From the Pastor’s Pen

Dear Friends,

So, for this month’s Steeple column, I wanted to describe our status as a church as far as demographics go, and then say a little about what that status means. To do this I wanted to look at a couple recent articles that will help us in understanding how we fit in the larger scheme of church life in the US and what that means for us.

The first article is a UCC focused and published article found on the website Vital Signs and Statistics, a web journal of UCC’s Center for Analytics, Research and Development, and Data (CARDD). The article is titled A Guide for Smaller (to go to full article, click link). The author David Schoen states that latest research by the Hartford Institute for Religious Research indicates the following:

“Since 2000 the median average worship attendance in the United States has decreased ‘by over 50% from 137 to 65 attendees in weekly worship services……with Mainline Protestants having the smallest median size of 50 worship attendees.’”

In other words, we are right in line with other Mainline Protestant churches in the U.S.

As for UCC congregations specifically, “the UCC Statistical Profile 2020 published by [CARDD] also reports a decrease in average worship attendance since 2000. ‘In 2019, ...over half (54.1%) of all UCC congregations now have a weekly worship attendance of 1–50 individuals.’”

As for Covid, it is not yet clear that declines in attendance and activity during the Pandemic will be permanent or if we’ll see a rebound in months to come. The earliest data is not looking great. According to the Barna Group, an organization focused on researching trends in American Christianity, in-person church attendance is 30% to 50% lower compared to pre-pandemic numbers.

So where are we in December 2021 other than coming out of a global Pandemic that seems to drag on and on? We, like the majority of other Mainline Christian churches, are a small church. We are likely to remain a small church unless a Third Great Awakening somehow happens.

But here is the thing – small is what folks might need most.

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Hospitals are no longer allowed to contact Churches to let us know that a Church member is there (because of HIPAA). If you know of a member that has been in or admitted to a hospital, would you please let the Church Office know? Thanks!

We appreciate you keeping current with your annual giving commitment!
In a recent article on the Religion News Service website titled, “Why the minichurch is the latest trend in American religion,” author Bob Smietana discusses how church life is increasingly binary. One either attends a megachurch or a minichurch, with the latter becoming the fastest growing way of doing church. Smietana states, the research “reflects the reality that religious Americans are being sorted into two kinds of churches — megachurches, and minichurches like,” well, like the Congregational Church of Plainville.

I for one don’t think being small is a bad thing. In fact, in a world that attempts to make us feel small and unimportant, that attempts to beat us into the ground sometimes, having a community akin to Cheers and its song – a community where “everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came,” a community that cares for us, is there for us through thick and thin – is a great positive!

In a mega-world, many of us want the intimacy and authenticity of a close-knit, loving community. Smallness is not necessarily a weakness. Like the mustard seed, it can do wonderful and transformative things in the hearts of people.

One of my favorite songs in high school was titled “Small Town” by John Mellencamp. The song embraces the reality of small town life, juxtaposing it to city life with its famous people and smoggy air. If you insert church where you see town in that song, you see the truth of what I’m getting at:

Got nothing against a big [church]
Still hayseed enough to say
Look who [goes to] that big [church]
But my [heart] is in a small church
Oh, and that's good enough for me.

The bridge of that song gets to the heart of it.

I cannot forget where it is that I come from
I cannot forget the people who love me
Yeah, I can be myself here in this small [church]
And people let me be just what I want to be

Now, I am not saying it isn’t important to grow in membership. It is something I continually strive to make happen in my role here. At the same time, accepting who we already are and at the same time deepening our spiritual walk is just as important. Who we are is pretty darn great! And deepening our faith only requires us doing the work. We have nothing to be ashamed of. We’re not lacking in any essential way. And maybe just maybe the best route to growth is this: insisting on being who we are. Small in worldly numbers, but wholly sufficient to God with an abundant life for us to live into. Maybe, just maybe, the journey and the destination are one and the same thing.

Peace,
Rev Don
CELEBRATIONS

Happy Birthday to:
Amelia Wazorko (12/1), Lynnette Astolfi (12/2),
Carson Stilwill (12/2), Paige Stilwill (12/2),
Kyle Wright (12/10), Nicole Guglietta (12/15),
Donna Zapatka (12/20), Carol Mason (12/21)

Happy Anniversary to:
Vicky & Thom Stilwill (12/8)
Deanna & Frank Hoxie (12/21)

MILESTONES & HIGHPONTS

New Members  Brianna Cully, Sue Piercy,
   Carol Webster
Reactivated    None reported
Transfers     None reported
Deaths        None reported
Baptisms      None reported
Births        None reported
Weddings      None reported
We are looking for instrumentalists of all ages (kids and adults) to play for the service on Christmas Eve.

If this is you, please be in touch with Jackie Harris-Stone at bonesandkeyboards@gmail.com
Christmas Wish Tree

We have gift suggestion tags on the tree in the Narthex for the 21 children in the caseload of our Covenant to Care for Children Social Worker, Ashley.

The tags have the gender, age and several gift suggestions for each child. **Please choose ONE gift.** We must remind you that gifts (including gift cards) must not exceed $25.00.

