

## Search and Call Tools for Congregations

Advancing the Spirit's guidance into God's future

# INTRODUCING THE NEW LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

Who  
are  
we

Who  
is our  
neighbor

Who is  
God  
calling us  
to become

?

The new Local Church Profile is not just for congregations in search of a pastor. *All* congregations are encouraged to engage in its process of discovery every 3-5 years. The UCC Local Church Profile reflects valuable data, assesses ministry, clarifies change, and helps advance the calling of the congregation. Not just to be completed by a search committee – the more participation, the better!

MINISTERIAL EXCELLENCE,  
SUPPORT & AUTHORIZATION

**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**



# UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

## LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

St. Stephens UCC  
Merrill, WI. 54452

### Associate Pastor of Faith Formation and Congregational Life

#### Summary Ministry Description:

*In a short paragraph, reflect on where your church is going and what it might look like when you get there. What do you need to get there? Who are you seeking to join you on this part of your church's faith journey?*

Where are we going? That's a great question, even more so as we emerge from Covid and begin doing the work to figure out what church is going to look like and how we might live into this changed future.

We have recently called a new Senior Pastor and we are already making plans for incorporating the wisdom we have gleaned from the last year as we move forward. We anticipate we will need someone who can function in the old ways while helping us bridge into a new hybrid church of in person and digital media ministry.

What we're doing in the meantime is saying "yes" a lot. We are working on breaking a culture of resistance and hesitation. In particular, we're saying yes to hands-on mission work and to outside groups using our building. We know our general direction: toward more faithfulness in broadening expressions; toward deeper engagement with our community to even better meet the needs of the people and raise the standard of living in our town; toward a more extravagant welcome. We are seeking someone with a pastoral heart who leads with love and is anxious to become part of a ministry team that is comprised of staff and volunteers. We imagine this person to be engaging and creative - willing to help us imagine a new and deeper faithfulness, rooted in tradition, with a spirit of innovation. We anticipate a person who is centered around the gospel - the life of Jesus - and the richness and challenge for life that this congregation offers.

#### 1b. SCOPE OF WORK

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*(add here the Scope of Work developed by your church using the Call Agreement Workbook)*

- Planning and executing the church's education program for all ages in collaboration with the Senior Pastor and Christian Education Team.
- Sustain and expand the youth group.
- Assist in worship and lead in worship and being comfortable in both roles.
- Train volunteers, Sunday School teachers, Messy Church hosts and others who wish to participate in and develop skills for faith formation and discipleship training in the church.
- Coordinate Mission Trip opportunities for youth and adults.
- Assist with and lead funerals, weddings and services of recognition as needed.
- Visit congregants who are hospitalized, in long-term care facilities and homebound.

#### Core Competencies:

*(List three core competencies that you imagine could be foundational in your next minister's relationship with the church. For example, a church seeking a pastoral care minister might hope to call someone who is caring, sensitive and sociable, while a church seeking an executive minister might want an organized, detail-oriented and time-conscious person.)*

- The ability to work as part of a team with long range planning and responding to current emergent needs.
- Openness and insight to see opportunities for non-traditional worship and points of contact for people who no longer see Sunday morning worship as part of the spiritual life.
- The ability to use technology to maintain current relationships and develop new relationships through digital social media ministry.

Worship is still the center of the life of our congregation, and we rely on it to bring the good news and give us life. We seek someone with a creative spirit found in the image of the Creator, so our worship might be as compelling as it is enlightening. We are open to exploring alternative ways of worshipping and involving all the generations in telling the Gospel story.

#### 1d. WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?

Describe the ministry goals you envision your next minister co-collaborating with the congregation to achieve.

Much of the church's existing programming is effective with a senior minister and lay leadership. However, we envision growth for our future. Growth may be defined as gaining in numbers or dollars, but more importantly, we envision new, meaningful, and relevant ways to connect with our community and one another. We desire to discover and live more fully into what sets us apart from other churches in our community: a progressive theology, a welcoming spirit, and a desire to live out the gospel in particular ways.

