

CENTRAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

CHELMSFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

AN ORAL HISTORY

1955 - 2000



Photo by Mark Timmins

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May 2022

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PART I

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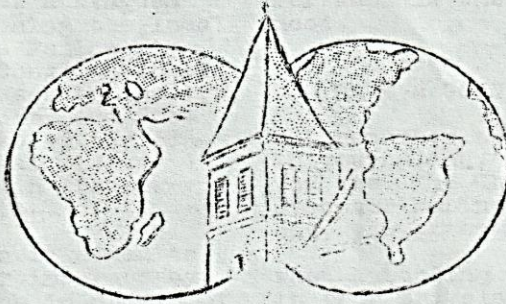
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Central Church Crusader



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Richard F. Manwell, Pastor

The church is never a place, but always a people;
Never a fold, but always a flock;
Never a sacred building, but always

A believing assembly.

The church is you who pray,

Not where you pray.

A structure of brick or marble

Can no more be a church

Than your clothes of serge or satin

Can be to you.

There is in this world nothing sacred but man,

No sanctuary of God but the soul.

-- Anon.

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All the People who Served as Church Historians

It is because of them that we can learn about our church's history

In Memory of Rachel Jane Vondal

Part One: Our Church Elders Tell the Story

I. Introduction

This oral history of our church from 1955 to 2000 is based on interviews held with respected elders in our church who agreed to participate in the project. It contains many important church events that took place over a period of 50 years, but it is unlike most histories in several different ways. It does not purport to be a comprehensive history of events. The majority of events are those that were told to me by the people I interviewed. The purpose of this history is to tell a story, and accordingly, the reader will find it more people-centered than event-centered. It is a story of what Central Congregational Church (CCC) in Chelmsford means and how it has been shaped by people who have been members for a long while.

The interviews were conducted between January 2021 and April 2022. I have had the privilege of talking with 15 people. Three people of this group joined the old Congregational church on North Road in the 1950s. Eleven first joined our “new” church in the 1960s. Two of the individuals I interviewed joined our church in the early 1970s. Each person I interviewed has been a member of CCC from fifty to seventy years! They have much to tell us.

Everyone was asked the same set of questions and I promised not to identify statements made by the individual interviewed. The topics we discussed began with when and why they first came to CCC, and why they decided to become church members. I asked about involvement in committees, missions, Sunday School, the choir, clubs, and other volunteer work. We talked about why they stayed with CCC all these years. Lastly, I asked everyone to talk about important church events that should be remembered, and to describe some of their most wonderful memories. Each person has a fascinating and important story to tell.

I augmented information from these lively interviews by examining annual church reports from 1955 through 2000, church newspapers, bulletins and church service programs, church histories written by members, other documents found in our church archives and from individuals' personal collections. These materials were used to obtain more details, dates, and specific information about the events that were discussed with me.¹ The events are presented by decade in table form in Part Two of this document. The memories recounted to me are all paraphrased, and they are presented for each decade following the table of events. These memories, and in some cases in the tables of events, are the only places where I included names.

More space is devoted to the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in Part One. Relatively few people in our church today know about this extremely active time in the church's history. It focuses on the growing pains experienced from the soaring population growth in Chelmsford and rapid increase in CCC membership, the decision to build a new and bigger church, and the incredible outburst of programs and activities the space in the new church allowed. This story also describes how the Pastor and members of the congregation worked very hard to assimilate the many new couples and their children into CCC.

II. Growth of Central Congregational Church 1950s-1960s

The congregants who attended the "old church" on North Road were very actively involved in all aspects necessary for managing the church, supporting their pastor, and creating a strong sense of fellowship. They held positions on important committees such as Finance, Trustees, Housing, Music, Nominating, Sanctuary; and the Church Cabinet and Christian Education to keep the church running. They sang in the church choir, taught Sunday School, and organized new service and

¹ See ANNEX 1 for a list of church documents and other materials used to tell the story of our church's history during this time period.

