

Comments from the Questionnaires

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ONE FINAL NOTE: EVERYONE'S HANDWRITING IS NOT PERFECTLY LEGIBLE, WE HAVE DONE OUR BEST TO BE ACCURATE IN THE TRANSCRIPTION.

The First Congregational Church (Ridgefield) 103 Main Street Ridgefield, CT 06877

I want the church and people to heal and I hope and pray we find a new, inspiring pastor to shepherd and inspire me in my faith journey.

I really hope we find someone who is as spiritually grounded and inspiring as I find Paul.

...

I hope the members of this church will become more trusting of each other, respectful of differences and accepting of the diversity of viewpoints. Otherwise, I see no vision for the church, unless members can acknowledge a common desire to follow the teachings of Christ. A new pastor alone cannot install a sense of mission. Instead the nucleus of lay leaders and the regular attendees will need to slowly build thrust, overcome hostility and focus on the messages of the Bible, not the malicious gossip of the moment. A spiritual commitment to, and practice of, Christian principles (combined with increased stewardship) can retain and attract members (and perhaps foster the return of former members.) Finally, those disenchanted members must reconcile themselves to the fact that we cannot replicate the talent or match the personality of a Clayton Lund or a Bill Nigh. But we can recognize the gifts of a new pastor and be supportive of the role.

...

My wish is that we find a vibrant, energetic full time pastor that can bring the bible alive as well as the congregation. That they have enthusiasm that is contagious and motivates us to expand our faith.

That the congregation can come together and want to get to know each other and support each other. Want to spend time together and build friendships and networks. That we know each other.

The Church is a place you want to be and you feel welcomed and valued.

It was hard to answer some of the questions ...was it based on the current interim pastor our previous pastor, etc. so I gave two answers.

...

Dynamic minister who attracts newcomers to Sunday worship and delivers intellectual, interesting sermons to the congregation.

...

I would like to see the First Congregational Church of Ridgefield CT not have any more financial problems. (Never Again!!!)

I am hoping that our next senior pastor is a charismatic and inspirational speaker (with sermons) and leader similar in style to Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. In the future, I hope this next pastor stays at least 10 years. Another thing I wanted to mention is that sermons have to be very interesting to keep the congregation's attention. Humor is not a bad thing either – laughing is healthy and to me very spiritual. ??? [word not legible] a sermon I want my attention to be on what the senior pastor is saying, not when will this be done.

In our church's future, I would also like to see a continuation of the Wednesday Night Fellowship Dinners as well as those adult programs (e.g., discover your gifts, Islam and Judaism, differences between those religions and Christianity). Some movie nights would also be fun, especially with popcorn and other snacks (drinks) – this could be done more often as a way to raise money for the church.

...

The church is good, It performs some good deeds, for me, it lacks spirituality. I've never really felt a true kinship with the congregants – management and professionals. Good people. Good intentions.

I don't really deserve to be giving any input. I stopped attending church when I went to college and only began again when we had children and wanted them to learn about God and Jesus and love. Reverend Nigh showed up at our house one day and we became members – albeit non-functioning ones.

...

I feel ambivalent about the church since Pastor Rosenberger left. A new senior pastor should be hired soon so the church can move forward with its ministry. The interim period seems to be taking too long and I find that I am not as interested in attending as I was in the past. Mark Allen would be a good choice for senior pastor. It is a shame that you are making him wait so long for the job.

...

Our prime effort for the near term should be focused on identifying and hiring a minister to lead the congregation – a person with a strong sense of faith who will strike a positive chord with the majority of the congregants. We should keep our aspiration basic at this time, that is to identify an effective minister to help us lead our daily lives – a person whose message we can confidently say after leaving church on a Sunday morning, "I hear a spiritual message today that will help me lead my life in a positive manner this week."

Secondly, since the spiritual needs of our children are very important, a minister should be able to establish a strong learning base for them. I do not believe at this time that we should get carried away with lofty ideals. Let's keep it as simple as possible and focus on our immediate needs.

With a good leader our dreams and desires will eventually be fulfilled.

We may not have to scour the countryside looking for the "perfect" person to minister our congregation. I believe that person to be right in our midst.

...

I have always felt comfortable in our church. I have never enjoyed a pastor more than Bill Nigh – though I was terribly upset by the "new members" welcomed in – who were so obsessively born again – it was uncomfortable for me. My children are in college or older, so I no longer have the energy to serve on committees – I did so consistently for years. I want to attend worship – hear a good sermon and listen and participate in a strong music program. I am happy following the traditions of the past.

...

I dream that our church is a beacon for the Lord in our town. I pray that everyone who comes to us (no matter if they join the church or not) would feel God's blessings and presence here. They would feel welcomed and embraced in a way that only the Lord's children can. I also pray that our congregants and programs bless the community, ??? [word not legible] and walk with outreach that truly comes from our faith.

