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THE UNITED CHURCH OF ROWAYTON
64th Annual Meeting, February 7, 2016

OFFICERS FOR 2015

Moderator	Des McLaughlin
Clerk	Bill Peltz
General Treasurer	Peg Mullaney
Business Manager	Lou Froelich

STATISTICAL REPORT

Total Adult Members on rolls as of December 31, 2014	377
Inactive Members Removed from Church Records During 2015	8
Transfers Out During 2015	5
Members Deceased	12
Members Received During 2015	14
Confirmands Received in 2015	8
Adult Members on rolls as of December 31, 2015	374
Baptisms	17
Weddings	3
Funeral and Memorial Services	16

Members and Friends who have died in 2015

Douglas A. Bora Sr.	Robert Pettus
Tina Horne	Robert Ready
Betty Longley	Bea Richardson
Tucker Machette	Margaret (Gary) Richardson
Diana McFarlin	Hubert (Hugh) Stommel
Lucille Marshall	Frank Sullivan
James Mulhearn	Frances Vietmeyer
Philip Penberthy	Phil Vietmeyer



The Church is the Church not when its bills are paid. The Church is the Church not when its pews are full. Those are nice things for a church to be able to say about itself, but they are not necessarily the metrics by which we measure our value, our worth, our success.

The Church is the Church when lives are changed. It is the Church when it inspires people to use their time, and resources to serve the common good. It is the Church when it helps people love themselves, their God and their neighbor.

(From *Beyond Resistance: The Institutional Church Meets the Postmodern World*. by The Rev. John C. Dorhauer, general minister and president of the United Church of Christ.)

This Annual Report reflects another year in the life of our Family of Faith. Unlike many churches we are able to say that our bills are paid and that (most Sundays) the pews are full, however, as John Dorhauer points out, more importantly, we are a Church that inspires and helps people!! We are a Church that changes lives!!!

I am grateful for our staff and leadership who help us be the church we are. This year's Stewardship theme is, "We are a Community of Givers." Our staff and leadership truly give from their hearts. As you read the reports say a prayer of thanks for any name you read. Look at the staff listing and say a prayer of thanks for our staff. It is a blessing to share this ministry with them. Staff: Marsha Hall, Kris Jenkins, Sally Stansbury, Wayne Gamache, Lou Froelich, Judi Livingston and Officers: Des McLaughlin, Bill Peltz, Peg Mullaney, Lou Froelich. As Judi and I move into our 30th year, having been called here in July 1986, we are feeling so loved and supported. Here's my prayer of thanks for our Family of Faith:

*Dear God, thank you for those who live out their faith
with kindness and care, shining your light,
as they share your love with a world in need. Amen.*

With Love,

John

FROM THE LAY LEADER

*“We are a Christian community,
dedicated to welcoming all who seek a relationship with God,
to sharing God’s Word and love
and to nurturing all in their journey of faith.”*

As I go into my second year as your Moderator and Lay Leader I feel a sense of peace with where we are as a Family of Faith. Our Church is strong and growing. Our members are diverse and engaged in our Church, our community and our activities.

Our Church is strong because Pastor John continues to inspire and lead us to new heights on our journey of faith through his sermons, his dedication to his ministry, his humor and his understanding of our strengths, weaknesses and needs. We are better people because of him and he is loved.

Our Church is strong because we have a caring and dedicated staff that do all the work that keeps us functioning and focused on our journey of faith.

Our Church is strong because of all the members who give their time and talents to lead and serve on the many Boards and Committees and whose work allows us to realize and surpass our goals as a Church and as a contributor to our surrounding communities.

Our Church is strong because each Sunday it is filled with soaring and inspirational music, singing and bells from all of our choirs and bell ringers.

Our Church is strong because of “all” the volunteers who make possible the many programs we have such as the Caregiving Ministry, the Prayer Shawl Ministry, the Tag Sale, the Silent Auction, the Youth Program, our Sunday School Teachers, our Mission Trips and many other programs too numerous to mention.

Our Church is strong because each Sunday we get to see our youngest members, the children, sit in rapt attention to Pastor John. We get to see an extraordinary interaction of teaching, joy and love.

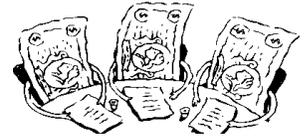
I remember many years ago when a group of us drafted the Mission Statement reprinted above. As I recall it took a great deal of discussion and time before we agreed and came up with the final wording. There are many key words, concepts and statements in the Mission Statement, each with very important meanings for The United Church of Rowayton.

