually for coffee and conversation and making pastoral visits in your homes; planning with ministry teams and walking a pilgrimage to Delaney Hall; discussing a Let's Watch film and zip-lining at Camp Johnsonburg; volunteering at CUMAC and laughing at our synchronized bowling; sharing tears at a Blue Christmas service and building blanket forts in the Assembly Room; hanging (or rather, watching others hang) the wreath on the tower during Advent and interring a loved one's ashes in the Memorial Garden; engaging in rituals of lament on the Women's Retreat and gathering around shared tables; listening as you debated budgets and building renovations and watching you beam with delight at a children's pageant; throwing axes with (not at) staff simply to play together; and sharing heartfelt prayers in worship each Sunday.

This is church, y'all! This is the ministry of worship, care, connection, justice, peace, play, and formation that we have the privilege to share with God and one another now and in the years to come.

I am especially grateful to serve a church that prioritizes ministry with children and youth. They are not our future. They are the church now. I give thanks for the way you welcome them, create a community of love and belonging, and invite them to participate fully in the life of the church. We are blessed with caring and creative leaders in children's music (Kristine and Jeremy) and faith formation (BJ). I am humbled and honored to serve alongside gifted and faithful youth leaders (Bryan, Rob, Grace, and Lisa) who are deeply committed to God, this church, and our young people. They have been a tremendous gift to me and are exceptional mentors as we relaunch youth ministry here at Union. Additionally, our newly formed Christian Education Visioning Team (Megan, Skye, Skate, Grace, and BJ) is guiding the continued development of our mission and implementation of children's and youth faith formation.

A highlight of the year for me – and I hope for the congregation – was my installation service in May. Several people asked why it had taken so long. Part of the answer lies in our UCC covenantal polity. An installation service includes not only the church, but also the New Jersey Association of the Central Atlantic Conference, and busy calendars had to be coordinated.

In deeper reflection, I realized we needed the time to get to know one another well enough to create the service we ultimately shared. I am not sure we could have pulled off a confetti anointing any earlier. We needed to know that we could trust one another and that we could let each other be fully who God has created us to be.

An installation is about more than a pastor. It is also about the congregation, where each person is called and how they are equipped by God for ministry. It celebrates the relationship we share and the ministry we are called to do together. We all bring our gifts, our stories, our wisdom, our foibles, our strengths, and our weaknesses. Together, we are the Body of Christ. Together, we embody God's love, justice, and joy in the world. We – all of us, individually and collectively – are a blessing! I look forward to our shared ministry in the year to come.

With you on the journey,
Rev. Leah

Moderator's Letter

Members and Friends,

One of the many joys of belonging to Union Congregational Church is our congregational discernment process. For nearly a decade we have gathered together to clarify our priorities; to envision a dynamic community space that is welcoming and accessible to members, friends, neighbors, and those we have yet to meet; to explore how to adapt our campus and right-size it to meet our current needs while ensuring its sustainability for generations to come; to realign our programs with our values; and to proudly and loudly proclaim who we are.

Congregational decision-making is both challenging and extraordinary. It can be difficult, frustrating, exciting, and truly inspiring. Throughout this journey, we have remained grounded in our faith, our Statement of Purpose, and our commitment to one another. We gathered to wrestle with difficult questions, made courageous decisions together, and embraced the outcomes with grace and generous spirits.

It has been an honor to serve as Moderator during this time of discernment and transition. I am profoundly grateful for your support, encouragement, generosity, and commitment to our shared future. And I am eager to see what comes next.

Christine Brown, Moderator 2025-2026

Executive Director's Letter

The 2025-2026 program year began with much excitement as Rev. Katrina returned from her sabbatical and we welcomed Rev. Leah to our staff in September. It has truly been inspiring seeing them work together to enrich our congregation's ministry.

When I reflect back over the past year, what stays with me the most is not a single event or program. It is the feeling of collaboration, both within our walls and beyond. Groups of long-time and newer members, clergy, staff, and missionally-aligned partners have come together to help create a more just world and transform our congregation to make it more sustainable as Union approaches its 150th anniversary.

I have loved watching the incredible energy and activity from last year continue. Thank you to everyone who has been involved in all aspects of church life – from the Governing Board and Standing Committees to Task Forces and Ministry Teams. For me, one of the highlights of the year was the Good Friday Pilgrimage to Delaney Hall. I was proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with so many from Union and other faith communities on a 10-mile journey to help shine a light on what is happening at this ICE facility, in our community, and around the country.

The year was also marked by big transitions for church programs and the campus. We said farewell to two long-standing and impactful programs: our nursery school after 58 years of educational excellence, and the Side Door program, which supported middle school youth for 24 years. All church offices and programs relocated to the Church Building. At the same time, we signed a long-term lease with a private nursery school for the full Vincent Building after 70 years of church use. We also agreed to sell the P2 lot to Cohome to construct a new shared single-family home for adults with developmental disabilities and neurotypical peers, while continuing to advance the Church Building Renewal Project with a focus on accessibility, the sanctuary, and new offices. Though some of these were difficult decisions, together they reflect our effort to right-size Union's campus and programs as we look forward to the next century at Union.

I am so grateful to our ministers and staff as well as the members of the Governing Board for their tireless work and advocacy over the past year. Union is fortunate to have tremendously dedicated leaders and staff who have answered the call to help shepherd our congregation through a period of discernment and help position the church for future growth and even greater community impact.

As we embark on a new program year, I am excited to work with each of you as we continue to take important steps toward transforming our congregation and creating a more sustainable future.

Jon Thomsen, Executive Director

Section 3: Milestones, Membership

Number of Members

268

Members 40+ Years

1941-1950

Elizabeth Taliaferro

1951-1960

Joan Grevatt, Donna Grieves, Judith Nesbit, Alvin Richter, Ingo Walter

1961-1970

Linda Cary, Larry Frick, Judy and Bill Lutz, Ellyn Minor, Horace and Gloria Ott, Elizabeth Pugh, Mattie Reed, Richard Saunders, Bruce Yeutter

1971-1980

Susan Awerdick, J. Martin Bailey, Carlee and John Bissell, Linda Dorf, Karen Ermler, Carl and Firth Fabend, Janet Hillman, Clifford Lindholm III, Sandra Male, Barbara Marin, John Osborne, Joan and William Parzynski, Allison Sargent, Amy Hohn Stover, Linda Wanat

1981-1986

Maggie Barbetta, Charlene and Terrance Connolly, Susan Dale, Gale Eberhardt, Donald and Nancy Foster, Michael Foster, Diane Franciose, Linda Griffin, Langdon Halloway, Armen Khachaturian, Nancy Kobylarz, Nancy Lands, Gregory and Susan Lotz, Dorothy McGann, Polly Monsees, Ted O'Dell, Kim Reissig, Genie Temmler, Calvin Trevenen

New Members

Erin and Michael Norton, Meena Sandberg, Betsy Richardson, Lauren and Adam Pruneski, Rev. Leah McCullough

Returning Members

Patrick Little

Those We Mourn

Doris Brett, Joyce Mims, Clarissa Schoch

Baptisms

Rowan William Saulnier, Xavier Sullivan, Elijah Harris

Confirmands

Elijah Harris, Natalie Russell, Xavier Sullivan, Erety Swett

Awards and Recognition

Faith in Action Award: Carlos and Janet Valdes-Dapena

This year's Faith in Action Award winners have used their dramatic, musical, and organizational gifts to enliven our worship, inspire and encourage performers of all ages and abilities, and bring the church and the wider community together.

UCC Players could not continue their long legacy without the tireless leadership of Carlos Valdes-Dapena. All who have worked with Janet Valdes-Dapena on the children's pageants praise the creativity and joy she brings to our youngest performers and the entire congregation. Both Janet and Carlos bring their musical gifts as soloists, instrumentalists, and choir members to worship.

Their behind-the-scenes work is less visible but no less important. Both have contributed many hours of sweat equity to thankless projects. Carlos and a small group of volunteers cleaned out the drama closet to make way for new church offices, while Janet tackled the kitchen and the music library.

Beyond the stage, Carlos has contributed his leadership and communication skills to our church in many ways. He served as Vice Moderator on the Governing Board and skillfully guided discussions about difficult issues at our congregational meetings. During those meetings, Carlos introduced "ta-da's" as a way of affirming good things happening around the church. He has also preached lay sermons and volunteers with Family Promise.

John McGann Award for Educational Excellence: Janet Frick, Isabelle Genest, and Sara Olson

Establishing a life in a new country can be exhilarating, frightening, and lonely. For newcomers, learning a new language is an important step toward feeling at home. This year's winners of the John McGann Award for Educational Excellence started out as tutors to a young Afghan woman, a refugee from that country's violence.

But their support has gone beyond teaching English-language skills. They have built a relationship with Neda, her husband Nabil, and their adorable baby daughter. Together, they have helped Neda obtain a driver's license and ease into her role as a new mom. Currently, they are exploring programs to help her pursue her professional goal of becoming a pharmacy technician.

When Neda's mother in Afghanistan asked whether she had made friends in New Jersey, she was quick to name Janet, Isabelle, and Sara. Union Congregational Church honored them for their ongoing efforts to welcome the stranger through education, smoothing one Afghan family's integration into American society.

Recognition

At the March congregational meeting, Linda Cary received a special award to recognize her many years of service providing professional guidance on insurance issues.

Clergy and Staff Update

Last September, we were so happy to welcome Rev. Katrina Forman back from her sabbatical and welcome Rev. Leah McCullough to Union as she began her ministry as our new Minister for Pastoral Care and Faith Formation.

On Sunday, May 17, Rev. Leah McCullough was officially installed as Union's Minister for Pastoral Care and Faith Formation at a joyous installation service followed by a reception.

After 24 years of service to middle-school youth in the community, Side Door held a celebration to commemorate the program with current and former staff and volunteers on May 29. The final day of the program was June 12. We are grateful to Co-Directors David Parra and Rahniel Simon for their years of service and dedication to the program. We wish them well in all they do in the future.

On June 5, Union Congregational Weekday Nursery School held its last official school day after 58 years of educational excellence. On June 11, Rev. Katrina Forman led a service of gratitude and recognition to thank the current and former outstanding faculty of the nursery school. From June 15 to June 26, the nursery school held its last two weeks of summer camp. We are very grateful to Director Lynn Kulik, Assistant Director Susanne Cantalupo, and all teachers and staff for their dedicated service to the school, students, and community, and wish them well as they begin their next chapters.

Submitted by Jon Thomsen

Operations and Space Use

The 2025–2026 program year was filled with joyous occasions here at Union Congregational Church. Our halls echoed with music from the many choruses and musical groups that graced our Sanctuary and Assembly Room, including the Pride Choir, Oratorio Society, and Montclair Early Music.