To me, the "congregational concept," is totally man-made and therefore has no place in how I value this church. Unfortunately, I am aware that to some, our sect is what matters – I feel that we are all God's children and all Christians are one in their faith in Jesus Christ.

...

I like to come to church to find inspiration and strength for my everyday life, from the services.

...

I hope we will find a minister who can bring our congregation together. One who will get people excited about coming to church – and excited about giving. I hope that a minister specifically for youth will be hired – I think we are losing the interest of some of our teenagers. I hope for continued work – improvement of the children’s ministry.

...

A common vision of what it means to be a member of the FCCR church family. A less divisive, less “us vs. them” environment. An energizing youth program that creates a bond that extends beyond the wall of FCCR. Led by a passionate, compassionate, and skilled senior minister.

...

When my husband died, this church welcomed me and is now my home. I am unable to fully participate but enjoy the times I attend church. I can no longer drive and in my seventies am winding down. I wish the church all the best – it is a wonderful place, filled with loving people. God blesses it I know.

...

1. I hope this church learns to balance its budget.
2. I think we need one minister, 2 services 9:00 and 10:45.
3. We need to down size music ministers and have some hymns that all can sing.
4. I hope the church will see fit to have regular communion (passed at least once per month) like we had before the new regime. I have complained several times and I don’t like walking up the alter like the Catholics. I just leave before communion takes place now. I have been a member of this church for over 40 years and it is not the church I joined nor would I join at this time.
5. I don’t think we need to study the Islamic religion in 10 sessions. I know all I need to know and the Islamics only want to destroy all Christian and Jews. My son-in-law is an Iranian and he thinks they are crazy. I think we have better things to discuss.

...

Growth, Spirit filled growth. A leader that will raise up a congregation for works of service, unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature in the fullness of Christ. Growth – first to maturity then to numbers/members.

...

I see a church without hostility to each other
I see a church who moves new people to lay leadership roles, and not recycling the elders.
I see a church filled to capacity because the message “moves” one closer to Christ.”
I see a church filled with small lay lead ministries reaching out with excitement and joy to talk about anything and everything.
I see a church with no monetary needs because people want to give freely.
I see a church where children want to be because they are nurtured and fed.
I see a church where Jesus is truly at the center and love among members is inclusive.

...

My hope for First Congregational Church is that we remain true to the tradition and teaching/practices of our denomination, that we grow and prosper as a congregation with our new/future pastor, and leave the conflicts and hurts behind us as we look to the future. I am sure God will guide us on this journey.

...

I would like our church to have “guest” pastors in frequently to do the Sunday sermons so we can see new perspectives and hear the word from different angles. That will keep us open-minded and receptive to fresh ideas and new ways of thinking.
It would also spark curiosity and enthusiasm in the congregation to come and hear the “guest” pastor.
Hopefully, it would also deter members from heaping their heavy unrealistic expectation load on our new pastor.

...

Stamp out hypocrisy – the church is full of smug, self satisfied Sunday Christians – people who are very un-Christian during the week – lawsuits, judgmental, gossipy, care mostly about amassing personal wealth – greedy. Self righteous.

A good idea – But some of your leaders are the same hypocrites – I don't believe it will change the nature of the town.

Fix Question 12 on Page 4 – doesn't allow any answer except failing to take a stand. I think this a weakness of the Liberal Protestant church.

...

I hope we can regain enthusiasm. We are very lethargic, except in our music which is sometimes over the top.

I wish I had more belief that we will make changes that will help our church. We are focusing on the minister, but there are a lot of underlying issues – lots of hurt and animosity and lethargy. We gloss over things, tell untruths, and act dismissively of those with ideas different from our own.

I would like to know what commitment the church has for distributing the results of the survey. I suspect the councils and personnel committee will come up with a 50,000 view that in the end looks down to “no major changes needed.” I think this whole exercise is a smoke screen – the decision has already been made.

...

A new minister that has strong people skills that will bring the congregations together and challenge them to be the best they can be in ministering to each other and the community.

Not sure what you will really learn from this survey.

...

I hope we can find an inspiring senior minister who can bind the various groups in the church together.

...

I strive for the church to come together as a loving community of Christians. I feel that once everyone gets involved in the life of our church we will be strong. At that point, not only will we be able to lift each other up but we will be able to go out into the world and so the Lord's work. As the mother of three teenagers I hope that we adults can show them that all is possible in love and following Christ.

...

Selfishly. I hope that the church continues in its current mission and directive. I understand that the church is going through difficult times, spiritually and financially. However, I hope that this is cyclical and will correct itself ultimately with the right leadership for the church.

...

I would like to see the church become a place of little conflict. There will always be time of disagreement, but a church should be able to work things out as a congregation without hurt feelings and work together to make the church a place where people want to go.

