

# A Guide For Church Members



## ROXBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

*A Congregation of the United Church of Christ*

24 Church Street

Roxbury, Connecticut 06783

[www.roxburychurch.org](http://www.roxburychurch.org)

The Rev. David F. Peters, Minister -2009

### **Introduction**

Welcome to the Roxbury Congregational Church. This guide is provided to introduce those who visit our church to the ways we move, live and work as a congregation of God's people. There is much that is not readily noticeable from one visit to worship or from many visits. As a member of our church community, our hope is that you will come to understand how the church operates, what the customs and norms are and how to get any assistance you may need. Our congregation is made up of people who come from a wide variety of religious traditions and practices. Our congregation is unique unto itself and with this in mind, this guide has been produced.

### **Mission Statement**

"As a congregation we are committed to glorify God through the worship of Jesus Christ.

We exemplify our faith by:

Teaching, learning and living the glory of God

Embracing the worth and dignity of all peoples in their faith journey

Serving our congregation and neighbors in a ministry of caring and nurture."

2001

## **Roxbury Congregational Church Guiding Principles**

The following are the Church's Guiding Principles that provide the primary goals and objectives around which we develop yearly goals. We recognize that there are many important and meaningful activities that we as a congregation support and embrace. These Principles are meant to be broad in scope and central to the essence of whom we are and the path in which we walk. The goals that are developed by each committee should embrace the spirit of these principles allowing and supporting continued growth of the Church and our church family.

2005

- We will provide a rewarding and nurturing environment for our internal and external church community by fostering a truly dynamic Christian education program that is available to all age groups.
- We will strive to provide a facility that is safe, in good repair, that can accommodate the Church's needs and that is supportive for all who desire to be a part of the Church's activities.
- We will provide an ecumenical and inclusive environment that is supportive and nurturing to all that embraces God's love and teachings.
- We will continue to support and celebrate fellowship activities that will appeal to the wide diversity of interests that make up our church family. This is a very important aspect of the life in our church and should be a part of all that we do.
- We will foster an environment that calls upon our church family to promote and support leadership, extensions of support within the community, Christian outreach, and the philosophies/beliefs that make-up who we are as members of the Congregational Church Community.

### **Polity (How the church governs itself)**

The power in the Congregational tradition is the congregation itself. The congregation is not bound by any other organization or Diocese or Conference. The congregation is totally responsible for the financial obligations it makes. The congregation chooses and hires the clergy. There is no term limit on the clergy. The clergy – congregation relationship is one of mutual support and challenge. As long as both are in place, the relationship flourishes and continues.

The Committees and Boards elected by the congregation, act on behalf of the church carrying out assigned functions. The Minister in the congregational polity has little official power, but has the role and duty to foster open communication and spiritual health within its fellowship. If you have a concern about the way a program is running, or want to offer help, it is best to talk directly with the committee responsible.

### **Expectation of Church Members**

Worship regularly

Witness and share God's love in your life

Serve God and neighbor responsibly and faithfully

Give your time, talent and money to further the church's mission,  
locally and throughout the world.

## **Communications**

Newsletter: The Congregationalist is our church's monthly newsletter. The deadline for news items is the 15<sup>th</sup> day of each month.

Church Web Page: The church's web page includes up to date items including photos of church events and links to many useful sites for church history, theology, disaster relief and mission work around the world. The website is [www.roxburychurch.org](http://www.roxburychurch.org).

E-mail: email has become a great and convenient way to communicate with the church office. Newsletter submission, notes of concern or meeting minute /notices can be handled in this way. The office email address is [office@roxburychurch.org](mailto:office@roxburychurch.org).

Thought for Today is a daily free email sent out to those who request it. Each day's email includes a short thought to help frame your day. Also included on Mondays are prayer concerns, on Wednesday, events for the coming week and on Friday, a funny religious cartoon. To sign up, just send an email to [david@roxburychurch.org](mailto:david@roxburychurch.org).