We imagine an associate minister who will join the team in collaboration with the congregation and senior minister to further our spiritual growth and expand our mission outreach.

Describe how your vision of the minister you are now seeking will assist the congregation in making an impact beyond its walls.

Saint Stephens is known for its leadership in community outreach within our city/area. The local food pantry originated here and continues to be a well-supported priority. We've been leaders and strong supporters in the Crop Walk, Fill the Gazebo (food drive for the various food pantries) Food 4 Kids, Christmas Spirit Giving Tree and other local ministries and agencies. We are currently providing the administration and organization for the Food for Kids program providing 200+ bags of food for kids every weekend at 5 different elementary schools. We participate in the Lunch in the Park (a summer lunch program for kids). We have entered into an agreement to provide space for Lincoln Industries to use in their community-based education program for Developmentally Delayed adults. We are re-starting our free weekly meal, "Dinner at Five," on Mondays with new volunteers and new ways of relating to the community.

These missions and programs have been embraced by the congregation after someone from within or outside of the church has become passionate about a need and brought it to the church.

One of the interesting outreach ministries we offer from our building is our Medical Ministry. It's a loan closet for the community to come to borrow medical supplies such as walkers, canes, commodes, wheelchairs, and an assortment of other devices that are loaned out for as long as someone needs it. We just ask that they return it when done so we can loan it out again.

There are certainly pieces of ministry that require the pastor's expertise, but we are most interested in someone with the leadership skills to help empower the congregation to continue searching out needs and passions, and then designing creative ways to make that impact, however large or small.

Based on what you have learned about who your church is, who your church's neighbor is, and who God is calling the church to become, describe four areas of excellence from *The Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministry* that your next minister will display to further equip the congregation's ministry in these areas.

- Understanding the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the elements of Christian worship to nurture faith.
- Empowering the Church to be faithful to God's call, reflective of Christ's mission, and open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit.
- Providing hope and healing to a hurting world.
- Practicing the radical hospitality of God.

Describe how God is calling you to reach out to address the emerging challenges and opportunities of your community and congregation.

In some ways God is calling Saint Stephens to address emerging challenges alongside challenges that others have already faced. As a former logging, mill, and factory town, our people are still struggling through what de-industrialization looks like as a community and individually. There is still an industrial labor force, but the area itself has been in a period of stagnation as the work to discover what comes next is still in process. Several industries, however, are expanding in Merrill. Two window and door manufacturers are expanding their plants and adding about 200 skilled labor jobs. The Weinbrenner Shoes Thorogood Boot factory with plants in Merrill and Marshfield is expanding and adding jobs as well. These longstanding industries are finding their niche in the marketplace and continue to offer good paying, skilled labor employment.

Economically, the city of Merrill is middle-class and working class, with a fair number of working poor, some that are truly impoverished, with outliers of a handful of homeless and of upper middle class on the other ends.

After two decades of transition, the church is better prepared to embrace today's concerns than it has been for quite some time. There is a clear willingness to move forward to address the concerns of the wider church. We are not currently ONA, but we are moving further toward progressive theology. Much of the conversation is around Biblical interpretation and the value of creating a safe space to worship and belong for all people.

There is plenty of energy present and still in the wings, to engage the spiritual needs of people today. Of course, the ever-present conversation about generational differences does come up, but in ways that there is an openness and desire to help meet the needs of generations that are underrepresented in the life of the congregation. We are finding that we provide an alternative church option for people in our town who are oriented toward church but reject the more exclusionary theology of other local churches.

The congregation is not afraid of politics. However, there are many political and social viewpoints represented in the congregation, so politics is best approached through the life of Jesus in a way that leaves space for personal choice, rather than theological mandate. We are open to being challenged in the ways of Jesus that help us live more faithfully.

God is calling us to continue to push our own boundaries to become more extravagantly welcoming and to better care for our community.

Describe how God is calling you to reach out to address the emerging challenges and opportunities of your community and congregation.