I read the Mission Statement every week I am in Church. For me it says everything about who we are and what we aspire to be. And after what must be at least 15 years since we introduced our Mission Statement I am more convinced than ever that the most important word in it is one of the smallest. That word is “all.”

Our Church is strong because we “all” come together in this open and affirming environment.

Our Church is strong because we “all” travel on our journey of faith together.

Respectfully Submitted,
R. Desmond McLaughlin
Moderator and Lay Leader



BOARD OF HOUSEHOLD CONCERNS

The Board of Household Concerns is responsible for all aspects of the Church's finances including the setting of budgets, revenue and support, monitoring of expenditures, managing the Church's endowment and other invested funds and maintaining the Church's physical property, plant and equipment. Committees and Sub-committees that report to the Board include: Investment, Stewardship and Property, Plant and Equipment.

Each Board member serves a three-year term. For 2015, members were: Billie Anker, myself, Anne Campbell, Frank Jenkins, Rob Lamendola, Tammy Langalis, Pete Ludwig, Heather MacLeod, Graham Powell, Tom Robinson, Shawn Sullivan and Chris Wittstock. Church officers and others with financial responsibility also attend meetings: Jim Clark, Chair of the Investment Committee; Lou Froelich, Business Manager and Peg Mullaney, Treasurer. In addition, meetings are attended by Des McLaughlin, Moderator and John Livingston, Pastor.

BUDGET: The final budget for 2015 reflected a less than 1% increase in spending vs. 2014. There were no significant “surprises” on the expenditures side for the year and, due largely to savings in heating oil more than offsetting above budget spending for snow removal, revenue and support will exceed expenditures for the year.

While there are other sources of income, the Church depends primarily on annual giving to support its programs. For 2015, pledges exceeded the budget target of \$405,000 and, as of November 30th, approximately \$390,000 of that amount had been received—with the expectation that the bulk of remaining outstanding pledges would be received.

In terms of the 2016 Proposed Budget, which is included in this report, while there are some minor changes in proposed expenditures by category, the Proposed Budget is essentially unchanged vs. 2015.

STEWARDSHIP: Tammy Langalis is leading the Stewardship campaign for the third year in a row and I am pleased to note that, as of year end 2015, 132 pledges have been received totaling \$336,480 against a target of \$400,000. So once again, we are optimistic that our goal will be met or exceeded.

Speaking as Co-Chair, the financial support of the Congregation has been a highlight. Not having to worry about whether stewardship targets will be achieved, adequacy of cash balances and having to consider program spending cuts is a real blessing to those involved in the financial operations of our Church. As a final note on the success of recent stewardship campaigns, the Board decided that the budgeted cash transfer of \$38,000 from Endowment to fund operations in 2015 did not have to be made. This is the first year that it has not been necessary to make such transfer!

INVESTMENTS: Reflecting what was a very volatile year in financial markets, the market value of the Church's investment portfolio stood at approximately \$1,880,000 as of October 31st. Factoring in cash withdrawals for capital improvements, performance for the first 10 months of the year was essentially flat. Performance was in line with its peer group but lagged its comparable index. This is to be expected for an actively managed portfolio, such as ours, with social parameters (no tobacco, etc.).

TAG SALE AND FUNDRAISING: Due to the efforts of the Fund Raising Sub-committee, the Church's Tag Sale activity was reorganized and re-energized—with the result that over \$24,000 in support of 2015 operations was raised. Plans are to continue with the Tag Sale and the Silent Auction in alternating years.

Our policy continues to be one of not including any anticipated Tag Sale/fund raising monies in the annual operating budget.

The Fund Raising Sub-committee was dissolved. Anyone with a proposed fund raising idea should contact any member of the Board.

PROPERTY, PLANT AND EQUIPMENT: As noted in the prior year report, this aspect of the Church's operations is now more organized and focused. Co-Chair Rob Lamendola and Board member Tom Robinson periodically update a Property, Plant and Equipment Improvement List. Projects are listed by building and prioritized. No projects are added or deleted without the approval of the Board.