...

That the church become a cohesive, unified body worshiping Jesus Christ, living in harmony and reaching out to the needy, locally and world wide.

...

My prayers for FCC of Ridgefield include a return to the caring, close camaraderie that once prevailed throughout the congregation.

I would like to have more opportunities to participate in small group discussions with trained leaders who can effectively curtail those who like to monopolize the conversation with little of value to say. These small groups would not be on going – no more than three or four sessions. This would prevent a person who has a full schedule from refraining from committing to a long term, drawn out, “extra” commitment.

The sermons have been very meaningful. May that continue into the future!

A bit tedious [survey] but understandably so. Quite thought provoking, which is a good and positive thing. We all need to have our cages rattled periodically!

...

That we will all volunteer and give more time to the church. All make a conscious effort to be more friendly and welcoming in our time at church. Try to get more fellowship activities going in the church.

...

Healing and growth.

Survey too long.

...

My prayer for FCC is to rise out of the ashes of anger, judgment and conditional love to embrace, truly embrace the word of God. With that acceptance and unconditional love for each other, the giving will come.

...

That we might stop fighting and start following Jesus. That we would honor and respect our ministers and staff. That we grow into a church that invites and inspires and encourages members to love and share the good news.

...

A strong church begins with a dynamic worship service. We need a minister who can challenge us, teach us and inspire us – and to speak the truth with love This is what I see as the key to our next five years.

...

I would like to see a robust congregation – large and embracing a diverse group of people. fellowship would become a large focus and people would respect and even support differing points of view. The church would enjoy a variety of new ideas re worship, music, sermons, activities and missions and not the rigid adherence to custom, tradition, conservative viewpoints that hinder the discovery of vibrant and invigorating atmosphere.

...

I would hope our church would help us to become a place where people who disagree could learn to love one another – because God first loved us.

...

Current problems of this church, in my opinion, are the result of weak, misguided or less than dynamic senior pastoral leadership for the past 16 or so years. Placement of a dynamic (not bombastic !!) senior minister will begin a rebuilding process for an unusually dedicated, diverse and eager congregation that will then lead the way

...

Some questions are ambiguous or mislead me to an answer that does not reflect my true feeling. Questions reflect current operation of our church under an interim senior minister as well as a temporary serious financial situation.

Example: under religious beliefs, question #4 on page 10, the religion of Islam alone is cause for a strongly disagree answer.

...

I would like to see the congregation as a whole come together and not have any divisions. It takes a lot of effort to let animosities go and think towards a church working together. Do not be a part of gossip and hear-say. It is very destructive.

...

A church whose membership comes together more as “ours” rather than as “multiple groups.” A caring church, caring for each other and all those beyond our membership.

An outgoing caring, easily “reached” senior minister. A leader with keen empathy.

A senior minister who effectively preaches, leads and inspires each of us to be better Christians.

A church and congregation which inspires others to want to join us in our journey of faith.

A congregation who through its love of Jesus and through the church gives freely and abundantly of its dollars to support the church, its programs, its outreach, its endowments.

...

To grow this church, the youth need to be included, involved, wanted and embraced. They need to be on boards and take place in ministries.

We are a wealthy community with “short arms.” Having money problems is a joke, we should be able to step up and help less fortunate ... Ridgefield and beyond. The home [word not legible] should be a base of our missions, and have a base for youth to come, enjoy fellowship and friends all week long, [word not legible] this is such a “transitional town.”

...

My wish for FCC is that we carefully and prayerfully consider who should be our senior pastor. The senior pastor is the key to harmony in a church family. That person should be charismatic; deeply spiritual and emotional centered; and must be approachable by everyone, 1 – 100 years of age. That person must deliver thoughtful, scholarly sermons, seeing the topic as universal the scripture will allow.

FCC should seriously reflect on the necessity and frequency of special appeals! It is impossible for most people to constantly give to every cause. At stewardship time one letter is sufficient. Parishioners should not be accosted by pledge envelopes in the pews. That is more unwelcoming! Never, ever, ask for money from the pulpit.

...

The church has been helpful in my own religious development, and music is my strongest approach to the divine. My hope is that our church might reach beyond the borders of Ridgefield, and make a difference in the world. I see the emptiness of popular culture and consumerism and I want my children to see beyond this. I see both fundamental Christians and fundamentalist Islamists moving the world backwards, making the world less civil and more dangerous for my children. I am angry about this, but see little effort by liberal Protestantism to combat this. I have one other comment relative to Christian education. My children have all been confirmed at First Congregational, with all the activities, Sunday school, etc. Each one of them has rejected Christianity as they have gone to college and beyond. I think our approach needs examination and re work. We may want to take some lessons from our Jewish neighbors. Some of the elements of the Jewish traditional education—such as individualized instruction – may be applicable to us.

