

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF GREEN'S FARMS

Westport, Connecticut



ANNUAL REPORT **May 2014 – May 2015** **For the** **304th Annual Meeting** **May 3, 2015**

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Senior Minister

Annual Report 2014 – 2015

The 2014-2015 church year started with a bang! In June, just a few weeks after Service Sunday when we served side by side with ministry partners across Fairfield County, we gathered in the Meetinghouse and adopted a brand new Vision Statement. More than a year in the making, the Vision Project involved thinking, praying, and, most of all, listening to one another as together we discerned God's direction for Green's Farms Church. I can't help but think that those Service Sunday experiences had a profound impact in shaping our understanding of who God is calling us to be:

Our Vision: *We are a church on a hill, glowing so brightly with the light of God's love that we shine like a beacon, guiding seekers to come inside where their souls are nourished and transformed, growing closer to God. We are a faith family of warm welcome, respectful acceptance, shared joy and tender compassion. We embody Christ's hope, love and service wherever we go.*

It's a wonderful vision, both inspirational and aspirational, but how does a church filled with individuals bring a shared statement like this to life?

Fast forward to the Fall of 2014 when Church Council, under the direction of Moderator Steve Parrish, challenged us to live into this vision by adding two strategic initiatives:

Deepening Community: *In a world of increasing isolation people are hungry for connection. As a church we will build community by growing opportunities to know and love one another and the God revealed in Jesus Christ.*

Discovering Discipleship: *In an age longing for meaning people want to lead lives of purpose. As a church we will practice the Christian faith by learning about who God is, what He's about, and how we can serve His world.*

Next, Church Council asked each department and staff person to think about how these initiatives could shape our ministries, what we choose to do, and how we go about doing it. This, in turn, led to some of the most engaged and thoughtful conversations I've witnessed in Church Council meetings!

People began thinking about new ways to approach and understand things we do all the time like membership, faith formation, and stewardship. And they spurred on the introduction of a brand new learning and listening process as Green's Farms Church began to consider how God is calling us to respond to the question of same gender marriage and the church, an ongoing process that is creating even more faithful conversation and engagement.

Here in Westport, we're blessed with so many opportunities – great schools, sports, and programs for raising children, safe homes by the water's edge, high level work, access to the city, endless entertainment, travel and recreation. But sometimes all those opportunities can create a vacuum of time, connection and meaning. Maybe that's what makes it such a hopeful thing to be a part of a faith community where people of all ages have the energy and passion to take time to deepen community and discover discipleship. It's been my tremendous joy and privilege to work and grow with you as we strive to make room for faith in our busy lives by following Jesus. Because of you this faith community is alive! This is a church that cares, prays, worships, serves, sings, learns, loves, grows and hopes together.

I especially want to thank the tremendous encouragement and efforts of outgoing Moderator, Steve Parrish, and welcome the service leadership of incoming moderator, Steve West. We are graced beyond measure to have lay leaders who make us want to be a better church.

With Joy,

Jeffrey Rider
Senior Minister

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name!
– Psalm 103:1

Moderator

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In some ways, the 2013-2014 Green's Farms Church year was "*The Year of The What*". We adopted a Vision reflecting what we have been, what we are and what God wants us to be.

If 2013-2014 was "*The Year of The What*", then 2014-2015 has been "*The Year of The How*". The GFC Council developed two Strategic Initiatives ("Deepening Community" and "Discovering Discipleship") to help us define how we, as a church, will work together to realize our Vision. Each department and committee spent time praying, thinking and talking about what the Vision and Strategic Initiatives mean for its work. You can see the results in the reports that follow. Look closely at these reports. You will see themes, phrases and words used repeatedly—welcoming, service, volunteer, shining, light, community, connections, discipleship, love.

In addition, the Church Council looked at what the Vision and Strategic Initiatives mean for the work of the Council itself. We are trying to become more of a leadership group, focusing on "the big picture" and not a collection of individual department and committee chairs only reporting on activities in their individual silos. We are trying to be more collaborative, to connect more with each other, to think about the work of the entire church, to think about the future.

I can't say "thank you" enough to all those in the church who have given so unselfishly of their time, their talents and their resources—members of Council, committee and department members, our clergy, our staff and all the others in the Green's Farms Church community who have stepped forward to help in so many ways. As Paul said in his letter to the church in Corinth:

Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit.
And there are different ministries, but the same Lord.
And there are different results, but the same God
Who produces all of them in everyone.
To each person the manifestation of the Spirit
Is given for the benefit of all.

1 Corinthians 12, 4-7 (New English Translation)

This is a time of great opportunity for Green's Farms Church. A time when, together, we can build on what has been given to us so that those who come after us will find a church on a hill, glowing brightly with God's love. A church of warm welcome, respectful acceptance, shared joy and tender compassion. A church filled with Christ's hope, love and service.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Parrish
Moderator

The Church Clerk

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TOTAL ACTIVE RESIDENT MEMBERSHIP, January 1, 2014 566

MEMBERS RECEIVED during 2014

By Affirmation of Faith and Confirmation	19
By Transfer and Reaffirmation of Faith	<u>17</u>
Total Received	36

MEMBERS REMOVED FROM ACTIVE RESIDENT MEMBERSHIP during 2014

By Death	4
Other	<u>32</u>
Total Removed	36

TOTAL ACTIVE RESIDENT MEMBERSHIP, December 31, 2014 566

THE BOOK OF LIFE

May 1, 2014 – April 30, 2015

Baptisms	8	
Addison Brooke Talbott		July 13, 2014
Jackson Harbaugh Talbott		July 13, 2014
Olivia Skye Talbott		July 13, 2014
Johanna Jane Lawton		August 10, 2014
Daniel Robert Welker		September 14, 2014
Mila Rose Kimberly		September 28, 2014
Logan Hood		November 2, 2014
William Mather Elliot		December 14, 2014

Deaths of GFC Members	5	
Allen Raymond		May 1, 2014
Raymond Maddock		January 7, 2015
Anna Bella Avery		February 20, 2015
Ed Barlow		March 29, 2015
Walter Eads		April 5, 2015

Memorial Services held at GFC	4	
Allen Raymond		May 1, 2014
Raymond Maddock		January 16, 2015
Anna Bella Avery		February 26, 2015
Ed Barlow		April 8, 2015

Deacons Department

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The Deacons seek to serve the congregation in many ways.