The email addresses for the Church Staff:  
Church Office is [office@roxburychurch.org](mailto:office@roxburychurch.org)  
Rev. David Peters: [david@roxburychurch.org](mailto:david@roxburychurch.org)  
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania: [dmc@roxburychurch.org](mailto:dmc@roxburychurch.org)  
Sandra Kleisner: [sandy@roxburychurch.org](mailto:sandy@roxburychurch.org)

## **Worship**

Regular Worship: From September through June, traditional worship is held in the church's Meetinghouse at 10:30 a.m.

- Holy Communion is offered on the first Sunday of each month.
- Family Worship is on the first and third Sundays of the month while Church School is in session. Children accompany their parents for the beginning of worship on these Sundays. After a children's sermon, they are dismissed to their classes. Also on Family Sundays we receive non-perishable food for Daily Bread Food Pantry in Danbury.

Summer Worship: During the months of July and August, the worship services are held at 9:30 a.m. in the meetinghouse. While there is no choir during these services, most Sundays, special musical offerings are made.

United Worship: We celebrate our unity within the Christian tradition by holding worship together with our neighbors at Christ Episcopal Church. The service time remains at 10:30 a.m. but alternates between sanctuaries and clergy preaching or leading worship. We unite on the Sundays after Christmas and Easter and one Sunday during the summer at the Apple Lane Recreation Area. Church School remains as normal on these Sundays.

## **Flowers for Worship**

Flowers are donated by members of the church. They can be placed in memory of a loved one, or particular name(s). They can also be placed in celebration or honor of someone or life event. You can choose to either take the flowers home with you after worship or by arrangement with the Board of Deacons, to have them taken to a church or community member who is either ill or in need of some cheer. It is the donor's responsibility to purchase and deliver the flowers to the church by early Sunday morning. The Flower Committee oversees this ministry.

The Meetinghouse is open for prayer and meditation 24 hours a day. It is never locked.

## **Christian Education**

Church School: Classes for 3 year-olds through 8<sup>th</sup> grade are available weekly during the 10:30 a.m. worship service. Nursery care is provided for infants and toddlers under age 3.

Church School Offering: On the Sundays that the children are in worship (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> they begin worship seated with their families. After a children's sermon, an offering is received as they leave for their class session. The monies from their offering are used to support of a young child in Oaxaca, Mexico through the non-profit organization, *Simply Smiles* child sponsorship program. It is suggested that students give a minimum of 50 cents each week. The offering helps teach concepts of giving beyond self and helping others in need in Christian love.

Confirmation: Classes for ninth grade students are usually held from October through Pentecost (spring). Study materials and activities initiated through an adult mentoring relationship enable young people to make an informed decision to join the church. Confirmands receive imprinted bibles for their own use.

Pilgrim Youth Fellowships (youth): Our fellowship programs for both middle and senior high youth provide opportunities to explore and expand their spirituality and sense of self. Their activities provide a positive connection with the Church, a sense of community and foundational experiences that help to guide them on their life journeys. There are two fellowships, Sr. for high school youth grades 9-12 which meets most Sundays, and Jr., for middle school youth in grades 6 -8 which typically meets monthly.

Adult Education: Christian Education is a life-long process. Offering on a regular basis, diverse programs provide a vehicle for understanding our faith, sharing of spiritual lives and community building. These programs include: bible study, discussion groups and adult "confirmation style" classes.

## **Music Program**

Music plays a major role in the traditions of the Roxbury Congregational Church worship experience. Participation in our music program provides a special opportunity to enhance the worship service for others, while enjoying the rewards of practice and fellowship.

Adult Choir: The Adult Choir rehearses on Sunday at 9:15 a.m. preceding the regular 10:30 a.m. worship service. Auditions are not required to participate. Our members' musical backgrounds vary from those unable to read music to those who have extensive experience. All are welcomed.

Youth Choir: All members of our Church School program are taught music twice a month during regular Church School time. The Children's Choir sings as a part of the regular worship service usually every 6 weeks and at major holiday times.