*For example, describe two experiments your congregation has initiated or engaged in the past year, what were the results and where do you see your next steps? Has your church had a multi-year strategic plan or vision statement; if so, where do you see that plan/vision taking you?*

We have had a radio ministry broadcasting our 9am service for over 30 years and with Covid we have begun livestreaming our 9am and other special services. We have invested in better sound system and video technology and expect to continue that ministry and expand our online presence. It has been well received by the congregation even as we have grieved not being able to worship together in person.

We recently adopted a new strategy in promoting the many ministries we support. We are focusing on one mission per month, our monthly mission focus, to better tell the stories of our special offerings and mission partners.

This monthly focus has inspired people's generosity with an average of \$2,000 a month contributed to homeless shelters, domestic abuse agency, our 5 for 5 offerings and our various hunger ministries.

Describe your congregation's life of faith.

*For example, what beliefs and commitments are stated in your congregation's purpose statement or membership vows? How is God most often described in worship liturgy? In what ways would you describe the Holy Spirit in your midst?*

We are a devoted congregation. You will find many walk into the sanctuary, find their pew, stand, and pray before they take their seat. Communion is important, both because of tradition, but also because the sacraments have special meaning to this congregation. People come to worship to be fed by what they hear from music and the word - both scripture and preaching. Tradition is very important, but there is plenty of space to experiment and try new things. Anything can be worth trying once, and if it works, there is space to incorporate it. There is also plenty of room for growth in this area, in terms of adult education, retreats, and spiritual practices. The God of love and forgiveness is the God that is worshiped in this congregation.

Describe several strengths or positive qualities of your congregation.

Saint Stephens quickly embraces no-nonsense, concrete projects and missions. We are known to be generous in our commitment to projects and our acceptance of others. Some strengths of our congregation are:

- Willingness to try new things
- Openness to being led by clergy and lay leaders
- Deep concern and desire to serve and engage in the community
- Loyal and steadfast; we keep our commitments
- If you're willing to ask, people are willing to help
- Most progressive church in town
- New energy and growth, after many years of transition
- We are willing to work and willing to learn
- We don't place the responsibility of growing the church solely on our ministers' shoulders, and we see it as a collaborative enterprise.

Describe what worship is like when your congregation gathers.

*For example, where does worship take place, and what is it based around? What was a recent baptism like? What are some words used to describe good preaching?*

After a year of foregoing in person worship, we have begun in person worship with guidelines in line with the Wisconsin Council of Churches. For the last year, we have held worship to be broadcast on our local radio station and livestreamed through Facebook.

We are now offering our 9am "vintage" service, broadcast on the radio and livestreamed with Sunday School at 10am. Beginning in October, we will offer a Wednesday evening service at 6pm that will be more informal and contemplative.

We primarily use *The Chalice* hymnal, have a choir and a chime choir.

Communion is offered monthly and other special holidays. Baptisms are celebrations of the congregation, most often witnessed by the Sunday school children surrounding the baptismal font. In response to Covid, we have allowed "private" baptisms with family only to protect infants from exposure.

Communion is important to the congregation, and our clergy stress the importance of the "open table," and that there are no barriers to receiving communion for anyone who desires to partake.

Describe the educational program and/or faith formation vision of your church.

We have been rebuilding our educational programming over the last couple of years. With our new Senior Pastor, we are exploring new curriculums with greater online resources for our teachers and leaders; we are beginning the Messy Church program this summer; we are planning to have children in worship beginning this fall and have Sunday School after worship.

Parents and children alike are responding with excitement to these changes and looking forward to trying new things and being more involved in worship.

One of our more recent changes came in our Confirmation program. In January 2019, our confirmation program changed to be a largely self-directed spiritual exploration for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders. The intention behind this is to accommodate already busy schedules of youth and families. It also is a way for the youth to take ownership of their own spiritual growth through the completion of specific projects that provide hands-on opportunities to experience key elements of our Christian tradition. Confirmands have class once a month for discussion and choose mentors to help them along this journey.