We were also thrilled to host incredible nonprofits like the Charles Sellers Foundation, Out Montclair, Dumpling Diplomacy, and Montclair Fund for Educational Excellence (MFEE). They all utilized our spaces in unique ways to bring the community together. Now, a new chapter of transition is underway, bringing physical transformations that are already taking shape through HVAC upgrades, moving the church offices, and constructing interim offices. Throughout this process, the Building Renewal Task Force has remained diligent in guiding Union into the next phase with purpose and grace.

As we adapt to physical changes in the main building, we look forward to continuing our partnerships with these wonderful organizations. We are equally excited to support our members' small groups. Together, you help make Union Congregational Church a true community center in Montclair. We deeply appreciate the hard work required to keep our congregation vibrant and our facilities strong. A very special thank you goes to the vendors, staff, members, and everyone who makes this community shine. We are truly blessed to work with you all.

"Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place" - Henri Nouwen

Albert Fenske-Williams, Operations and Space Use Manager

Section 4. Ministry Area: Worship & Music

Worship Attendance

In person average: 102
Average # of children in worship: 12
Livestream average: 22

Christmas Eve 2025 attendance (both services) – 331 in person, 25 livestream, 16 children

Easter 2026 attendance - 285 in person, 30 livestream, 30 children

Combined Gospel Service with Grace Presbyterian Church – 241 in person, 24 livestream

(Note: Worship attendance is based on the 2025-26 program year. Averages do not include Summer worship, Christmas Eve, Easter, and Combined Gospel Service with Grace Presbyterian Church.)

Sunday Morning Welcome Teams

Approximately 40 people served on a Welcome team this year, including six new adults and eight children or youth.

We started the year with first aid and CPR training to help prepare us for emergencies. We also introduced a hybrid team organization. Two monthly teams are fixed with the same members serving the same weeks each month. Two teams are flex-scheduled so that individuals can sign up to serve in a way that fits their personal schedule.

Looking ahead, we want to continue to increase the involvement of children and youth on the Welcome Team, either with their families or as children/youth activities. We also encourage newcomers to the church to join the Welcome Team. It's a wonderful entry point for serving at Union!

Submitted by Bryan Respass

Communion

The Communion Team assists the ordained ministers in celebrating the sacrament of Communion by preparing the bread and juice, serving them to the congregation, and washing up afterward. The regular volunteers include two bakers and 25 servers. Communion is regularly celebrated 12 times a year with gluten-free, nut-free bread and juice on the first Sunday of every month, and on some other occasions (e.g., Maundy Thursday). The usual practice is by intinction, which is by dipping a piece of bread into a cup of juice.

The Communion Team strives to draw the circle wide by emphasizing inclusion of people of all ages, abilities, and places in a joyful feast. A highlight of the year was celebrating Communion with Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili in the style of Peace Cathedral in Tbilisi, Georgia.

With thanks for faithful participation by Skye Amory, Margaret Barbetta, Alison Beringer, Charlotte Black, William Black, Sarah Carter, Joaquín Céspedes, Timothy Crist, Lawrence Frick, Cheryl Galante, Isabelle Genest, Ina Isobe, Christina Kelly, Robert Kent, Eric Knies, Todd Landis, Grace Lawson, Rob Middleton, Nina Rue, Michele Sionas, Della Smith, Catherine Spinella, Michael Spinella, Tawnya Switzer, Pierce Switzer, Sara Tamargo, Armando Tamargo, Laurie Walle, Gérald Walle, and Rick Wright.
Submitted by Ina Isobe

Banners

About five years ago, when we began livestreaming Sunday services after COVID, Rev. Bob Chase gathered a team to create banners for the back of the chancel area, where the dark wood projected a tone more somber than our joyful worship. What began as a practical need has blossomed into a true ministry. Every stitch, fold, and color choice made by our Banner Ministry Team is more than fabric coming together—it's a visible expression of our faith and shared mission. Throughout the year, the team's hands have turned thread and cloth into symbols of the spirit of our congregation. The Banner Ministry Team members are Blythe Chase, David Jouard, Grace Lawson, Michele Sionas, Della Smith, and Sara Tamargo.

Special thanks go to Jeremy Carlisle's mother, who created banners for the June Pride Choir concert and graciously donated them to the Banner Team. They continue to hang proudly in our sanctuary as witness to God's inclusive love and the many gifts shared within our community. We are deeply grateful for her creativity, generosity, and faithful contribution.

Special mention also goes to Albert Fenske-Williams, who salvaged a handmade Lenten cross hanging and other paraments he discovered while clearing spaces for the staff office move into the Main Building. Thanks also to Beth Pugh and Judy Nesbit, whose detective work traced the cross's origins back to the 1990s—a wonderful reminder that the ministry of these handcrafted pieces spans generations of our congregation.

Submitted by Sara Tamargo

Music Ministry: Sanctuary Choir and UCC Ringers

The Music Ministry at Union Congregational Church is committed to providing focused, purposeful, and meaningful music that enriches Sunday morning worship while creating opportunities for intergenerational community-building. Through worship, concerts, and special events, we strive to support the church's mission by fostering beauty, connection, and belonging. This year, the Music Ministry presented several special musical offerings, including:

- For Advent, the Sanctuary Choir presented Dan *Forrest's LUX: The Dawn from on High*, a musical journey from darkness to light celebrating hope, love, and the Light of Christ through ancient and modern texts.
- The UCC Ringers accompanied the annual Advent Event, bringing together members of all ages for music, fellowship, and holiday cheer.
- The Christmas pageant *Knock, Knock! Who's There?* celebrated the tradition of Las Posadas and invited our congregation into the Christmas story in a meaningful and engaging way.
- The Sanctuary Choir's spring presentation was *Make Our Garden Grow*, a meditation on the beauty of creation, our responsibility to care for it, and the consequences of failing to answer that call.
- The spring pageant, *The Thankful Tree*, featuring actors and singers from both the Sanctuary Choir and Children & Youth Choir, invited the congregation to reflect on all we have to be grateful for.
- *The Gospel According to Dolly* was a special worship service celebrating the generosity, compassion, and enduring message of Dolly Parton's music.

Throughout the year, we also collaborated with musicians and music directors from neighboring congregations to provide special worship experiences for Christmas Eve, Easter, the beginning and end of the program year, the Good Friday Pilgrimage, and Gospel Sunday with Grace Presbyterian Church.

One of the year's greatest blessings has been the continued growth of our ensembles. We welcomed new singers and ringers throughout the year, reflecting our commitment to creating an accessible, joyful, and Open and Affirming music ministry where people of all musical backgrounds feel encouraged to participate. This growth is a testament not only to the quality of our music-making, but to the warmth and hospitality of the members who make our ensembles such welcoming communities.

None of this ministry would be possible without the extraordinary dedication of our volunteer singers and ringers, professional instrumentalists, section leaders, soloists, and accompanists. Week after week, they generously share their time, talents, and faith to enhance our worship and strengthen the life of our congregation. We are deeply grateful for their commitment and for the countless hours they devote to rehearsals, preparation, and service.

The outpouring of encouragement, affirmation, and support from the congregation has empowered us to continue pursuing innovation, collaboration, and outreach as we seek to align our ministry with Union's mission and values.

Looking ahead to the 2026–2027 program year, we are excited to present:

- A special Second Hour recital on September 13, featuring Jeremy Carlisle and section leaders Kristine Hart, Kimberly Martinez, and Bill Amory, alongside Co-Directors of Music John David and Jeremy Whitener. The program will include a selection of art songs and opera arias, offering the congregation an opportunity to experience and celebrate the musical gifts of our ministry leaders.
- *Appalachian Christmas*, the Sanctuary Choir's Advent concert combining two Appalachian-style cantatas by Joseph M. Martin into a celebration of Christmas through beloved folk melodies, including Simple Gifts, Come Thou Fount, How Can I Keep from Singing, and more, accompanied by a bluegrass consort.
- A Lenten presentation of Gabriel Fauré's *Requiem*, a serene and deeply comforting setting of the Mass for the Dead that offers a vision of eternal peace and hope, accompanied by violin soloist Annelie Fahstedt, harpist Karen Stern, and a string quintet.
- An expanded outreach ministry by the UCC Ringers, who will be "on the road" throughout the year, bringing live music to members of the Montclair community beyond our four walls.

We are grateful for another year of making music together and look forward to continuing to serve God and our community through worship, fellowship, and the transformative power of music.

Submitted by John David and Jeremy Whitener

Music Ministry: Youth and Children's Choir

I am very proud of this year's work with the Youth and Children's Choir. This growing choir of many ages performs together with joy! Below is a summary of this year's performances and activities.

- Blessing of the Animals Service: The Youth and Children's Choir performed the song "Jesus Loves the Animals." They were asked to bring their favorite stuffed animal or dress up like their favorite animal.
- I'm So Blessed: In November, the choir performed a new piece. The words really spoke to their hearts: "On my best day, I'm a child of God. On my worst day, I'm a child of God." The Youth and Children's Choir loved learning and performing this song!

- Palm Sunday Greeting Card Project: The Youth and Children's Choir created greeting cards during their rehearsals and shared them with the congregation on Palm Sunday. This activity helped the youth and children work together as a community.
- Christmas Musical: In December, as part of our Advent theme, "One Christ, Many Cultures," our Christmas pageant was dedicated to the Mexican Christmas tradition of Las Posadas. Las Posadas take place daily during the nine days before Christmas, from December 16 to 24. The children and youth performed traditional Christmas carols, as well as a Latin American Christmas carol, *Mi Burrito Sabanero*.
- Spring Musical: Our spring pageant, *The Thankful Tree*, was an original creation by Jeremy Whitener and Kristine Hart.
- Generosi-Tea Event: Our final performance of the year was at the Generosi-Tea event, where we sang our favorite songs from the 2025-2026 worship year.

Submitted by Kristine Hart

Section 5. Ministry Area: Christian Education and Spiritual Formation

Sunday School

The Sunday School Team has successfully created a space where kids feel at home each week. I frequently hear from parents that it is their kids who want to go to church every Sunday because they don't want to miss it.

This was our first full year using the Godly Play curriculum. Some stories are beginning to repeat, which has actually been a benefit. The materials are prepared, the stories are familiar, and the kids engage with them more deeply each time they hear them.

This spring, we talked a lot about the Mystery of Easter and Jesus. A key part of that is understanding the importance of the Temple in Jerusalem and the sacrifices that were made there. Weeks later, while doing a Godly Play on a parable of Jesus, one of the children's reflections was about the temple and Easter. It was a nice reminder that this type of storytelling curriculum sinks deep into a child's spiritual development.

Metrics

- Total number of children involved: 43
- Average Sunday attendance: 12-15 kids
- Average of new families attending each year: 2

Major accomplishments: Our biggest accomplishment was implementing a robust Godly Play curriculum on Sunday mornings that introduces children to our core sacred stories and teachings of Jesus while honoring their unique spiritual life and growth.