...

My wish is that we finalize our senior minister decision. I think it is pathetic that it has taken us one year to do what I see as essentially nothing. We don't even have a search committee. We have a very talented assistant minister and I feel he should be make the senior minister. If he is not and he chooses to leave our church I will seriously consider leaving – and I have faithfully attended for many years.

I think that one of the major problems at our church is that, I for one and I know others, feel the same. Do not trust the people making the budget. I feel it is wrong to not reveal salaries and it was wrong to hire an interim minister when we didn't have enough money to do so.

...

1. A permanent senior pastor who is compassionate to all of the congregation, a people-person who cares about everyone and will visit people in need.

2. A congregation that comes together, realizes that there are differences of opinion, but they respect each other, as they listen, with love and caring in their hearts.

We need pastors who listen to all sides, not just what they feel is politically correct. There were to many voices crying out in the wilderness with serious concerns, no one listened. That is why we got in the fix we are in today.

...

A church that does not have financial problems. A minister who can excite and inspire the congregation thereby increasing membership. A much improved youth group with a youth director.

...

I have scarcely completed this survey. because I have not been active for quite some time. I do not feel qualified to answer these questions.

...

Through no fault of its own, FCC suffers compared to the church we belonged to for several years before moving here. We raised children there, served several terms as trustee or elders, listened to dynamic preachers and enjoyed a first class music program. It has been difficult to find the same level of appreciation here and we find ourselves drifting away.

...

I hope the church can build more faith and trust among the members of the congregation. I hope we can attract energetic leadership in our middle and high school youth groups. Thirdly, I look forward to fostering more service oriented programs.

The survey posed some very through provoking questions, particularly about areas of church life that I don't often think about.

...

I would like to see the church have an extroverted senior minister, as well as children and youth leaders. I would like to see more children's activities, children's sermons by the children's minister and bible based programs during weekdays for little ones. I would like to see our church gain an exciting momentum – emphasis on outreach and evangelism.

...

That church devotes its time to the fundamental truths of being a Christian. Solid in the word of God, lead by the Holy Spirit and placing the salvation of Jesus Christ at its core. We don't need to develop "user friendly" tactic ... Just be devoted to the support of each other and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with Joy and thanksgiving and beautiful music.

(Enough break out meetings ...)

...

Our congregation is extremely diverse in our religious requirements. A loving, caring, personable senior minister is what we need to unify our members. Hopefully, prayerfully we will find someone to lead us.

...

It seems to me that, at times, it is the views of the various committees that determine the direction of our church rather than the ministers. I think it should be the ministers overseeing the committees, not the other way around.

...

All members should remember it is God's church, not theirs. If one has an agenda please work it out with Christian guidance; do not disrupt the entire church to have one's own way.

...

For the congregation to be inspired and energized to work together for the church and community. I would like to hire a minister who helps us look at the church as God's house, filled with the Holy Spirit, empowered and called to ministries. We will trust and respect one another, allowing our minister to be a leader. Members will give up their own agendas and we will work for and love others as Christ asks.

...

I hope that we could have more unity within our church. I would pray that we get a strong minister that would have sermons that would deal with daily life.

...

Impact lives to do the will of God. Deepen our faith in God, Jesus, Holy Spirit. Have joyful, grateful worship. Be a beacon of hope, love, in our community.

...

I would like to see trust in lay leadership of the church. Support of ministers by congregation. If you cannot support the church, find a new church home.

Re-configure staff/ministers to fit our current income/pledges – number of ministers? -- part time assistant minister / youth leader.

...

My wish would be for this congregation to find a pastor who would inspire the members to be the cohesive church family that we once were. I believe that the church's attitude is hopeful now, and I want to see this enthusiasm continue. It is important that the church follow the tenets of The Congregational Church and new members should be aware of those tenets.

...

I hope our church can continue to come together as a community of faith. There has been great strides made in this direction. It needs to continue. We need not judge each other. We need not judge our pastors. See the good, live with compassion and grace – as God asks us to do. Church should be a positive, joyful place of worship, reflection, hope and fellowship. The future is bright.

...

1. Should fight homosexuality, abortion and other liberal ideas. 2. Outreach to legal, non English speaking immigrants.

1. There seems to be an inner circle that runs the church. 2. The columbarium was a waste of money.

...

I wish our church:

would get its financial house in order so we could focus on other things.

be realistic about its financial matters

be less resistant to change – adopt change more quickly

find a way to identify, inspire, motivate volunteers

would become less focused on each other and more focuses on service and missions

become a magnet for uncharted and spiritual respite for all members.

...

That we come together and work toward a more harmonious way of being together. That people can disagree without hostility. That we can find a shared vision of what kind of church we want to be.

...