For those who are ill, in the hospital or confined to home, we try to decrease their isolation and bring comfort by visiting, delivering flowers, or providing meals. Sally McNeela manages the **meals service**, recruiting volunteers with the use of the Lotsa Helping Hands website.

The days following the death of a loved one is a difficult period for the family. Barbara Cross and other volunteers try to ease their way by offering to host a simple cookie and beverage **memorial service reception**, at no cost to the family. We also offer the option of a catered reception, for those families who wish to provide a meal for their guests. In addition, volunteers are at the memorial service to help direct visitors, provide tissues, and to help the family.

Happy occasions also give us an opportunity to practice the Christian faith. When a new baby is born, we welcome him/her with a rose on the altar and an offer to provide a few meals for the family. Claudia Haizmann chairs this **Baby Food** ministry.

Often elderly or non-driving members of the congregation have difficulty getting to Sunday services or other church activities. Natasha Johnston arranges for volunteers to **give rides** to those who need them, so everyone can feel connected and be an active participant in our church community.

Throughout the year, Renie McCutchen sends get well, sympathy, and congratulations **cards** to members of the congregation. At Thanksgiving, the Deacons write notes to those who have done a lot for the church, or those who may need a little extra support and love.

Beautiful flower arrangements on the altar help to give our Meetinghouse a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Diane Parrish coordinates deliveries from Blossoms Floral Design in Fairfield. After the service, Jane Steiger ensures that a Deacon will **deliver the flowers** to someone in the congregation who is going through a difficult time. If it seems appropriate, the deacon may **visit** for a little while. This provides us with the opportunity to get to know people whom we may not have met otherwise. In addition, at Christmas and Easter, Diane Parrish and Wynn Hermann **make the church festive and inviting** with creative greens and flower arrangements. This year, we also draped purple cloth at the altar in observance of Lent, and, with the help of many congregation members, created a new Easter Banner.

During Advent and on Palm Sunday, we give GFC members the opportunity to serve God by serving others. We ask for volunteers to purchase a plant from Pivot House and then deliver it to someone in need of cheer. The deacons (with guidance from clergy) provide the names and addresses of recipients. Again, connections are made between members who may not have met before, and they have the chance to demonstrate God's love. Sarah Menchaca and Maureen Barre coordinate these **special projects**.

From time to time, we host **programs about pastoral care issues**, such as dealing with grief, coping with aging, and other life challenges.

It is the goal of the Deacons to serve church members and to help members love and care for one another, as God loves us. Also, we are always looking for new ways to be the hands and feet of Jesus. If you are interested being part of any of these ministries, please let us know. You will get much out of giving.

With thanks to the GFC staff for their guidance: Jeff Rider, Lynn Rider, Rebecca Floyd Marshall, Alison Fisher, Bob Custer, and thanks to the members of the Deacons department: Claudia Haizmann, Sally McNeela, Natasha Johnston, Jane Steiger, Renie McCutchen, Maureen Barre, Sarah Menchaca, Barbara Cross, Diane Parrish, Wynn Herrmann and Isabelle Breen.

Respectfully,

Judy Hlawitschka

Education Department

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SUNDAY SCHOOL

Submitted by Lynn Rider, Director of Children's Ministry

Deepening community and discovering discipleship is what Sunday School is all about! Our goal is to help children from birth through grade 5 experience God's love, see God's face in the people around them, and grow into disciples striving to build the kingdom of God by sharing God's love on a daily basis. Kids at GFC learn what it means to follow Jesus by immersing themselves in the stories of the Bible through a variety of interactive activities lead by interns from Yale Divinity School who take faith and service seriously, but know how to have fun! As a result, each Sunday School classroom becomes a mini community of disciples as teachers focus on building relationships with and among kids.

Deepening Community Highlights:

- The "Back to Sunday School Fall Family Picnic" hosted by Daryl and Jennifer Moccia was an overwhelming success this year as families engaged in an intergenerational community event.
- Due to unexpected numbers of students, the 4th and 5th grade classroom space was transformed (by working together with weekday preschool users and purchasing new lightweight tables and chairs) in order to have everyone sitting around one large table, creating a sense of community in the classroom every Sunday morning.
- This year for the first time elementary aged kids engaged in a hands on outreach reach project creating 100 Necessities Kits for our neighbors at the Norwalk Emergency Shelter, growing their understanding of community by asking, "Who is My Neighbor?" and "How Does Jesus Ask Us to Treat Neighbors?"
- Families worked together creating Advent centerpieces with the help of the Education Department and Deacons to deliver to congregation members in need of holiday cheer and thanks, growing young disciples' understanding of the people and practices of our church community.
- The Nativity Pageant included a record number of walk-ins – friends, neighbors, cousins, and guests—helping us to be a welcoming community dedicated to sharing the story of Jesus.
- The contagious Family Band, created by Kirsten Horton, invites adults and kids of all ages to come as you are and share the joy of worshipping God together on special occasions using string, brass, woodwind or whatever kind of instrument you can play!

Discovering Discipleship Highlights:

- LaQruishia Gill, Kate McCormack and Tyler Ung are this year's truly outstanding Yale Divinity School interns who teach from the standpoint of Christian faith and theological grounding. Their excitement for Sunday School is contagious!
- Teaching each week focuses on biblical literacy, which includes developing skills for finding texts and using the book, but also engaging each student in the creation of a rich biblical imagination filled with characters and stories from the Bible.
- This year we shifted how we get Bibles into the hands of our students. Now anytime a child is new to GFC or simply doesn't have a Bible we give them one on the spot. Instead of giving out Bibles once a year we're now giving them out to our elementary students all year long so no one in the classroom ever has to feel left out.
- Kids receive stickers each Sunday they bring their Bible to church.
- Parents are invited into the classroom as guest readers, emphasizing importance of reading scripture. During specific story units the emails sent to parents include the weekly Bible citation so families can look at the text at together before coming to church.
- Monthly rotating texts are drawn from lectionary readings to parallel parent's worship experiences and create opportunities for inter-generational conversation about the faith.
- Lessons have included practicing discipleship. During Lent students learned how to pray, talking with God the way Jesus taught us to pray including praise (I Love You!), confession (I'm Sorry), thanks (Thank You!) and *then* requests (Please!).
- The Cherub Choir, age three – Grade 1, under the leadership of Caroline Barney and guitar playing Tyler Ung, gives our youngest singers the chance to praise God in the classroom and in the meetinghouse using song, sound and motion!
- The overarching theme for 2014-2015 lessons has been *Following Jesus*. Kids are exploring what did it mean for the first disciples to follow Jesus, and what does it mean for disciples today (us) to try and do the same thing?

