

THE TWENTY SIXTH ANNUAL REPORT

For the year 2016

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CLINTON

109 Haskell Avenue
Clinton, MA 01510

Presented at the Annual Meeting of April 30, 2017



Rev. Dr. Scott Stewart
Bob Lidstone
Pam Dobeck
Jackie Wuth
Linda Wheeler
Gloria Parkinson

Pastor
Moderator
Clerk
Treasurer
Financial Secretary
Musical Director

Agenda for Annual Meeting of April 30, 2017

Meeting Called to Order

Bob Lidstone

Opening Prayer

Minutes from Semi-Annual Meeting

Reports – call for additions, corrections and then vote to approve
(no reports to be read out loud).

Pastor

Membership Report

Deacons

Pastor / Parish

Stewardship

Missions & Social Justice

Christian Education

Property

Music Ministry

Worship Planning

Servants in Faith

Financial Reports

Financial Secretary

Treasurer

Investments of the United Church

Review Visioning Goals

Old Business

New Business

Closing Prayer

2017 LAY LEADERS OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CLINTON

Moderator: Bob Lidstone

Financial Secretary: Linda Wheeler

Asst. Financial Secretary: Heather McNamara

Clerk: Pam Dobeck

Treasurer: Jackie Wuth

Assistant Treasurer: Diane Cummins

Historian: Eric Chetwynd

CHURCH COUNCIL

Moderator.....Bob Lidstone
Clerk.....Pam Dobeck
Treasurer.....Jackie Wuth
Asst. Treasurer.....Diane Cummins
Stewardship.....Diane Cummins
Missions & SJ.....Gloria Parkinson
Financial Secretary.....Linda Wheeler
Asst. Financial Secretary...Heather McNamara
Youth Council.....Chrissy Dobeck
Heather McNamara
Deacons.....Pamela Dobeck
Pastor.....Rev. Dr. Scott Stewart
Property.....Fred Sontag
Servants in Faith.....Dawn Sivert
PPRC.....*To be Elected*
Historian.....Eric Chetwynd
UMC Rep.....Madeline McTague
UCC Delegate.....Dudley Moses

YOUTH COUNCIL

Sunday SchoolHeather McNamara
Sunday SchoolChrissy Dobeck
Confirmation.....Bob Lidstone
Kelly Turcotte
Shelly O'Toole
Haleigh Dobeck
Gloria Popp
Sarah Erickson

DEACONS

Pam Dobeck
Dudley Moses
Madeline McTague
Kathi Merz
Janet Lamy
Alana Limber
Kelly Turcotte
Dee Titus
Sarah Erickson

WORSHIP & MUSIC MINISTRY

Gloria Parkinson
Dudley Moses
Alana Limber
Eric Chetwynd
Erin Chetwynd
Pam Dobeck
Chrissy Dobeck
Kelly Turcotte

STAFF

Pastor.....Rev. Dr. Scott Stewart
Musician.....Allan Mueller
AdminAssistant.....Jennifer Wile Jacobs

STEWARDSHIP

Bob Lidstone
Madeline McTague (Lay Rep) UMC
Diane Cummins
Linda Wheeler

MISSIONS & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Gloria Parkinson
Gloria Popp
Madeline McTague
Dianne Mather

PASTOR/PARISH RELATIONS

Madeline McTague
Diane Cummins
Robert Lidstone
Perry Sivert

PROPERTY COMMITTEE

Fred Sontag
Perry Sivert
Pam Dobeck
Chris Perez
Andrew Kay

SERVANTS IN FAITH

Sarah Erickson
Mary Ellen Matthew
Dawn Sivert
Teressa Sontag
Edie Shaw

HOSPITALITY

Marge Lamy
Dee Titus
Dawn Sivert
Linda Wheeler
Mary Ellen Matthew
Janice Ganusko
June Schultz
Alana Limber

DISCIPLESHIP

Rev. Stewart

SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING
THE UNITED CHURCH OF CLINTON
OCTOBER 23, 2016

OPEN – Pastor Scott Stewart opened the Semi-Annual meeting at 11:20 AM with prayer. There were 26 members present.

APPROVAL OF ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES – Kelly Turcotte moved to have Pam Dobeck take the minutes for the meeting. It was seconded by Gloria Parkinson and passed. Dudley Moses moved to accept the Annual Meeting Minutes as presented it was seconded by Madeline McTague and passed.

ELECTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS – The list of nominees was presented and the following additions and/or corrections were made.