The Parsonage was the main focus in 2015:

- Interior wood floors refinished
- Upgrade HVAC—installation of air conditioning system
- Replace refrigerator
- Installation of new oil tank
- Repair chimney mortar
- Insulate entire house

Additional projects will be undertaken in spring 2016 when weather permits.

The Sanctuary roof was inspected in August and it was determined that, while some shingles are in need of replacement, the roof is basically good for another 10 years or so. The cracked concrete on the porch and side entrance was repaired and the porch painted and sealed. Cracked flagstone walkways were also repaired.

Other projects in the works: replacement of the floor and stair carpeting in the Meeting House, repair/replacement of the fencing around the playground (hopefully with cost shared with the Nursery School) and fencing on both sides of Emig Park.

RECOGNITION AND THANKS:

- On behalf of Rob Lamendola, Co-Chair, and myself: a thank you to our fellow Board members for their service—especially to those who “volunteered” to take minutes.
- Our Church financial officers—Lou Froelich, Business Manager and Peg Mullaney, Treasurer—for all the time and effort they devote to the Church and the accurate and timely financial reports that make the Board's job that much easier.
- Moderator Des McLaughlin for his direction and oversight.
- Tammy Langalis for shouldering the Stewardship campaign for three years in a row!
- Veronica Lamendola for taking on a Tag Sale leadership role and all of our Tag Sale participants.
- Anne Campbell for research and counsel on property matters.
- Office Manager Kris Jenkins for everything she does to assist our efforts.
- Rob Lamendola for creating and keeping the Property, Plant and Equipment Improvement List up to date so that we don't lose sight of things.
- Frank Mullaney for quarterbacking the survey of the Sanctuary roof—and covering the cost!
- Pastor John for guiding us on our faith journey,
- Members of the Congregation whose financial support and participation make this Church all it is.

Respectfully submitted,

Gehr Brown
Co-Chair
Board of Household Concerns

2015 FINANCIAL SECRETARY REPORT



Total Receipts

Pledges Paid	\$349,636
Unpledged Contributions, Plate, Church School	27,768
Rentals	50,870
2014 Pledges	8,249
Fundraisers	24,083
2015 Pledges paid in 2014	65,133
 Total	 \$525,739
 2016 Pledges Paid in Advance	 126,105
Endowment Income	0
 Grand Total	 \$651,844



TREASURER'S REPORT as of December 31, 2015

Fairfield County Checking Account	\$135,033.84
Fairfield County Money Market Account	\$124,064.84
Amerprise Financial	\$101.02
Total	\$259,199.70

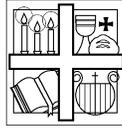
Benevolence Checking	
Deacon's Fund	\$2,125.16
Mission Trip	\$1,725.15
Outreach	\$150.63
Sabbatical Fund	\$9,891.29
Total	\$13,892.23

Capital Checking	
Capital Fund (Depreciation)	\$5,405.12
Memorial Gifts	\$5,579.21
Total	\$10,984.33

Flower Fund	\$4,642.08
Memorial Garden Checking	\$129.11

Schwab Unrestricted Account	\$167,302.70
Schwab Restricted Account	\$60,815.55
Schwab Memorial Garden Account	\$27,447.70
Schwab Investment Account	\$39,436.96
(Includes Rainy Day, Memorial, Other Unrestricted Dollars)	
Total	\$295,002.91

Proposed Budget for 2016				
		ACTUAL	BUDGET	PROPOSED
INCOME		2015	2015	2016
	Actual Pledges Received	\$414,769	\$395,000	\$400,000
	Anticipated Pledges			
	Building Rental	\$23,370	\$25,000	\$20,000
	Transfer from Endowment	\$0	\$38,000	\$38,000
	Nursery School	\$27,500	\$27,500	\$27,500
	Plate/Unpledged Contributions	\$27,768	\$21,500	\$21,500
	Fundraisers	\$24,083	\$0	\$0
	TOTAL:	\$517,490	\$507,000	\$507,000
EXPENSES				
Board of Christian Education				
	Class Activities and Curriculum, Youth and Confirmation Programs, Special Events, Child Care, Adult Ed	\$5,523	\$7,000	\$7,000
Board of Christian Outreach				
		\$47,900	\$47,900	\$47,900
Board of Deacons				
	Spiritual Development, Sabbatical, Music Program Development, Supplies, Instrument Maintenance and Special Programs	\$9,837	\$10,100	\$10,100
Salary and Benefits				
	Clergy and Staff including Director of Music, Children's Choir Director, Office Manager, Business Manager, Maintenance Manager and Director of Christian Education	\$277,143	\$286,200	\$286,200
Administration				
	Office Expenses, Communications (Telephone, Website), Payroll Taxes, Legal and Auditing, Insurance, Advertising Stewardship and Social Committees	\$50,217	\$50,000	\$50,000
Plant and Facilities				
	Heating Oil, Electricity and other Utilities, and General Maintenance of House of Worship, Meeting House and Parsonage	\$84,474	\$100,800	\$98,300
Capital Repairs				
		\$4,800	\$5,000	\$7,500
	TOTAL:	\$479,894	\$507,000	\$507,000