Finally, the desire to grow opportunities for community and discipleship among the children of GFC is fueled by the Education Department, which is on a journey of its own. This group of faithful lay leaders has started beginning monthly departmental business with a prayer meeting. Members of the committee recently joined the youth group to transform the traditional job of stuffing of Easter eggs into a fun inter-generational evening spent "bearing one another's burdens". Next year's work looks to continue supporting children's discipleship by expanding the ways their most important teachers,

their parents, grow and connect in the faith. Many thanks to the members of the committee, and especially to chairs Caroline Barney, Jennifer Herold, and Jennifer Moccia for working to make GFC the kind of faith community that can extend God's radical welcome and inclusion to people of all ages.

YOUTH MINISTRY

Submitted by Rebecca Floyd Marshall, Associate Minister for Youth

In shaping Youth Ministries, I have been focusing on the Strategic Initiatives that came out of our visioning process:

1. To deepen community (connections, relationship-building)
2. To foster discipleship (providing opportunities for learning, mentoring, serving as Christians to one another and the world)

In an effort to highlight these strategic initiatives, the report will be laid out in two areas. First will be our successes in implementing the strategic initiatives, second the areas of growth/hopes and dreams for the future.

Successful efforts to further our new Strategic Initiatives

DEEPENING COMMUNITY: Opportunities for connection:

Inter-generational Connections: We intentionally added more opportunities to our existing program schedule that would help connect folks across traditional age-based silos. Some of the successes that we should keep in mind moving forward are:

- **Confirmation Mentors:** This year we started a program where 4 of our Senior High Schoolers came in to the Confirmation class every week and acted as mentors to a small group of six confirmands each. This was a huge success, providing leadership development for the high schoolers and connecting two groups that normally don't interact. At this point in the year, the confirmands have really bonded with their leaders and I believe this not only helps them connect to the church in general, but will particularly help them connect on the Mission Trip in June.
- **8th Grade Integration with High Schoolers:** Related to the above point, I made greater efforts to integrate the 8th graders who are going on the Mission Trip with the High Schoolers earlier in the year so that it isn't as scary come June. We had a Navajo Culture night led by Kate McCormick, Yale Divinity Intern, which was a great opportunity for fellowship between our 8th graders and our high schoolers on Team Mission Trip.
- **Fall Fundraiser - Babysitting:** This year our Fall Fundraiser focused on connecting our High School students with families of young children. The little kids loved playing with the "big kids" and the youth loved helping with the younger kids. It also connected families that don't know each other and moms got to line up church baby sitters for the future!
- **Ash Wednesday Service:** The past two years the youth have led this event, but this year we had an intentionally inter-generational service. Our taizé song leaders included a high school youth, a 24-year-old Yale Intern, and one of our seniors. The readers and greeters also spanned the age range. This was a very cool evening of inter-generational community-building through worship.

- **Easter Egg Collaboration:** Normally our High Schoolers spend a very long evening stuffing Easter Eggs for our big Easter Egg hunt. This year, we collaborated with the Children's Ministry Department by having some of our Education Committee Members (moms of young children) come in and stuff eggs with us. This was AWESOME — it was fun and went by fast and best of all, broke down silos. The moms got to talk with the high schoolers about all sorts of issues while stuffing eggs — everything from the youths' experience with the gifted program at the elementary school to advice on bullying and standing up for yourself in middle school. The youth were empowered as people who had wisdom to offer and the moms were so grateful for the experience. As one mom wrote to me in an email "Such cool kids. So mature and level headed. Hard to believe in a few years my kids will be like them. The guys were so fun to talk to. So happy to see what lies ahead for the kids at GFC."
- **Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser:** an inter-generational community event focused on connecting and relationships by inviting everyone to share a meal. This was a huge success for building community and I've received lots of feedback that people loved this kind of event. Plus, we made money for our Mission Trip!

Connecting in New Ways: The youth love our weekly meetings but this year we tried new events or settings that were intentionally focused on connecting in ways other than our usual meeting-format in the youth room.

- **White Water Rafting:** This was a new event for us, and focused on bonding the group off-site. We drove up to MA to go white water rafting on the Deerfield River. A success at really connecting the kids through a shared adventure.
- **Thanksgiving Dinner:** Also a new event, this focused on a more personal and home-y setting. One of our 12th grader's family hosted the entire group for a Thanksgiving Dinner the week before Thanksgiving. It was a wonderful opportunity for the youth to connect over food and around a table. Definitely a win.
- **Lazer Tag:** Another new event, this one for Middle School. We took the middle school group up to Shelton for Lazer Tag, bringing high schoolers and adults as chaperones. It was an awesome bonding event that was also intergenerational.
- **Zip-lining in Bridgeport:** this is an awesome bonding event for our Middle School group that is worth repeating next year!
- **Navajo Night** (see above): again, a chance to connect in a new way by actually cooking the meal together and then eating it.

Meeting them where they are: Finding ways to meet the youth where they are rather than always asking them to come to us is really important for connections.

- We created a private Facebook group in 2014-2015, managed by the Associate Minister for Youth and Yale Interns. This allows greater communication of events, questions, etc. in a confidential setting amongst the group.
- We also continued attending team events, games, plays, concerts, and award ceremonies to support the kids and express our interest in their lives because community is a two-way street and takes effort from both sides to go where the other one is.