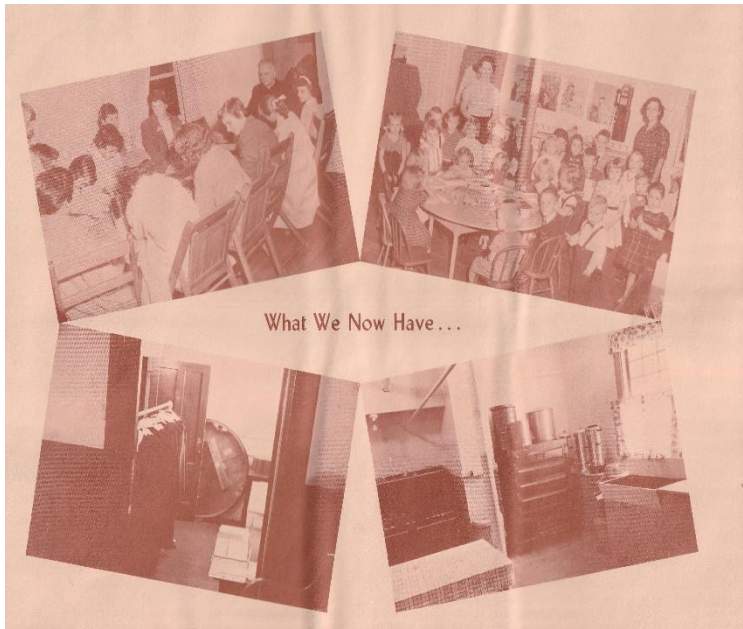
missionary activities. They sponsored boy scout and girl scout troops and started youth basketball teams...both girls and boys....and formed leagues with other churches for them to play on a competitive basis. They started the Central Co-Op Kindergarten, ran capital improvement campaigns, held church fundraisers, and volunteered to pitch in whenever needed. Originally started in 1938, The KiSeLo Club met once a month as they do now. As now, there was a strong youth group with organized activities for teenagers. In 1956 the new pastor, Rev. Richard Manwell, organized a summer vacation Bible school for children.

There was an excellent senior choir that gave several concerts open to the public each year featuring religious and classical music in addition to Easter and Christmas concerts. Members of the “Couples Club” organized a wide diversity of activities for the large membership of young couples that joined the church in the 1950s and 1960s. The Club also staged and performed annual “pop” concerts drawing from songs recorded by popular singers and from Broadway shows.

During the period of 1955-1970, the number of committees, clubs, programs, and activities were just as numerous as we have today. Some were developed to serve felt needs of the time and no longer exist today. These include the Women’s Mission, the Women’s Association, Women’s Fellowship, the Friendly Circle, the Senior and Junior Pilgrim Fellowship, the Junior Deaconate, the Junior Choir, the Flower Committee, the Couples Club, and the Church Cabinet. Some of the activities of these organizations have been folded into committees and clubs we have today. For example, some of the essential functions of the Church Cabinet initiated in 1959, have been absorbed into today’s Church Council. The Social Action Committee and the Women’s Mission merged to become the Social Action and Mission Committee.

And very importantly, they were responsible for building the church on Worthen Avenue where we worship today.

In the mid-1950s it had become abundantly clear that our church was no longer big enough for the growing membership. Sunday School rooms were overcrowded. CCC congregants literally outgrew the church.² The photo below, from a 1958 publication, shows just how crowded the church had become.



In the 1956 Annual Report, Rev. Manwell noted that although he had only been here for six months, he observed from the active involvement of people in many different clubs and committees that there was a real spirit of engagement among church members. He was excited by the church's potential.

Rev. Manwell also saw the need to create a true church family by developing opportunities and events that would enable **everyone** in the church to be able to come together as one. To get to know one another and to enrich each other's spiritual lives as Christians. He saw the need for developing connections **between** the many committees, clubs, and associations. He worried that we were more of an aggregation than a congregation.

