

The First Congregational Church of Woodstock, Connecticut

BYLAWS

Adoption at the Annual Meeting, 28 January 2024

I. NAME

This Church will be called **THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, INCORPORATED, OF WOODSTOCK, CONNECTICUT.**

II. FAITH, COVENANT, AND POLITY

The polity of this Church is that of the United Church of Christ. We believe in the freedom and responsibility of the individual soul and in the right of private judgment. We hold to the autonomy of the local Church and its independence of all external ecclesiastical control. This Church cherishes the fellowship of other Churches of Christ of every denomination and doctrine. We seek to foster a sense of community with those of other faiths. We particularly recognize our relationship with the Churches of the United Church of Christ joined in the Windham Association, the Southern New England Conference, and the national Church.

The covenant under which this Church serves, and which its members accept, is that we have promised to be God's people on earth. We agree to maintain the teachings of the Gospel, and to submit ourselves to the orderly administration of the affairs of the Church. We strive to know the will of God as taught in the Holy Scriptures. We pray for one another and for our world, and we seek to work together in love and holy accord.

We maintain a policy of welcome to all worshipers and hold to our Open and Affirming status, adopted on January 10, 2003.

In matters not provided for in these bylaws, we will be governed by the usage and practices of the United Church of Christ. We will conduct the ministry and business of the Church in ways that are consistent with our vision, mission, beliefs, and core values, which have been appended to this document.

III. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

III.1. QUALIFICATIONS

The membership of this Church will consist of those who support the vision and mission of the congregation. Prospective members may join this Church by letter of transfer from another Christian Church, confirmation, and/or participation in an orientation process defined by the

Pastor and agreed to by the Governing Board. All those who join this Church agree to subscribe to these bylaws and use their gifts and talents as they feel called to further the congregation's ministry and mission.

III.2. FRIENDS OF THE CHURCH

Friends of the Church are people who have an affinity for and connection to this Church, but who are unable to attain or maintain the requirements of active membership. Friends are welcomed and included in all services and programs and considered a valued part of the Church family. Friends have voice at congregational meetings, but do not have voting rights.

III.3. RECEPTION

A person shall become a member by participating in the rite of reception of members, which will take place during Sunday worship. Any who are unable to attend a Sunday service in person may be received in absentia.

III.4. DUTIES

Members are expected to be faithful in the spiritual duties essential to Christian life, to attend the services of this Church (either in-person or online), to give regularly to its support and its mission, and to share in its organized work.

III.5. RIGHTS

Active members are entitled to vote at duly called meetings of the congregation and to serve as officers and as members of the Governing Board, teams, and other sanctioned groups of the Church. Friends of the Church have voice, but no vote at congregational meetings and can serve on teams and other sanctioned groups of the Church, with the exception of the Governing Board.

III.6. TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP

A. Any member in good and regular standing who requests a letter of dismissal and recommendation to any other Christian Church is entitled to receive it. The letter will be valid as a recommendation for one year from its date, unless renewed, and this restriction will be stated in the letter.

B. If any member desires to join a religious body with which this Church is not in fellowship, or which would not receive its letter, the Church may, upon request, give a certificate of good standing and terminate the membership.

C. If a member in good standing asks to be released from the covenant obligations of this Church, the Pastor may grant the termination of membership and may request an exit interview, with the permission of the departing member, to determine the cause of separation.

D. All members, resident and non-resident, are expected to communicate regularly with the Church and to support the life of the Church. The Stewardship Committee, with the assistance of the Clerk, will be responsible for an annual review of the membership lists, and may place members on the inactive or friends list if they are not deemed active in the life of the Church.

IV. GOVERNANCE

The ruling body of the Church is the congregation. The legislative and administrative power of this Church is vested in its membership, assembled in a congregational meeting. The right to elect members of the Governing Board, to call or discharge a Pastor, to set the Church's annual budget, and to decide about matters affecting the property of this Church is solely that of the congregation.

IV.1. Governing Board

The Governing Board acts on behalf of the congregation to support the vision and mission of the Church in all matters not specifically reserved as matters to be brought before a congregational meeting; including but not limited to governance, strategy, planning, and oversight. The Governing Board shall manage the Church through adopting policy, designating lay leaders as responsible for finance and facilities matters, while delegating the spiritual, programmatic, and other administrative work of the Church to the Pastor and his/her staff. It shall develop and publish policies, in conversation with relevant leaders, that guide conduct of its responsibilities.

A. Membership and Election

The Governing Board will consist of seven voting members: six members of the congregation and the Pastor, *ex officio*.