BOARD OF DEACONS

The United Church of Rowayton Board of Deacons enjoyed a meaningful and productive 2015. We appreciate the guidance and leadership of our Pastor, John Livingston.

We thanked outgoing Deacons: Mark Sattler, Kerry McFarlin and Julie Begos. We welcomed new Deacons: George Albano, Dan Borgman, Carolyn Snyder and Roger Wachnicki. Diane Albano and Neville Peltz were designated Co-Chairpersons. Also serving as Deacons for the year were Jessica Knowles, Nancy Loomis, Lynne Pratt, Caroline Robinson, Bill Sarr and Sara Sykes.

Each meeting we are involved with updates from Caregiving, Music, Altar, Prayer Shawl (the “Knitisters”), Christian Education, Outreach, Social, Financial/Stewardship and Worship.

Prayer Shawl ministry knitted hats, mittens and scarfs to be sent to the reservation in South Dakota and hats for the cancer center at Norwalk Hospital. The shawl cabinet is fully stocked and the committee is searching for new projects to continue their good work.

In April we reviewed the protocol for emergencies and fires. This included the location of the fire pull boxes, fire extinguishers, choking poster and landline phone. This led to the discussion, installation and training for a defibrillator now located in the Meeting House.

The Board of Deacons approved a Sabbatical for Pastor John to be taken during May, June and July. He was here (by his choice) to perform Sunday services but did not attend weekly meetings during those three months. He did not preach every Sunday but was available for real pastoral concerns.

In November the Caregiving Ministry hosted an informational session with Margo Meeker entitled “Is Getting Older Getting You Down?” It was very well-attended.

Always up for discussion is the need for ushers, acolytes and people to host Fellowship Hour. If you have any interest in participating or ideas to help generate interest please let any Deacon know.

Other highlights: On March 1, a total of 15 fourth graders received First Communion; March 8, the first ‘Soup, Salad and Simple Lenten Worship’ was well attended; May 3, Confirmation Sunday; June 14, the annual ‘Jazz Service’ directed by our own David Snyder; June 14, High School Senior Recognition and the Jonathan Wildman Scholarship presentation; Summer Worship was held in Pinkney Park with Pastor John officiating in July and Holly Adams officiating in August; Oct. 25, ‘Blessing of the Animals’ was held inside the Church for the first time with 40 dogs, two cats and a turtle, along with a number of stuffed animals, being blessed; November 1, ‘Pastor Appreciation Sunday’ with John receiving a basket of notes and gifts along with a masterful painting of John and our Church painted by Matt Wachnicki; November 16, New Member Gathering; December 4, fifteen New Members joined along with an Advent Pancake Breakfast following service, and the annual Tree Lighting followed by pizza and cookies that night; and December 13, the annual ‘Live Nativity Pageant.’

And, of course, that does not include all of the special planning that goes into Lent, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Easter, Advent, Christmas and all of the special events that our Church provides.

Personally, I would like to thank all of the Deacons for their hard work and commitment in assisting Pastor John to make our Church the special place that is.

Respectfully submitted,
Diane Albano, Chairperson

♥ CAREGIVING MINISTRY ♥
Dedicated to listening and keeping in touch

MISSION STATEMENT

The Caregiving Ministry of The United Church of Rowayton is dedicated to utilizing its spiritual gifts in a shared ministry that provides for the well-being of God’s people. Caregivers are caring Christian friends who listen, understand, accept, and pray for and with care receivers who are experiencing the joys and sorrows of life.



