

## INFORMATION SHEET

Answers to questions raised in the survey and house meetings

- **Weren't we supposed to have raised all the money for construction of the new building (Amistad Hall) before any ground was broken?**

In April of 2005, prior to groundbreaking, the congregation passed a balanced budget for Amistad Hall. A number of factors have contributed to our current debt. First, we have not sold the Academy Building. Second, unforeseen costs were discovered, as in all renovation projects (Porter Memorial), which were funded out of the increase in our endowment portfolio. The funds, however, were not transferred in a timely manner and the portfolio lost value with the economy. Third, we have had a small percentage of pledges that have been unpaid or not paid in full. Finally, the need to pay for debt service has cut into our ability to pay principle.

- **The church is being painted and landscaped – where is the money coming from if the church has a huge deficit?**

Both the painting and the landscaping are being paid for out of funds that were specifically designated for these purposes. The painting comes from a reserve fund that we pay into each year for maintenance and upkeep of our facilities out of our Operating budget (usually about \$25,000 per year) according to our Capital Budget.

The Landscaping Ministry Team has raised money for its project through fund-raisers that target the Farmington community rather than the church. The slow economy has allowed us to get more value from our dollar as contractors have offered reduced pricing, which is why construction is happening now.

To be clear, the church does not have a huge deficit. We currently have a balanced budget, as we did last year. We do have a large debt, however. But monies raised for a specific purpose must be used for that purpose.

- **What percent of giving goes to Buildings and Grounds and Staff and what percentage for Outreach?**

For this current budget year, June 2009 to May, 2010, our \$592,650 budget is 26% Buildings and Grounds (Utilities, fuel, insurance, supplies, etc., \$151,875), 61% Personnel (2 Full-time and 8 part-time employees, \$360,020), 2% Outreach (Local and global, \$12,000), 3% Program (Christian Education, Worship, Music, etc., \$18,620), and 8% Debt Service (\$48,150). This information can be found in this year's Annual Report.

- **Global Missions must take a chunk of money, are we cutting back in this area?**

In the past 10 years we have gone from an Outreach Budget of \$56,592 to \$12,000. Yet we have also added an Associate Minister for Service and Outreach WHO, IN ADDITION TO OTHER PASTORAL DUTIES, HAS greatly increased our hands-on participation in outreach projects and mission trips. Some of our global mission program is paid for by donations made by members and non-members who contribute directly to those programs. These donations are not reflected in the Outreach budget.

- **Where does our Outreach money go? Specifics.**

In the most recent completed year, 2008-2009, the Outreach Committee budget was \$22,050. Of that budget, \$3000 went to the Youth Mission trip; \$2000 to Habitat for Humanity; \$1500 to Rebuilding Hartford Together; \$500 to the Christian Activities Council (CAC); \$750 to Adventures in the City, an urban summer camp of the CAC; \$500 to the Interfaith Coalition for Equity and Justice; \$2500 to the El Salvador Ministry Team; \$500 to the Sierra Leone Ministry Team; \$150 to Covenant to Care; \$650 to Loaves and Fishes; and \$10,000 to Our Church's Wider Mission, for local and global mission and church work through our denomination, the United Church of Christ. We do have other monies given to programs beyond our walls funded by gifts over and above our pledges, such as the Neighbors in Need offering, Church School offerings, Food for the Hungry pew envelopes and One Great Hour of Sharing.

- **Can we pledge to support the entire church and also indicate through check boxes which outreach/service project we'd like to focus on?**

A few years ago, as an experiment, the Council of Deacons and the Stewardship Committee asked for a “split pledge”: one amount to operating budget and another amount to missions. In the end, the amounts pledged to each was no different than what was usually budgeted, so the practice was not repeated. However, indicating a pledge of time and energy to a specific ministry or service project is a wonderful idea to take under advisement.

- **Why is the budget not clearly presented for the layperson? Why are some budget items “hidden?”**

The final presentation of a budget is a balance between enough and too much information. First Church's finances are complex and not easily portrayed on a single sheet. To this end, certain individual items have been grouped together instead of detailed. Another concern of budgeting is the ability to show prior year activity to compare apples to apples. This has led to a perpetuation of difficult budget presentations. This year the Council of Deacons is committed to revising the budget presentation so that it is transparent, understandable in lay terms, and is able to show comparisons to prior years. Expect to see a very different type of budget this year. Please also be aware that our Treasurer, Bob Price prepares very detailed budget reports monthly for the Council of Deacons and is happy to share that detailed information with anyone in the congregation.