Governing Board members shall be nominated through the Nominating Committee and elected by $\frac{2}{3}$ vote of the members participating in the annual congregational Meeting. Those elected take office immediately.

Governing Board members are elected to serve two-year terms in classes of three per year. Members may serve two consecutive full terms. After serving two consecutive full terms, a one year waiting period is required before that member can be elected to another term on the Governing Board.

If a Governing Board member wishes to resign, the member will send written notice to the Governing Board Moderator or the Pastor.

Vacancies on the Governing Board may be filled for the remainder of a term by appointment of the Governing Board.

B. Organization

At its first meeting after the annual congregational meeting, the Governing Board will choose its Moderator and Vice Moderator. The Moderator and Vice Moderator will also serve as Moderator and Vice Moderator, respectively, of congregational meetings.

A quorum of the Governing Board shall consist of four members.

Meetings shall be guided by Robert's Rules of Order. Actions of the Governing Board will be taken by formal vote.

The Governing Board may appoint committees, task forces, and teams to assist in the work of this Church.

The Governing Board will prepare a written report of the previous year's work for the annual meeting.

C. Responsibilities

Through the work of the Governing Board and its committees and teams, the Governing Board:

- Meets regularly;
- Drafts policies governing Church activities;
- Serves in an advisory role to the Pastor;
- Serves as a long-range planning committee of the Church;
- Drafts the annual budget of the Church, for presentation to the annual meeting;
- Acts for the congregation, where appropriate, between annual meetings including the ability to authorize emergency expenditures;
- Appoints ad hoc committees, teams, and task forces of the Church, as needed;
- Assumes care and custody of the property, real or personal, that is owned by the Church;
- Handles the financial, legal, risk management, and compliance affairs of the Church;
- Makes requests for regular reports and special reports from the Treasurer and sets policies for bill payment as needed;
- Accepts monetary gifts to the Church, including bequests and legacies;
- Manages the funds contributed to the wider mission of the Church and directs the Treasurer to distribute these funds;
- Ensures that an internal audit is performed at least every three years;

- Hires all paid employees of the Church;
- Conducts the annual performance review of the Pastor, ensuring full and proper communication with the Pastor well before the review;
- Does not dispose of any real property of the Church without approval, given at a legally called meeting of the Congregation; and
- Consults with lay leaders of the Church to identify a Nominating Committee. The role of the Nominating Committee is to present a slate of names for the Governing Board to the congregation for approval at the annual meeting.

V. OFFICERS AND DELEGATES

V.1. The Moderator presides at all business meetings of the Church and at meetings of the Governing Board. The Moderator works closely with the Pastor and lay leaders of the Church to exercise leadership and prepare agendas for meetings. In the absence of the Moderator, the Vice Moderator will preside at meetings. In the absence of both the Moderator and the Vice Moderator, the Clerk will call the meeting to order, and a Chair pro tempore will be elected for that meeting.

V.2. A Vice Moderator to serve in the absence of the Moderator.

V.3. Four additional lay members to make up the Governing Board.

V.4. OTHER OFFICIALS to be appointed by the Governing Board.

A. A Clerk will be appointed by the Governing Board to serve a two-year renewable term and need not be a member of the Governing Board. The Clerk may be replaced at the request of the Clerk or at the discretion of the Governing Board.

The Clerk is responsible for:

- Keeping the records of the Church, including minutes of all duly called congregational meetings of the Church, including the annual meeting, which will be published or read for approval at the next business meeting;
- Keeping an accurate list of the members of the Church with a record of baptisms, marriages, and deaths within the membership;
- Preserving official communications and written official reports, giving legal notice to all meetings when such notice is necessary;
- Keeping minutes of the meetings of the Governing Board.

B. A Treasurer will be appointed by the Governing Board to serve a three-year renewable term and need not be a member of the Governing Board. The term may be renewed at the discretion of the Governing Board. The Treasurer may be replaced at the request of the Treasurer or at the discretion of the Governing Board.

The Treasurer is responsible for:

- Keeping records of all monies raised and expenses in accordance with document retention policies;
- Maintaining the accounts of the Church, and monitoring investment accounts;
- Making deposits and payments in the name of the Church;
- Making an annual written report of all receipts, expenditures, investments and funds of the Church;
- Keeping of the corporate seal.

C. An Assistant Treasurer will be appointed by the Governing board to serve a renewable one-year term and need not be a member of the Governing Board. The Assistant Treasurer has the powers of and performs the duties of the Treasurer in the absence of the Treasurer, and gives assistance to the Treasurer. The Assistant Treasurer may be replaced at the request of the Assistant Treasurer or at the discretion of the Governing Board.