- * Change Christian Education to Youth Council
- * Remove Cynthia Stewart from Youth Council
- * Change Mission to Missions and Social Justice
- * Add Andrew Kay to Property
- * Linda Wheeler was nominated for Financial Secretary
- * Remove Gertrud Finkbeiner as Financial Secretary
- * Pam Dobeck was nominated for Clerk
- * Remove Kathleen Kopitsy from Deacons
- * Add June Schultz and Alana Limber to Hospitality
- * Add Kelly Turcotte to Worship Ministry

Kelly Turcotte moved to accept the proposed committee with the amendments, it was seconded by Heather McNamara and passed unanimously.

2017 BUDGET – Bob Lidstone presented and explained the 2017 budget and its shortfalls. At the present time our church cannot meet its budget and the financial committee decided that it was time to show an unbalanced budget as we cannot depend on our investments to support the general budget. The Methodist Conference has strict guidelines on pastoral compensation and at this time we cannot pay Pastor Scott what we should be paying him. On November 17th PPRC will meet with the District Superintendent to explain our plight and ask for guidance.

Pastor Scott will also meet with the district superintendent and explain our current situation. We need an additional \$20,000.00 to meet our budget and we need to give the conference a heads up. We will send a letter to the membership asking for a pledge increase of 27% - if this happens we may be able to make this work but with the current economy it may not happen. Pastor Scott commented that he cannot in good conscience continue at the current salary and he does not think that we should go another year draining our

funds. He would rather leave us with a vibrant congregation rather than eventually closing the doors. Gloria Popp suggested fund raisers to keep Pastor Scott here but he said it probably wouldn't be enough. Bob noted that we are very thankful for all that Pastor Scott a full time experienced pastor has done for us. Pastor Scott is a very talented leader with exceptional organizational skills and we are thankful for all that he has taught us.

A motion was made to accept the budget as presented by Dawn Sivert, seconded by Fred Sontag and it passed.

OLD BUSINESS – Dawn Sivert moved to terminate the Energy Fund going forward this meeting and to use the money collected so far to energy related improvements that have been made recently. It was seconded by Gertrud Finkbeiner and passed. A letter will be sent to the congregation explaining.

NEW BUSINESS – Pastor Scott took a minute to thank Gertrud and Markus for all that they have done for our congregation. We wish them the best of luck in California and we will miss them dearly!

CLOSE – A motion was made to adjourn at 12:10 by Kelly Turcotte, if was seconded by Heather McNamara and it passed. Pastor Scott closed with prayer.

Respectfully submitted by Pam Dobeck

Pastor's Report

As pastor, my responsibility is to partner with lay leaders and members to be faithful in living out our vision as a church. As you look through our annual report, our budget, our stories, our pictures and each gathering we host, it becomes clear that the United Church of Clinton is on a mission to live out the Gospel through our pillars of Worship, Mission, Community, Justice, and Global Presence.

This past year, we went deep in our theme of “God's people loving and serving God” with a focus on Social Justice. It wasn't always comfortable, but it was necessary to help us continue our journey as followers of Christ. We want to see every person – not just surviving – but thriving in their lives. We want this for our youth and children. We want this for women and men, single and married, young and elderly. We want this for ourselves! But, this isn't just about being happy and putting on happy faces on Sundays. It's about experiencing God's power, Jesus' Lordship, and the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives. It's about having the courage to identify areas that are toxic and experience healing and change. It's about encountering God's presence and abundance in our lives. This is God's desire for His people. This is God's desire for His creation. Jesus came that we might have life, and have it abundantly.

While many of our ministries in 2016 mirrored our ministries in previous years, every effort throughout the year was made to reach new people with the good news that is ours to share and to offer our very best to every age and group. During 2016, several ministries and committees were charged by the council to take a deep and comprehensive look at key areas of our life together, specifically our youth, discipleship, our mission outreach and partnerships, and our aging facilities. Over the next several months you will be seeing signs of strengthening our efforts in these ministries areas to secure the effectiveness for the generations to come.

Average attendance at worship is somewhere in the high 70s to low 50s. We're down a bit from last year, but there is still a positive trend. Special services for Christmas and Easter remain full, and the Sanctuary is used for special services and weddings. We have been blessed with the efforts of the worship team and members of the ensemble for their dedication and service week after week. Likewise, the Deacons have served with dedication making sure we are ready for worship every Sunday. Summer worship attendance rarely went below 30. We made some minor changes in the order of worship in to focus the transition into reverent worship.