BUILDING DISCIPLESHIP: providing opportunities for learning, mentoring, serving as Christians to one another and the world:

- **Interns: I cannot express how huge of an impact our Divinity Interns have had on these young people and the program.** This year we were blessed to have two Yale Divinity Interns during the year, and to have had a Duke Divinity Intern over the summer. They are such blessings on the church, furthering both of our strategic initiatives in countless ways. Their energy, enthusiasm, fresh perspectives, and their commitment to their own faith journeys give them such a unique ability to help lead our Youth. They become mentors that truly build relationships and discipleship. There is no way I could have furthered our strategic initiatives so successfully in the youth programs without their time and help (15 hours per week each). My hope is that we again find a way to have two young people interning with us as Youth Ministry Interns in the coming year, and I am very excited that we will again have a Duke Divinity Intern this summer!
- **Youth Bible Study:** In 2014-2015 we started a weekly bible study, which has helped foster discipleship through more consistent and deeper teaching about scripture. The bible study started off very small with 3 kids attending, but in January the group has grown and we now have 6 kids regularly attending. The kids love it and we hope it will grow in the coming year!
- **Focused Christian Topics in Icthus:** In 2014-2015, we made a greater effort to cover topics in Icthus High School discussions that were explicitly connected to Christianity, God, and faith. Each week, either the Associate Minister for Youth or the Yale Divinity Interns would lead a discussion that was intentionally faith-based to foster discipleship among our young members.
- **Youth Praise Team:** In 2014-2015 we shaped the Youth Praise Team to be less about “rehearsal time” focused on the product and more intentionally a worship time that focused on the process (worshipping God and forming disciples!). We met weekly with a group of 6th-12th graders on Sundays after church with Tyler Ung, our guitarist and LaQruishia Gill, a Sunday School teacher with a leading voice, not only to sing praise songs, but to read scripture, pray, and sing worshipfully. The praise team participated in worship at this year’s Thanksgiving Service and Advent Service, and will sing at the Easter service and our Contemporary Worship Service. This was an amazing ministry that created discipleship in kids and our adult “helpers”, teaching practices of worship, prayer, and praise. It also ended up being inter-generational because we have adults who come sing with us. We do need to work on the scheduling (see below section), but this is truly a program that furthers both of our strategic initiatives.
- **Involving Youth in Worship:** Asking kids to read, sing, greet, usher, or pray during worship is a very important way to foster discipleship. They learn to love worship and lead worship, and the younger kids look up to them while they do it! In 2014-2015 we have amped up efforts to engage kids in worship. They helped at our special services as usual (Advent, Ash Wed., etc.), and we will really have them front and center *leading* worship at our Contemporary Worship Service, Service Sunday, Confirmation Sunday, Mission Trip Sunday, and Children and Youth Sunday.
- **Youth Prayer:** In 2014-2015 we increased our focus on teaching young people to feel comfortable with prayer. We consistently pray to open and close meetings, letting kids

take the lead at Praise Team, Confirmation, and at Youth Group. This was again hugely aided by our Divinity Interns from Duke over the summer and Yale during the year—seeing other young people praying has a huge impact!

- **Service:** In 2014-2015, in an effort to foster discipleship through service, we began discussions about partnering more frequently with our Outreach Team. One outcome of this conversation is that our youth are taking a more active role in our upcoming Service Day. In addition to this, I attended a training for a new program called “Midnight Run” that serves the homeless population in NYC. This is an event to be scheduled for 2015-2016, but will be an awesome intergenerational service opportunity that fosters discipleship for adults and youth. In addition to these new initiatives, we continued our ongoing service by again hosting the men of Pivot House for dinner and worship in the fall, caroling to our GFC friends in December, and of course our largest service effort will come in June, when we embark on our annual mission trip (this year to the Navajo Nation in NM). Service continues to be an important way that we foster discipleship in our young people.

Areas of Growth/Dreams for the future!

Broader Schedule of Activities for High Schoolers: Our youth’s schedules are so challenging that frequently dance or football will knock them out of participation for a whole season of Thursdays. Right now the only non-Thursday options are bible study or Sunday worship, which only offer connection points for a small number of kids. Moving forward, I would like to brainstorm ways that we could engage the Youth (especially high schoolers) at other times.

- One thought is a monthly meal where we all gather at someone’s home (on a rotating basis) on a Friday, Sat, or Sunday night. This could allow for connecting beyond Thursdays.
- Another idea is having them more involved on Sunday mornings. Perhaps a bible study or other youth-oriented faith formation program that happened a few Sundays a month. Especially for 9th and 10th graders who usually are not interested in sitting through worship. This could perhaps be something the Yale Intern helped lead.

Connecting with Seniors: While we increased our intergenerational efforts, we haven’t had a chance to really engage the youth with our older members. We did do a cookie delivery around Christmas to some of our seniors, but it ended up being just me and one student. My hope is to find a way next year to have an event or opportunity of some kind where we can connect our youth with our seniors.

Praise Team Scheduling. The youth show up for Praise Team in large numbers right before we are going to sing in church (or at another event). It is a challenge to get them there weekly following church during stretches where we are not actively preparing to sing in church. When the youth are there, this program has such an impact that it is worth thinking about how to make the schedule work better for them.

- One idea for this is to increase motivation by having more opportunities for them to sing. One way to do this is to introduce a monthly (or quarterly?) contemporary worship service and really use Praise Team time not only to worship but to prepare for the

service. I think this could create other opportunities for connection and discipleship for youth and adults.

- Another idea is to have our youth music person lead the music on a rotation basis leading up to events rather than weekly. Or at a different time — perhaps during Sunday School rather than after church.

Middle School Programming: This year we offered more options for middle schoolers (Praise Team, weekly Middle School Youth Group (MSYG), weekly Middle School Sunday School plus Confirmation in January), but ended up competing with our own programming. Especially once Confirmation begins in January, all the weekly programming is too much for their busy schedules. Moving forward, we have to find concentrated points of connection, particularly for 6th and 7th graders during the spring.

- One idea is to do fewer events in the spring (no weekly MSYG) but make them big events focused on 6th and 7th graders.
- Another idea is to focus on mixing it up in Middle School Sunday School, offering more community/relational activities at that time slot in addition to our discipleship moments. In the past we have used Sunday School as discipleship building time and the Youth Group events as bonding time, but Middle School Sunday School could be a great time to focus on both.

Fellowship Department

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According to our Vision, Green's Farms Church aspires to be a ***faith family of warm welcome*** and out of the Vision Project grew the strategic initiatives, one of which is ***deepening community***. Our Fellowship Ministry is all about warm welcome and deepening community! Fellowship is so much more than serving coffee and goodies at Sunday Social Hour. Beyond keeping folks hydrated, caffeinated and well fed, it offers a time to connect and socialize, to catch up and reach out, to forge new friendships and feed existing ones.