Activities and events

- Advent Wreath Lighting
- Parents' Night Out (February)
- Family Easter Egg Hunt
- First-ever Union game night (April)

Looking ahead, we plan to continue Godly Play, game nights and community events.

Sunday School Team

- BJ Carter, Sunday School Coordinator
- Masuma Begum, PreK Sunday School Teacher
- Katie Spaar, PreK Sunday School Teacher

Submitted by BJ Carter

Children, Youth and Families

For 2025-2026, the church set forth a Missional Priority to:

Strengthen our programs for children, youth and families to reflect our desire for people of all ages to grow in relationship with God and discern Christian truth and meaning.

Benchmarks and Accomplishments:

Support Minister of Pastoral Care and Faith Formation in focus on programs for young people.

- Recruited and equipped a strong and dedicated team of youth leaders who have helped lead Sunday youth group, service projects, social activities, and summer youth trips.
- Increased the number of adults who have completed the Trust with Care training.
- Formed the Christian Education (CE) Visioning Team and tasked them with discerning the mission and implementation process for faith formation for children and youth.
- 17 youth participated in at least one youth activity this year; 9 will participate in summer youth trips.

Explore new ways of engaging with intergenerational worship and programming.

- Welcomed more children and youth into worship leadership in a variety of ways. (Welcome Team, ushering, liturgists/scripture readers, testimonies, pageants/music, and Message for All Ages.)
- Designated every fifth Sunday for intentional intergenerational worship with leadership across the generations.
- Created new opportunities for intergenerational play, learning, and formation (Fun Days at Camp Johnsonburg and Food, Faith and Fun).
- Invited youth to lead Second Hour presentations (Wyatt Foster, Eagle Scout Project; Pierce Switzer, documentary film, Passaic River).

Discern the needs of children and families within and beyond the congregation to better serve them.

- Engaged in individual and group conversations between Rev. Leah and youth, parents, staff, and youth leaders about the needs and desires for children and youth faith formation programs and practices.
- Asked the CE Visioning Team to help lead assessment, visioning and implementation with the congregation.

Submitted by Rev. Leah McCullough

Daytime Bible Study

The Tuesday Daytime Bible Study Group meets weekly from 12:30 - 2:00 pm in the Guild Room. The group provides its members with the opportunity to learn and to discuss faith and other concerns with others who are interested in the Bible, the history of Christianity, Union Church, and societal issues. The group generally has a moderate to liberal Christian outlook.

During the past year we studied Revelation with Reverend Katrina and viewed a related video. We read and discussed *Across That Bridge: A Vision for Change* by Congressman John Lewis, and watched the related *Selma* film. We also read *Who Stole My Bible?* by progressive minister Jennifer Butler. We read more than 100 of the 150 Psalms out loud prior to discussing them.

The group provided a useful venue to get to know Rev. Leah and discuss the church renovation and P2 lot plans.

Thanks to Lindy Fisher, the group generally has some food along with fellowship and conversation. Refreshments have been provided by Karen Ermler and Karen Daviou. The group has helped members process some events of the often evil days we are living through. A few

group members attended art exhibits on The Psalms and Renoir and enjoyed dinner together in New York.

The group has 23 members on its distribution list. Up to 15 people attended the sessions led by Rev. Katrina on Revelation, a few of whom were not members of the group, although one became a member afterward. Weekly attendance is normally 8 to 12. We have gained three new members this past year and officially lost one.

During the coming year, we look forward to studying some non-canonical biblical texts with Rev. Katrina. We plan to read *The False White Gospel: Rejecting Christian Nationalism* by Rev. James Wallis. We will presumably continue to discuss the injustices and un-Christian actions of our current federal government.

The group appreciates the church's support, especially from Rev. Katrina, Albert, Kim and the rest of the church staff.

Submitted by Paul Nishimoto

Holy Hangout

Holy Hangout is a Tuesday evening Bible study group led by the Carter, Black and Norton families. The group met weekly from 7:00 – 8:30 pm throughout the school year, alternating between the Black and Carter homes. We studied the Gospel of John, focusing on the seven signs and the seven "I Am" statements of Jesus. We plan to continue in the fall, and we are currently deciding whether to study Acts or a different book of the Bible.

Submitted by BJ Carter

Archives

This past year, the Archives Ministry Team met most Tuesday afternoons in the Archives room in the Vincent Building to organize and preserve important documents, records, photographs, and artifacts from Union's history. We also continued to expand and refine our online spreadsheet/database as the first step toward creating more robust and accessible finding guides for our collections.

Throughout the year, we sorted and identified photographs documenting Union's vibrant ministries, fellowship, and community life. We also undertook the organization of the records, documents, and images of Scout Troop #13 that Union has proudly chartered since the troop's founding in 1911.

Union's archives help connect our rich history with our ongoing journey of faith. This year, Archives Team leader Tim Crist, together with Sara Tamargo, published a full-color booklet on the church's Tiffany Windows. Drawing on our historical files, and work by the Rev. Betty Jane Bailey from the 1980s—carefully preserved in the Archives—the booklet recounts the history of the windows, dedicated on Easter 1920, and provides descriptions and scriptural context for each medallion. It was especially meaningful that copies were placed in the pews on Easter Sunday.

With the relocation of all church operations to the Main Building, much of the second half of the year was devoted to planning and outfitting our new Archives space next to the Schneidewind Library on the second floor. We also organized, packed, and moved the entire Archives

collection. Special thanks to Albert Fenske-Williams for his guidance, support, and hard work throughout the move, and to Christine Brown for the many hours she spent helping us pack.

In the coming year, we will unpack the collection into archival-quality storage boxes and prepare a comprehensive online collection guide for public access. With much of the material now organized, we look forward to focusing more on the many fascinating stories and diverse voices preserved in Union's history. These stories remind us how our congregation has adapted through changing times, and faithfully discerned God's call across generations.

Archives Ministry Team: Tim Crist, Patrick Little, Ellyn Minor, Judy Nesbit, Beth Pugh, Catherine Spinella, and Mike Spinella.

Submitted by Catherine Spinella

Union Congregational Weekday Nursery School

What a rich tradition Union Congregational Weekday Nursery School (UCWNS) has had! Steeped in the Emilio Reggio approach and in business for close to 60 years, its inquisitive and gentle approach to the education of children has been held dearly by the community.

Over the years, through changes in directors, staff, and children, this curriculum has emphasized the creativity and uniqueness of each child. I witnessed this through my own four children. Their UCWNS years helped mold them into the adults they now are. One of them is a teacher.

While the closing of UCWNS is bittersweet, we're excited to watch how the future of the Cooper Children's Center will unfold. We are certain that this new iteration, still under the steady leadership of Lynn Kulik, will grow, thrive, and develop independent and creative young children.

Submitted by Marcie Wallace

Section 6. Ministry Area: Congregational Care and Small Groups

Congregational Care Communications

Congregational Care Communications is one team within the more encompassing Congregational Care group. The team helps maintain connection between the church and primarily its local members. Each team member has 6 to 12 congregants that they reach out to via cards, calls, e-mails and/or visits. Flexible communication options allow members to forge connections in their own style and in accordance with member preference. We assist the ministry through these contacts, helping to inform both ministry and Congregational Care about member needs and news.

Members include Maggie Barbetta, Karen Daviou, Lindy Fisher, Janet Frick, Ina Isobe, Armen Khachaturian, Lisa Kaufman, Judy Nesbit, Susan Razzaz, Helen Respass, Della Smith, Ellen Smith, Amy Hohn Stover, Genie Temmler, Laurie Walle, Linda Wanat, and Analisa Winther.

Most of us send cards at Christmas and in the spring to connect with members. Della loves sending special cards throughout the year. Amy fosters friendships by inviting her group to her home to share food and conversation. Armen enjoys visits that allow him to have a conversation. All of us help keep ministers and other teams aware of special needs: a ride, a homemade meal, a visit. Many members also offer rides and deliver meals or flowers, although those aspects of Congregational Care are not part of the Communication Team's focus.

Submitted by Maggie Barbetta

Generosity Team

The Generosity Team this year included four members of the congregation (Rob Iracane, Michael Spinella, Marcie Wallace, and Faith Wozniak), supported by three staff members (Rev. Katrina Forman, Executive Director Jon Thomsen, and Member Engagement and Communications Manager Kim Crabtree).

This year's theme was A Chorus of Generosity. The team used this theme to remind the congregation of the many diverse programs and mission activities their pledges support, and that we have more leverage to accomplish things when we work together "in harmony".

Working toward the 2026 calendar year, we established stretch goals of 120 participating pledge units and $500K in total pledges. Ultimately, we received pledges totaling $484.1K from 109 pledgers. This represents nearly a 3% increase in total pledging dollars. The number of pledging units also increased by one, despite some attrition from last year's pledgers.

The congregation once again demonstrated its tremendous generosity and commitment to the work of Union Congregational Church. An event dubbed "Generosi-Tea" was held on June 6 to celebrate and express gratitude to those who pledged for this year's drive.

Submitted by Mike Spinella

Classic Movies

The Union Church Film Group meets monthly September through November and January through June. Most screenings are on Friday nights, but we screen longer films on Sunday afternoons. We view films that interest at least 6 or 7 members of the group, hoping to get 14 or 15 people to attend each screening. The selected films have some artistic and/or social merit, as well as being well-received by critics and viewers.

A bring-your-own meal generally precedes each film, during which we discuss films or current events. The leader introduces each film and offers additional anecdotes following the film, as well as facilitating discussion. Films are presented with subtitles whenever possible.

The Film Group has 47 members on its distribution list, with 12 to 18 showing up for a screening and 10 or 12 for the pre-film meal. The group nearly doubled in size in its second season.

During the past year we viewed *The Third Man* directed by Sir Carol Reed, *Is Paris Burning* by Rene Clement, *Chinatown* by Roman Polanski, *Red River* by Howard Hawks, *Shadow of a Doubt* by Alfred Hitchcock, *Much Ado About Nothing* by Sir Kenneth Branagh, *Murder on the Orient Express* by Sidney Lumet, *Notorious* by Alfred Hitchcock, and *Hitsville: The Making of Motown* by Ben and Gabe Turner.

Films tentatively selected by the group for viewing in 2026 – 2027 include *Strangers on a Train* directed by Sir Alfred Hitchcock, *Hamlet* by Sir Kenneth Branagh, *Witness for the Prosecution* by Billy Wilder, *Death on the Nile* (1978 version) by John Guillerman, *Rabbit Proof Fence* by Philip Noyce, *Land of the Pharaohs* by Howard Hawks, and *Inside Man* directed by Spike Lee.

See you at the movies!

Submitted by Paul Nishimoto

Women's Breakfast

The Women of Union's Breakfast has been active for over 15 years. It was started to fill a void in women's activities in the church. Our goal was to enhance our spiritual development and to provide educational programs relevant to women's issues.