- **After the October 25th meeting, will Stewardship have enough direction to “get the job done”?**

The Stewardship Committee will continue its work long after the October 25<sup>th</sup> meeting. It has committed to a December 1, 2009 deadline to give a final total to the Council of Deacons for budgeting for the upcoming year. It is the role of the Council of Deacons to propose a budget to the congregation each year. But the Stewardship Committee is committed to introducing a year-around stewardship message to the congregation, emphasizing generosity as a part of our spiritual practice as Christians.

- **Will there be a plan by December 31<sup>st</sup> (year-end)?**

The Council of Deacons is committed to crafting a budget by December 31, 2009 so that the necessary preparations for staffing and programming will have plenty of time to be made known and completed before the Annual Congregational Meeting in May and the beginning of our next fiscal year, June 1, 2010.

- **How many members pledge, don't pledge but give generously, don't pledge or give?**

In the most recently completed year, 2008-2009, out of 406 member households, 246 pledged or contributed in a way we can track. Of the 160 households that did not pledge, 100 of those households have moved away, left the church, died, become inactive, or had pastoral or financial concerns that do not permit them to pledge. The remaining 60 households are being followed up on in the current stewardship drive. Our “plate” contributions (the loose, unattributable dollars placed in the offering plate on Sundays) has remained consistent in the past 5 years at about \$15,000 per year.

- **Is pledging a part of church culture? What role does endowment play in the pledging?**

Pledging is a part of Protestant church culture and has been part of First Church culture since about 1947. (Some Evangelical churches, Catholic churches and Jewish congregations have very different models of financing their ministries, including tithing, multiple offerings, and assessing each family a membership fee.) Prior to 1947, pews were “rented” and a “Seating Committee” assigned your pew according to the size of your pledge. A pledge is a “faith promise” that allows the church to know what to expect from its members so that it can plan, budget and be good stewards of the church's finances.

Though there are notable exceptions, endowments often suppress pledging because of the conscious or unconscious perception that with an endowment the church does not “need” my pledge. This does not address the gospel call to be generous or our “need” to give.

- **What are our current membership numbers compared to the membership numbers five years ago?**

We currently have 817 members on the rolls with an average of 252 in worship on Sundays. Five years ago, in 2004, we had 679 members on the rolls with an average of 234 in worship. In those 5 years we have taken in 236 new members. However, we have also lost members to transfers, death, nursing homes, shut-in situations and inactivity. We have not yet gone through our every 5 year process of “cleaning the rolls” to remove those who have moved, become inactive, or left the church. Membership, according to our Constitution, requires participation through time, treasure or talent within the past 3 years.

- **Where have some of our members gone?**

Members go various places for various reasons. Many move. Some become dissatisfied with the church. We have an equal number of members leave because they feel First Church is too “liberal” and that it is too “conservative.” Some discover it is not as friendly or open as they had first experienced. Some have expectations of the church that have not been met. Some have burned out or been burned. Some have just gotten out of the habit and have not been invited back.

- **Once children have completed confirmation, do the parents continue to attend church?**

There is no single answer to this question. The answer is as varied as the parents. In the past 5 years we have received 89 Confirmands, of whom 76 families are still active and attend.

- **What percentage of members actually participates in church?**

Once again, there is no single answer to this question. From a strict membership requirement perspective (the offering of time, talents, or treasure in the past 3 years), about 85% of our households participate. From a worship attendance perspective, we have an average of 252 adults and children taking part in worship and Christian Education each Sunday. However, many of our members do not attend worship weekly but once or twice per month. Since we do not take attendance, it is difficult to determine the actual percentage.

- **Why do we not require more of our new members?**

Requiring more of new members than we require of current members is a losing proposition. Every congregation has a “culture” that is its norm, and that unspoken culture is easily picked up by newer members. If we want new members to step up to higher standards we will need to first step up our standards for current members.

- **Are we planning alternate worship opportunities to meet our diversity, such as 2 Sunday morning worship services, a Saturday service, etc.?**

We do not have any plans for new worship opportunities at this time, but are awaiting the results of the priority setting exercises that are currently taking place. Worship is our single largest cost, and any additional services will require a significant allocation of resources.