D. Church delegates are appointed as needed by the Governing Board to provide representation at association, conference, or any other meetings to which the Church should send delegates.

VI. MINISTRIES

VI.1. The Pastor shall be chosen and called by the Church. When a vacancy in the office of Pastor occurs, the Church will elect a Pastoral Search Committee of no fewer than seven or more than twelve members, who, in consultation with the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, will nominate a successor. The new Pastor must be called by ballot vote of at least two-thirds of those members of the Church present at a meeting called for that express purpose. Attendance at the meeting for purposes of voting may be in person or via telephone or internet connection. The Pastor's term of office will be of indefinite duration. After becoming a member of the Church, the Pastor will be installed by the Windham Association of the United Church of Christ, at a time agreed upon by the Church and Pastor.

As an ordained minister, the Pastor serves with ministerial standing in the association to which this Church belongs. He or she has charge of the worship services and ministry teams of the Church and carries on a ministry of teaching, pastoral care, and leadership. As ordained leader of the congregation, he or she is a member, ex officio, of the Governing Board and all teams and committees, and is entitled to attend any meeting of any Church-sanctioned group. The Pastor

has a vote on the Governing Board, except in matters affecting his or her compensation. The Pastor supervises the work of all paid employees of the Church and prepares their yearly performance reviews, in conjunction with the appropriate Church leadership. In the exercise of the office, the Pastor will seek and cherish the advice and assistance of congregants, ministry teams, and the Governing Board. The Pastor is responsible for the administration of the sacraments and officiates at weddings and funerals.

The termination of the relationship between the Pastor and the Church will be subject to not less than sixty days' notice. The Pastor may be dismissed for substantial, documented cause upon a vote of four members of the Governing Board, followed by a two-thirds vote of a congregational meeting, duly called for that purpose. Such cause shall be determined only after lengthy and careful consideration in consultation with the Area Conference Minister of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, within which every attempt will be made to resolve conflict.

VI.2. Areas of Ministry

The ministries of the Church comprise the ongoing work in support of the vision and mission of the Church. The ministries of the Church are performed by staff, lay volunteers, and ministry teams, operating in accordance with the policies of this Church and under the leadership of the Pastor. On going oversight and evaluation of all ministries is conducted by the Governing Board to ensure alignment with vision and mission.

The ministries of the Church are organized into areas of ministry, including leadership functions and ministry teams. Areas of ministry are defined and refined by the Governing Board under the advice of the Pastor, who shall solicit the participation and help of the congregation in this process. Current areas of ministry are Worship, Community Care, Faith Formation/Lifelong Learning, Faith in Action and the Diaconate.

Each area of ministry shall have one or more team leaders appointed by the Governing Board in conversation with the Pastor. The Pastor will facilitate periodic meetings to foster collaboration, communication, and coordination among the ministry areas, teams, and sub teams.

Annually the ministry teams, coordinators, and Pastor will review and refine responsibilities, goals, and plans for the ministries.

VI.3. Responsibilities

It is anticipated that it will take an additional year to transition to the Ministry Team structure envisioned in these bylaws from the Committee/Board structure as described in the bylaws approved by the congregation in January 2022.

During this time the Diaconate will work with the Pastor to facilitate the transition of historic responsibilities from the former structure to the new structure; refine the structure further;

describe team and sub-team roles, expectations, and activities; form ministry teams/sub-teams; invite congregants to explore ministry; and identify proposed revisions of these bylaws.

The Senior Deacons, with the Pastor, will continue to administer the Deacons Fund.

VII. MEETINGS

VII.1. FOR WORSHIP:

- A. Public services will be held on Sunday, the Lord's Day.
- B. Communion will be celebrated on the first Sunday of each month, or as determined by the Pastor and Worship Ministry.
- C. Special services may be called at the discretion of the Pastor, in conversation with the Worship Ministry.

VII.2. FOR BUSINESS:

A. **The annual meeting** will be held on the last Sunday in January, unless otherwise ordered for good cause by the Governing Board. At this time the annual reports of boards and committees will be presented, officers and committee members elected, and other business of the Church transacted. The annual meeting will be called by the Clerk, who will cause notice to be read aloud to the congregation, or published in the Church bulletin, on the two Sundays preceding the meeting.

B. **Special meetings:** The Governing Board may issue a request for a special meeting of the Church. Members who wish to present a matter to the congregation must first consult the Governing Board and the Pastor. If the members are not satisfied after working through those channels, five members may enter a written request for a special meeting.