Fellowship also provides ***warm welcomes*** and opportunities to ***deepen community*** at special events like Homecoming Sunday and Sundae Sunday as well as times other than après worship on Sundays. There is always a time for coffee & conversation surrounding any Bible Study session, GFC Seniors program (Apple & Pie, Brown Bag luncheon, etc.) or special evening event (Messiah Talk). Fellowship and the women of Sophia's Gathering hosted a Compo Beach Gathering, a Painting with a Twist Ladies' Evening, the Women's Christmas Coffee, held this year at the Historical Society, and plans are in the works for a Spring Outing at Longshore. Fellowship is supporting the Women's Wellness Series providing light refreshments for Yoga Night, Intro to Meditation, Baking Bread Workshop, so far, and a Reiki Workshop on the docket. Service Sunday also has a major Fellowship component with a group of volunteers providing hot lunch for Gillespie Center and refreshments and celebratory lunch for the Service Sunday workers.

Any worthwhile offering is not without its challenges. The Fellowship Ministry suffers a bit from a reputation of utilitarianism; it simply does not have the same spiritual dazzle as our Prayer, Pastoral and Outreach Ministries but it is an essential element in all that we do here at GFC. There are many willing Fellowship "helper volunteers" and a few Fellowship "Angels" who will commit a captaining the effort for a few Sundays but the job of coordinating the Sunday captains, volunteers and supplies is considerable and we have been without a lay leader for two years. It is my hope is to identify an individual or two who would be willing to work as Fellowship overseer(s) for Sunday Coffee Hours next year.

In the meantime, I have done my best to simplify and streamline both the volunteer recruitment process as well as the job of hosting. Some simplifications that have worked well and I intend to maintain include our standing order of pre-paid, pre-cut bagels from Fortuna's, asking the one-time volunteers to please bring a platter of something for the buffet table, limiting our cold beverage offering to water (unless there is juice or iced tea leftover from an event the previous week,) and serving Simply Smiles coffee (which is pre-measured and packaged for our GFC coffee makers, tastes delicious, is price competitive and supports a wonderful organization.) Having Confirmation families serve as part of their Confirmation requirement makes good sense (providing needed volunteers and encouraging these families to participate in various ministries) but often becomes an administrative challenge. Having a GFC department be responsible for providing volunteers for a particular month has had mixed success and will have to be re evaluated. Creative solutions and volunteers are always welcome!

~Alison L. Fisher April 1, 2015

Membership and Community Life Department

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Members: Ellie Lowenstein, Brittany Steel (co-chairs); Ed Barlow, Lori Fabian, David Feliciano, Kathy Horton, Bunny Thompson, Bob Tirreno, Ann Stewart, Erica Winkler

Sometimes we think of ourselves as the ‘Welcoming’ committee. We try to spot, greet and be available to visitors every Sunday in our sanctuary and at coffee hour and greet them. We watch for them on subsequent Sundays, and we are available as a church resource and an interested church member. We personally **deliver a loaf of bread** and a welcome letter to all those who have made an initial visit to our church service.

We **search the city records for newcomers** to Westport and send them letters about our church and its many activities. We are there with **name tags** for all worship participants on designated Sunday mornings to help us all with names and faces.

When people are seriously interested in knowing more about Green's Farms Church, our faith and the United Church of Christ, we invite them to an **Inquirers' Series** where they learn more intensely or more in detail of what we are about as a church. We then facilitate their joining, if they desire to do so.

A new project resulted from our desire to further be involved in the Vision of our church by helping people find connectedness - “a way to be part of a community with others in the church.” **Faith Partners**, consists of teams of 12 each, many of the participants new to the church while others having been part of GFC for some time. The goal is to “form a community to worship, serve, and socialize.” On Sept 16, 2014 we launched the first Faith Partner team and the second this March.

We would like to **follow up with telephone calls** to parishioners we have not seen for awhile to let them know they are missed and to establish their needs. In the future, we plan to **check with our newest members** to see if they are connecting or participating in the areas of the church they desired when first joining GFC.

GFC's Vision Statement dovetails with the real purpose of the Membership Committee.

Our job is to welcome and facilitate visitors and potential new members. But, we are humbly more aware that it is not so much what we will do as a committee – as it is how we will go about it - how we as individuals will represent Greens Farms Church and Jesus Christ.

Visitors come into our sanctuary to see who we are and what we are about. For many, it is very difficult to be a newcomer. They decide rather quickly whether they want to come to us again. Often, a member of our group is entrusted to be the first contact “seekers” encounter. We want most of all, to be ‘there’ for them. We are increasingly more mindful of how critical it is for that meeting to be warm, welcoming and genuine. At any given service, there may be a casual visitor, or there may be someone in serious need.

At the very least, we seek to be a friendly soul, offering kindness and conversation and a clear welcoming introduction to the kind of people they will find in our church. We are also conscious of how delicate new relationships can be and of how fragile and tenuous the commitment process can be. We strive to be knowledgeable and forthright about what our church has to offer. At the same time, we do not wish to overwhelm. We are honored to be the 'Welcoming' Committee for new 'seekers'. We humbly aspire to be Christ for them and to see Christ in them. We pray for the Lord's help in doing that.

Outreach Department

Annual Report 2014 – 2015

The Outreach Committee of Green's Farms Church has been busy! Early last year we were planning our first service day – a response to the GFC Trustees challenging to us to do something new and that involved the whole congregation. Along with the rest of the congregation, we were involved in the Vision project and we engaged in discussions to see how we could reflect that vision in our work. We also have been blessed by eight new members, who have taken up the good work and relationships that have preceded us.