Confirmation is led by our Senior Pastor, who believes in the learning method of "watch one, do one, teach one" so the "upper class" of the 2-year program are expected to teach a 15 minute segment sometime during their 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

Our Youth Group is in a rebuilding process after Covid and we are focusing on revitalizing it with fellowship and mission focus.

In the past we had two youth groups, a middle school (grades 6-8) and a high school (grades 9-12). The Associate Minister led and coordinated all things youth group, with the help and aid from lay leaders.

Both youth groups met once or twice a month. These gatherings consisted of service projects, lock-ins, movie nights, and regular get-togethers where the youth learned about one another and what the church does and can look like, all while having fun!

Our Senior Pastor thoroughly enjoys adult Christian Ed programs and has begun a weekly bible study and plans to offer Living the Questions 2.0 in the fall along with an adult study at Messy Church.

We are always open to new ways of engaging the lives of our members and those outside our community, considering the changing culture and schedules, but also people's desire for spiritual growth and nourishment.

## Describe how your congregation is organized for ministry and mission.

We have a Mission Committee that coordinates the various ministries our congregation takes part in.

- Food for Kids provides a weekend's supply of food for elementary students every Friday (about 200 students a week)
- Summer Lunch program works with 4 other churches to provide lunch for children every weekday through the summer—we have Taco Tuesdays.
- Support of Haven, a domestic abuse shelter.
- MAC Home—warming center and homeless shelter for those experiencing homelessness in Merrill,
- ReBoot—an educational and support program for Veterans
- Bluejay Nest—a pantry for food, school supplies, hygiene supplies and other items for students at the high school
- The Merrill food pantry
- Annual community Thanksgiving Meal

The Mission Committee coordinates the various groups and people who feel passionate about these ministries.

This frees members to become part of other groups about which they are passionate rather than becoming burned out by over-commitment of their time to a single group. It also allows for new missions to form and completed missions to dissolve as needed. An example of this is our new Green Team. We are still living into this intentional way to create new paths and missions.

- When it comes to decision-making, how many hours are spent in meetings per month?

The person called to this position would be expected to staff the Christian Education Committee and attend the one hour or so monthly meeting, organize teacher training and orientation sessions and attend other meetings if they are interested in the work of that committee.

The person will be asked to attend Council meetings and Church and Ministry meetings as needed, perhaps not the full meeting but to give a report and share any concerns or ideas.

- Think of a time when action had to be taken quickly, for example when a crisis or disaster occurred. How was that accomplished?

When Covid-19 hit, the Council met with the Associate Pastor (the only pastor on staff at that time) and worked out plans for following CDC guidelines, shifting to an all radio and the new livestream option for worship. The Council met mostly via email during the stay-at-home order and then resumed meeting after 2 months to monitor the situation and our faithful response to the health and spiritual needs of the congregation.

## COMMUNITY VISION

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How do the relationships and activities of your congregation extend outward in service and advocacy?

*For example, which service activities has your church participated in this past year? Where has the church participated in global connections of care and justice? What is currently transformational in your church's engagement with neighbors near or far?*

Our congregation is actively searching for ways to extend outside our walls. When a need is presented, we are open to offering whatever resources we can provide. For example, we were active in the Busia Compassionate Center in relationship with the WI Conference of Credit Unions, Dinner at Five (a free community meal), Re-Member (in Pine Ridge, South Dakota), Make a Difference Day, Food For Kids (providing food for school children throughout the year), and the Lincoln County Christmas Spirit Tree. We have established a Hospitality Corps that greets before the 9:00 AM service on Sunday.

In 2018, we planned a new community outreach event, Oktoberfest. The event was a success for members of the congregation and community at large. We are in the planning process for our Fourth Annual event.

Describe your congregation's participation in meetings, relationships and activities connecting the wider United Church of Christ (association / conference / national setting).

The congregation is connected to the Association and Conference primarily through the participation of our pastors in leadership roles in the adjudicatory levels of the denomination. We try to have delegates go to the Conference annual meeting which is a large celebration of church at the state level, at Green Lake Conference Center. We are a 5 for 5 congregation and have been for many years. We support the Wisconsin Conference outdoor ministry United Church Camps, Inc. [www.ucci.org](http://www.ucci.org) and encourage our youth to attend.

