

The First Congregational United Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin

A History of our Ministry

2001 - 2010

- Sponsored the innovative Prison Ministry Project.
- Was a leader in the fight against a state constitutional amendment to ban same sex marriage.
- Contributed to purchase of mobile medical unit in Iraq.
- Provided funds and labor for the Bliss House, a Habitat for Humanity project; continues with additional Habitat projects.
- Collaborated with the Zwingli UCC of Paoli in supporting the Food Resource Bank.
- Continued to served a free Thanksgiving Dinner annually to the community and to participate in Luke House.
- Financially supports human services organizations such as Porchlight, Project Bootstrap, Orion Family Services, the Salvation Army Women's Shelter, the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice, and the Madison-area Urban Ministry
- Provided a home to the chamber group *Con Vivo*
- Sponsored back packs for the Girls and Boys Club
- Sponsored a church softball team and other social opportunities for members
- Established a lay ministers group
- Sponsored environmentally friendly modes of transportation to church
- Engaged in a worship partnership with S.S. Morris A.M.E. Church

1975 – 2000

- Helped start the Madison Urban Ministry
- Established a day-care center in our building?
- Provided an early home for HospiceCare, Inc
- Provided a hostel for out-of-town relatives of hospital patients
- Renovated the sanctuary and installed a new Holtkamp organ
- Appointed women to ministerial positions
- Sponsored church members who entered the ministry
- Made full-time appointments in music and Christian education
- Accepted Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgendered (LBGT) people into full membership of the church.
- Began a continuing participation in Luke House, which provides meals to those in need
- Provided a free Thanksgiving meal to the community
- Adopted a new inclusive language hymnal
- Established a vital connection to communities in Chiapas, Mexico, through church members' work visits there

1965 – 1975 Vietnam War Years

- Church leaders dealt with dissension in the church over the Vietnam War.
- Some members and two successive Youth ministers urged the church to be active in behalf of minorities, anti-Vietnam war movements, and student protesters
- The congregation as a whole voted to send a letter to Lyndon Johnson calling for a cease fire in Vietnam just before the Dow protests launched widespread anti war activity on campus.
- The church provided a ten-day residence for a draft resister, and his supporters in 1969 which evoked an intense and divisive response from the congregation.
- War protesters came to church one Sunday and unfurled anti-war banners during the service, and then stayed for an extended conversation with congregation members afterwards.

1928 – 1965 The Depression, World War II, Korean Conflict and Beyond

- Began to build its present building on Breese Terrace, spurred by membership growth and a desire for closer ties to the university, the church; the plans for the project were announced in 1928, on the eve of the Great Depression
- Emphasized the importance of recognizing the rights of conscientious objectors in military service through its preaching
- Tended to the impact of World War II on the community by hosting a Red Cross Center in the choir room, providing a gathering place for local soldiers when they were home, and creating a share-your-car program to reduce energy consumption when going to church
- Opened its doors to the Madison community for overflow university classes in the period after World War II, countless lectures and concerts, served as a place for folks from other traditions to worship, and as a meeting space for neighborhood groups, music ensembles or theater companies.
- Sponsored new groups and programs after World War II, some social, some theological, some issue-related
- Emphasized a liberal social gospel, a strong Jesus-centered theology, and a commanding moral commitment
- Often found itself at the edge of controversial issues, including opposition to the Korean War and attempts to legalize gambling, and for civil rights
- Firmly established religious education for all ages, a continuing close relationship with University faculty, staff and students, and an expanding outreach into the Madison community
- Joined the newly-formed United Church of Christ, in a merger of the Congregational Christian and Evangelical and Reform denominations.
- Unanimously adopted a race relations and civil rights policy in October, 1963, during the battle to adopt an open housing ordinance in Madison – the first in the nation. Proponents worked hand in hand with members of the congregation to get it through the city council.
- Engaged with the soul-stirring issues of the mid-1960s: civil rights, women's rights, Vietnam, the war on poverty, Arab-Israeli conflicts, and sexual standards, among others
- Installed an elevator for the elderly and handicapped.

- Sponsored an extended outreach into and beyond the community, an ongoing discussion of theological issues, and continued efforts to involve young people.

1840-1928

- Was established by nine men and women in 1840, a month before William Henry Harrison was elected the ninth President of the United States. Madison's population was a rousing 146 persons and Dane County had about twice that number.
- Held its first meetings and first worship services in the library of the territorial capitol building. Right from the start, the congregation had a connection with both scholarship and politics.
- Increased its presence as early pastors of the congregation served as chaplains to the territorial legislature and to the state's first constitutional convention. The fourth pastor was among those proposing in the late 1840s that the state buy a hill about a mile from the Capitol area where it could build a college. That site is now called Bascom Hill – named after a university president who was an active member of the congregation.
- Built their first building on South Webster Street just east of the Capitol Square at the intersection with East Washington Avenue where a state office building now stands.
- Provided a space was for a legislative assembly hall, a courthouse, a lecture and concert hall. Later, the space would be used by the Unitarians, and then by the German Presbyterian Church.
- Built a new building on West Washington Avenue in 1872. A 1926 article in the *Capital Times* newspaper said: "in a short time, it became one of the leading Congregational churches in the west".
- Became known for the quality of its music – "some of the finest church music in the city," *Capital Times*, 1926.
- Established itself as a prophetic church, speaking truth to power, blazing trails that other congregations could then use to navigate their own involvement in the issues of the day
- Engaged early on in the debates involving science and religion. Darwin's *Origin of the Species* outlining his theory of evolution, published in 1859.
- Included in its membership four UW presidents (1860 -1900), who helped students understand that science and theology need not conflict, a bold stance in that era, putting the church in the center of the intellectual debates of the day.
- Became a gathering place for students with an interest in religion, speaking to the community in an open-minded way.