But first a little on the organizational front. The Council asked us to reflect GFC's vision in our work. They further defined our focus with the initiatives "Building Community" and "Service and Discipleship." In response, Outreach adopted the following principles to guide our efforts:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." John 15:12

1. **Financial Support:** Support worthy local organizations relying on faith-based assistance with financial resources that can have a material impact on the lives of those in need. Favor organizations that offer opportunities for the congregation to provide direct service and practice the Christian faith by developing relationships with the recipients of the church's support.
2. **Hands-on Service:** Seek regular hands-on service opportunities, near and far, that make an immediate and long term difference in the lives of those served, the lives of those who serve, and create community and faith connections within the congregation and with the communities that are served, enlarging our understanding of who and how Jesus calls us to love.
3. **Engage the Whole Congregation, Enrich Discipleship:** Create opportunities for all members of the congregation to follow Jesus by serving and sacrificing in ways that create connectivity and community and enrich our experience of discipleship.
4. **Be Open:** Always remain open to God's call in human suffering that inspires our imagination, speaks to our hearts, or requires us to question our settled assumptions and ways of doing things.

While we have always sought to serve our immediate and greater community, we have tried to reorganize our focus from a model that relied upon the committee membership being the primary hands and feet of various service opportunities to leadership / sponsorship of service opportunities that will be available to all in our congregation. The goal is to multiply and broaden service opportunities.

GFC's first Service Day was a perfect opportunity to reflect this aspect of our vision. For those that participated (and we had over 150 volunteers), we all remember the great work, fellowship, new friendships and God's spirit working in us and in those that we served. From the GFC Trustees who challenged us, to the volunteers who participated and the organizations we partnered with, we are all very grateful to have been blessed with this experience. We especially owe a debt of gratitude to Jeff Booth and Claire England who led this effort and cleared a path for the rest of us to follow. It was a simple decision to continue this effort which took place on April 26. Alex Horton and Nicholas Eisenberger led the effort this year and along with Alex's intrepid and inspired children, James and Grace, have signed up over 175 volunteers! Two new organizations will be served this year, Habitat for Humanity and the Walk Against Hunger – Walk a Thon. We continue to look for other opportunities to serve that involve more of our congregation – we are surrounded by needs and blessed by God's abundance, we seek to give back what has been so graciously given us.

We have tried to create "Liaisons" within the committee to form closer relationships with the agencies we serve. We invite organizations that we support to present to us during our monthly meetings and we seek to develop deeper relationships with them in order to find better ways to serve. If we have ongoing relationships with service organizations we believe we will find more opportunities to serve and serve more effectively.

As an example, following Lori Redmer's passing in 2013, a memorial fund was established by the family and just over \$7,000 in contributions were given largely by members of Green's Farms Church. The Outreach Committee was asked to think of a use that would be fitting for such an extraordinary woman whom we all knew and loved. One of our committee members, Bill McCutchen, met Gaston Warner who is the director of *ZOE Helps*, which is a relief organization originally established in Zimbabwe and now active in Rwanda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Malawi. GFC along with Bill and his wife Renie, have been active supporters of Indian Gospel Mission and it occurred to Bill that IGM's mission would be perfect for a *ZOE* initiative there. The Outreach Committee felt that helping establish *ZOE* in India would be a perfect tribute to Lori, who devoted so much of her personal and professional life to helping children in need. The initial seed capital required was a grant of \$21,000, to be given over a three-year period and IGM requested the grant not be provided in lieu of the other support we have traditionally given them. The GFC Trustees agreed to the proposal. We spoke with Jacob Williams, who is the director of IGM in Chennai (many of you have met him when he visited GFC in 2013) just a few weeks ago ***and already they are serving over 80 orphaned children in the slums of Chennai providing them with skills and resources to help enable them to become self sufficient.*** We have more progress to make in establishing organizational liaisons, although we are inspired by this story and see God's grace working in and through us.

We have sought to delegate ongoing service opportunities to GFC congregants, with the Outreach Committee providing backstop resources and support. The goal is to provide more opportunities for GFC congregants to participate without the commitment of being a full Outreach Committee member. Examples include the Hungry Hearts (middle schoolers with Brad Cosgrove's leadership), Gillespie (Grace Chiang and GFC volunteers) and the Bridgeport Rescue Mission Thanksgiving Coat Drive in November and Person to Person's Gift of Giving Toy Store in December.

The Outreach Committee has eight new members in 2014. We believe recruiting and rotating membership is an important part of our commitment in that it requires us to involve more of our congregation in this role we believe is so central to our Christian faith.

Last year, Green's Farms Church provided \$147,000 (which was 12% of overall church income last year) allocated to Outreach through our budget. We funded the Service Day last April (approximately \$9,500), and made direct grants of \$127,000 to 16 agencies we help support. We also provided \$10,500 to support for the Youth Mission Trip. We are grateful to serve and look forward to what God has in store for us this year!

Finally, if you are interested in participating, either as a committee member or for a specific service opportunity, alone or with your family or a friend, please let us know! We want to connect with you and to connect you to those in need. Thank you for allowing us to serve.

In faith and service, the Outreach Committee.

Brad Cosgrove
Vince D'Agostino
Nicholas Eisenberger
Jeff Esser
Chris Fitch
Alex Horton
David Kercher
Bill McCutchen
Kenneth Kosinski
Daryl Moccia
Caroline Nevin
Steve West

Personnel Committee

Annual Report 2014 – 2015

During 2014, the Personnel Committee of Green's Farms Church has been active in addressing a number of staffing changes.

With respect to ordained staff, in May, The Rev. John Twiname was named Minister Emeritus, marking 19 years of extraordinary service to Green's Farms Church in countless capacities. He continues to be an active member of our family and has been especially active in the church's planned giving program, Legacy Partners, and spearheading a coalition of local churches and synagogues helping secure a full time chaplain at Carolton Rehabilitation Hospital in Fairfield.

Following the departure of The Rev. Dan England, in July, who answered a call to be the interim minister of First Congregational Church of Litchfield, we added The Rev. Peter Grandy and more recently David Stambaugh as visiting teachers of the adult bible study. Participants enjoyed learning from both Peter and Dave and we see benefits in having rotational leaders for the adult bible study ministry in that we have the opportunity to see different perspectives in our study of God's word while the potential drawback with such an approach is the risk participants may not have the opportunity to form deeper relationships with a longer term leader. While we remain open to filling this permanently, we are not in a rush and continue to enjoy Dave's ministry and teaching.

In January, Minister of Pastoral Care, The Rev. Amy Forte, began a one year leave of absence from the church staff to spend more time with her family. We continue to evaluate our needs in this ministry while Amy and Dwight continue to be active members in the life of Green's Farms Church.