-Get our fiscal affairs in order

-To expand our missions work, especially Pilot House

-To hire a full time youth minister or an assistant minister whose duties include youth ministry

-To reinstate a contemporary, youth based, Sunday service.

-Find ways to make youth participation much more visible to the congregation.

...

My hope is that our church membership will become more united and the divisions will be minimized. Everyone needs to work for the good of the church – not their own personal agendas. I think this is beginning to happen but I worry about the pastor coming to the church and having people focus on their own issues before the whole church.

...

To have a minister who can unite the church and bring back the fellowship, joy, energy it used to have. To become more involved in the church through bible study, fellowship, outreach programs and have a sense of community again.

Hire a new music minister.

...

Our church led by a caring, shepherding minister who preaches from the bible. A minister who can lead, keep our congregation all going in the same direction and communicate effectively. A church fully supported by the congregation spiritually and financially. A church where Jesus Christ is front and center.

...

I would like the church to feel secure with where it is – even if that means reducing the number of services to two, perhaps because we are smaller. It might be nice to all go to church together.

...

I would like our church to find a dynamic, compassionate new minister who would rekindle our joy in worship. I would like a new youth program to involve our kids in Christian fellowship.

...

Increased spiritual development for adults. Increased activities / involvements of the middle school and high school children. I would like to see the barn rebuilt to house the activities for the older youth.

...

That we can worship and support one another relishing in our differences of belief. that we can do this with mutual respect and love for one another.

Some of the answers to questions are not as black and white as the survey would allow.

FCC Ridgefield, has divisions amongst its congregation – set up and perpetuated by our previous minister. Until we heal and the divisions melt away and trust and respect return, we will continue to be in conflict.

...

My church does not currently have a senior pastor. My hope is that we may look for and find a new senior pastor who is able to bring together and heal and revitalize our congregation.

...

The new member program was great. I hope the church has more fellowship opportunities where new members feel welcome and have opportunities to get more involved. I believe with involvement comes pledges, starting an upward spiral. Coffee hour after service would be good. I feel the church community is currently too disjointed and too many things are being done by too few people. The church needs to focus primarily on itself and its members – not outreach / town events, etc. – until it has found its direction with a new senior pastor. I hope communications improve. The fountain needs to be simpler, clear, and more concise. I often left with basic questions: where? when? can my kids come? how long? etc. KISS and more people will come. Good survey.

...

At this time after over thirty years of membership, I am involved only in Sunday worship and have no opinion as to the day to day activities of the church. I do hope it will be vital to the membership as it has been for me over the years.

...

I would like to see First Congo. expand its ??? to 500+ family / member units. At that ??? we can achieve a critical mass, both in our spiritual / ??? and our ability to perform a good level of outreach and service to the broader community. We spend a lot of time focused on a narrow target, and nostalgic remembrances of the past.

[handwriting illegible]

...

I have not attended the church enough to answer the enclosed questions intelligently. I know that the church is in bad shape financially. I am surprised that only 40% of all the church membership pledges.

I understand that there is a conservative element in the congregation that makes church life tough for others.

...

To get the young married couples more involved and to get everyone to pledge. Women's Fellowship was disbanded because no one has time any more to take on responsibility for leadership. It's just the same "old" people and we got tired of it. We used to have a very active and vibrant Women's Fellowship. Our luncheon meetings, with invited speaker, would have 80 or more attendees. Our Holiday Fair raised thousands of dollars for our church and other denominational and community organizations.

...

I wish that we would learn to accept our inherent differences. Build on our strengths and nurture the many positive things that are currently evolving, as illustrated by the formation of small groups, etc. I wish that we would give to the glory of God and not based on how much we like or dislike our pastors. I wish that we would not look at the size of our membership as the leading indicator of our strengths as a church.

...

A new senior minister – continued and additional small groups – increased stewardship – increased joy in congregants relations. An involved, fun. learning youth program.

...

I would like to see the congregation come together as one church family, not several factions. I would like to have a minister come to us who is planning on making this his/her church home, not using as a stepping stone to other interests, accepting and caring about the members who have now, not worrying so much about getting more members. I would like the church to remain a mainline Protestant church.

...

My hope is for a church that is: Christ-centered: where the gospel is taught and demonstrated in each member's / friend's daily life; where great emphasis is placed on each member's / friend's growth in their faith journey; where each member /friend understands the depth of God's love for him / her; where we trust one another and can truly enjoy each other's faith stories without feeling threatened that our own faith (wherever it is) is "imperiled" or judged.

Reviewing the above, I think that my dream is for a DEEPER church – where very important hands on caring comes out of the desire to give back to the Lord in the huge measure that the Lord gives to us.

Page 7 re: the pastor – priority: Immediate, critical care.

Page 19 re: Bible – category of infallibility vs. literal interpretations was not addressed and I believe there is a difference.

