

First Congregational Church, Rochester, Michigan United Church of Christ



What's Wrong with this Picture?

That's right ... the sanctuary is empty. That's the way it's been at First Congregational since March 15 of this year, and the way it will continue to be until the decline of COVID-19 infections in Southeast Michigan makes it safe for us to worship together again.

Before we continue, allow us to introduce ourselves. **We are the Search and Call Team of First Congregational Church**, and we are sending you this material as our invitation to consider whether God is calling you to become our next Pastoral Leader. Here's who we are:

Brenda Brannack
Stephanie Lange
Nancy Swinerton

Abbie Goerg, Chair
Judith Satterthwaite
Craig VanCoillie

Ken Goerg
Elaina Steward
Mary Wilson



We began this search early in 2020, and we had a clever idea about a design for the materials we were going to send. The cover was going to be a picture of an open doorway, and the theme of the search was going to be "The Doors God Opens." Our text was going to be Acts 16:26b, "... immediately all the doors were opened...", and the text inside the cover would read:

"We are the Search and Call Team at First Congregational Church, UCC, in Rochester, Michigan, and we are wondering if God's Spirit might be leading you to consider ministry with our congregation.

"It could be that you'll go through the process with us and discover, like Paul and Silas, that you are supposed to stay right where you are. But it could also be that God is opening a door for you to join us in Rochester, Michigan."

"We encourage you to look through this booklet and all the other materials we've sent you, and if what you see interests you, please let us know. Eventually, we'll need a UCC Ministerial Profile, but for now, we just want to get the conversation started."

"We'll be praying for you as you consider this open door!"

We got started taking pictures of all the open doors in our church, and we were going to tell you all the great things that happen because of the people who go through these doors. Here's a sample:



**Sanctuary
Doors**



**Food Pantry
Entrance**



Office Doors



**Wiggle Room
Entrance**

With each picture, we'd give you a description of the ministry represented, and how it's making a difference in the church and in our community.

But then the coronavirus pandemic hit. We never got our pictures finished. The doors were closed. And as directed, we all stayed home and stayed safe.



During the first two weeks, the only ministry that continued at the church was the **Neighborhood House Food Pantry**. Previously, 5,000 pounds of food delivered in a week would be considered heavy demand; now the pantry was providing as much as 13,000 pounds in a week.



Gradually, other ministries found ways to continue their work in spite of the stay-at-home orders. At the end of just the second week of the shutdown, having missed only one Sunday, we posted our first **Virtual Worship Service**—and it wasn't bad! A lot of members stepped up to make it happen, and viewership was more than double the number of people who regularly attended our services in person.

Eric and Lana (husband and wife) help lead worship



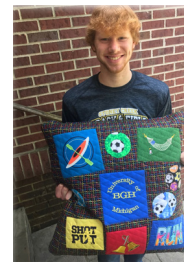
Shortly after worship was underway, our Director of Music—who is also a seminarian—asked if she could do her **Pastoral Care Internship** at the church beginning May. The Leadership Team agreed, and it was one of God’s surprising blessings to have such wonderful assistance in keeping the congregation connected during the time when we could not be together in person.

Pastoral Care Intern, Traci



Our **Nimble Needles** quilting group may have stopped holding their weekly meetings, but several of the members got to work on making masks, while others were determined to continue an FCC tradition: Giving a quilted pillow to our high school graduates.

Masks

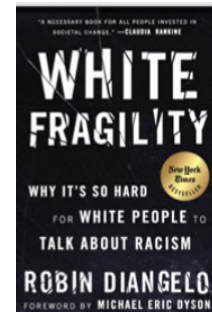


Graduate with gift pillow

After just a few week's hiatus, First Congregational's daytime **Thoughtful Christian Book Study** group got back together via Zoom. The death of George Floyd in May led the group to consider *White Privilege*, a UCC study resource that prompted a month of serious and enlightening conversations.



FCC's Moderator began a new evening book study group at about the same time, choosing to take up *White Fragility*, another timely and challenging text.