Bob Custer, our long time Sexton who has been with us for close to three decades, is moving to a part time basis. He remains a full time employee now but will migrate to part time during the next few months. He has been instrumental in so many things in our GFC community and we are pleased and grateful that with his shift to part time, we are not losing him entirely.

An important personnel change involves our replacement for the position left vacant by the passing of JoAnne LaBella in June last year. Joanne was the office manager for GFC for over 15 years and not only was a key part of the administrative team supporting GFC's ministries, she occupied a special place in all of our hearts. She is deeply missed. In considering her replacement however, we reflected on the changing needs of GFC specifically with respect to our vision and the direction our members had embraced during the vision project itself. Specifically, that members wanted to be more connected with each other and in service to the church and our wider community. Providing more opportunities to serve that involve more congregants requires a level of administrative capacity that is missing at GFC. Our service day last April helped crystallize this view – a great success and many expressed a desire to expand such opportunities, but the administrative burden (fortunately not visible in the execution) was substantial and we saw that our ability to realize our vision required a different organizational capacity.

In recognition of these issues, we create the role of a Director of Operations (DOO), which would occupy a more senior role than what JoAnne had previously performed. This position would organize and coordinate our administrative group, oversee the support of ordained staff, act as point person on administrative matters involving GFC council and trustees, and leverage the Senior Minister on a variety of matters from day to day staff supervision to planning and budgeting. Our goal is to allow ordained staff to be more focused on their ministry and not as burdened with the administrative burdens that divert their focus. We retained a temporary DOO, Kathleen Nekola, to help us flesh out this role and to assist while we find a permanent replacement. We are interviewing for this position and expect to fill it shortly. We don't anticipate any other changes to existing positions.

Finally, we expect to retain an administrative assistant to fill many of the office functions and to assist ordained staff. We expect to fill this position before the summer.

This is an exciting time for GFC. We are honored to serve and are committed to help provide the staff with the tools to support our ordained staff and members to realize the vision of GFC.

In faith and service, the Personnel Committee.

Stewardship Department

Annual Report 2014 – 2015

"Stewardship is everything we do after we say we believe." ~St. Francis of Assisi

These simple but insightful words from St. Francis of Assisi were the inspiration for this year's "Live the Vision!" theme, and guided the Stewardship team in its every effort. We strived to highlight the existing connections we have – with each other, with GFC, and with God – and to inform the congregation about available opportunities to develop and deepen those connections every day.

We aimed to shine light on the values we share – Community, Family, Fellowship, Worship, and Preaching & Teaching – values previously identified through listening sessions and interviews with the congregation during the formation of the GFC Vision. We know that God has both blessed our congregation with these values, and asked us to share our blessings with others who may not be as fortunate.

We joined the wisdom of St. Francis with the aspirations of the GFC Vision and were prompted to ask: "What is God calling us to be?" Or perhaps more appropriately, "What is God calling us to DO?" The Stewardship team was excited to walk with the congregation – seeking, listening, and answering God's call. We hope that God's call continues to resonate in your life today.

And, we acknowledged that of course the financial part of stewardship matters greatly. Jesus spoke about money more than any other subject – He knew it would be one of our biggest challenges as stewards. It is a multifaceted challenge: establishing budgets and making financial commitments personally and as a church body, providing for those with fewer resources, making choices about what we want versus what we need, being responsible for GFC in gratitude to previous generations who built this church home, and being good stewards for those who come after us.

With regard to 2015 pledges, it is important to recognize the continuing generosity of the congregation. Although the number of pledging families decreased slightly from last year (191 v. 200), the financial commitment increased and will allow GFC to fully support its 2015 budget for staffing, programs, and outreach. GFC and the Stewardship team are extremely grateful for your response. Thank you!

We hope we've helped to frame stewardship in a broader sense, as an opportunity to consider and offer gifts of presence, participation, and pledges. Collectively these are what our church and our community need from us. Going forward, the Stewardship team aspires to make stewardship an integral and year-round part of the conversation and identity of GFC, as "we embody Christ's hope, love, and service wherever we go."

A special thanks to Vince D'Agostino, Kaye May, and Tony Menchaca who provided testimonials about the role of stewardship in their lives, and the importance of looking outside of ourselves as we

serve God by serving others. The sharing of their personal experiences was a generous gift to us as we strive to be good stewards of all that God has provided.

Thank you for all you do, both in service and financially towards God's purposes. Live the Vision!

GFC Stewardship

~ Eric Chiang, Cindy Cornell, Stu Hawley, Matt Smith, Steve West, Bob Zapata ~

Trustees Department

Annual Report 2014 – 2015

The Trustees of the Congregational Church of Green's Farms are responsible for:

- Analyzing the financial needs of the Church consistent with the Church's objectives and recommending an annual budget to the congregation for approval;
- Managing use of the Church's funds and developing a long-term plan to cultivate the financial resources of the Church; and,
- Maintaining the Church's buildings, parsonages, and cemeteries.

The Trustees were able to continue to support the growth of our Church's programs and retain a strong balance sheet, despite an operating deficit of approximately \$35k in 2014. The deficit was primarily due to a shortfall in pledge income, which was partially offset by an increase in other income sources and funding from our endowment. The 2015 budget projects operating breakeven based on anticipated pledge receipts of \$915k (an increase of \$32k over 2014) and continued funding from our endowment in a conservative amount consistent with expected investment growth. Based on early indications, our pledge receipts are expected to exceed the budgeted level and should allow us to continue to meet our program objectives. Nevertheless, increasing the overall pledge base will be one of our most important priorities in 2015.

The Trustees continue to manage the Church's endowment and other fund accounts to ensure good stewardship of the Church's resources and maintenance of a strong balance sheet. These resources include the Memorial Fund (representing the Church's unrestricted endowment), the Bryant Fund (used primarily to fund Outreach programs) and three specialized property accounts (including Major Maintenance, Parrish Grant Property, and Jennings Cemetery Accounts). Total fund accounts began 2014 with a balance of \$1.874mm and ended 2014 with a balance of \$2.181mm, an increase of 16%. The main drivers of this increase were a \$150k contribution to the Parrish Property Account, a \$35k dividend from Green's Farms Nursery School, and strong performance from our investments.