Special Occasion Artists: On occasion the Minister of Music will coordinate the musical offering of one of our members or an invited guest artist from outside the congregation. This happens particularly during summer months and at holiday times.

## **Mission Activities**

Our mission is to enable and empower members to translate Christian ideals into action in local, regional, national and global communities. Our Mission Committee educates the congregation by focusing on specific issues such as hunger, housing and poverty, as well as aid following natural disasters.

The Roxbury Church encourages financial support and personal participation in programs such as One Great Hour of Sharing, Neighbors in Need, Habitat For Humanity, Daily Bread Food Pantry in Danbury, and localized inter-city programs.

Some of the special missions offering opportunities during the year include:

### *Neighbors in Need* (October)

Neighbors in Need seeks to help those in the United States who need help with issues of justice and basic needs. In the past specific projects have included health care for American Indian in the plains states, the development of church programs in the inner city.

### *St Nicholas Fund* (early December)

Working with the New Milford Social Services Department, screened area families are given two unmarked presents at Christmas time for each child. These needy children receive one clothing item and one toy item. Also members can donate towards the cost of a turkey dinner given to each family. Our congregation has historically been one of the major supporters of this effort.

### *Veterans of the Cross* (Sunday before Christmas)

Some retired clergy served in a time when no provisions were made for retirement and wages were often too low to allow for saving. From this time, some have trouble affording health insurance or basic needs from their small pensions. This offering is intended to be a helping hand for those who served the church and now are in need.

### *Souper Bowl Sunday* (Super Bowl Sunday – late January)

Our Senior High Pilgrim Youth Fellowship lead this effort to raise money for our local soup kitchen, *Dorothy Day* in Danbury. Each parishioner attending worship on Super Bowl Sunday is asked to donate \$1 toward this effort celebrated in churches across the country.

### *One Great Hour of Sharing* (Spring)

Offerings collected are channeled to the national setting of the church and used 100% to help with disaster aid and rural development around the world. As with all worldwide mission programs and missionaries, they are coordinated with a local church body to insure appropriateness and effectiveness.

## **Relation to the Wider Church Community**

The Church relates to the wider church primarily through two agencies:

The Litchfield South Association: Although we are a self-governing congregation, we are associated with other United Church of Christ churches in our areas through membership in the Litchfield South Association and the wider Connecticut Conference. The Litchfield South Association furthers the fellowship and development of cooperation among its member churches, promotes their welfare, stimulates their spiritual and missionary purposes, works with state and national organizations of the United Church of Christ in furthering activities, and promotes plans for developing the Christian life.

Connecticut Conference The Conference is made up of the 15 Associations of the United Church of Christ in Connecticut. It makes up the largest Protestant denomination in the State. The Rev. Michael Ciba is the NW Regional Conference Minister who serves our church and those in the NW region of CT. The head of the Conference is the Conference Minister, The Rev. Dr. Davida Foy Crabtree. The Conference is headquartered in Hartford. The Conference coordinates a large variety of programs for clergy, laity and youth. Their web site is [www.ctucc.org](http://www.ctucc.org).

General Synod – National Church: The synod meets every two years with over 700 delegates from across the denomination / country; of which over half are laity. It speaks to the denomination and oversees its worldwide work. The work of the denomination is carried out through four covenanted ministries: Office of General Ministries, Justice and Witness Ministries, Local Church Ministries, and Wider Church Ministries. Denominational headquarters are located in Cleveland, Ohio. [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)

## **Importance of Volunteers**

The Church is a voluntary organization. As such, we cannot compel individuals to carry out tasks on behalf of the congregation. But as you can well imagine, volunteers are needed for the church to be effective and faithful. Your volunteer efforts are very important. From time to time, you will hear individuals or the Minister ask for help from members like yourself. We believe that God calls each of us to tasks and has endowed each with the skills and talents to carry them out. The Nominating Committee, for example, takes its task seriously when looking to match people from the congregation to the positions that need to be filled. If a Committee member asks you to consider a task, we hope that you will prayerfully do so. Our basic guide is that “not just

anyone can do that job...find the right person to do it.” And God calls one of us to that task!