...

Our church at one time was bursting at the seams. Our minister was a man who "walked the talk" – I look forward to a minister who leaves his or her ego in the car – is truthful, team player, funny, caring and is passionate about his or her calling. I miss the joy. I feel since Paul Goodman has come to our church the feeling has become happier. It will be nice to see over the valley once again.

...

This church needs to come to grips with the present. We should accept the past but that is behind us. This is a fast changing area and new people need to feel part of a solid religious experience that can include members of 20 years as well as 20 months. We need to focus on the strengths and agree to disagree on the personal issues. My hope is that people will share their income to build a community here at Ridgefield CC.

...

A church based exclusively on the joy of salvation – where the joy and understanding is evident in all church relationships, lead by a spiritual leader who loves his or her congregation. A church that is not weighted down by fiscal recklessness or differences of opinion.

...

Expand small church groups. Expand mission outreach as in Habitat, travel to needy areas.
Increase involvement teens. Fewer services = interaction with members and social gatherings.

...

As a long time member and former historian, I have a great interest in the health and future of our church. We have an associate minister – Rev. Mark Allan – who is well qualified to be our senior minister. Mark is an extraordinary person and a true Christian. His sermons are excellent and inspiring. He knows our Church and members of the congregation and is respected in the community. Many member agree with me that Mark should be our senior minister and that the search committee should offer him the position.

Excellent survey.

...

I hope our church will swiftly choose a minister / although I am extremely happy with our interim minister, and he will be a “hard act to follow.” I pray for the church’s financial struggles to be resolved – by each member stepping up their pledge to fill the gap.

...

I would like to see members who have stopped attending church services to return and become active again. More fellowship activities.

...

That FCC Ridgefield would grow, physically and financially, but more importantly grow spiritually to the point (and beyond) embracing and espousing the Christian Faith (not tradition) attracting others to learn and believe.

Christianity is a faith, not a tradition.

...

We need a pastor who will be hard hitting – tell the truth even though it will make some people uncomfortable. We need our “prayer of confession” every week – not a “prayer of approach” – We need a pastor who is vibrant, vital, intelligent, good sense of humor – and an a bidding love for God and Jesus so he can teach us to be the same.

There has been such bitterness at our church, I don’t think it will ever be the same. I miss being close to the church – it was my life before all this happened – now I feel estranges and have to push myself to go. Please pray or our church so that we may come together and heal. Thank you.

...

My vision for this church is that we move towards a goal of everyone in ministry. this includes actively bringing Christ into the lives of the children in our church family and modeling Christian discipleship. One way to get there is to encourage the investigation of our personal spiritual gifts and the use of those gifts through local church and mission activities – as part of our stewardship of time, talents and treasure. Through greater service and participation, better fellowship will emerge and I hope that we take that energy and reach out beyond the walls of our church with the love of Christ – to bless others as we have been so blessed.

Some of the questions on social issues and outreach were unclear to me and hard to answer. I couldn’t tell whether they were mission directed or politically directed. Question 14 on page 19 was the least well written. It did not include a complete list of choices for “now.” Missing were: commitment to my membership vows, serving as I feel called by God, loyalty, etc.

...

That we would fine a genuine and faithful (humble) servant leader (minister).

That our church family would re-unite and learn to speak the truth in love and trust one another again.

That political and power culture would fall away and we would be Christian brothers and sisters, again.

That our youth (teen) program thrive to love and support kids in different years of development

Imagine this would be hard to design as a church recovering from a crisis ... perhaps we need answers that reflect current climate (or recent one) with an eye toward learning from our mistakes – going forward with hope and faith. Thank you.

...

My desire is that we can move into the future as a healthy church – willing to let the past go. From cottage meeting, it was obvious people are stuck in reliving the past, re: Dale Rosenberger was the cause of our problems. This was discouraging. I would like us to be open to change, new ideas.

We must get in a firm financial ??? [handwriting difficult to read] for the first time in years. We cannot continue to ask for “one time money” to move us through one crisis only. [handwriting difficult to read here]

...

Critical to my family is the selection of a new minister. Quality sermons keeps us here. The children’s program has eroded in the last several years. Particularly the middle school – a key time before confirmation. We are seriously considering a move to Jesse Lee if this is not improved quickly. We have pre-confirmation children. The interim minister is doing a wonderful job in helping us heal. I personally felt betrayed by our ex-minister. We joined because of him. I defended him for a long while. He hurt dear friends of mine. It will be a slow process for me to feel confident again. Edwin’s music department is what is keeping us here, for now.

...

I am hopeful that FCC will heal from the dissension that arose with the last senior pastor. My hope is that a new, effective pastor will be called, and that the congregation will rally around him or her. Decisions regarding programs and staffing need to be reached. A strong youth program needs to be revitalized.