As we look at our congregation today we should be aware that we will only grow by working together and investing love in one another. There is much to be proud of. We have been fulfilled our calling to watch over this small town. While the core of what we do is no different than what our ancestors in faith have always done: there are places where we are going to adapt to broaden our ministry. Specifically, I would like to see all of us put some sort of effort into building a Sunday school program and adult discipleship for our church. What exactly will this look like I do not know. What I do know is that it will be a project that takes patience and loving kindness.

Every year, we have big transitions. Change is inevitable and such will be the case in 2017. As you all aware; The United Church of Clinton is in the process of Pastoral change. It has been a privilege to work to fulfill the ministry of this church. I want to remind you that this is far from being a done deal. The transition is complex and I'm convinced that while our church is doing all that we can, it will ultimately be a “God thing.” But all “God things” offer an invitation to His people to be a part of it. And in the coming months, you'll hear more from the pulpit search committee and how you can be a part of this significant move will impact both our church, neighborhood, city – and even the larger world – for years to come.

It has been an immense joy and privilege to serve with a host of talented and gifted church leaders. I am grateful for this opportunity in ministry as The United Church of Clinton continues to present a strong witness to God's presence in our world, to be a holy place of hospitality and to a voice for peace, justice and mercy in our community.

Rev. Dr. Scott Stewart

Membership Report for the United Church of Clinton for 2016

CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

TRANSFER IN

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Jacqueline Wuth
Kevin Wuth
Laraine Amelotte
Margaret Hogue

SUBTOTAL INCREASE IN MEMBERSHIP =	+4
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Transfer Out:

Deaths:

Desire Wuth
Carole Ann (Cooper) Vosburg

SUBTOTAL LOSSES IN ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP =	- 2
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TOTAL CHANGE IN ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP =	+2
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Baptisms:

Jon Sawyer

Confirmations:

Maddison Arpano,
Haleigh Dobeck,
Justin Newton,
Justin O'Toole,
Guy Sawyer,
Mason Taylor,
Spencer Taylor
Ben Turcotte

Deacons Annual Report 2016

The Board of Deacons for The United Church of Clinton consists of at least six members and the Pastor. Currently the slate for 2016 consists of Pastor Scott, Madeline McTague, Diamily Titus, Dudley Moses, Sarah Erickson, Alana Limber, Kathy Merz, Janet Lamy and Pam Dobeck. The Deacons meet on the first Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m. Pam Dobeck is the chair and the council representative.

The Deacons are responsible for the Spiritual nourishment and development of the Church. Along with the Pastor the Deacons help plan worship services including special services. (This is also addressed in the Worship Planning Meetings) We oversee special occasions such as Baptisms, Confirmation and Weddings. The Deacons have a voice in special occasions such as Advent and Lent. The Deacons change the paraments, supply and replace the candles, order Palms and ashes for Palm Sunday, order and supply the flowers for all occasions, prepare Holy Communion on the first Sunday of each month, accompany the Pastor if he so wishes to bring home Communion to the shut-ins. The Deacons help the Pastor and Christian Education conduct special training to the youth such as Bible Bearer, Acolyte and Communion training. The Deacons along with the Congregation test the Confirmands and supply them with study Bibles at Confirmation. The Deacons are now teaching the older children in the Sunday school – we are teaching in pairs on a monthly rotation. The Deacons assist the Pastor at new member gatherings. The Deacons act as or recruit greeters for each service, find supply speakers in the Pastor's absence, CORI checks on all teachers and volunteers at the church are overseen by the Deacons and secured by Christian Education, and the Deacons oversee the music program – Gloria Parkinson is the music coordinator.

In 2016 we had one baptisms! We baptized Jonathan Sawyer. We would like to welcome you into our church family.

In 2016 we welcomed four new members by profession of faith – Laraine Amelotte, Margaret Hogue, Jackie and Kevin Wuth. The United Church of Clinton welcomes these new members to our church family. We also welcomed eight new members through Confirmation – Congratulations and welcome to: Maddison Arpano, Haleigh Dobeck, Justin Newton, Justin O'Toole, Michael (Guy) Sawyer, Mason Taylor, Spencer Taylor and Ben Turcotte.

In 2016 our church suffered three loses, we mourned the deaths of Kate Arpano, Desire Wuth and Carole Ann (Cooper) Vosburg. We will never forget these vital members of our church community, they are greatly missed.

On Sunday, November 13th the Deacons once again hosted Bring A Friend Sunday. This was a success, inviting friends and neighbors gets our church name out and shows people what we are all about. Everyone enjoyed a luncheon put on by the Deacons and Christian Education after worship.