We meet monthly throughout the program year for companionship, mutual support, improved knowledge, and last but not least, a delicious breakfast!

During the 2025-2026 program year the women were taken on a spiritual journey.

- Rev. "Farmher" Leah, spoke on her various experiences while working on several farms. She said there is something holy and healing about putting your hands in dirt. Growing food, feeding others and caring for the creation is sacred work.
- The men of the church were invited to hear Lisa Blankenship speak about her recently published book "A Theory of Rhetorical Empathy." We gathered in small groups for discussion.
- Bethany Hall spoke about her experiences as a comedian. She then led exercises on how to be a "stand-up" comic and how to tell stories.

We took trips to:

- Lambert Castle, a well-known New Jersey landmark that was the private residence of Catholina Lambert, an English immigrant who made his fortune in the silk industry.

- Crane House, where we learned about the early lives of the families that occupied the historic house in Montclair.

We also had a Game Day where we played Bunco, a fast-paced game that is easy to learn, fun, and relies entirely on luck!

In July, the Women of Union sponsored a “Dinner and a Movie” evening. This year the women of Grace Presbyterian Church joined us. A summer dinner was served, followed by the movie “Wicked,” which emphasized women “finding themselves.”

The Women of Union is one of the small groups offered to members of the congregation. Around 20 to 25 women attend the breakfasts and 30 to 35 attend the movie evening.

Members of the Women’s Breakfast Team are Barbara Marin, Sara Olson, Karen Daviou, Catherine Spinella, Nancy Herron, Sally St. John, and Karen Ermler.

Submitted by Karen Ermler

Women’s Retreat

In mid-January, 39 women from Union and First Congregational Church met at Trinity Retreat Center in West Cornwall, CT. Pastors Katrina and Leah led us in exploring the theme “Ancient Tools for Modern Times.” These tools included reading scripture from different viewpoints and writing lamentations. We also released tension by smashing pottery and enjoyed a communal scream. (We are not sure how much the resident donkeys enjoyed the scream.) Co-leader Sharon Fennema led us in *a capella* singing to further express our emotions and connectedness.

Some comments from those who attended were: the leaders were an amazing team who worked well together; there is power in releasing anger; God welcomes questions and lamentations and gives us the emotions of anger, sadness, and grief; energy and optimism were renewed; we all need community, hope, and optimism.

Trinity Retreat Center has been the site of our retreat for many years. The center offers simple accommodations, delicious meals, walks in the woods, a labyrinth, and visits to the donkeys that live on the campus. A highlight of the retreat is the opportunity to deepen our ties to the women of Union.

The committee members were Karen Ermler, Isabelle Genest, Vicki Lockhart, Joy Mishkin, Liz Olson, Sara Olson, Jane Seaman, Sara Tamargo, and Suzanne Tuck.

Submitted by Sara Olson

Men’s Retreat

The Men of Union met at Crossroads Retreat Center in Port Murray, NJ in early October 2025 for their Annual Retreat. There were 25 men in attendance, our biggest showing in at least a decade. Our theme was The Changing Roles and Identity of Men in Family and Society.

Our facilitator was the Rev. Rusty Eidman-Hicks, making a return visit from a few years ago. The discussions were rich and covered four main areas: Men in Family, Men in Society, Men at Work, and Male Spirituality and Growth. Rusty led us through discussions marked by candor and filled with humor, poignancy, and insight.

In addition to our themed discussions, a key goal of the retreat is always to deepen the camaraderie and support we find among this group of men. To that end, we had plenty of free

time and shared meals, beginning with dinner at a local brewpub before the start of the retreat, and culminating in our Saturday evening cookout and campfire. The men work together to prepare and cook the meal, directed by Armen Khachaturian, as well as to set up the campsite for the evening's festivities.

Submitted by Mike Spinella

Sages

Sages is a group of older, mostly retired members and friends who meet twice a month for a brown-bag lunch and informal discussion. Sages aims to build community and support by providing a forum to discuss questions and issues that are particularly relevant at this stage of our lives. Group members reflect on where we have been and where we are now. We enjoy reminiscences and a lot of laughter.

One meeting was a lively discussion about preparing for emergencies, both with our families and each other. There is a lot to do! One outcome was sharing contact information among members of the group. We considered our spiritual legacy as well – what values we want to be remembered for and leave for those who come after us.

We talked about our experiences living in a diverse place like New Jersey and how that has influenced and enriched our lives. Another topic was the books that opened our minds or changed how we see the world. This was a diverse list.

We discussed a poem about aging that one of our members wrote for a poetry class in the style of Emily Dickinson. A particularly engaging meeting focused on the question "What was the most daring thing you've ever done?" Some of the answers were amazing! In all of these discussions, we have gotten to know each other better. We appreciate the close ties we've developed.

In November, we held a baby shower for Karla, a member of our custodial staff, attended by her family and other Union members. We enjoyed sharing gifts and food and a lot of pink.

Meetings are held in the Guild Room or (in summer) the Assembly Room. We meet on the first and third Wednesdays of each month from noon to 1:00 pm. All are welcome.

Submitted by Sara Olson

UCC Players

Mission: The UCC Players seek to entertain, challenge, uplift, and inspire audiences while providing opportunities for members to share their gifts through performance and creativity. Our work strengthens relationships, builds community, and supports UCC's vision of becoming a community hub.

Productions: Under the leadership of Carlos Valdes-Dapena, in partnership with Janet Aldrich and Kathryn Osborne, the UCC Players produced two original works during the program year.

November 2025 – *From the Abuelas' Window*. The Players presented a staged reading of a new musical depicting one family's hopeful search for their father, a desaparecido during Chile's Pinochet dictatorship. The cast of 14 included UCC Players members, church staff, and students and professionals from the wider Montclair community. The musical was written by Montclair resident Nancy Burke, with a score by Chilean composer Ignacio Valdivia, who also

provided guitar accompaniment. UCC friend and alum, Charl Louw, served as pianist for the performance.

January 2026 – *List, List, Oh List: Shakespeare's Lists in Songs, Sonnets, Soliloquies, and Scenes.* This original production offered a curated program of Shakespeare-inspired songs, sonnets, monologues, and scenes highlighting the playwright's distinctive use of rhetorical "lists." The evening also featured improvisation and performances by two members of the local rock band BARD, known for setting Shakespeare's texts to contemporary music. The cast of 21 included church staff (our two ministers and one co-music director appeared as the witches from Macbeth), along with church members, several of whom were new to the stage, and participants from the broader UCC Players community.

Facilities and Transitions: This year involved significant changes to our physical spaces. With the relocation of church offices from the Vincent Building, the long-standing Players Closet required full clearing and reorganization. Maggie Barbetta and Carlos, along with long-time UCC Players member Kirk Woodward, sorted through decades of costumes, props, lighting, and sound equipment, determining what to retain, recycle, or discard. Retained items were boxed and moved to a newly designated basement storage area.

Additionally, the basement room historically used for set pieces and building materials—shared with the Scouts—was reassigned as a staging area for the forthcoming HVAC installation. All stored materials required evaluation and relocation. Carlos, working with Bill Amory, Larry Frick and Patrick Little, moved set pieces and lumber to a new storage space on the opposite side of the basement.

Finally, UCC Players Co-lead Kathryn Osborne, who has a long history of leadership with us, has moved to Austin, TX. She will continue to direct, teach and act with Austin as her base, and will remain available to us as an artistic resource when and if possible.

Looking Ahead: Planning for the coming year is ongoing. With church offices now located in the Main Building, the Players are reassessing rehearsal and performance space needs. The group hopes to mount a revival of *List, List, Oh List* in the autumn or late winter and stage a full length play next June.

Submitted by: Carlos Valdes-Dapena

Section 7. Ministry Area: Justice & Community Engagement

Racial Justice

Our congregation-endorsed *Racial Justice Missional Priority* calls us to build on existing relationships, learning, and action to deepen our awareness of and commitment to racial justice through three initiatives.

Throughout the year, Ministry Team members represented Union at convenings of the NAACP (Religious Affairs and Housing Committees, MLK Scholarship Fund, and Membership Luncheon), The Mark Cares/Freedom School, AAPI New Jersey, and NJ/Essex Together. Union also provided financial support to these organizations, as well as IMANI, Good Success Academy, Friends of the Howe House, Montclair History Center, and the NJ Institute for Social Justice.

Initiative 1: Strengthening Union's Antiracist Practices

Katrina Forman, Leah McCullough, Jeremy and John David Whitener, Ina Isobe, Tim Crist, Bryan Respass, Gerald and Laurie Walle, and Catherine Spinella have been part of the United Church of Christ's six-workshop series, *Decolonizing Worship*. Together, these ten clergy, lay leaders, and staff are examining worship traditions that unintentionally privilege one cultural experience as the norm, and ways we might broaden worship while honoring Union traditions. Union will host the Conference's concluding session this fall, and the Ministry Team engaged UCC educator Dr. Sharon Fennema to support staff in designing four worship services to strengthen our intercultural capacities and expand every worshipper's sense of belonging.

Initiative 2: Congregational Learning and Engagement

In addition to sponsoring Union participants in the *Decolonizing Worship* workshop series, the Ministry Team continued to foster theological reflection and learning by hosting "Let's Watch" film discussions featuring *Farmageddon*, *Crip Camp*, *Descendant*, and *The Visitor.*

Initiative 3: Affordable Housing Advocacy

Recognizing the connections between racial justice, environmental justice, and housing equity, clergy and lay leaders remained active with the NAACP Housing Committee and NJ/Essex Together. Union's campus served as a stop on the NJ Together tour of potential affordable housing sites, and team members supported successful community approval of rezoning opportunities in Montclair and a public action with Jersey City's Mayor to advance tenant protections, rent control enforcement, and affordable housing development.

Team Members: Tim Crist, Isabelle Genest, Rev. Katrina Forman, Ina Isobe, Shaun Kennedy, Roxanne Kent, Seo Hee Koh, Grace Lawson, Rev. Leah McCullough, Rose Oosting, Tawnya Switzer, Catherine Spinella, Gerald Walle, Karen Whitehaus.

Submitted by Catherine Spinella

Creation Justice

This is the ministry team for everyone! Here are some of our 2025-2026 accomplishments:

- “Outreach” contributions totaled $4,000.
- 26 members hiked more than 10 miles of the Lenape Trail in Essex County during Lent.
- In September 2025, we participated in SUN Day festivities with Interfaith Climate Action, hosting a Clean Energy Info Fair in the Assembly Room.
- To support clean energy, we collected 194 Climate Hope Postcards from area congregations and delivered them to seven NJ State Assembly members.