Caregivers demonstrate love and commitment and strengthen relationships with everyone around them. This past year we were happy to add four new members to our Ministry: Petrea Poler, Lynne Pratt, Patrick Steele and Shawn Sullivan. They join Diane Albano, Billie Anker, Stephanie Close, Debbie Douglas, Carol Haskell (Card Ministry), Heather Hopkins, Ray Meurer, Graham Powell, Caroline Robinson, Linda Scull, Donna Wachnicki, Roger Wachnicki, and Michael Ziegler. We’d like to offer a big thank you to all of our dedicated members.

Our Caregiving by Cooking group was formed in 2012 and continues to make meals for distribution to our Family of Faith when a prepared meal is most welcome. Caroline Robinson recognized the need for this part of our Ministry and has once again gathered individuals during the year to cook and keep our Church freezer stocked with meals. What a wonderful addition this has been to our Ministry—thank you, Caroline!

On November 1 we presented to the entire congregation a program titled “Is Getting Older Getting You Down? An Informal Discussion of Depression and Aging.” Margo Meeker, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Psychotherapist, and Life Coach, led this program that covered what is normal, what is not, and what you can do about it.

This past year we were able to join in the celebration of two Church members who celebrated their 90th birthdays and one member who celebrated her 100th birthday—perfect examples of the joys of life!!

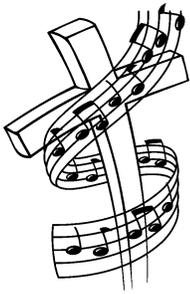
All of our work is strictly confidential.

Respectfully submitted,
Joanne Brown and Ann DiLeone, Co-Chairpersons

Caregiving Ministry



MUSIC DEPARTMENT



Time for another Annual Report regarding the music program at The United Church of Rowayton. Is there anything new and interesting? For yet another year, the Senior Choir continues to thrive serving as an integral part of worship on Sundays with special music during Christmas, Easter, Interfaith Service, etc. Their dedication continues week after week, year after year. They continue to support each other musically and spiritually.

The Adult Handbell Choir is thriving and playing so well. Their hard work and dedication is contagious. The Youth Bell Choir and Children's Choir have children faithful to the programs and their Church. They are "quick studies" learning repertoire easily. Parents should be commended for their continued efforts to get children to rehearsals and Sunday performances.

Looking back on previous Annual Reports, there are so many similarities to this year's report. The reports are dotted with words like "talent," "dedication" and "support." Consistency is the hallmark of a successful program. The music program **THRIVES** because of those words written each year - - talent, dedication, support.

Respectfully submitted,
Marsha Hall

ALTAR COMMITTEE

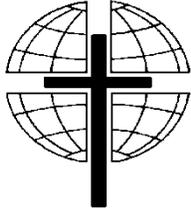
The Altar Committee continues to provide Altar flowers for Sunday worship as well as carnations for Mother's Day. We also care for the plants in the sanctuary. We decorate the sanctuary at Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving with plants, flowers and greenery as the season requires. We provide and care for the Advent wreath as well as all the outside wreaths. Our funding continues to come from the Congregation throughout the year in the form of memorial flowers for loved ones or the celebration of a particular joy. We do not receive any funding from the annual Church budget. Any surplus monies from these gifts, particularly at Christmas and Easter, form the basis for our regular expenditures. Cost of flowers has increased, as everything else, but so far we are still OK for funds.



The Committee members are the same as last year, namely Stephanie Close, Kate Davies, Kathy Draper, Lynne Pratt, Caroline Robinson, Danielle Holmes, Beverly Viele, and myself, June Strubinger. The Deacons supply the communion and baptismal roses. The Committee in a combined effort took charge of the Harvest Festival decorating. It was decided to extend the decorations by another week as it seems a shame to put so much effort for only one Sunday. It is always a fun challenge to express our creativity. Everything except the floral plants and Altar arrangement was donated for the occasion by the members of the Committee. We enjoy making the Church look festive. The planter care has been handled by Stephanie Close. Plants are replaced as needed to keep the planter attractive. There are extra plants to care for at Christmas and Easter which are later given away. I'm still trying to get one person to take charge of the whole job.

We thank the Congregation for its contributions throughout the year. Their gifts allow us to provide a pleasant setting for worship each Sunday. We are grateful for their generosity.

Respectfully submitted,
June Strubinger
Altar Committee Chairperson



BOARD OF CHRISTIAN OUTREACH

The Board of Christian Outreach thanks the Congregation for making a difference through volunteering, donating goods and providing monetary support to elevate the needy in our community. We had a very successful 2015!