### **Financial Support for the Work of the Church**

Pledging of Members: The majority of the operating budget of this church, including mission giving, comes from the faithful contributions of its members. Each fall, the Stewardship Committee solicits financial pledges for the coming year. Offering envelopes are provided to those who request them. These envelopes allow our Church Collector to accurately record giving for tax deduction purposes. If you would like offering envelopes, please contact the church office. You also have the option of giving electronically. To set up an electronic debit from your bank account, contact Rev. Peters.

Special Fund – Raising Events: While most of the work of the church is supported by pledges, additional funds are derived from special fund raisers such as the Country Church Christmas Fair held in early December, the Spring Rummage Sale and Annual Beef Barbecue. If are willing to help out with one of these events, contact the Church Office 860-355-1978.

Planned Giving: Is a carefully considered way of giving out of one’s accumulated assets – including stocks, bonds, real estate, or life insurance – that is pre-arranged through a will, a trust or other life income agreement, such as a reverse annuity, that may provide lifetime income for one or more individuals, where upon death(s), the remaining principal will to the Church. Planned giving can provide a gift to the church while still insuring a very adequate income source.

Memorial Gifts: Many people like to remember loved ones through gifts to charities in lieu of flowers at the service. The church gladly accepts memorial gifts for this purpose. Most gifts received are entered into the Church’s Book of Remembrance that is used for projects within the Meetinghouse only. By pre-arrangement with the Minister, larger, named memorials can be established. The Board of Trustees, which is charged with the management of the Memorial funds, solicits suggestions from the family for such named memorials.

Special Emergency / Relief Giving: In the event of natural disasters (floods, hurricanes, earthquakes) around the world, the church receives financial donations to aid in relief work. 100% of all funds donated go directly to the relief agency locally, because the administrative structure and costs are already in place through our denomination. Checks for these special gifts should be made out to the Roxbury Church with the specific location / emergency noted on the memo line.

## OUR CLERGY

### **We Invite You To Contact Your Clergy:**

Your clergy is available to you twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for pastoral support. Following is a list that has circulated among church newsletters over the years that attempts to name those times you might want to consult clergy:

- When you would like to talk about your faith or your religious values...
- When you would like to talk about joining the church, or finding a place here to contribute your gifts, time and talent...
- When you want to get acquainted or introduce yourself to the minister...
- When someone close to you has died or is critically ill, and you would like to talk...
- When you are to be hospitalized, or know someone who is and would appreciate a visit...
- When you are confined to your home and would appreciate a visit...
- When you are planning to be married ...
- When you would like to have your child baptized...
- When you would like to discuss funeral / memorial service planning...
- When you have personal or family problems you would like to discuss... with your job, children, relationship, or anything else where a sympathetic ear might help...
- When you are faced with an important decision and would like someone with whom to talk...
- When you would like to learn more about the United Church of Christ...
- When you have an idea for adult religious education programming in the church...
- When you are disappointed with the church or excited about the church and would like to talk about it...
- When you are upset with someone and would like some coaching in how best to address the person directly...
- When you are either upset with the minister or pleased with the minister and would like to share your thoughts, feelings and ideas...
- When you feel called to offer your talents and energy to the church and its larger purpose, and seek help finding the right place to serve...

### For Rev. David Peters:

The best ways to reach him are: the Church Office at RCC, 860-355-1978, which has a message service. It is checked every day, except Tuesday. Email at church is [david@roxburychurch.org](mailto:david@roxburychurch.org). Email is generally checked on a daily basis. His home telephone is 860-355-8830, which has a message service. Rev. Peters' day off from church is Tuesdays, except emergencies. We ask that you honor that as clergy need that sabbath each week.