Submitted by Michele Sionas

Refugee Resettlement/Immigration Justice

The Refugee Resettlement Team continued to face a challenging environment. The Trump administration approved very few refugees, most of them white South Africans. ICE operations grew in number, intensity, and violence. Delaney Hall and Elizabeth Detention Center, the two facilities where immigrants are detained in New Jersey, allowed overcrowding, lack of medical care and food, and general mistreatment of the detainees.

The team’s activities centered around supporting refugees and immigrants who are already here and advocating for them. Here are some of our key accomplishments:

- Union participates in the Montclair Collaborative for Immigrant Advocacy facilitated by MFEE to stay informed about developments and opportunities to help.
- Our congregation provided funds for rent support in Minnesota during ICE ‘s Operation Metro Surge early in 2026. We helped a Honduran family, supported by Bnai Keshet, raise a security deposit to finally move into their own place. (The family is featured in a documentary film, *Brenda.* View it here: https://www.brendathefilm.com/). We also loaned rent money to a Venezuelan family that arrived in 2025 so they could manage cash-flow issues and move to a larger apartment.
- The relationship between the Afghan CWS social worker, Nabil, his wife, Neda, and several members of the team continued to blossom through ESL and social events such as the Iftar dinner with Peace Islands. Our congregation paid for Neda to take the driving lessons required by New Jersey to obtain a driver license.
- Union’s Easter offering went in part to MFEE to fund legal assistance for Montclair immigrant families by Catholic Charities immigration lawyers. This service provides families with advice following an intake and helps them either fight or plan their deportation. The cost and availability of legal resources has become the top concern of organizations that advocate for immigrants.
- Members and pastors gave in-person support and financial donations to organizations that host and support the families and friends attempting to visit detainees at Delaney Hall.

The coming year will bring more challenges and similar activities. We may look into educational activities to address misinformation and prejudice against immigration and immigrants.

Active team members include Alison Beringer, Jennifer Hand, Genie Temmler, Sara Olson, Janet Frick, Michael Spinella, Catherine Spinella, Scott Randel, Ina Isobe, Isabelle Genest, and Annelie Fahlstedt.

Submitted by Gerald Walle

Good Friday Pilgrimage to Delaney Hall

Approximately 100 intrepid souls gathered in the sanctuary of First Congregational Church (FCC), Montclair, at 8 am on April 3 to begin the Good Friday Pilgrimage. Those gathered were

anointed, blessed, and sent forth on the 10-mile journey from suburban Montclair to Delaney Hall, the ICE Detention Center located in an industrial section of Newark. This privately-run detention center has been the site of at least one death and routinely inhumane conditions. It is part of the machinery of aggressive tactics with which the Trump administration is targeting immigrants. Watch some news footage of the pilgrimage here.

The idea for the pilgrimage emerged from our Lenten theme "The Way" exploring pilgrimage as a practice and metaphor for faith, and ongoing conversations with congregants and clergy about how we as people of faith could show up for our immigrant neighbors. Although the response was enthusiastic, we couldn't have envisioned the scale this pilgrimage grew to. While 100 or so people began the journey that morning, by the end of the day more than 300 people had participated in some way. More than 30 were members or friends of Union, and about half were from at least 12 UCC congregations across New Jersey.

Our pilgrimage was not just a protest; it was a prayer and an act of witness and solidarity. So often we fall into the trap of separating "justice" and "worship." But we know that Jesus taught that the second commandment – to love our neighbors – is *like* the first, to love God (Matthew 22:39). In other words, love of God and love of Neighbor are inseparable.

When we loved God across 10 miles of Essex County, we felt in our hearts and soles what it means that these two are intertwined. I believe the witnesses to our journey – those detained within the walls of Delaney Hall and those we encountered along the way or who saw the news later – felt that too.

The pilgrimage was also a beautiful reminder that we in the United Church of Christ have a vital role to play in this moment. Our collective leadership created an opportunity that people were hungry for. Folks from other denominations, churches, faith traditions, and secular groups signed up and showed up. It reminded me that the relationships we form and the values we share within our denomination are a foundation for the living witness we are called to share with the world.

Submitted by Rev. Katrina Forman

LGBTQ+ Welcome, Advocacy & Justice

At Union Congregational Church, we believe in a boundless love that truly embraces everyone. As a vibrant Open and Affirming congregation, we joyfully welcome all people, celebrating every sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Our commitment to the LGBTQ+ community is not simply a statement; it is woven into the heart of our ministry and reflects our faith in an expansive and inclusive God. Throughout the year, the church has also hosted community events for Out Montclair and the Montclair Pride Center in the Assembly Room, Cole Room, and Guild Room, extending our welcome beyond the congregation.

The church continues to sponsor Pride Choir, an LGBTQ+ inclusive community choir launched in 2023 with Union's support. The choir has grown exponentially and, this year, took steps toward incorporating as an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Four members of Union's staff will serve in leadership roles as Pride Choir transitions to its new organizational structure: Union accompanist Jeremy Carlisle as Executive Director; Co-Directors of Music Jeremy Whitener and John David Whitener as Music Director and Artistic Director, respectively; and Member Engagement and Communications Manager Kim Crabtree as Producing Director. Pride Choir's sixth community concert, *Wondrous Journeys,* marked an exciting new chapter for the ensemble. With more than 60 active members, the choir presented two sold-out performances to accommodate its growing audience and performed with an eight-piece

instrumental ensemble for the first time. Planning is already underway for an even bigger 2026–2027 season.

Beyond our walls, Union continues to support the United Church of Christ's Open and Affirming Coalition, contributing to the wider movement for LGBTQ+ justice, welcome, and inclusion throughout the denomination.

Submitted by John David Whitener

Essex Together/New Jersey Together

New Jersey Together is a growing, broad-based, multi-faith coalition in New Jersey. We challenge ordinary people in our state to identify problems facing their neighborhoods and city, connect individuals and organizations to multiply their power, and mobilize people to bring about creative and effective change.

Since the launch of our first chapter in Jersey City in 2016, New Jersey Together has added two more local chapters, Morris Area Together and Essex Together. Collectively, our work has resulted in or leveraged more than $1 billion in investments in housing, schools, neighborhoods, and more in the places where we work in New Jersey.

Highlights from this past year include:

In April 2026, nearly 200 leaders from New Jersey Together gathered to call on the gubernatorial candidates to commit to their agenda on affordable housing and criminal justice reform. Since her election to office, Essex Together has reached out to Governor Mikie Sherrill to advance these issues.

In May 2026, 20 leaders from Essex Together/New Jersey Together congregations and allies attended the Montclair Planning Board to support the "Yes In God's Back Yard" (YIGBY) initiative. Leaders representing six local congregations gave powerful testimonies about the need for housing and why it is so important to allow affordable housing on faith-based properties. The board officially endorsed the Fourth-Round Housing Element and Fair Share Plan, which incorporates YIGBY, to rezone faith community land for affordable housing.

Essex Together is an amazing way to meet people from all walks of life. This welcoming, diverse group is working on recruitment training to better engage organizations in its core mission: contributing to the betterment of the underserved and underprivileged.

Submitted by Marcie Wallace

Food Security/CUMAC

Food security is a growing justice issue for our congregation. This past year, 17 volunteers participated in monthly sessions at CUMAC, an organization dedicated to fighting hunger and its root causes. We carpool to CUMAC's warehouse in Paterson for each two-hour session. If you have never squeezed into the third-row seats in a large Tesla, you are missing a comedic car ride. We often have a waiting list, so we are considering expanding volunteer opportunities and designating school holidays for youth involvement.

Submitted by Michele Sionas

Palestine/Gaza

Even though a ceasefire and the release of the hostages were finally celebrated in 2025, the situation in Gaza remains critical. Israel restricts humanitarian resources. Bombings and shootings continue, with over a thousand Palestinians killed since the ceasefire. Meanwhile, the West Bank continues to see the growth of Israeli settlements, the expulsion of many Palestinian families, and constant harassment and attacks by settlers.

Union, together with First Congregational Church, participated in educational programs and aided humanitarian efforts in Gaza and the West Bank. We met with *Standing Together*, an Israeli organization uniting Israeli and Palestinian citizens of Israel, at Bnai Keshet, and with *Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)* at First Congregational. As part of the CMEP program, Union participated in selling fair trade goods to support the Bethlehem Fair Trade Artisans, a group of Palestinian women who are essential to the economy, given continuing settler violence against local farmers. In the spring, Union became a partner with CMEP at a critical time when Palestinian Christian villages in the West Bank were under attack.

UCC members also met at Ner Tamid with *Breaking the Silence*, a group of Israeli Defense Force (IDF) leaders opposed to the continuing occupation of both Gaza and the West Bank. It was a sobering and perspective-altering discussion for both Union and Ner Tamid participants.

Our Christmas offering raised $17,460 and was split between Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza and Roots of Resilience, a New Jersey-based organization supporting farmers in the West Bank.

Some members attended webinars sponsored by Global Church Ministries (and partly by Union) on women in Palestine, faith in a time of genocide, the ongoing Nakba, and the prospects for peace and justice for Palestine, as well as the Roots of Resilience fundraiser in 2026.

Submitted by Gerald Walle

Circles/Family Promise/PALS

Union is a long-time supporter of Family Promise of Essex County (FPE), the local chapter of a national social service organization that provides homelessness prevention, emergency shelter and permanent resettlement services to about 250,000 people yearly. Union provides an annual donation for food, as well as many volunteers and the use of our Assembly Room for the Circles program.

In 2025 FPE assisted 343 families, including 70 homelessness preventions, 9 emergency shelter placements and 127 permanent placements/stabilizations, as well as other community services and referrals for 405 families. While those numbers were down from the prior year due to cuts in federal grants (FPE derives over 40% of its revenue from state and federal grants), FPE remains financially stable and committed to its core mission.

In 2024, FPE teamed with Circles USA, a provider of enhanced employment mentoring services for under-employed people. The program has claimed some significant successes in 2026, with one team leader starting her own business and another returning to Essex Community College to earn her Associate degree. Due to budget constraints, the program dropped its national affiliation and was rebranded as PALs. Union provides ongoing meeting space for the program, which is funded through 2026 by volunteer donations.

For FPE and PALs, the near future depends on increasing contributions from individuals, companies and other non-profits, and ongoing budget discipline. FPE had its most successful

fundraising auction last fall and will hold its 2026 auction, “Harvesting Hope,” on October 9, 2026.

Submitted by Roxanne and Bob Kent

Special Offerings

Christmas Offering

We were so grateful for the congregation’s generous contributions to this year's Christmas offering. Together, we raised $17,460 for Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City, which provides a direct lifeline of healing to those in the midst of crisis, and to Roots of Resilience, a local organization that supports farmers in the West Bank. The congregation’s generosity was a witness to God's love made tangible, Christ's presence born anew in Bethlehem, Gaza and beyond. We sent the gifts to these partners with our prayers for the work of peace, justice, and healing to take hold in 2026.