The Deacons of The United Church of Clinton would like to extend an invitation to anyone who is interested in becoming a Deacon to attend a meeting and witness what we do. If anyone has any concerns, comments or suggestions feel free to call the church office or any one of the Deacons.

Submitted for the Deacons of The United Church of Clinton by,

Pam Dobeck

Missions & Social Justice Committee Report for 2016

Committee Members: Diane Mather, Madeline McTague, Gloria Parkinson (Chair), Gloria Popp, and Pastor Scott Stewart.

This year was the first full year the Missions Committee acted as a stand-alone committee and was not part of the Stewardship Committee. Early in the year, Church Council agreed to include “social Justice” as an aspect of the committee’s responsibilities. To this end, throughout 2016, the Committee coordinated the mission and social justice work of the church; collaborated with internal church teams on other related activities; scheduled the special collections of the church.

2016: Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself: An Overview

In keeping with living our vision statement of “God’s people loving and serving God”:

~We are committed to serving others.

~We distribute our time, talents, and treasure in ways that are financial, hands-on, or a combination of the two (“dollars and doing”).

~We select mission and social justice projects that are **local, national, and global** in nature.

LOCAL PROECTS

Lenten Mission: Spare Change for Abby’s House, Worcester

This year our church family once again supported Abby’s House, which provides both emergency shelter and affordable housing for women and their children. Abby’s House serves hundreds of homeless women and children from across Central Massachusetts each year. (Learn more about Abby’s House at www.abbyshouse.org.)

WHEAT Community Café

Our church continues with this local mission project. The WHEAT Community Café serves dinner every week night to approximately 60 guests. On the third Monday of each month, volunteers from our church family delivered pizza, salad, and ice cream. To support this mission project, on the first Sunday of each month, Communion Sunday, there was a special place-setting collection to cover the cost of the food we deliver.

Growing for Others

During the growing season our church had a 4’ by 8’ growing bed as part of the Maybarton Community Garden on High Street in Clinton and four similar growing beds on the church lawn beside the church (an increase of last year’s two church beds)

Despite a summer of severe drought conditions, we did manage to donate a sizeable harvest to the WHEAT pantry. Our fresh produce was very much appreciated and would be gone from the WHEAT produce tables in the twinkling of an eye.

Spare Change Summer Collection for The Item Appeal

Throughout the summer months we stepped forward every Sunday during the singing of the first hymn and dropped our spare change into two large jars at the front of the Sanctuary. Our change was in support of The Item Appeal, Neighbors Helping Neighbors, a local charity.

Plastic Bags for WHEAT:

We continue to collect plastic grocery bags for WHEAT to assist in that agency’s food distribution program. A simple mission but much appreciated by WHEAT and a reminder that small acts can make a difference.

NATIONAL PROJECTS

Winter Togs Collection: Sioux YMCA in Dupree, South Dakota

During October/November we collected warm winter hats, scarves and mittens. After blessing them in December we sent them to the Sioux YMCA in Dupree, South Dakota. We always receive a heart-felt letter of thanks from the community.

GLOBAL PROJECTS

Our Growing Family of HeroRats

With Faith and Hope, our adopted giant-pouched African rats, now busily employed efficiently sniffing out buried landmines in former war zones and detecting tuberculosis, during October and November we took up a Spare Change collection so we could adopt two more HeroRats. Learn more about the HeroRat program and the nonprofit organization APOPO at www.apopo.org.

Special Offerings

We continued to coordinate special offerings to support the good work done by our two denominations: The United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church. We divide the following special collections equally between the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ and the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church: One Great Hour of Sharing; Strengthen the Church/Peace with Justice; Church World Service; World Wide Communion Sunday/ Neighbors in Need; Christmas Fund Offering/Vets of Cross.

Report respectfully submitted by Gloria Parkinson on behalf of the Missions and Social Justice Committee.

United Church of Clinton
Annual Report for
Youth Council 2016

The Youth Council has been recognized as a committee since the 2016 semi-annual meeting. The Youth Council has been formed combining the Sunday School, Youth Group and Confirmation committees. We would like to thank all of the volunteers, parents, members, and Pastor Scott for their support of the youth of our church over the past year. The Sunday School, Youth Group and Confirmation would not be successful without everyone's support.