- **What is the actual number of surveys returned?**

294 surveys were returned, out of 794 mailed.

- **What happens to the visitor forms that people fill out in church?**

Visitor forms generate a welcome letter from Ned Edwards with an offer for more information. Those looking for a new spiritual home are placed on our mailing list and contacted as prospective members.

- **It is the responsibility of the Minister to market the church. Why is he not doing this?**

There are a number of assumptions in this question. The first has to do with the expectations a church has of its Senior Minister. Though the Senior Minister’s job description calls him to “represent the body of Christ in the

community”, it does not call him to market the church. In fact, all studies of church growth show that the single most effective church marketing strategy is personal invitations to worship by current members. This does not relieve Ned of the responsibility of marketing and motivating us as members to market, but does get at what the proper role of a clergy person in a Congregational church is, as well as the proper role at First Church. The expectations of our clergy will be an important part of the staff reconfiguration that will take place after the priority setting exercises are completed. Two other factors enter into this question as well. The first is our culture of volunteerism and how much we are willing to do ourselves as opposed to how much are we willing to pay someone else to do for us. This question is being brought home by the economy and will be addressed directly in next year’s staffing budget. The final factor is our Congregational heritage. An inherent part of being a Congregational church is the recognition that each of us is a minister. Each of us is a leader as well as participant and each of us bears the responsibility of marketing the church, inviting others to worship, welcoming those who visit, and encouraging them to participate in the life of the church.

- **After the UCC bi-annual meeting with the ministers, etc., do they come out with rules that we must follow? Opt-in or Opt-out rules?**

Our denomination, the United Church of Christ, is a non-hierarchical entity, which is a difficult concept for most church members. In the UCC every local church is in “voluntary covenant” with the various settings of the denomination (Farmington Valley Association, Connecticut Conference, and the National Setting of the UCC – note the use of the word “settings” rather than “levels” – we are non-hierarchical, and each setting is autonomous). This means that the UCC at any setting cannot require anything of us, including rules of doctrine, governance or finance. (The one exception is certain legal requirements since we are gathered as a 501(c)3 under the UCC, not as an individual local church.) When the UCC or the CT Conference makes a statement or takes a stand it is never speaking FOR the churches, but TO the churches in a prophetic voice, calling the churches to faithfulness and a study of the issue. These statements or stands are not made by individuals or paid staff members, but by a vote of delegates from local churches gathered for that purpose; members like you and me who represent the churches and voluntarily give of their time to serve.

First Church is granted 6 delegates with voice and vote to both the Farmington Valley Association and the Connecticut Conference, but we have not found a full contingent of interested people in recent years to fill these positions. Our National UCC meeting (General Synod) delegates are chosen by the Farmington Valley Association.

Currently, Ned Edwards serves as the Vice Moderator of the Farmington Valley Association, on the Board of Directors of the CT Conference, the Capital Campaign Committee for Silver Lake Conference Center, and as a consultant for Church Governance for churches of the Conference. Kim Hoare serves on the Advisory Committee for the Associate Conference Minister for Youth and Young Adult Ministries, does Boundary Training for the CT Conference, and was recently a delegate, with church member Emily Davol (a youth delegate), to the General Synod in Grand Rapids, MI. Emily also serves as the New England Representative on the national Council for Youth and Young Adult Ministry, traveling to Cleveland for meetings multiple times a year. Jane Rowe serves both on the Coordinating Committee of and as a member of CAUCE (Connecticut Association of United Church Educators), a group of UCC Christian Educators, as well as a Partner in Education for the CT Conference. Jane’s husband, the Rev. Dr. Ron Brown, serves as the Associate Conference Minister for Clergy Concerns in the CT Conference. First Church member Bill Mackay-Heckles serves in on the Board of Directors of the UCC Pension Boards and Jane Smith, Lulu Mann and Bob Gerrett have all served recently on the Committee on Ministry of the Farmington Valley Association.

As in the local church, the more participation people have in the work of the church, the more invested they tend to be. Because of the investment that our ministers and members have in the denomination, it may seem as though we are “charged” with certain activities that are “required” of us, but a more accurate representation may be that our participants are “inspired” and “challenged” to new ways of ministry and mission as we experience some of the wonderful things our denomination is doing beyond our local community.

Historically, we are less involved in our denomination (both financially and through individual participation) today than at any other time in the last two centuries.