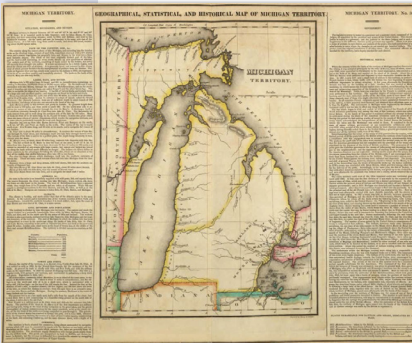


As the coronavirus pandemic entered its third month, the church's Outreach Team approved an **art installation** for LGBTQ+ Pride Month in June. The east side of the church never looked so bright and hopeful!

LGBTQ+ Pride Month Art Installation

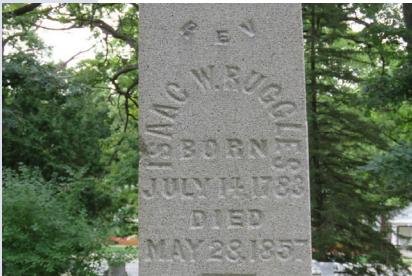
What the Search and Call Team learned from all these mid-pandemic activities is that the First Congregational Church of Rochester is a **RESILIENT** church—which should have come as no surprise to us, because First Congregational has *always* been a resilient church!

Michigan map from 1822



Consider these events from our history:

1827 – The church was founded in July of 1827 before Michigan was even a state. John Quincy Adams was President of the United States, and the entire territory of Michigan and Wisconsin numbered fewer than 8,000 residents. The town of Rochester was little more than a clearing in the wilderness when the **Rev. Isaac Ruggles**, an 1813 Yale graduate, arrived to begin a new congregation. William Burbank's 1860 history of the church describes him as "A pioneer missionary in this new country whose untiring efforts in the cause of The Divine Master is searching out Christians scattered through this, then almost wilderness, gathering them into churches, visiting from house to house though few and far between, consoling the afflicted, encouraging the desponding, affectionately admonishing the straying and counseling their return to duty. He was a faithful man of God."



1837 – There were ten original members of the church, two of whom died during the first year. Five were added in 1829, and eight more by 1831. Then followed a time of severe hardships, so much so that the Rev. A. S. Wells was sent to inquire whether circumstances warranted the **disbanding** of the church. After several days of prayerful discussion, the members made a commitment to revive the church, welcoming new members and electing two new deacons. By the following year, membership had grown to 23.

DETROIT SOLDIER BOY BURIED AT SEA

JOHN PLUGGE STRICKEN WITH SMALLPOX ON STEAMER.

With the dispatch announcing the arrival of the United States transport Egbert in San Francisco, Friday, came the sad information to Frederick Plugge, 150 Wabash avenue, that his soldier son was dead and had been buried at sea.

No particulars concerning the young man's death were received, and believing that there was a possibility of some mistake Mr. Plugge appealed to Mayor Maybury, who at once telegraphed Washington. Yesterday the war department replied, stating that young Plugge had died of smallpox in Nagasaki harbor, Japan, May 5. It being impossible to preserve a body tainted with that dread disease, it was buried at sea with the usual honors.

John Plugge was 22 years of age. He was employed by the Michigan Central Railroad Co. a year and a half ago, when he became 21 years of age. A few days later he enlisted in Company F of the Ninth Infantry. He went to the far east and when the war broke out in China was sent there, going through all the battles in which the Ninth engaged. He was near Col. Liscum when that gallant soldier fell. His letters from China were very interesting.

A few weeks ago his father received word that the young man had been detailed on special duty to bring some prisoners to San Francisco, but unfortunately, he wrote, his orders were to return to Manila by the next transport, and he would not therefore have time to visit his home.

Original church building, built 1838



1895 – The year 2020 isn't the first time the church was closed due to a viral disease. In 1894-95, smallpox was breaking out in communities across America. Fearing a repeat of earlier **smallpox** epidemics, on October 20, 1895, the Board of Health closed the church to prevent a further spread. The congregation's historical record doesn't indicate how long the church was closed, but the statistical report of 1896 makes no mention of it, and the financial and membership records suggest that the closure was for only a short period of time.