Sunday School: The 2016 year continued with changes to the Sunday School. Attendance continues to be an area of concern, as families are busy, and sports/other activities take priority. We have seen most of the children again this year however the struggle continues to be with the consistency in which we see the children. The Sunday School continues to be a self-funded program within the church. The Sunday School experienced a loss of a member this year, with the passing of Kate Arpano. The "Sunny School" classroom was dedicated in her honor at this year's Christmas Pageant with her sister Bella Arpano cutting the ribbon celebrating the opening of the classroom.

Nursery: The nursery has had a some updating with the purchase of a new rug, and a "bouncy" seat for older infants. We will continue to discuss updates such as painting for the 2017 year.

Christmas Pageant: The Sunday School presented a traditional Christmas Pageant this year with many children and families participating.

Missions: The youth collected shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child, participated in the Souper Bowl of Caring and raised money through bake and yard sales to donate food to local food pantries.

Confirmation Classes: The Confirmation Class had 7 confirmands successfully complete the program! The confirmands were Maddison Arpano, Haleigh Dobeck, Justin Newton, Justin O'Toole, Spencer Taylor, Mason Taylor, and Ben Turcotte. Congratulations to the Confirmation Class of 2016.

For the 2016 annual report we had the following teacher participation:
Teachers: Shelly O'Toole, Amy Arpano, Kelly Turcotte, Laura Taylor, Erin Chetwynd, Christine Burgos, Sarah Erickson, Laura Newton, Bob Lidstone (confirmation), Heather McNamara, Chrissy Dobeck.

There were 32 children actively involved in the programs offered by the Youth Council.

Respectfully Submitted, Heather McNamara & Christine Dobeck

Property Report for 2016

MEMBERS: MARKUS FINKBEINER, STEVE GRANGER, PERRY SIVERT, PAM DOBECK, CHRIS PEREZ, ANDREW KAY, FRED SONTAG (CHAIR)

As you all know Markus is now in sunny California and we wish him well. Markus was chairman for almost all of 2016 and we thank him for all his efforts. He did a great job and we miss him. We are losing or have lost Markus, Steve and Chris and will be looking to elect one or two new members at this meeting. If you are interested please talk to me so we can get you nominated.

We used the Mass Electric energy program to upgrade the parsonage saving us over \$2,000. The \$4,000 we spent should pay for itself in less than 5 years. Most of the parsonage walls had NO insulation in them! Thanks again Markus for your leadership in getting this done.

A special thanks to Perry for his work on the boy's bathroom. He repaired the walls, fixed a few items and repainted the room. Looks great.

Thanks also to the Dobeck family for their help, especially with the snow removal.

With sadness we will be losing our custodian. Thanks Chris for all your work, the church never looked better. Thanks also for all your volunteer help in the several projects we accomplished.

There's one more person that deserves a special thanks, Pastor Scott. Along with his ministry duties, he has excellent handy-man skills. Just to mention a few things that he helped with. if not totally accomplished by himself, include; Refinishing floors, repairing doors, replacing water fountain and cork boarding the downstairs wall, painting, ceiling repairs, plexiglass windows, heating system upgrades and more. The most impressive improvement he made was to completely repair the parsonage cellar walls and turn this basement into a functional section of the house. Thank You!!

There is a lot more work we'd like to do. The parsonage "steam" heating system can be made more efficient. Sections of the church that were not sided are in need of painting or preferably siding. The inside of the parsonage will need to be repainted before the next tenant moves in. The challenge is to repair what we can without draining our limited funds, and will remain our goal.

Respectfully submitted,
Fred Sontag

SERVANTS IN FAITH/ GERMAN CHRISTMAS MARKET

April 30, 2017

Committee: Dawn Sivert, Diane Cummins, Edie Shaw, MaryEllen Matthew, Jackie Wuth, Alana Limber, Diemily Titus, Pam Dobeck, Philip and Sarah Erickson, Theresa Sontag, Janet Lamey, Gloria Popp.

This committee came together in January 2017 to continue the Servants in Faith and German Christmas Market Programs. Please feel free to join us in our monthly meetings, and in making these programs better.

Since January we have been making plans for the Old Home Day Booth, the German Christmas Market, and also bringing back a quarterly Pot Luck Supper.

In February we put together a luncheon after the funeral of long-time member of the Church Fred Dunkinson.

From mid-March thru April 2nd we organized and held a silent raffle. We were able to put together 48 raffle items (we had hoped for 20-25) and we raised \$670 to use toward advertising for the German Christmas Market. We want to thank everyone that participated in making this such a success.

On May 6th we are planning our first Pot Luck. For this supper we are planning for the committee to put together a potluck of some of our favorites meals, and we are hopeful that many of you will come and join us for this, and enjoy the food we prepare.