...

I would like to see less emphasis on “god” and “god-faith” like language and more emphasis on action in our communities, debate on important issues of our time, teaching of all forms of religion (educational), ecumenical work. Less emphasis on “you must believe in God and have faith” to be okay. Many good people could be members of our church if we were a place where ideas were exchanged, people met, did good things in the community together without overdoing “the gospel” aspects of the past. Unfortunately many bad things have been done in the name of religion or given a blind eye while they happened. How do we reach out to Muslims? Maybe that would be a timely thing to do (maybe you are doing it and I don’t know).

Survey a great idea. I like congregational church and its history (they financed the ??? of the Amistad! and embrace – provided the roots of democracy here in New England. I miss that activism and think it may be time to move in that direction again.

By the way, the interim minister gets high marks based upon only one encounter during confirmation where he acknowledged my daughter’s choice not to be confirmed in a positive, supportive, non judgmental way. Good man.

...

I hope we can find a strong minister to help us get back to being a strong UCC church. I would hope most of the discordant and divisive factions in the church would be solved. I would like to see a revival of the Women’s Fellowship. I would hope that conflicts could be dealt with openly so we have a united congregation and not one in which rumor abounds. The church would have an effective and active children’s and youth program. Our financial situation would be improved and we would budget carefully and live within as regards hiring staff, etc.

Some of the answers did not reflect my views – example page 20 – the neutral or unsure category. I checked it several times because the other choices did not reflect my feelings.

...

To find a faithful and passionate leader than can inspire the congregation to be more Christ centered.

To grow membership and entice younger families

For my children to have a positive Sunday school experience with their peers.

Reduce negativity of core group of members and refocus their activities, behaviors and discussions with constructive, Christian-like approach.

Please share tabulated results with congregation so we can learn more about who we are collectively and share in crafting the preferred profile characteristics / gifts desired in our next spiritual leader.

...

To find a loving, caring and sincere minister who will lead this congregation in worship and extra curricular activities, be a role model for the children and youth and admired by the adults; a minister who is approachable, adaptable and genuine. The rest of the church will really take care of itself. (Or come back to our former glory), if we have the right leader.

I am still saddened and disgusted over the treatment by this supposed “loving congregation” to our former minister. I do not wish to associate with people who acted so “un-Christian” and hypocritical. I suffer with that daily.

...

Open and transparent – games are over. Some financial stability – the raids on the cookie jar – endowment have been met with an operating budget that can be raised through giving.

That the work of Christ be increased. Now our church spends less than \$25,000 on mission / ??[word not legible here] A budget of \$800,000. Enough. Forward! As General Booth of the Salvation Army used to say, the order to march is being written today.

Generally well done. I wished the questionnaire focused more on the ?? [word not legible] source or spirit and what makes it ??? grow. Would joining a soup kitchen in itself be a trigger or would I benefit from a home study / ??[word not legible] Our church is a mess and we are struggling to find a path forward. We need the moxie of Joel Osteen and the passion of William Sloan Coffin. thanks.

...

My dream for the church is to regain its spiritual vitality weekly. People from diverse places in their faith journey feel at home and inspired. We were once a place where people from a variety of backgrounds and theology could share in their diversity. Increasingly there is only “one way” to think, worship and believe. This is God. We are too self-centered – it should not be all about me. It’s about Jesus and the difference he makes in our lives.

I find it curious that you dance around tough questions and issues. This church, like many, has conflict. Why not ask some questions about why people have left and what might bring them back? Why not address the question raging in our culture regarding the place of church in society? It’s very difficult to be a Christian today – one is often attacked from all sides [??? the left and right—handwriting difficult]. Our denomination and institution are generally in denial on this. Are you too? Question for you: Can you talk about your faith at work and not be sanctioned? I can’t at my job.

...

1-To have a senior minister who will guide the congregation in spirituality and harmony.

2-To have an active and meaningful youth program in place, with an energetic and consistent youth leader.

3-To balance the budget

4-To emphasize outreach to youth and adults

5-To have a feeling of stability and harmony

Page 2 – Tasks of the church and Page 12 – worship: Adding a “don’t know” or “Neutral” column would have been easier for me to answer in these categories. Instead, I used “generally satisfied” as my answer.

My opinion and belief is that many will not complete this survey because they will not want to take the time, and that 50% or less will be returned completed.

...