The Clerk will read the call for a special meeting, or will cause notice to be printed in the Sunday bulletin, for at least two Sundays preceding the day fixed for the meeting. The reason for the meeting will be clearly stated.

C. **Quorum:** At the annual meeting and all special meetings, a quorum shall consist of 50% of the average in-person attendance for the public Sunday worship for the previous 6 months (excluding July and August). Attendance at the meeting for purposes of establishing a quorum and voting may be in person or via telephone or Internet connection.

D. **Statements of support:** For a given meeting, the Moderator can authorize the entry of written statements in support of or against a particular measure, such statements to be read into the record of the meeting but not considered as votes.

E. **Conduct:** Meetings of the membership and the Governing Board will be governed by the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order, insofar as those rules are not in conflict with the bylaws.

VIII. DISCIPLINE

VIII.1. In cases where serious contention arises between members, the Pastor, Senior Deacons, and the Moderator will work together to address the conflict.

VIII.2. In case of grave difficulty or public scandal, the Church will seek advice of the Area Conference Minister of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, or of the Windham Association.

IX. CORPORATE SEAL

The Church, legally incorporated under the laws of the State of Connecticut, adopts as its corporate seal a circle containing the words: "The First Congregational Church of Woodstock, CT. Founded 1690, Incorporated 1925."

X. AMENDMENTS

These bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds vote of those present at a properly convened meeting of the Church, provided that the proposed amendments have been submitted in writing to members of the congregation at least two Sundays preceding the meeting at which a vote on the amendments will be taken.

Revision prepared by the Governing Board January 2024.

Appendix

1) Core Values

As a beloved community of friends in Christ, we value the following:

Worship

The celebration of God's love is the heart of our life together as a beloved community of friends in Christ. We are uplifted by beautiful music. We are inspired by scripture, our Pastor's relatable message, by guest sermons, and faith stories from members of our congregation. We experience profound connection to one another as we share our joys, concerns, and prayers. We nourish our spirit outside of Sunday worship with second hour discussions and Bible study. Worshiping as a community gives us respite and replenishes our spirit, energizing us to continue to live our faith in the world.

Service to Others

"But be doers of the word, not simply hearers," we are admonished by scripture (James 2:22). We seek to balance contemplation and action, faith and works, worship and service. As we experience profound relation to one another and to God in worship, we are impelled outward to care for members of our own congregation and to assist others in the wider community and the world whose issues include food insecurity, social and racial injustice, effects of climate change, mental health crises and loneliness. Where there is a need, we look to fill that need with volunteer assistance, financial donations, and partnering with organizations that are already doing important work.

Openness and Inclusivity

As we worship and serve, we are committed to do so in a spirit of openness and inclusivity. "For God shows no partiality," Paul tells us (Romans 2:11). We recognize and celebrate the inherent divinity of each person as a child of God. All are valued, all are welcome "without regard to race, nationality, age, marital status, gender, mental, emotional or physical challenges, economic status, or sexual orientation" (FCCW Open and Affirming Statement, 1993).

Building Community through Relationships

Through worship and service, we recognize the value of being together with individuals who lift our spirits and remind us that God is the God of love. We seek to build relationships and care for those in our congregation in a spirit of hope and togetherness.

2) Beliefs

We believe the following

God's Presence/Being

We believe in the living God. God is always working in our lives, in everything and everywhere. There is no place that God is not. Nothing can separate us from the unconditional love of God.

God Reveals God's Self

We believe the God of love and forgiveness reveals God's self in infinite ways (the beauty of nature, service to others, prayer, music, sacred spaces, to name just a few). God is revealed most fully in Jesus Christ, who gives us the vision of what God is calling us to do. Jesus is our role model and teacher who is in all of us and is one of us.

Our Being

We believe that each of us is a beautiful creation, a vessel of God's spirit. We have each been given gifts and are asked to use our gifts to reflect God's love out into the world. We are called to be intentionally aware of the divine presence in our lives.

Relationship / Connection with others (in and out of Church)

We believe that Jesus showed us what a life full of God looks like and that we are called to create and develop authentic relationships with others. Community encourages and challenges us to grow beyond our limited experiences and understandings as we listen, learn, and serve in ways that we cannot do on our own.

Church Community / Purpose

We believe that our Church community renews and restores us. As Jesus taught us, our community of faith cares for one another, looks out for one another, and is a place where we can see the face of God in others.

Inclusivity and Openness

We believe that God is too big for only one way. We understand and are accepting of the ways, ideas, and experiences of others.