There are mail slots in the Church Library for staff, committees and church officers. Notes and information are best left there.

Here are the broad parameters of his schedule: Rev. Peters is typically in the office most mornings and out in the community afternoons.

He holds one afternoon for reading, study, and service preparation, either Thursday or Friday. When possible, he will group meetings and appointments in a clump to consolidate travel time. Our minister has two days off per week. Rev. Peters takes Tuesdays off, as well as a day spread throughout the week, to be present for his children's activities and other family needs. Pastoral Emergencies take priority over all this.

*From Rev. Peters:*

*“With the size of our congregation (1), my priority is on those who are most in need and those who request to see me. If you do not see me in your home, it is not because I do not care about you. It couldn't be further from the truth. If you want me to stop by, even with no particular agenda and / or problem, please contact me and let me know.”*

In my experience, fixed office hours are not always compatible with the rhythm of parish ministry. My schedule is full of variation—meetings, visits, and special events. Chances are good that I can find a time to meet with you quite readily.” David

For Rev. Diane Monti-Catania, Associate Minister for Parish Life:

The best way to contact Diane is by telephone at the church or her home in Bridgewater (860-354-6588). Diane serves part-time here and is in the church office on Tuesdays through Thursdays. Her email which is checked daily is [dmc@roxburychurch.org](mailto:dmc@roxburychurch.org).

### **Policies For Worship, Baptism, Communion, Wedding, Funeral**

These have been set by our Board of Deacons.

#### **WORSHIP**

1. Flash photography shall not take place during the service of worship.
2. The Sr. Pastor and/or Associate Pastor of this church shall preside at all worship services. The Clergy can invite another minister to co-officiate or excuse themselves from participation at their discretion.
3. The Minister of Music serving this church is responsible for planning the weekly music program.
4. Children join their families for the first part of worship on the first and third Sundays of each month.

#### **BAPTISMS**

1. Parents of babies to be baptized are either to be
  - a.) members of the church or
  - b.) regular worshipping members of the congregation, who intend to raise them accordingly.
2. Grandchildren of members may also be baptized at the discretion of the minister or the Board of Deacons.
3. In all but rare occasions, baptisms are to take place during the regular service of worship and in the meetinghouse.

4. The Church shall not charge any fees in connection with baptisms.

#### COMMUNION / LORD'S SUPPER

1. Wine shall be offered as well as grape juice for communion, except for common cup at which time juice shall be served.
2. All, regardless of age, shall be able to partake in the Lord's Supper. It is hoped that parents shall stress the meaning and seriousness of the sacrament to their children beforehand.

#### WEDDINGS

+ This church views all marriage services as worship of God. The service should be conducted accordingly.

1. Members of the Church and their children shall be able to use the meetinghouse without fee. An honorarium is requested for the services of the organist and the clergy.
2. Those not affiliated with the church shall pay a fee to the organist and for use of the meetinghouse. They shall also pay an honorarium to the officiating clergy.
3. The throwing of confetti or rice on the front steps/walk is not allowed.
4. Flash photography shall not be allowed during the ceremony from the time the bride takes her place until the couple's kiss at the end.
5. No flowers or ribbons shall be attached by tape or nails in the meetinghouse woodwork.

#### FUNERALS

1. The resident minister shall officiate at all funeral or memorial services in the meetinghouse.
2. There shall be no open caskets allowed in the meetinghouse, except, on rare occasions, for a brief family viewing in the rear of the meetinghouse prior to the services.
3. Those not previously affiliated with the church shall pay a fee for use of the meetinghouse as set by the Trustees.
4. It is expected that a fee be paid to the organist for services and a honorarium for the minister.

Board of Deacons

January 12, 1995

## Items of Note

### BUILDINGS

Meetinghouse Built in 1838. It is of Greek Revival period of design.

Chapel Which originally was located approx. 1/4 mi. to the west of its current location, was built in 1845. It has served the town and church in many ways. It has been a school, a meeting hall, and a Boy Scout hall. It was moved in 1989, to become part of the Parish House complex completed in 1990.