In 2015, \$37,900 was distributed principally to non-profit organizations serving Norwalk residents. Attached find a list of the 2015 grant recipient organizations, its general mission and amount of financial assistance provided. Each Board member interviewed the agencies assigned to them, made a report and recommendation for funding. Attention was given to the amount of each organization's overhead as a percentage of revenue as well as its strength in raising funds from other resources. This allowed us to direct UCR dollars to groups and causes that needed the funds the most and have the greatest impact. We are thrilled to include Hill Top Homes and Norwalk Grassroots Tennis.

The UCR Public Relations team really helped Board this year through various articles and TV spots. Their marketing efforts increased Norwalk's community awareness to UCR and the Board. Our Backpack Drive had over 75 backpacks for the Department of Children and Families (DCF), and around 110 bags for Thanksgiving dinners for DCF. We collected and distributed over 80 bags of food for Norwalk Person-to-Person (P2P) and 50 White Doves for Norwalk P2P children to receive a toy, book and game.

We were very proud to stand before the UCR Congregation in November to explain what we does and to have David Kimani from Norwalk Grassroots Tennis discuss the impact of our funding to his organization. We really can make a difference!!

Please join me in thanking the outreach team for their time and hard work: Bill Close, Fouad Onbargi, June Foster, Betsy English, Thomas Guarcello, Tammy Langalis and Mark Scott. We would also like to thank Anne Campbell for organizing the White Dove program.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah Ritchey, Chair

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN OUTREACH BENEVOLENCE 2015

Americares Free Clinic	\$1,500.00
Provides walk-in care for underinsured clients	
Appleby School-Based Health Clinics	\$3,000.00
Provides on-site physical and mental health services to adolescents at local schools	
Child Guidance Center of Mid-Fairfield County	\$2,500.00
Provides comprehensive mental health services to local children and their families	
Carver Foundation	\$2,500.00
Helps children reach their greatest potential by providing educational, social and recreational programs.	
Community Plates	\$2,000.00
Collection of fresh produce and prepared meals for distribution to the “food-insecure”	
Domestic Violence Crisis Center, Inc.	\$2,500.00
Helps those involved in physical, emotional and sexual abuse	
ElderHouse, Inc.	\$2,500.00
Provides seniors with a safe and supportive environment	
Family and Children’s Agency – summer camp	\$5,000.00
This fund sends approximately 25 pre- and early-adolescents to summer camps	
Family ReEntry, Inc.	\$3,500.00
Works with those who are incarcerated and the recently released to re-integrate into society	
Friends of Hill Top Homes	\$1,000.00
Keystone House	\$1,500.00
Helps people with mental illnesses remain in society	
Norwalk Grassroots Tennis	\$1,500.00
Improves the lives of underprivileged youth through the ideals of Arthur Ashe.	
Norwalk Meals on Wheels	\$2,000.00
Provides 2 meals/day to Norwalk residents not meeting their nutritional needs	
Open Door Emergency Shelter	\$4,000.00
Addresses the needs of the homeless and working poor	
Our Churches Wider Mission	\$2,000.00
This contribution to basic support is sent to our Conference	
Person to Person	\$2,000.00
Provides food, clothing and financial assistance to needy Norwalk families	
Silver Lake	\$900.00
UCC – CT Conference Retreat Center; Serves up to 1,300 youths	
Simply Smiles	\$2,000.00
Dedicated to providing brighter futures for children specifically in South Dakota and Oaxaca, Mexico	
STAR, Lighting the Way	\$2,000.00
Provides services, beginnings at birth, for mentally challenged clients	
Thanksgiving Gift Certificates to Dept. of Children & Families	\$1,500.00
For turkeys and other fresh foodstuffs	
Visiting Nurse & Hospice of Fairfield County	\$2,500.00
Provides home health and hospice care services	

Total: \$47,900.00



FROM THE DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

(with thanks to our other Board members: Brian Anderson, Rob Ayala,
Debbie Douglas, Alyssa Sarr and Emily Zerega)

“There are so many ways of being happy that it is funny how some people have to be unhappy”
Wendy McKernan, 12, from **A Child’s View of Happiness**

We have so much to learn from what comes out of the mouths of children. 2015 has been a year that has generated much happiness for the Congregation of The United Church of Rowayton. The Board of Christian Education emphasizes the development of both our children and our adults.