Please wrap the gift and securely tape the card to the package or gift card. Placing a gift card in a Christmas card is a good idea. We ask that you return the Gift, or Gift Card to the church by **Sunday, December 19th.**

Thank you ahead of time for your support and participation.

~ The MSAC Committee

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**The Holiday Shopping season is upon us.**

If you would like to get your holiday shopping done and help The Congregational Church of Plainville, UCC at the same time we have an easy option for you!

Shop at **smile.amazon.com** and they’ll donate 0.5% of eligible purchases to C.C.P.—no fees, no extra cost.

Simply use the link below to sign up! This link will take you directly to the C.C.P. page.

[https://smile.amazon.com/ch/06-0790280](https://smile.amazon.com/ch/06-0790280)

If you have any questions, please contact the Church Office.

**Thank You!**
On November 21st we kicked off our Stewardship campaign for 2022 ~ **Rooted in LOVE.**

One of three cornerstones of Stewardship is the gift of **TIME.**

With that in mind, we are looking for volunteers to help out during Sunday Services at C.C.P.!

If you are interested in being a Greeter, Read Announcements or Read Scriptures during Sunday Service please contact the Church Office.

**Leadership and Committee Members Are Still Needed!!**

Leadership Roles and Committee Participation are vital to the life of C.C.P. Coming up in January of 2022 we will have vacancies in some key roles and we need YOU!

Please take a moment to read the openings that we are looking to fill:

**Leadership vacancies:** Moderator, Vice-Moderator, Treasurer

**Committees looking to add members:** Diaconate, Finance, Personnel, Trustees

**Committees looking to re-form:** Evangelism & Church Growth, Music

**Delegates Needed:** Farmington Valley Association, Southern New England UCC

Please take a moment to prayerfully consider how you can serve on a committee or in a leadership position. We need you to help us make C.C.P. the best it can be and to carry on the missions of our Church Life.

We would like to thank all the people in leadership roles and who have served on committees that have devoted countless hours to helping our church grow. For your contributions we will always be grateful.

If you have questions on what is required of the position you are interested in, please feel free to contact Rev. Don, Kaara, Teresa or someone currently serving on a committee.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.
**2021 CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS**

We are pleased to announce that we will once again be offering Christmas Poinsettias! Participants will have the opportunity to donate Poinsettias in honor or remembrance of someone special in our lives. The plants will then be given to those members that need to be remembered by our Church during this season. The beautiful plants are purchased through Karabin Farms in Southington CT. They are delivered to the church and displayed in the sanctuary during the Christmas week services, with the names of the donors and those they are honoring or remembering listed in the bulletin. **There will be one line for each donated plant.**

This year, once again, we will also take orders for plants that may be wanted for personal use. You will be asked to pick the plants up at the church on Saturday, December 18th. These plants will not be noted in the bulletin.

The plants are $10 each. Please use the order form below to indicate your contact information and how many donated plants and/or how many personal plants you wish to purchase. You may attach multiple forms together if needed. **The order deadline is Sunday, December 12th, 2021. No order will be accepted without payment.**

Checks (made out to C.C.P.) or Cash will be accepted. Orders and payment may be sent to the Church office. This floral ministry of the church is coordinated through the Diaconate, the Minister, and the Church Office.

Thank you for participating in this beautiful ministry.

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**2021 Poinsettia Order Form**

**Order Deadline:** Sunday, Dec. 12, 2021  
**Price:** $10.00 each (All orders require prepayment)

Name: ______________________________ Phone: __________________ email: __________________

☐ A. I would like to donate ____ (# of plants) in honor/memory of the following people. These plants are donated to the church for distribution to persons to be determined by the Minister and Diaconate. Please circle Honor or Memory in each notation. (This is a tax-deductible contribution)

In Loving Honor/Memory (circle one) of ________________________________

In Loving Honor/Memory (circle one) of ________________________________

In Loving Honor/Memory (circle one) of ________________________________

In Loving Honor/Memory (circle one) of ________________________________

☐ B. I would like to order ____ (# of plants) for personal use. I will pick up at church on Saturday, Dec 18th. These will not be noted in the bulletin. ($2.25 of the cost of each plant is a tax-deductible contribution to the church.)

Total # plants (A+B) ____ x $10 each = ____

Make checks payable to:  The Congregational Church of Plainville, UCC  
Send checks and completed forms: The Congregational Church of Plainville, UCC  
130 West Main Street  
Plainville, CT 06062

Office use:  
☐ Cash  
☐ Check # ______
WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Sunday ~
10:00 a.m.  Worship Service
  ~ In-person Worship will be broadcast live via Facebook~

Wednesday
7:00 p.m.  Theology Book Club

Thursday
7:15 p.m.  Choir Rehearsal

Join Us for the Holidays

Special Services include:

- December 12th: Service of Light and Blessing of the Pledge Cards
  ♦ We will be including a special Service of Light during our Sunday service at 10 a.m.