Easter Offering

Our Easter Offering helped breathe new life and support into two valuable local organizations serving young learners and their families. Through our collective efforts, we raised $15,000 to support MFEE’s partnership with Catholic Charities to provide legal services to immigrant families and IMANI's important work to narrow the achievement gap in Montclair schools. Legal consultation will offer clarity, agency, and reassurance to immigrant families in a time of great fear and uncertainty. For IMANI, our donation offers them some security as they seek to strengthen their work despite budget cuts at the district level.

Side Door

The Side Door program began over 20 years ago with the goal of providing a fun, safe space for middle school students to hang out on Friday afternoons. At the time, Montclair merchants felt they were overrun with lively pre-teens at the end of the week. A small group of adults (Union staff and volunteers) invited these students to hang out in a safe and supportive environment in the basement, or Fellowship Hall, of the Vincent Building, and Union’s outside campus. Word spread and Union welcomed middle schoolers from across Montclair.

The program evolved with the vision of Susan Johnson, Side Door’s director for many years. She introduced games and events that often drew up to 100 students. The program also provided service-learning opportunities for Montclair High and Montclair State Students.

The Governing Board had been considering the future of the Side Door program for several years. In 2026, we made the difficult decision to close the program. Members of the congregation had become less involved, and attendance had dropped to about 20 to 30 children each week. The time seemed right, with the move out of the Vincent Building, planned construction in the Main Building, and uncertainty about the availability of programming space in the next couple of years.

We are optimistic that we will find new and exciting ways to engage youth in our programs and on our campus.

The last day of the Side Door program was June 12, 2026. To commemorate its long and successful run, an ice cream social and end-of-year celebration was held on Friday, May 29.

Many thanks to all who have volunteered over the years, and notably to David Parra and Rahniel Simon, Side Door co-directors, for their leadership in recent years.

Submitted by Christine Brown

Scouting America Troop #13 and Pack #12

Troop 13: Developing Leaders and Giving to Community

Union Congregational Church has sponsored Troop 13 for 115 years. This longevity would not be possible without support from members of the congregation. Troop 13 is led by Scoutmaster Michael Bateman and Troop Committee Chair Luis Villafana, with dedicated parent and adult volunteers who serve as Assistant Scoutmaster, Troop Treasurer, and committee members. Michael Spinella has been working diligently to chronicle the troop's history with items in our church archives.

Troop 13's active program includes weekly meetings and monthly backpacking and camping trips, as well as advancement toward the rank of Eagle Scout. This year's trips included backpacking in Harriman State Park, participating in the Arctic Challenge Scout Skills overnight in January, and an overnight trip to Antietam to learn about Civil War history. Over 20 Scouts attended a week-long summer camp at Camp Aquehonga in Narrowsburg, NY. A group of 12 Scouts and leaders spent 10 days on a wilderness backpacking trip at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico.

Over 50 boys are currently registered in Troop 13, and we expect 10 new Scouts in September. Scouting provides a youth-led program that seeks to develop youth into leaders through advancement and community service. Most visible are the diverse Eagle Scout projects. They include helping with community gardens, working at Van Vleck House and Gardens, and conducting STEM events for elementary students.

The 2026-2027 program will be equally active. With the continued support of Union Congregational Church, we hope to have another 115 years of Scouting!

Pack 12: Another year of fun!

Pack 12 had another year of great activities and family participation. The pack is led by Anthony Montalto, Cub Master, and Chad Flick, Pack Committee Chair, supported by parents who serve as Den Leaders, Treasurer and Membership Coordinator. Pack 12 registered 150 boy and girl Cub Scouts during the 2025-2026 program year and we expect as many in 2026-2027. When parents and siblings join in our activities, we have over 200 participants.

In addition to earning rank advancements of Tiger, Wolf, Bear, Webelos, and Arrow of Light, the Pack attends monthly meetings focusing on fire safety, veterans, and physical fitness. The year's activities included camping trips to Fairview Lake, Battleship NJ, and The Great Divide, as well as monthly hikes, a food drive, pinewood derby and the annual Christmas tree sale.

The program has been so successful that Pack 12 leaders are helping to establish a new pack at the Unitarian Church in Montclair, with 30 boys and girls already registered. None of this would be possible without support from the members of Union Congregational Church.

Submitted by Cliff Lindholm

Section 8. Governing Board, Standing Committees, Task Forces, and Lay Leaders

Key Congregational Decisions

Sale of P2 Lot

For many years the congregation has considered what to do with the vacant lot adjacent to Parsonage 2 on Cooper Avenue. Town zoning laws limited our options and prevented us from using the lot for parking, programming, or even public gardens or green space. Through a connection with Essex Together we learned that Cohome, Inc. was looking to build a single-family home for a group of neurodivergent and neurotypical adults who would live together as one family. The Governing Board agreed that this was an opportunity to utilize our resources in ways that align with our values. On October 19, 2025, a majority of the members of the congregation voted to approve the sale. We look forward to welcoming the Cohome community to Cooper Avenue.

HVAC System

On May 17, 2026, the congregation voted to replace the heating and air conditioning systems in the church building with a modern, energy efficient, single system to provide zoned heating and cooling throughout the building. The new system would lower energy costs while reducing our dependence on fossil fuels, more fully utilizing our solar panels, and curtailing ongoing maintenance expense. New Jersey Clean Energy incentive funding may be available to cover some of the costs. To ensure that funds are available when needed to meet the installation goal of early fall, we amended the Constitution to permit borrowing against church assets and approved a loan from the UCC Cornerstone Fund.

Capital Campaign Approval

Over the course of the year, plans were developed and cost estimates obtained for the renovation and renewal of the church building to make it more welcoming and accessible. Plans included creating meeting spaces and staff offices on the second floor, installing an elevator and a fully ADA accessible restroom, and improving accessibility in the sanctuary by redesigning the chancel, upgrading the audiovisual and lighting systems, and considering flexible seating. On June 14, 2026, the congregation approved the initiation of a capital campaign with a goal of at least $1.5 million. Planning for the campaign will begin in the summer of 2026 with a kickoff planned for early 2027.

Governing Board

Governing Board members are elected by the Congregation. Officers serve a single two-year term (unless they request a shorter term). At-Large members are also elected to two-year terms. No person shall serve on the Governing Board in any combination of positions for more than six consecutive years.

Governing Board July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026		Term Ending June 30, 20XX	Years on GB in this position at end of term	Total years on GB at end of term
Moderator	Christine Brown	2027	2	2
Vice Moderator	Rob Iracane	2027	2	2
Treasurer	Bruce Hager	2027	2	2
Secretary	Barbara Ross	2026	1	1
Members at Large	Tim Crist	2026	1	3
	Seo Hee Koh	2026	2	2
	Helen Respass	2027	2	2
	Kayla Jackson / Rob Middleton	2027	2	2

Standing Committee Appointments for July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

All members of Standing Committees (with the exception of the Leadership Discernment Standing Committee) are appointed by the Governing Board for 1-year terms. Standing Committee members may serve a maximum of 6 one-year terms on a particular Standing Committee. Chairpersons are noted in **bold.**

Building & Campus Care

Building and Campus Care Committee		Appointment Ending June 30, 20XX (1 yr. appointments)	Years on SC at end of term (max. of 6)
Rob	**Middleton**	**2026**	**6**
Eric	Knies	2026	2
Faith	Wozniak	2026	2
John	Osborne	2026	4
Suzanne	Tuck	2026	3

Finance and Investment Policy

Finance & Investment Policy Committee		Appointment Ending June 30, 20XX (1 yr. appointments)	Years on SC at end of term (max. of 6)
Sally	Iracane	2026	3
Jade	Holmgren	2026	2
Todd	Landis	2026	2
Bruce	**Hager**	**2026**	**1**

Human Resources

Human Resources		Appointment Ending June 30, 20XX (1 yr. appointments)	Years on SC at end of term (max. of 6)
Sara	Olson	2026	2
Jen	Hand	2026	3
George	**Black**	**2026**	**5**

Nursery School

Nursery School Committee		Appointment Ending June 30, 20XX (1 yr. appointments)	Years on SC at end of term (max. of 6)
Marcie	**Wallace**	2026	2
Tim	Crist	2026	1

Rev. Katrina's Pastoral Relations Committee

Pastoral Relations Committee – Rev. Katrina Forman		Appointment Ending June 30, 20XX (1 yr. appointments)	Years on SC at end of term (max. of 6)
Steve	Oosting	2026	3
Rob	Iracane	2026	2
Catherine	Spinella	2026	1

Rev. Leah's Pastoral Relations Committee

Pastoral Relations Committee – Rev. Leah McCullough		Appointment Ending June 30, 20XX (1 yr. appointments)	Years on SC at end of term (max. of 6)
Suzanne	Tuck	2026	1
Vicki	Paulson	2026	1
Lisa	Blankenship	2026	1
Mike	Spinella	2026	1

Leadership Discernment

The Leadership Discernment Standing Committee is elected by the Congregation. Members serve a single three-year term.

LEADERSHIP DISCERNMENT July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026	Term Ending June 30, 20XX	Total years on Leadership Discernment at end of term
Marcie Wallace	2026	3
Karen Ermler	2026	3
Armen Khachaturian	2026	3
Lisa Blankenship	2027	2
Carlos Valdes-Dapena	2027	2
Michele Sionas	2027	2

As always with this committee, nomination of members to the Governing Board is a major responsibility. Elected to the board for the 2026-2027 program year are Jen Hand, Secretary, and At Large members Kevin Shaw, Barbara Ross, and Joaquin Cespedes (Youth).

In addition to this responsibility, the core foci in the coming year will be:

1. New format for the signup fair
2. Need to identify practices and systems that will help our congregation fully live out its ministry.
3. Questions for future work include:

- Do members understand the organizational structure of the church and the various ministries available?
- How can we communicate this information more clearly?
- Would training be helpful on topics such as leading effective meetings or making meaningful invitations for members to become involved?

Thank you, Karen Ermler, for all your past work – and welcome Alison Beringer. Looking forward to another fruitful year.

Submitted by Marcie Wallace

Task Forces
Task Forces are appointed by the Governing Board.

Building Renewal Task Force

Over the past year, the building renewal effort moved from planning into implementation, with refined project goals, congregational approval of key priorities, and a successful transition from the Building Renewal Task Force to the new implementation group overseeing the next phase of work.

The Building Renewal Task Force—Nick Loudon, Chair; Bob Chase, Tim Crist, Rev. Katrina Forman, Paul Sionas, Sara Tamargo, Jon Thomsen, and Suzanne Tuck—guided the project over three years from inception to the construction stage. Its work concluded with Bill Pfaff and Gretchen Reinheimer of Pfaff Architects, whose Main Building Feasibility Study, begun in spring 2023, provided the foundation for the planning and vision that followed.