We kicked off our Church year in September with our annual Rally Day- an event filled with laughter as everybody stood in line for their ice cream and lots of toppings.

In October, we celebrated our second annual World Communion Sunday by asking our parishioners to bring in a favorite food item (savory or sweet) from their country of origin. Everything was delicious and we were lucky enough to collect some of the recipes. International music and national flags only added to the festivities.

In November, Dana Basta created our second annual Thankful Tree which included a picket fence, a pumpkin and a dove flying overhead. Our church members were completely in the spirit to fill out their leaf to say what they were thankful for and attaching it to the tree. All the quotes from those leaves will be posted in the *February/March Church Newsletter*.

The events in December were met with much anticipation. Advent Sunday was the day of two wonderful occasions - our annual pancake breakfast (with lots of pancakes, berries, whipped cream, coffee and juice to go around). Don’t forget everyone’s favorite - 30 pounds of bacon were enjoyed by all.

In the evening there was joyous caroling, a beautiful Tree Lighting and a Pizza Party with pizza and salad for dinner. Dessert followed with cookies, hot chocolate and candy canes handed out by Santa. The faces of all those who attended either or both of these occasions were filled with delight.

Our Church School, which represents Pre-Kindergarten through 3rd grade and is supported by our wonderful volunteer teachers, receives praise for all that is offered to our young students. Our Youth Group is a great alternative for those in 6th-8th grade and is held on Sunday evenings once a month in the Fellowship Hall.

As we head into 2016 there are wonderful monthly events organized and hosted by the Board of Christian Education. We hope you enjoy them all!



Church School

All the best and Happy New Year,
Sally Stansbury and Val Harden

LAY DELEGATE TO THE CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND FAIRFIELD-WEST UCC ASSOCIATION

The United Church of Rowayton is one of seventeen churches belonging to the Fairfield West Association of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ. Former UCR member Holly Adams, now Pastor of the United Church of Christ, Norwalk, is our Moderator, and I serve as Treasurer. The Association asked me to be a delegate of the Connecticut Conference at the 30th General Synod, which was held in Cleveland at the end of June. Synod is the governing body of our greater church, and approximately 4,000 gathered from around the world for this meeting. We elected John Dorhauer to be our President and General Minister, and were captivated by his vision for the future of the UCC. We deliberated on ten resolutions. We delegates were asked to take our experiences back to our churches. I want to share just two of them in this report. One resolution called for changing the racially demeaning name of the Washington National Football League team. “How silly,” one person said to me. Is it really? I talked with Toni Buffalo and learned why the name is so demeaning. *Red skin* is a term that goes back to the days of bounty hunting, back to the days when whites proved they had killed “Indians” by nailing pieces of their skin to a board. Silly? No. Truly, the name is horrendous. The most controversial resolution called for the divestment of holdings in companies profiting from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian Territories. This resolution had flaws, and everyone knew it would strain our relations with our Jewish friends. But the UCC has a long and proud history of recognizing where justice is needed and supporting marginalized persons, and so the resolution was passed. It was a powerful statement that Israel is oppressing its Palestinian neighbors and a strong statement of support for our Palestinian brothers and sisters. Telling a friend that he is behaving like a bully takes courage, something the UCC has in abundance.

In October, the Conference held its annual meeting, at which time I was elected Moderator. Conference Minister Kent Siladi spoke about the importance of leadership in our churches. The Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer declared that our church plays a vital role in the world. He likes Peter’s realization in Acts 10: “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality.” The question, Dorhauer said, is not whether we can accept the other but can we accept a God who already has. This sentiment is expressed in our Church’s open invitation: *No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.* A renewal of the Conference’s twenty-one year old partnership with the Kyung-Ki Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea was signed. Delegates overwhelmingly voted a resolution that calls for the state General Assembly to make their original birth certificates available to all adult adoptees. Under current law, those born before 1983 can only see a substitute certificate bearing the names of their adopted parent(s). These people are, thereby, denied critical information about their medical history and cultural heritage. At the end of the meeting, church leaders, one of whom was our Moderator, Des McLaughlin, were commissioned and anointed with oil.

William H. Peltz
Lay Delegate

HISTORIANS COMMITTEE

The narrative history of our Church for 2015 has been completed for review and approval by the Pastor with an eye to it being published about the time of the Annual Meeting. Copies will be available in the House of Worship for anyone interested.