- December 19th: Ugly Sweater Carol Sing
  ♦ Join us for an Ugly Sweater Carol Sing led by the Christian Education kids. Following service please join us in Kelsey Hall for a Cocoa Bar coffee hour and the announcement of the “Holiday Guess Who?” winner.

- December 24th: Christmas Eve Service
  ♦ We will be holding our traditional Christmas Eve service at 6 p.m.

- December 26th: Remote Only Service
  ♦ Please join us online on our Facebook page (@uccplainville) for Sunday Service at 10a.m. There will be no in-person service.
## Financial Update to the Congregation through October 2021

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Message from The Finance Committee

OCT 21

Total

2021 YTD

Budget

21 Budget

%
Mission Social Action News

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

This year, we rejoice at the opening of possibilities for gathering and worshipping together again, as we anticipate the good news of great joy at Christmas. Still, challenges remain for many of our pastoral leaders who continue to experience loss of income as congregations struggle with budget shortfall.

Please show your continued gratitude for our active and retired UCC clergy who need our support by giving generously to the Christmas Fund this year.

On December 19, 2021 we will receive donations for the Christmas Fund. Members wishing to contribute to the Christmas Fund may either send donations directly to the Congregational Church of Plainville, UCC (please note Christmas Fund in the memo) or donate online at www.christmasfund.org.

Thank You for your prayerful donation to this fund.

The Mission Social Action Committee

Message from the Stewardship Team

Rooted in Love

By now you should have received your 2022 Stewardship packet. Please prayerfully consider your pledge commitment for 2022 and return the commitment card to the church by December 12th.

On December 12th, we will dedicate the cards and rededicate ourselves to fulfill the ministry and mission of this church that means so much to all of us.

Thank you!
Your Stewardship team
Plainville High School Project Graduation 2022 needs your support...

Listed below are two opportunities to help out Plainville High Seniors sponsor their Project Graduation.

◊ **five BELºW** fundraising shopping event. Save your **five BELºW** shopping for December 15th-19th. It costs nothing extra and 10% of the purchases you make will be donated back to Project Graduation if you present the flyer at the time of your purchase. Flyers will be sent out via email in a future message. Flyers must be presented to the cashier at the time of sale.

◊ **Comedy Night** is being booked for Friday, January 22nd at the VFW. Tickets will be available at the December 8th meeting, or by contacting Christine Millette @ avon_christine@yahoo.com or Stevie Centurelli @ iamstevie@hotmail.com. Get your tickets in advance as this event is always sold out!!

The Plainville Community Food Pantry has served the town of Plainville for decades, providing not only food assistance, but also clothing, heating assistance through the Fuel Bank, and referrals to crisis intervention services. It has been a lifeline for many. The pandemic has strained its resources, and strained its staff as well, as the work of volunteers had to be curtailed.

We can all help. Consider writing a check. Add the Food Pantry to your weekly shopping list…it will quickly become a habit.

The Food Pantry basket is back in the Narthex ready to accept donations of food and other non-perishable items.

If you would prefer to make a financial contribution please send a check to The Plainville Community Food Pantry at 54 South Canal Street, Plainville, CT 06062.

If you have any questions for the food pantry or are in need of help please contact them at (860) 747-1919.

Thank you.
In Our Community

The Plainville Choral Society

Donations will benefit the Plainville Community Food Pantry

SONGS OF GOOD CHEER
A CONCERT AND A BENEFIT

To view our live-stream program, go to: http://plainvillecs.anywhereseat.com

Friday, December 10, 2021 - 7:00 pm
In-person and live streaming
Tickets: $15 - Children under 12: $5
Live stream donation - $10

Saturday, December 11, 2021 - 7:00 pm
A virtual Christmas carol sing-along
Live stream only - Free-will donation

The Congregational Church of Plainville
Kelsey Hall - 130 W. Main Street, Plainville, CT
In our Prayers, we remember:

Jean & Tommy McCormack (Bev Letendre’s cousin), Dave, Michael Letendre, Jordan & family (Curtis Johnson’s teammate), Cindy Potter, Cassy, Henry Mazurek, Ray Bellamy, Gabriel Smykla, Martha (Russ Drachenberg’s cousin), Annalise (Jackie Harris-Christy’s friend’s daughter), Jason Guglietta, Paul Hawes (Sue Piercy’s brother), Brian Gorneault (Sandy Dombrowski’s son), Amanda, Students & Educators, Healthcare Workers, Essential Workers, Charlene Archambault, Marilyn Borry, Cliff Carlson, John Dombroski, Sandy Dombroski, Charlotte Karabin, Bobbi & Norm Turcotte, Leslie UrbANSKI

The families and friends of: Joan Litteral (Ed Boiczyk’s cousin), Byron Treado (Bonnie Mazurek’s friend), Bruce Bull, Chuck Hoover (Mariann Wright’s friend), Nancy Merrow

Members and friends serving in the military: Renny Astolfi Sr., Thomas Heslin, Beth Smith, Mark Joseloff, Adam Smith, Spencer Pelletier, James Palmer, Mark Terrill, Ryan Steikers, Shawn Ellis

For peace, wisdom, and compassion in our communities, state, nation, and world and in the leaders therein.