News of a smallpox victim

1933 – A different kind of closing threatened the existence of the church during the Great Depression. The historical records indicate that a **bank closure** in 1933 prevented the church from completing its regular financial report. The pastor, Rev. Clarence D. Oberlin, took a voluntary reduction in his salary, as total church receipts early in his ministry (1927) had been \$5228.61, but by 1934 totaled only \$2380.72

Bank run at Guardian National Bank of Detroit



1961, 1976, 2010 – As early as 1950, the church leadership was discussing the possibility of **relocating the church** due to community growth and overcrowding in the existing facility. At the time, there were four churches within one block of the congregation's Walnut Avenue address, all worshipping at the same hour, which led to major parking issues. Land was purchased in 1953, groundbreaking took place in July of 1960, and the first worship service in the new facility was July 30, 1961.

Chapel and North Wing

A South Wing was opened in 1976, and an **award-winning new sanctuary**, designed by architect George Pappas, was added in 2010. Architecture website Arch Daily wrote,



"This project consists of a new 375 seat sanctuary addition with associated lower level community spaces. The concept is based on the cross sectional articulation of a box, and how to manipulate light into the interior of the worship space. The box, or church is divided into a series of tiers and clerestories. Intended to be intimate from its inception, the sanctuary allows the congregation to be no further than 40 feet from the Communion Table and Chancel. Further efforts to increase natural light into the sanctuary are derived through the use of high clerestories around the box."

Exterior view of sanctuary 2010

1968 – When the Inter-Church Women’s group was finding it difficult to transport local people to a variety of area locations for assistance with personal and family needs, the idea of forming a central location was floated. In February of 1968, the Ministerial Association proposed that a **Center of Concern** be established where people go could to seek professional counsel, assistance and information of a personal, family or welfare nature, as well as information about food stamps or medical help.



Exterior view of Neighborhood House



Ten churches joined in this effort and less than a month later the **Rochester Area Neighborhood House** was in operation.

2016 – Several years after it was first raised as a possibility, the congregation voted to become an Open and Affirming congregation in the United Church of Christ. While this decision cost the congregation several families and members at the time of the vote, it has more recently become one of the primary factors cited by visitors and new members as their reason for visiting First Congregational.



2019 – After suffering the same kind of membership and financial decline as has been experienced by numerous mainline churches, some members of FCC were willing to consider the possibility of selling the building. God, however, provided a different solution: **a tenant for an unused part of the facility**, the Birch Grove Montessori School. Their faithful rental income has returned the church to a solid financial footing.



These are just a few of the ways in which First Congregational Church has demonstrated its resilience over the years. Through peacetime and war, strong economies and financial downturns, religious apathy and spiritual awakenings, this congregation has persevered. We hope you will consider whether God is calling you to become the next pastor of this RESILIENT church!



Our Budget and Finances

RECEIPTS:	2019 (actual)	2020 (budget)
Pledged income	225,106	190,866
Above and beyond pledge	28,820	0
Non-pledged income	37,512	30,000
Loose offering	2,613	2,000
Back pledged income	200	200
Facility Use	63,445	109,500
Interest Income	641	2,000
Fundraising	522	0
Recycling	226	0
Community Service Reimbursement	30,615	30,000
TOTAL INCOME	389,700	364,566
EXPENSES:		
Payroll Expenses	232,327	236,463
Operating Expenses	131,221	123,978
Funds for Ministry Teams	14,921	9,550
Missions (Outreach)	5,000	5,000
Our Church Wider Mission	1,742	1,050
Detroit Association	700	0
Seminary Support	500	0
Trinity St. Marks	478	2,200
Other Missions	8,420	8,250
TOTALEXPENSES	386,889	378,241

First Congregational Church, By the Numbers

Congregation by Age

Birth to 15	10.9%
Age 15 to 24	22.5%
Age 25 to 34	0.0 %
Age 35 to 44	5.4%
Age 45 to 54	9.3%
Age 55 to 64	12.4%
Age 65 to 74	17.8%
Age 75 to 84	17.1%
Age 85 and older	4.7%

Congregation by Education (Adults over 25)

Less than High School	1.3%
Completed High School	8.9%
Some College or Trade School	11.4%
Associate Degree	5.1%
Bachelor's Degree	35.4%
Post-graduate, Masters/Doctorate	38.0%

Congregation by Marital Status (Adults only)

Never married	8.9%
Married (first time)	62.0%
Separated	0.0%
Divorced	8.9%
Remarried	11.4%
Widowed	8.9%

First Congregational Church
1315 North Pine Street
Rochester, Michigan 48307
ph. (248) 651-6225
fccrochester.org