Maintenance of the files continues, as does gathering of new material. We encourage anyone to offer clippings, photos or other items of possible interest for consideration and request their source and date be clearly indicated. Such items should be placed in the Church Office "slot" labeled Flowers and Historical.

Respectfully submitted,
Michael Ziegler

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

The Memorial Committee has received gifts for the year of 2015 in memory of the following:

Betty Longley	Jim Mulhearn
Douglas A. Bora, Sr.	Diana McFarlin
Philip Penberthy	

Respectfully submitted,
Lois Froelich

MEMORIAL GARDEN COMMITTEE

The Memorial Garden is for past and present members of The United Church of Rowayton, and their immediate families: spouse, partner, siblings, children and parents. Applications for a reservation are available in the Church Office. Any member of the Memorial Garden Committee will be happy to answer any questions that may arise.

Last year, 2015, there was one new reservation and ten interments. The Memorial Garden now has 235 members, with 122 interments. With the current Garden configuration, there are 38 available spaces.

All of the Memorial Garden funds have come from reservations of Church members and contributions specifically designated for the Garden. The Memorial Garden continues to be financially responsible for its maintenance and upkeep.

The Memorial Garden Committee thanks our Church Family for their continued support for this beautiful project.

Chris Basta	Kate Davies	Caroline Robinson
Marcia Smith	Emily Zerega	

Respectfully submitted,
Michael A. Poler



NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The purpose of the Nominating Committee is to identify, encourage and enlist members of the Congregation to serve on the Boards and Committees of the Church as well as individuals to serve in Delegate and Officer positions.

Candidates will be presented on the proposed slate at the Annual Meeting held in February. Thank you to all who have agreed to serve.

The Committee is always open to welcoming members of the Congregation who are interested in becoming involved in the Church and in the various activities of Christian outreach and service. If you are interested in serving on a Committee or Board or would like to recommend someone for consideration to serve, please contact one of the members listed below.

Currently serving on the Committee are: Stephanie Close, Courtney Oldrin, Bill Sarr and Meggan Douglas Warren.

Respectfully submitted,
Courtney Oldrin

SOCIAL COMMITTEE

The Social Committee had another successful year for 2015.

There were the usual four events:
March--Winter BBQ
May--Spring into Summer
September--Welcome Back From Summer
December--Cookie Tasting



We are looking forward to planning another successful and fun year for 2016.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Fritsch, Chairperson



PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

The Public Relations Committee distributed 11 press releases about Church events, published six *Newsletters* that were sent to Church members, posted three videos on YouTube, one video on the church website, and advertised weekly sermon topics in *The Hour* and *The Darien Times*.

The press releases were emailed to area newspapers and TV about the Holy Week Services, a Special Music Service, the Giant Tag Sale, the Wildman Scholarship Winners, the Backpack Drive, the Blessing of the Animals, the Thanksgiving Food Drive, the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, the White Doves program and new costumes for the Christmas Living Nativity Pageant.

The *Newsletters* were published by Kris Jenkins with the support of Board members, Committee members, Church staff and others in the Congregation who contributed articles.

The videos can be seen by going to YouTube and searching on United Church of Rowayton. One video is about the rehearsal for the Christmas pageant and another is a video taken by Bill Peltz of the pageant itself. A third video inviting people to attend the Blessing of the Animals was posted by Bill Peltz. In addition, a video taken during the Blessing of the Animals was posted on the Church's website.

The press releases were based on reporting by committee member Joanne Schreiber. Photography was provided by Sandy Aldrich, Bill Peltz and David Siever. Debbie Douglas used social media such as Facebook to give added distribution to the press releases. All Church members are encouraged to post comments about Church activities on their own Facebook page or other social media.

Special thanks go to Sarah Ritchey and Anne Campbell of the Board of Christian Outreach for working with the Public Relations Committee on several press releases. The Thanksgiving Food Drive release resulted in an interview on Channel 12 with Sarah Ritchey. The story was seen by Stew Leonard's, which immediately donated 20 turkeys to the drive.

The Committee welcomes ideas from Church members for press releases or photo opportunities. Also, if you see something of interest about the Church, take a photo using your smartphone and send it to me at jmeurer@optonline.net.

Respectfully submitted,
Ray Meurer