Parsonage (28 Church Street) This house was built approx. 1810, and has had numerous additions since then. The church purchased the house in 1984. It was completely renovated and enlarged in 1996.

Former Parsonage (20 Church Street) The Church used the former parsonage from 1965 until 1984, when it was sold. It was meeting place for town leaders in the early days of the town's history. It is now a private residence.

### WITHIN THE MEETINGHOUSE

Rodgers Organ The current organ is made up of a Rodgers digital organ with the addition of 5 ranks of pneumatic pipe work, from the former Muddler Tracker organ. The funding for the organ was from the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation of New York City, in honor of Dr. Thomas H. Meikle, Jr. former President of the Foundation.

Steinway Piano This baby grand piano was a gift of Stephen and Denise Adams, members of the congregation.

Meetinghouse Steeple Bell The bell was cast in 1845, by A. Meneely of West Troy, New York.

Communion Set One pitcher, two platens and two chalices comprise the set given in memory of Hiram Curtiss, who died on March 22, 1874.

2 Communion Plates The plates, made of silver plate, were given in memory of Mrs. Stephen Sanford and Mrs. Elliot Beardsley.

2 Offering Plates The silver plate plates were purchased and inscribed in loving memory of Tamara Lowe Hinckley, who served as a treasurer of this church, who died in 1994.

2 Offering Plates The silver plate plates were purchased and inscribed in loving memory of Donald Dodge, a trustee of this church, who died in 2000.

Deacon's Bench Here the Deacons sit while serving communion. It's history is unknown.

Communion Table Candlesticks and Flower Bowl This was a gift of the Mrs. Ella Errsson in memory of her son, Sven-Eric, who died soon after he returned from Viet Nam, in 1968.

Wooden Chancel Cross. This hand-made cross was made by Mr. Carl Reker from an oak plank found in the church attic.

Scripture Plaque Scriptures are painted on this piece given by an unknown donor hanging in the Narthex.

Pilgrim Hymnals Given in memory of Debra Beckman in 1993, by James Beckman and his daughters

Chalice Hymnals These hymnals were purchased by members of the congregation in 2008 in memory of various persons. A set for the choir was purchased with the kind support of the Thomas H. Meikle, Jr. Music Fund.

Pew Bibles These New Revised Standard Version Bibles used each Sunday during worship were given in 1994, by Mr. Arthur Newcomb, in memory of his wife, Hazel Newcomb, grandmother of Rev. David Peters.

Former Tracker Organ A 2 manual- 9 stop organ built by Bernard Muddler of Philadelphia c. 1900. The organ was removed from a monastery in Norwalk, CT. and installed in the early 1940's by the late Mr. George White, husband of the late Marie.

Lingsch Baby Grand Piano Built by F. A. Lingsch of New York, New York in 1932. It was a gift of his daughter, Mrs. Gertrude Lingsch Caveness. It is currently on permanent loan to Christ Episcopal Church, Roxbury.

Sound System A professional sound system including CD player, tape capabilities and wireless sound was donated by an anonymous congregation member in 2003.

The meetinghouse air conditioning was installed through the generosity of Donald and Elizabeth Blyn in 2005.

4/09

## **Theological Basics**

The Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God.

God: Acting in love, God is ever active in the world.

Jesus Christ: In Christ, the only head of the church, God has come, conquering sin and reconciling the world to Divine Love.

The Holy Spirit: God sent the Holy Spirit as the Eternal One's continuing presence and activity in the world.

The Church: consists of a group of people united in Christ through worship, work and witness.

Salvation: Forgiveness, grace and eternal life are promised to all who have faith.

Authority of Scriptures: The Bible is the ultimate rule of faith and practice.

Doctrinal Freedom: Different covenants and confessions of faith are accepted in different congregations. (We hold up testimonies of faith and tests of faith)

Christian Unity: All Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ, and must help each other.