Soon we will be asking each of you to volunteer to help out with crafting, cooking, and helping to man the booths, work in the kitchen, and in the outside with cooking bratwurst. Please let us know if you knit, crochet, or sew, or do any other crafts. We would like to have some craft nights and work together on crafts. There will be more on this to come.

Submitted by

Dawn Sivert

MUSIC MINISTRY REPORT

Why Bother with Music?

Now that's an interesting question! The music we experience together during worship on Sunday mornings, on a granite ledge on Easter morning, seasonally in the neighborhood, in the simplicity of a home worshippers home, and elsewhere is not intended to be performance art. We do, however, strive to make it the best it can be. Why? Tradition, habit, or just because...?

Here's one biblical reference that got me thinking. Psalm 150, verses 3-5: *Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with clanging symbols; praise him with loud clashing symbols!*

During 2016 we've done just about all that! We've had a variety of stringed instruments, including at least three guitars, a mandolin, a ukulele, and more than one violin. As well as several types of trumpet, we've had other wind instruments. We've beaten a couple of different drums. We've had a tambourine with clanging symbols. And, yes, we've danced in the Sanctuary! To crown it all, we've employed the largest instrument we possess—us, pews of worshippers singing with gusto!

Thank you everyone who serves our church through music—those in the pews; Ensemble folks (Erin, Eric and Rachel Chetwynd, Alana Limber, and Madeline McTague); and bell ringing folks (Erin, Eric and Rachel Chetwynd, Markus Finkbeiner, Alana Limber, and Linda Wheeler. Thanks also to the musical contributions of the multi-instrumental Meifert family. Thank you, Dudley Moses, for raising us up with your soaring tenor voice that continues to reach the rafters; ditto thanks to Markus Finkbeiner for your trumpet playing on multiple trumpets. (Markus, we wish you joyful music worship in your new home state. Know we'll miss greatly.) Thanks, as always, to Allan Mueller for the service you perform on the piano and organ every week and for putting together a chamber orchestra of professional players for the German Christmas Market weekend.

But the question remains, why bother? Back to Psalm 150.

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Respectfully submitted by Gloria Parkinson
Music Ministry Coordinator

Our Church's Worship Planning Team

How does our worship happen? How does what takes place in the Sanctuary every Sunday morning at 10:00 AM come to be? Think of the many aspects of worship included in an hour's worship service; the variety of readings, prayers, hymns, special music, and more, for 52 Sundays each year, plus additional seasonal services for Christmas and Easter?

The design of our worship services is a collaborative effort between our pastor, Brother Scott, and our church worship planning team. This collaborative effort happens at least once a month, when worship for the month ahead is mapped out.

Worship planning meetings typically take place at 8:00 AM on the last Sunday of the month. Occasionally we will schedule additional meetings. Seated around the table in the pastor's office are representatives from several of our church committees—Deacons, Missions and Social Justice, Christian Education—and individuals from our church family who have an interest in worship. Our goal is to devise meaningful weekly worship that speaks to everyone present in the pews. By definition, this means building in variety because our church family is made up of worshippers who come from different denominational traditions or no tradition at all. For example, what may be a beloved, familiar hymn to one person may be a first hearing to the person sitting in front of them. Above all, we strive to create a coherent through line in the service so that upon reflection a worshipper might think, oh, that's why that was included this morning.

Our pastor, of course, is the leader of the collaborative planning effort. He has the final say about the direction and components of all worship services. The first minutes of our meetings are brainstorming moments with Brother Scott to discern his likely sermon themes.

Another early step at the monthly planning gatherings is to decide whether we'll adopt the theme explored in the lectionary readings for the month ahead or if we'll work on an independent series. In December, for instance, we followed the Advent lectionary. In the several weeks before that, we devised worship services around an exploration of the meaning of "worship" itself. Some may recall a service in the fellowship hall where we sat in an enclosed circle that allowed us to see all our faces while we worshiped.

We also have a very useful reference book, which changes annually to reflect the changing lectionary readings. This book contains hymn suggestions too. Depending on decisions made early in our meetings we may or may not adopt any or all of the suggestions. Again, we're striving for meaningful worship in which the individual pieces add up to a unified and comprehensible whole. At the end of each planning session, the weeks ahead still have a number of "holes", such as the prayers that Brother Scott selects as he works on his sermons.

Hope you find this "behind the scenes" peak at worship planning interesting.
Gloria Parkinson, member of the Worship Planning Team