The Church's physical facilities remain in good condition. Property maintenance projects during 2014 were focused on continued improvements in handicap access and renovation of the parsonage. Due to the completion of these projects, major maintenance expenditures are expected to decrease from \$82k in 2014 to \$53k in 2015. Going forward, our resources should be sufficient to support other planned major maintenance projects as well as changes to the Church property to more effectively support our program offerings and growth. This will be a renewed focus during 2015, as the Trustees seek opportunities to enhance the Church's physical structure in ways that support GFC's vision of a welcoming church and initiatives intended to deepen community and improve discipleship.

The invested portion of the Church's endowment funds continued to perform well in 2014. The fixed income portion (primarily the Vanguard Bond Fund) had a 6.0% return and the equity portion (Vanguard S&P 500 Index Fund) had a 13.7% return. The Investment Committee continues to make capital preservation its top priority and as a result maintains a 30-35% allocation to equities.

We thank all the Trustees and the Church staff for their efforts over the past year. Trusting in God's providence, we look forward to continued financial strength in 2015.

Respectfully submitted,

Tony Menchaca & John Durkin, Co-Chairs

Craig Barney

Jeff Booth

Heather Lee

Carol McKay

Matt Smith

Deborah Welch

Brian Welker

Financial Review Committee

Annual Report 2014-2015

The Financial Review Committee (the Committee), as established by the Constitution of the Congregational Church of Green's Farms (GFC), reviews the financial practices of the Church Treasurer annually. The Committee can make recommendations to the Treasurer and the Board of Trustees pertaining to the Church's finances, and also confirms that previous recommendations have been acted upon.

The Committee reviews the Treasurer's duties, including basic transaction input, report generation, investment practices, and operating procedures.

No significant changes were noted in either the Treasurer's duties or processes. Accounts continue to be prepared using QuickBooks and the review found the processes to be well prepared, accurate and supported.

Although the Committee does not perform a "formal" audit and the resulting report does not conform to generally accepted auditing standards, the review did not identify any major issues or concerns; however, the following recommendation is proposed to continue to enhance the financial practices and support procedures:

Youth Mission Trip balance (repeat recommendation):

The Youth Mission Trip balance continues to increase and now stands at \$37,812 at 31 December 2014, an increase of approximately \$5,850 from 2013. The Financial Review Committee discussed strategies for using the balance and recommends a formal proposal be adopted by 30 June 2015.

Finally, the Committee would like to thank Suellyn Durkin for her support and cooperation during this review.

Respectfully submitted,

Ian Overton

Worship and Music Department

Annual Report 2014-2015

The department had a successful year with a full complement of members and two Chairs, Ken Moy & Ashley Welker. Both co-chairs were able to share the responsibilities of coordinating communion preparation and supporting the head ushers as needed.

The committee met in August for a kick-off dinner and a review of the roles and responsibilities of head ushers. We were fortunate to have many returning members from the past two years as well as some new folks. The following members served as a head usher for a respective month: Maureen Barre (September), JoAnne Reeves (October), Carlos Garcia (November), Ken Moy & Ashley Welker (December), Gail Smith (January), Joan Beer (February), Mary Esser (March), Lorraine & David Feliciano (April), Alex Horton (May) and Ashley Welker (June). We also had some frequent head ushering support from others like Ed Barlow, Grace & Eric Chiang, and Steven Bean.

The head ushers recruited and supervised ushers, greeters and communion servers. With the assistance of Alison Fisher & Rebecca Floyd Marshall, our confirmands and their families served as ushers and greeters for most Sundays from January through May.

Our Minister of Music Eileen Hunt, Chancel Choir, Cherub Choir and Family Band once again provided extraordinary music all year long. In addition to the standard program, Eileen Hunt and Caroline Barney also coordinated special music for our Christmas, Palm Sunday and Easter services.

Summer services were held at Compo Beach as usual. Regular 10 a.m. services were held in the sanctuary. Communion elements were provided and set up through most of the year by the head usher. We continued the approach of having the existing head usher handle the communion elements for the next month, crossing over with the incoming head usher.

Thanks to all department members for their service throughout the year and to Alison Fisher, Rebecca Floyd Marshall and Bob Custer for their support.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the department,

Ashley Welker
Co-chair

Ken Moy
Co-chair

MINISTER OF MUSIC

Green's Farms Church enjoys a very active and eclectic Music Ministry. We are so fortunate to enjoy a wonderful choir and soloists, and frequent guest musicians. What a joy it is to plan worship services with music to inspire our hearts and souls. I often think about the ways in which the Music Ministry embraces and intersects with the many other ministries of our church. Music intersects with education, whether it be in presenting a talk on Handel's *Messiah*, or teaching a new hymn to the congregation, or talking about how a certain composition came to be written. Music embraces youth and children, in encouraging young singers to participate in worship, or in mentoring a young instrumentalist who is studying violin and is will to share his/her gifts with the congregation. And, of course, it is an integral part of worship each and every week, with carefully chosen preludes, postludes, hymns, choral music and vocal solos.

Music also brings us together in community. Our choir is a close knit community as we sing and learn together every week throughout the year. The guest musicians with whom I work on a regular basis create a community as we come together to rehearse and present special music at our services. And music brings our congregation closer in community as we sing together each week. Some of our hymns are sung prayers to God, some are joyful psalms of praise, some are sung meditations. I am always reminded of St. Augustin who said "She who sings prays twice" and I know those are true words.

This year is also an important anniversary for our Music Ministry as we mark the 50th birthday of our magnificent Aeolian-Skinner organ. The inauguration of the organ took place on March 7, 1965 and I have a series of special events planned this spring to celebrate this wonderful instrument. Notably, on May 10, 2015, I will present the Connecticut premiere of Robert Sirota's work ***Apparitions*** for organ and string quartet. Composed in 2013, this work was premiered in 2014 at the National Convention of the American Guild of Organists in Boston. Robert Sirota, a nationally known composer, will join us in worship that morning.

Lastly, April 1, 2015 marked the beginning of my 30th year with you at GFC. Here's to lots more wonderful music in worship at GFC! I close with the words Johann Sebastian Bach wrote at the end of every one of his compositions: **Soli Deo Gloria.....To God Alone be the Glory.**

Dr. Eileen J. Hunt
Minister of Music