In March, the Church Building Task Force was formed to lead implementation, with Christine Brown, Rev. Katrina Forman, Sally Iracane, Paul Sionas, Jon Thomsen, and Suzanne Tuck serving as members.

The task force began working with Paul Sionas and Nicholas Colello of Gregory Switzer Architects (GSAPC). They have been responsive and flexible in helping us meet project objectives while keeping available resources in focus.

To prepare for all church operations to move to the Main Building by June 30, many members of the congregation helped clean, sort, and organize key spaces, including the Drama closet, archives, basement storage rooms, Assembly Room linens, silver and china; Worship closets, music storage, and seasonal decorations.

The move out of the Vincent Building was completed successfully thanks to the organizational and project management skills of Jon Thomsen, Albert Fenske-Williams, and the entire staff. Temporary offices are now fully operational, and the Main Building is active throughout the week.

Preparations are underway to install a modern, greener HVAC system that will support fuller use of programming spaces throughout the church building. The congregation approved the project at the May meeting, with the estimated $950,000 cost to be funded through incentives, the sale of the P2 Lot, and, if needed, a bridge loan from the UCC Cornerstone Fund. Our New Jersey Clean Energy incentive application is progressing, with a decision expected in September.

At the June 2026 Annual Meeting, the congregation approved building renewal as a missional priority and strongly endorsed the goals of making our campus and buildings more welcoming, accessible, and adaptable.

Members also endorsed the specific renewal project, with a total cost of $1.475 million and the following key objectives:

- Install the HVAC system
- Improve accessibility throughout the building, including programming spaces, restrooms, and stairways
- Renew the sanctuary
- Install new staff offices
- Install an elevator
- Install a mechanical lift

- Improve exterior accessibility

Under Christine Brown's leadership, the task force has brought sharper focus to exterior accessibility while beginning upgrades to improve the functionality of existing spaces.

Architectural plans and renderings were shared with the congregation for feedback, and an Assembly Room bulletin board now provides ongoing project updates.

Gregory Switzer Architects is preparing construction documents for the elevator, offices and program spaces, restrooms, balcony floor, and railing—the final step before bids are solicited.

Submitted by Suzanne Tuck

Nursery School Joint Church / Parent Task Force

Tim Crist, Marcie Wallace, Christine Brown and Jon Thomsen met with a group of Nursery School parents to explore and determine whether it would be possible to continue the Union Congregational Weekday Nursery School program at another location, or in the Vincent Building. The group met weekly from October 2025 through February 2026. After extensive discussions, and considering a wide range of options, the group agreed that the church would lease the Vincent Building for 15 years to a newly formed non-profit organization, The Cooper Children's Center, for use as a nursery school beginning on July 1, 2026.

Submitted by Christine Brown

Ministry Area Coordinators

Worship & Music: Steve Oosting

Wider Church Representatives from Union

NJ Association:
Ina Isobe - Vice President NJ Association
Catherine Spinella - Co-chair NJ Association Church and Ministry Commission

In addition, all ordained ministers who are members of Union are representatives to the NJ Association

Whenever the summary of a year is attempted, some things will be missed. Unfortunately, sometimes people are missed as well. We rely on your good grace for forgiveness. After all, "to err is human, to forgive, divine." This annual report is a product of all of our members and friends over the course of the year. Please know that we are all valued members and friends of Union Congregational Church.
Christine Brown, Kim Crabtree, Barbara Ross, Catherine Spinella (Annual Report Committee)

Section 9 - Financials

Treasurer's Report

Fiscal Year July 2025 - June 2026

Highlights: Financial statements are presented on a consolidated basis, including both church and nursery school operations. A CPA completed the 2024-2025 FY Financial Review, which was reviewed by the Finance and Investment Policy Standing Committee and accepted by the Governing Board. The 2025-2026 FY marks the final year for the church's nursery school and Side Door programs.

Income: Total church income of $2,064,468 exceeded budgeted income of $1,863,000 by 11%. This reflects a favorable variance in pledge, space use and Kobler Trust income and additional nursery school enrollment after budget approval. Church income exceeded budgeted income by 8.4%, while nursery school income increased 12.2%.

Expenses: Total church expenses of $2,373,738 came in slightly above budgeted expenses of $2,356,450 (0.7%). Church expenses of $1,054,384 were 10.5% below budget, due to careful expense management. Nursery school expenses were 12.2% over budget due to costs related to higher enrollment and additional programming and increased facility, administrative, and transition expenses.

Reserved Funds Draw: As a result of higher than budgeted income, the total draw on church investments to cover the budget deficit was $309,270, 37% below the approved budgeted draw of $493,450. This amount represents a 5.1% draw from investments the church controls, below the approved 8.1% budgeted draw.

Balance Sheet as of June 30, 2026: The fiscal year ended with total assets of $9,004,360, a 6% decrease of $579,804 from year-end 2025, due to investment losses and planned withdrawals that totaled $467,101. Net Assets (equity) of $8,826,574 increased $122,339 from year-end 2025.

Investments: As of June 30, the church's investment portfolio totaled $6,071,916, representing a 7.14% loss due to market fluctuations and budgeted draws during the 2025-26 FY. The church maintained a fully ESG invested portfolio with an investment-allocated asset mix of approximately 60% equity, 35% fixed income, and 5% cash/money market funds. In addition, the Buckley Kobler Trust, valued at $2,752,062 as of June 30, generates approximately $100,000 in annual income. The church is the sole beneficiary of this trust.

Submitted by Bruce Hager, Treasurer

Budget vs. Actual

June 2026 Consolidated Church and Nursery School Budget to Actual

	Actual	% Actual Annual	Annual Budget	Difference
Church Income	$ 742,701.28	108%	$ 685,000.00	$ 57,701.28
UCWNS Income	$ 1,321,766.53	112%	$ 1,178,000.00	$ 143,766.53
TOTAL INCOME	**$ 2,064,467.81**	**111%**	**$ 1,863,000.00**	**$ 201,467.81**
TOTAL RESERVE FUNDS *	**$ 309,270.16**	**63%**	**$ 493,450.00**	**$ (184,179.84)**
Church Expenses	$ 1,051,833.77	89%	$ 1,178,450.00	$ (126,616.23)
UCWNS Expenses	$ 1,321,904.20	112%	$ 1,178,000.00	$ 143,904.20
TOTAL EXPENSES	**$ 2,373,737.97**	**101%**	**$ 2,356,450.00**	**$ 17,287.97**

* Reserve Funds refers to monies budgeted and drawn from the church's funds that comprise its investments with Ameriprise as well as program cash funds.

Church Budget to Actual

June 2026 Church Budget to Actual

	Actual	% Actual Annual	Annual Budget	Difference
Income				
Pledges				
Total Pledges	$ 489,830.51	104%	$ 470,000.00	$ 19,830.51
Contributions				
Total Contributions	$ 68,574.14	91%	$ 75,000.00	$ (6,425.86)
Grants Received				
Total Grants Received	$ 5,000.00	100%	$ 5,000.00	$ -
Space Use Income				
Total Space Use Income	$ 52,045.50	208%	$ 25,000.00	$ 27,045.50
Other Income				
Total Other Income	$ 127,251.13	116%	$ 110,000.00	$ 17,251.13
Total Income	**$ 742,701.28**	**108%**	**$ 685,000.00**	**$ 57,701.28**
Reserve Funds				
Total Reserve Funds	**$ 309,132.49**	**63%**	**$ 493,450.00**	**$ (184,317.51)**
Expense				
Worship & Music				
Total Worship & Music	$ 47,846.02	139%	$ 34,500.00	$ 13,346.02
Christian Education				
Total Christian Education	$ 10,542.02	40%	$ 26,500.00	$ (15,957.98)
Congregational Connection and Care				
Total Congregational Connection and Care	$ 24,478.36	91%	$ 27,000.00	$ (2,521.64)
Justice and Community Engagement				
Total Justice and Community Engagement	$ 60,879.99	82%	$ 74,000.00	$ (13,120.01)
OCWM & NJ Association Dues				
Total OCWM & NJ Assoc. Dues	$ 43,834.00	98%	$ 44,650.00	$ (816.00)
Governing Board				
Total Governing Board	$ 33,368.55	124%	$ 27,000.00	$ 6,368.55
Staff Compensation				
Total Staff Compensation	$ 577,021.84	88%	$ 658,900.00	$ (81,878.16)
Administration				
Total Administration	$ 34,208.93	56%	$ 61,500.00	$ (27,291.07)
Buildings & Grounds				
Total Buildings & Grounds	$ 219,654.06	98%	$ 224,400.00	$ (4,745.94)
Total Expense	**$ 1,051,833.77**	**89%**	**$ 1,178,450.00**	**$ (126,616.23)**

Nursery School Budget to Actual

June 2026 Nursery School Budget to Actual

	Actual	% Actual Annual	Annual Budget	Difference
Income				
UCWNS Income				
Total UCWNS Income	$ 1,321,766.53	112%	$ 1,178,000.00	$ 143,766.53
Total Income	**$ 1,321,766.53**	**112%**	**$ 1,178,000.00**	**$ 143,766.53**
Reserve Funds				
Total Reserve Funds	**$ 137.67**	**0%**	**$ -**	**$ 137.67**
Expense				
Governing Board				
Total Governing Board	$ 8,500.00	100%	$ 8,500.00	$ -
Staff Compensation				
Total Staff Compensation	$ 989,319.34	105%	$ 945,000.00	$ 44,319.34
Administration				
Total Administration	$ 163,210.66	144%	$ 113,500.00	$ 49,710.66
Buildings & Grounds				
Total Buildings & Grounds	$ 139,414.48	151%	$ 92,500.00	$ 46,914.48
UCWNS Program Expenses				
Total UCWNS Program Expenses	$ 21,459.72	116%	$ 18,500.00	$ 2,959.72
Total Expense	**$ 1,321,904.20**	**112%**	**$ 1,178,000.00**	**$ 143,904.20**