## REFERENCE 1

Rev. Kyle Carnes  
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Former Senior Minister, 2014-2019

Saint Stephens is the most sincere church I've ever served, with the least amount of pretense or need to impress. It is a church deeply committed to its roots and to its community. They are a church who is open to try new things, if they are led into them rather than being handled or told what the "new way" is going to be. They will be up for an adventure, and innovative ideas, again, if you lead them, rather than force the issue. I found Merrill to be a community that was not averse to change because they didn't want change, in fact in many areas I believe people definitely did want change. The resistance was that many simply believed it wouldn't make a difference either way, because forces beyond them kept things the same. The task then is to preach, teach, lead, befriend, and love in a way that change makes sense and makes a difference for good. Bring your whole heart and they will respond.

Even as the most theologically progressive church in town, it is a deeply "purple" church. Too quickly or too easily blending progressive theology as a straight line into liberal politics will be a non-starter. And yet, the belief that the core of the gospel is love, love of neighbor and caring for one another is the heart of this church. They desire devotional and spiritual growth. Lean into this, care for them, and they will go with you.

As for areas of growth, like so many congregations they are still too dependent upon the leadership of the pastor to "do" church, but there are many who are willing to lead, with coaching, support, empowerment and companionship. Again, as with many organizations, in the absence of non-anxious leaders, the loudest, more anxious voices and forceful personalities, will fill the vacuum. There are good leaders in the church if they are nurtured to stand up, use their voice, and take the lead.

Some of the most meaningful experiences of my time at Saint Stephens were when we worked and grew together. The Church Council leadership retreats to Moon Beach were both life-giving and productive. The trips to Re-Member in South Dakota allowed for new relationships to grow and deepen. It was a time where individuals were challenged to grow spiritually, and they did. These times "away" from church always affected the larger whole when small groups were inspired in new ways. This also happened when we traveled to Kansas City for leadership conferences. Day in and day out, however, I valued working alongside staff and lay people who were deeply committed to the mission projects and congregational care of Saint Stephens.

This church is an unsung gem of the Wisconsin Conference and of the denomination as a whole. To be called as pastor and teacher to this place, is to be blessed. Take the time to learn who they are, and who they've been, and together your ministry will make a difference in the broader community for good.

I would be happy to answer any other questions you may have.

## REFERENCE 2

July 2021

TO: Prospective Candidate

FROM: Chaplain Mary Pat Campbell, NACC, BCC, retired

RE: St. Stephen UCC

I spent three years at St. Stephen's as their pastoral associate. My responsibilities included visitation on all levels, some worship and committee work.

There are three areas within the St. Stephen congregation that I will focus on based on my ministry and observations.

**SERVICE:** individuals are invited to participate in congregational and greater Merrill community opportunities to serve. There is something offered for all age groups, levels of availability, interest, learning and expertise. From the Green Team (environmental) to Taco Tuesday (lunch for children in the park) needs are being met by the members of St. Stephen's.

**WELCOME:** "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here." This statement is embodied at St. Stephen's. People come and go daily just to "stop by". Theological discussions "pop up" with enthusiasm. Merrill clergy and community members feel at home, included. As a Catholic chaplain I felt included by all, called to the Lord's Table, spiritually nourished.

**PRAYER:** Tradition is maintained by the pastoral team and participants who continue to offer a sense of familiarity and peace to the congregation through worship and prayer. The Wednesday evening service has a more modern feel (asked questions, why nots and spiritual wanderings). Prayer at St. Stephen's holds something old and something new in the midst of the life of faithful believers.

Two final comments. I experienced a true sense of joy at St. Stephen's. That joy was extended, lived out and internalized.

It is my hope that the St. Stephen Congregation becomes an "official" all inclusive community, The LGBT community in Central Wisconsin rural areas needs to be affirmed in a safe and open church setting.

In Christ,



Mary Pat Campbell

P.S. Your office has a window!