I want lack of righteousness, and the general sense that everyone in our congregation has great wealth and the ability to access unlimited funds. People ought not feel disenfranchised from membership or involvement because they are not able – for whatever reason – to “ante up.” We were led sorely astray by Dale Rosenberger during his tenure and we need to seek God’s guidance in becoming a more cohesive and caring congregation. Alliances were formed and control was given – and badly abused in some cases. We need a transparent and a very much clarified vision of who we actually are and the way to go forward in unity and strength. We need to have more genuine concern – not distance – for those less fortunately. We need our assistant minister to seriously connect to his “flock.” I can only hope that that sense of involvement and interaction that was somehow controlled or discouraged by Dale Rosenberger and that it might return; to date, that hope has not been fulfilled and he is not much benefit to our church. I am quite discouraged in many areas of our church life and pray that we can recover and thrive once again.

...

First Congregational has been our church home since the early seventies. My family has very fond memories of a very welcoming, loving church where our congregation felt like one large family. My hope for FCC is to once again find unity in a senior pastor who is embraced, supported and respected by all members who work together in Christian love for the good of the whole, not for the promotion of personal agendas. My hope is for FCC to be a church influenced more by tradition and history than by today’s trends, that we need to resolve conflicts with respect for one another. I accept the fact that change is inevitable and small group ministries is one way to create unity for individuals with common interests. However, I do feel the trend leads to a feeling of “separateness” in the church as a whole.

I have served FCC on just about every board and committee, taught Sunday School, led youth groups over the years. Right now my husband and I are in retirement transition and spend many months away from Ridgefield. I continue to play in the bell choir but other than that, we just love to attend Sunday worship. We know that first Congregational is a Church that will survive any conflict and will continue to do God’s work at home and away.

...

I dream that this church will have a more cohesive mix of active members that that we will greet one another impartially with smiles. I hope there will be plenty of opportunities for men and women to work side by side in fund raising (like the Silent Auction). The leaders of groups might encourage those over 60 to actively participate in programs. Daytime groups should appeal to seniors to join them.

I wish our Sunday music would have 4 stanza hymns and one short one in each service. I wish our music would concentrate on old and happy times more.

Good questions – thought provoking.

I enjoy the minister’s relaxed style – more informal than previous ministers and yet completely biblically centered.

...

There be a dynamic focus on how to apply my being a Christian to every day life. Focus on the practicality of Christianity. Much more adult ed. Increase in membership.

I appreciate the challenges of conducting a survey of this nature. However it is difficult for me to answer a lot of the questions honestly because I am new to this church, a new Christian, and I am not familiar enough with the culture of FCC to accurately answer some of these questions.

...

-Would love to see more young families be involved and attend on regular basis

-Would love for financial issues to go away so we can focus on what is important

-Would love to have chit chat and hallway gossip disappear (it seems much better than it was in the past)

-Feel like we are headed in a positive direction

-Congregation needs to support church council and other involved people who put in lots of time and effort.

Would love to see one main Sunday service to unite the congregation and limit number of Sunday school teachers.

Survey was great and thorough. Seemed to focus upon many issues.

...

I like the church as it is and as it was when I joined the fellowship 50+ years ago. Only thing I see wrong with church is its reluctance to outspokenly “ask for money.” There is too much timidity and “pussy-footing” about a congregant’s obligation to help support the church: its expenses, its staff, its mission, its overhead (heat, electricity and printing costs, etc.) this reluctance to “sell” stewardship has resulted in year after year of asking those who support the church for additional dollars to support our free loading Christian brethren and sisters. The simple act of identifying givers by name – not size of gifts – is considered near heresy. I’ve brought this up at congregational – stewardship Sundays in the past, but it went over as “revolutionary.”

However every group I’ve ever given money to has published lists of donors – some even put givers into dollar categories. (This was not a suggestion I made to the congregation; I just asked that “givers be listed.”) It follows, obviously, that non-givers would be conspicuous by their absence. Apparently the suggestion was viewed as un-Christian by some of the congregation. It is a very sore point for this giving, retired, family.

...

We appreciate the care and dedication that members of our church are showing for the transition. We however are ready for action – we must pull together and step forward. The analysis can go on forever and some would still not be satisfied with a new minister. The church needs to grow and as a rudderless ship, it is not likely to attract new families. While we welcome all, families especially will be the foundation for the church’s stable future – which leads to my opinion that children, family and youth ministries are the areas to be developed for the thriving future of FCC. Let’s go!

...

I would like to know where the church and denomination stand on important issues of the day. This is never discussed, and it is very frustrating. We as a congregation are in a position to be advocates for social justice and change – as I am sure Jesus would want us to be. I hope we eventually get a senior pastor who can “shake us up” and get us going strong in this direction! Also we could do more to get ourselves known beyond “the stone church at the fountain.” Who are we? What do we stand for? What is our heritage? Why would anyone do well to join us? This won’t happen but I’ll mention it anyway – I wish we would drop the passing of the peace or at least move it to the very beginning of the service. Its current place in the worship is disruptive, awkward and intrusive.

Also as noted earlier, we never say the Apostle’s or Nicene Creeds and rarely the Statement of Faith. I miss these “reminders.”

...