Bearing Witness: We must each be disciples, in word and in deed – the strength of our faith.

Redeeming Faith: Each generation is responsible for rethinking its beliefs, as God's word unfolds and conditions change.

Serving Others: The mission of the church is to work for justice for all and to establish God's rule in the world.

Sacraments: The United Church of Christ, along with most mainline Protestant denominations recognize two sacraments, instituted by Christ:

Baptism: Through baptism, persons are joined in faith with Jesus and accepted into the fellowship of the Church. Our practice is by sprinkling of water on adults or children.

Lord's Supper. The breaking of the bread and pouring of "wine" are done in remembrance of Christ's death on the cross and resurrection. The Roxbury Church serves a common loaf, of which a piece is broken off. The "cup" is offered as both wine in the outer ring of cups or grape juice in the two inner rings. We partake each together.

The church also recognizes these special ceremonies or rites: confirmation, marriage, ordination, and burial.

## **Brief Histories**

### The United Church of Christ

#### The First Centuries

All Christians are related in faith to Judaism and are the spiritual descendants of the first followers of Jesus who spread through the world with the Gospel (the "Good News") of a loving God. After four centuries, Christianity was no longer a small persecuted sect but the state religion of the Roman Empire. Originally, the church was an undivided, universal (or "catholic") church. But partly because Christianity identified with the different cultures in which it took root, the "Latin" Christianity of the western Empire, centered in Rome, gradually grew apart from the "Greek" Christianity of the eastern Empire, centered in Constantinople. By the year 1054, the Latin and Greek churches separated into two rival communities.

Our history continues as part of the western—or Roman Catholic—church. The church continued to grow during these years. These were the so-called "Dark Ages"—actually a time of spiritual and intellectual growth. But by the 15th century, the bonds that held the Roman church together were beginning to unravel. Dissidents denounced corruption in the church's hierarchy; some began to call for a return to a simpler form of Christianity. These were the Reformers, or "Protestants" because they protested against authority. At first, their intention was to reform the Roman Catholic Church. But as the struggle intensified the result was another split—between the Roman church and a number of new communities that called themselves Protestant, Lutheran, Reformed or "Evangelical" (from the Greek *evangelion*, meaning "Gospel").

Reformers like Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin believed that the Bible had precedence over the Pope as the source of church teaching. And it was in the Bible, especially in the writings of the Apostle Paul, that Luther rediscovered a simple idea that would change the history of world religion: that salvation is not earned, but is a free gift from God who loves us and whose power will save us from spiritual death.

#### Spreads through Europe

This message spread throughout Europe. Some Catholics found in Luther's doctrine of God's generous love an experience of liberation from fear. The churches that later were named in his honor ("Lutheran") replaced the Roman church as the dominant expression of Christianity in much of Northern Europe—including Scandinavia and the northern, eastern and central regions of Germany. Another branch, the "Reformed" churches inspired by Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin, put down roots in Switzerland, Germany, France, Hungary, Transylvania, the Netherlands, England and Scotland.

The United Church of Christ traces its history back to both the Lutheran and Reformed movements. It presently binds in covenant about 6,000 congregations with

1.4 million members. One of the youngest of American churches, its background also makes it one of the oldest in Protestantism.

The United Church of Christ, a *united* and *uniting* church, was born on June 25, 1957, as the result of a union of four traditions. Two of these were the Congregational Churches with roots in the New England colonies founded by the English Pilgrims and the Puritans, and the Christian Church with origins on the American frontier. These two denominations had a shared tradition of religious freedom and the right of local churches to govern their own life. They united on June 17, 1931 to become the Congregational Christian Churches.

The other two traditions were the Reformed Church in the United States, founded by 18th-century German and Swiss immigrants who settled in Pennsylvania and the mid-Atlantic region, and the Evangelical Synod of North America, a 19th-century church planted by German settlers along the Mississippi Valley. In these churches the "Lutheran" and "Reformed" traditions came together, and they were united on June 26, 1934, to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

The Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches shared a strong commitment to freedom of religious expression under the authority of Jesus Christ. They combined strong European ties, early colonial roots and the vitality of the American frontier church. Both denominations revered the Bible and were more interested in what unites Christians than with what divides them. They were united in Cleveland, Ohio, on June 25, 1957.