Consolidated Balance Sheet

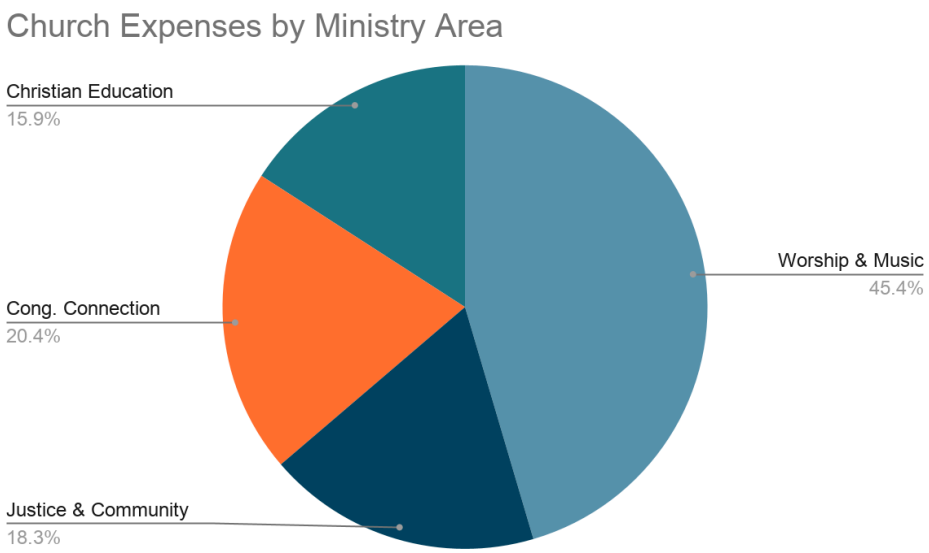
Balance Sheet as of June 30, 2026		
Assets		
Checking Accounts	$	191,137.14
Petty Cash	$	95.00
Fixed Assets	$	2,717,854.81
Pre-Paid Expenses	$	3,357.32
Investment Accounts	$	6,071,916.08
Deferred Whittenburg Scholarship	$	20,000.00
Total Assets	**$**	**9,004,360.35**
Liabilities		
Space Use Deposit	$	60,000.00
UCWNS Accrued Expenses	$	56,431.91
UCC Accrued Expenses	$	34,575.00
Employee Withholding TSA	$	1,698.29
Deferred Income Grants	$	10,135.57
Accounts Payable	$	11,158.07
Credit Cards	$	3,787.60
Total Liabilities	**$**	**177,786.44**
Equity		
UCC Operating Funds	$	(318,863.05)
UCC General Funds	$	4,476,339.62
UCC Building Funds	$	1,809,856.76
UCC Program Funds - Cash	$	6,451.13
UCC Program Funds - Donor Designated	$	134,934.64
Fixed Assets	$	2,717,854.81
Total Equity	**$**	**8,826,573.91**
Total Liabilities + Total Equity	**$**	**9,004,360.35**

Fund Activity Summary Spreadsheet

Fund Activity Summary for the period of 07/01/2025 to 06/30/2026

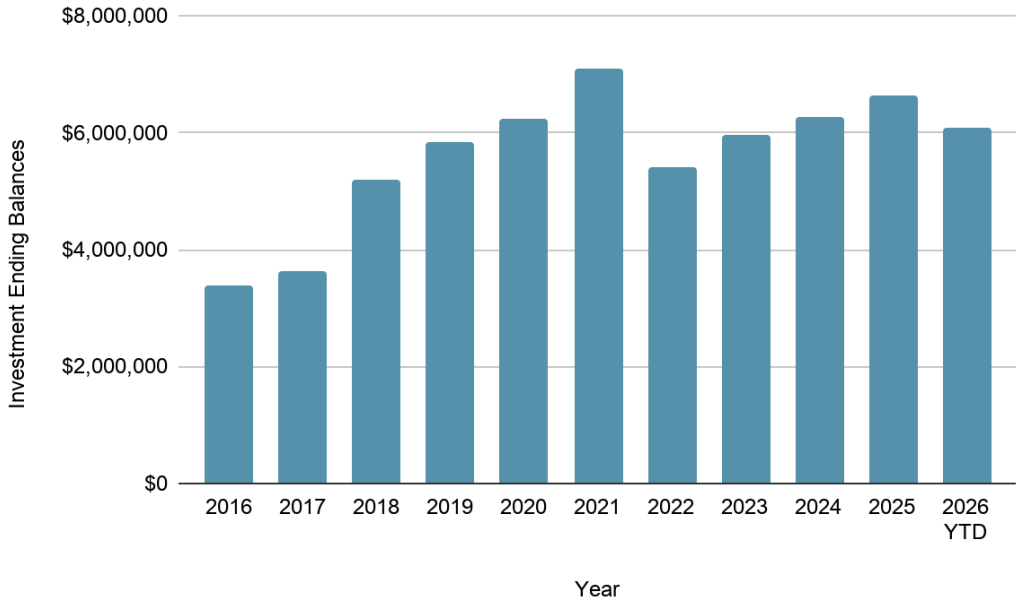
Fund	Beginning Balance	Income	Expenses	Transfer	Ending Balance
UCC Operating Funds					
01 - Operating Fund	-1,213.65	741,038.95	726,193.71	5,079.63	18,711.22
Total UCC Operating Funds	**-1,213.65**	**741,038.95**	**726,193.71**	**5,079.63**	**18,711.22**
UCC General Funds					
21 - Foundation Fund	1,222,010.75	158,170.54	31,500.00	461,627.75	1,810,309.04
22 - Jean Kuhnis Fund	1,664,700.47	152,558.87	112,052.58	37,974.18	1,743,180.94
56 - Christian Mission Fund	924,879.79	83,706.27	85,736.42	0.00	922,849.64
Total UCC General Funds	**3,811,591.01**	**394,435.68**	**229,289.00**	**499,601.93**	**4,476,339.62**
UCC Building Funds					
76 - George C. Vincent Building Maintenance Fur	1,324,622.65	164,941.65	20,246.86	218,340.66	1,687,658.10
80 - Centennial Garden Fund	60,598.80	6,228.02	2,645.73	0.00	64,181.09
84 - Knowles Garden Fund	37,923.04	3,491.95	947.55	0.00	40,467.44
78 - Building Renewal Fund	150,000.00	0.00	35,306.87	-97,143.00	17,550.13
Total UCC Building Funds	**1,573,144.49**	**174,661.62**	**59,147.01**	**121,197.66**	**1,809,856.76**
UCC Program Funds - Cash					
40 - Music Fund	7,853.53	1,868.00	5,610.07	-1,343.00	2,768.46
39 - Women of Union Fund	3,617.05	6,412.04	11,962.39	0.00	-1,933.30
45 - Drama Fund	2,109.07	898.00	306.67	0.00	2,700.40
52 - Samaritan Fund	3,813.14	10.00	907.57	0.00	2,915.57
43 - Pride Choir	5,858.94	23,229.00	10,317.01	0.00	18,770.93
Total UCC Program Funds - Cash	**23,251.73**	**32,417.04**	**29,103.71**	**-1,343.00**	**25,222.06**
UCC Program Funds - Donor Designated					
31 - Schneidewind Fund	24,396.45	2,264.75	4,303.17	0.00	22,358.03
32 - Upton Scholarship Fund	9,147.82	1,027.28	0.00	0.00	10,175.10
41 - Knowles Music Fund	37,596.75	3,521.88	1,322.44	1,343.00	41,139.19
82 - Sulzberger Fund	38,839.84	3,651.55	0.00	0.00	42,491.39
Total UCC Program Funds - Donor Designated	**109,980.86**	**10,465.46**	**5,625.61**	**1,343.00**	**116,163.71**
UCWNS Funds					
95 - UCWNS Operating Fund	1,746.77	1,321,746.53	1,317,854.20	-343,213.37	-337,574.27
96 - UCWNS Reserve Fund	584,092.12	0.00	4,050.00	-580,042.12	0.00
Total UCWNS Funds	**585,838.89**	**1,321,746.53**	**1,321,904.20**	**-923,255.49**	**-337,574.27**
Fixed Assets					
77 - Land & Buildings	2,593,956.54	0.00	173,478.00	297,376.27	2,717,854.81
Total Fixed Assets	**2,593,956.54**	**0.00**	**173,478.00**	**297,376.27**	**2,717,854.81**
Total	**8,696,549.87**	**2,674,765.28**	**2,544,741.24**	**0.00**	**8,826,573.91**

Church Expenses by Ministry Area



Investment Portfolio, Additional Church Investments

Investment Portfolio Value Since 2016
6/30/2026: **$6,071,916**



Additional Church Investments:

Buckley Kobler Trust:

- Current Value: $2.75M
- Approx. $100K annual income

Justice & Community Engagement Expenditures

Justice and Community Engagement Expenditures	Category Detail	Category Total
July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026		
Our Church's Wider Mission & NJ Association dues		**$43,834.00**
Advocacy		**$7,500.00**
NJ Together	$7,500.00	
Side Door		**$13,646.98**
Creation Justice		**$4,000.00**
Northeast Earth Coalition	$1,500.00	
Ironbound Community Corp	$1,000.00	
Greenfaith	$500.00	
Hilltop Conservancy	$250.00	
Yantacaw Brook Park Conservancy	$125.00	
Brookdale Park Conservancy	$125.00	
NY NJ Trail Conference	$500.00	
Contingency Funding		**$9,188.02**
Domestic - First Lutheran of Montclair Giving (for mobile showers)	$1,000.00	
Domestic - Cohomes Summer Fundraiser	$391.52	
Domestic - imani Easter Offering Supplement	$4,096.50	
Int'l - Churches for Middle East	$500.00	
Int'l - Standing Together - Palestinian & Israeli grassroots movement	$1,600.00	
Int'l - NJ Assn. UCC - Palestine Webinars	$400.00	
Int'l - Global Ministries	$1,200.00	
Food Security		**$10,000.00**

CUMAC Sponsorship - 40th Anniversary	$5,000.00	
Human Needs Food Pantry	$2,500.00	
Toni's Kitchen	$2,500.00	
Gender Equity/LGBTIQ+ Support		**$212.87**
Montclair Pride	$212.87	
Racial Justice		**$9,617.99**
NAACP - Thurgood Marshall Freedom Fund Dinner	$1,000.00	
AAPI Montclair Gala	$750.00	
IMANI Benefit	$643.75	
MLK Scholarship Fund	$50.00	
The Mark Cares, Inc. Freedom School (Lunch 1 day/wk for scholars)	$1,680.00	
Good Success Academy	$2,000.00	
Friends of Howe House	$500.00	
Montclair History Center	$500.00	
NJ Institute of Social Justice	$500.00	
CAC (UCC) Workshop Series - Decolonizing Worship	$400.00	
Worship Planning - Decolonizing Worship	$1,500.00	
Let's Watch Film Series	$94.24	
Refugee Resettlement / Immigration Justice		**$7,929.79**
Rent assistance for Refugee Families	$6,929.79	
Cosecha (Support to refugees in detention and their families)	$500.00	
First Friends (support to refugees in detention and their families)	$500.00	
Wider Church		**$6,000.00**
UCC Neighbors in Need	1,500.00	
UCC Christmas Fund - Veterans of the Cross	1,500.00	

UCC One Great Hour of Sharing	1,500.00	
UCC Strengthen Our Church	1,500.00	
Special Offerings		**$28,363.50**
Christmas Offering (Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City & Roots of Resilience - West Bank)	$17,460.00	
Easter Offering (MFEE/Catholic Charities - legal services for immigrant families and IMANI in Montclair)	$10,903.50	
TOTAL		**$140,293.15**