### Roxbury Congregational Church

The founding of the Roxbury church dates to the "mother church" in Stratford, Connecticut. In 1672 a group from that church was granted by the General Court of Connecticut "liberty to erect a plantation at Pomperaug."

Fifteen families came up the Shepaug River to what is now the Town of Roxbury and made their way over Good Hill to the Valley of the Pomperaug. The following year it was made a town and called Woodbury. Roxbury was a part of Woodbury called the Shepaug District until 1796 when it became the town of Roxbury.

In 1731, the inhabitants of the district petitioned the Connecticut General Assembly for liberty to have their own preacher in the winter months, as travel to the church in Woodbury was too difficult.

The petition was granted in 1732 and a meetinghouse was erected across from the cemetery on Old Roxbury Road. It was not until May 27, 1743 that the Assembly said, "inhabitants are hereby made one distinct ecclesiastical society and it shall be called Roxbury."

On April 16, 1744 the first minister, Rev. Thomas Canfield, was called. He and his family are buried in the old cemetery near the first meetinghouse. Their graves are next to the first grave of General Seth Warner (now on the Town Green) the Commander of the Green Mountain Boys during the American Revolution. He was an active member of the church upon his return to Roxbury from Vermont in 1782. A new meetinghouse was built on the same site in 1746.

By 1795 most of the inhabitants were down in the valley so in 1796 a new meetinghouse was built on Church Street. The Town of Roxbury was established that year as well. In 1838 the present meetinghouse was built and in 1843 the chapel now a part of the church building was built to the west, a short distance away. This was used as a schoolhouse for many years. In 1818 a new constitution for Connecticut was passed separating the Congregational Church from the State. Most of the towns in Litchfield County (including Roxbury) voted against the new constitution. The population of Roxbury decreased from the years when we were an industrial town with mines, quarries, hat factories and other manufacturing plants. In 1810 there were 1210 people and in 1949, 660. So, in 1940 we became a yoked church with the Bridgewater church. In 1965 due to more inhabitants in Roxbury we terminated the yoked status and had our own minister again. And from 1743 to 1990 we have had 32 ministers.

Since the 1960's, members of the congregation have dreamed of expanded facilities for Christian education and social and community functions. In 1986, a successful capital campaign was conducted to build a new Parish House attached to the rear of the meetinghouse and extending eastward. The new Parish House was dedicated on April 29, 1990. Since the late 1980's the congregation has seen tremendous growth both in adult participation and church school registration. The current (2007) official membership is 426 adults with 75 children registered in the church school.

Over the years, the Congregational Church denomination in the United States has had several mergers, one with the Christian Church and for a while we were the Congregational Christian Church and in 1962 we voted to merge with the Evangelical and Reformed Church to become a member of the United Church of Christ.

Elmer Worthington, Historian 1992 *revised*, October 30, 2005

### **Resources for the Journey**

Our church is blessed to have a wonderful Church Library. It is located in the former Chapel section of the Parish House just outside the Church Offices. In it you will find a wide range of books of interest. There are books on all facets of Christian history, theology, prayer and spirituality. The Children's Library is also filled on a wide range of topics. To take out a book, simply choose the book, write your name on the Library card in the rear pocket of the book and place it in the box near the card file. There are no library cards. Books may be borrowed by Church Members only. The loan period is two weeks. Our Librarian, Joan Temple, is available to assist you or to receive suggestions of possible book purchases. The entire book catalog is available at the church's web page, [www.roxburychurch.org](http://www.roxburychurch.org).

### **Important web sites for more information**

[www.roxburychurch.org](http://www.roxburychurch.org)

[www.ctucc.org](http://www.ctucc.org)

[www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)

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