One of Rev. Manwell's ideas to bring everyone together in one big church family was to hold Family Nights and church-wide suppers to sit at The Lord's Table together. But he finally had to agree, the space was way too small to host such events. The kitchen was too small to cook meals

² The photo on this page shows overcrowded conditions for Sunday School classes, the small kitchen, and the small multi-purpose choir/storage room. It was taken for a brochure published in 1958 for CCC members to explain how the design of the new church would provide more than adequate space compared to what we had in that year. The brochure also described building plans, how the church was going to be financed, committee involvement, fund raising plans, and the role of the membership in sharing costs.

for such a large number of families, Fellowship Hall was too small to host sit down suppers, and too cramped for after service gatherings that we all enjoy now. It was poorly lit and very dark. As a young child, I recall there were several places on the old floor one was supposed to avoid.

The Sanctuary was almost filled to capacity and there was little room for the choir. The Sanctuary was also too small for all the people who wanted to attend CCC's religious concerts.



The Couples Club arranged to rent the Chelmsford High School Auditorium for CCC shows and concerts³ since Fellowship Hall was too small. This photo is from the May 9, 1957 *Chelmsford Newsweekly*. It

captures a rehearsal for the “Hobo Act,” part of the show sponsored by the Couples Club. Note the photo says “to be held at the High School auditorium.”

Membership at CCC had already grown substantially from 216 in 1945 to 287 by 1950. It rose to 327 in 1955 when discussions about the need for a larger church began in earnest.

In the meantime, Rev. Manwell continued to promote group gatherings drawing from across the many clubs and committees to bring everyone together. He drew on volunteers to organize

³³ The high school was located in the building that currently serves as Chelmsford's Town Hall. In the mid-60s a modern high school was built on North Road and the old building was used as the Junior High School. The “modern” high school now serves as Chelmsford's Junior High School.

church-wide picnics in the country side surrounding Chelmsford. In 1956 he launched a monthly church newspaper⁴ as a forum for communicating to the members and to build a sense of church fellowship. In the first issue he writes that the stated purpose of publishing a Church paper was *...” to present you with the news of your church, to reach out into that “fringe” of our membership and stir their hearts, so that our Church will be stronger spiritually, socially, and sacrificially. Our church can mean more than a building on North Road, more than the church of which you are a member in name, only in so far as it projects itself into the life of the community and into the hearts of its inhabitants.”* (Church News, Chelmsford Massachusetts, Volume I, Number 1.)

In 1959 Rev. Manwell established a Church Cabinet. Its purpose was to coordinate the numerous events and activities to ensure there was a workable space to hold each activity, that important events sponsored by different committees and clubs would not be scheduled at the same time, and that there was no duplication of effort on similar activities. Chaired by Rev. Manwell, the Cabinet included representatives from every committee, club, and organization. Cabinet members heard monthly reports and planned activities from each group. Following the reports, the Cabinet discussed the degree to which the goals and activities of each group supported the church’s overall goals and mission. Feedback was given to each group to help them strengthen those activities in this regard.

Just three years later, church membership had increased from 327 to 398! Active planning was in play for building a new church. It was 1958 when church members voted for a colonial style building and began organizing the financing and fund raising to build the church. A new Building Committee was elected to oversee all aspects of the building.

⁴ This paper was the origin of the Crusader, now known as the Beacon.

Rev. Manwell marked the occasion of this decision in his annual Pastor's Report. ***"An historian, sometime writing the history of Central Congregational Church – a project seeking an author – will give special place to the year 1958 as perhaps the most momentous since the church's founding in 1876. Think of what has transpired: the fateful decision to go forward with a building program to replace the entire present structure and the financial undergirding of the program; the choice of an architect and the approval of his plans; some sixty canvassers enlisting financial support."***

The new colonial style church where we gather today was designed to include a wing with an office for the pastor and business offices, a nursery, multiple rooms for meetings and volunteer work, a wing with rooms for Christian Education, a choir room, a large, modern kitchen, a spacious fellowship hall and stage, a parlor, and most importantly, a beautiful and inspiring sanctuary for worship.



Ground was broken in 1959 and in the spring of 1960, the new church was completed and ready to use. A ribbon cutting ceremony and service of dedication for the new church was held on May 1, 1960.⁵ On Sunday, May 8, two separate dedication services were held; one for the new church organ and chimes, and one for the Christian Education wing. This was an exciting time for those congregants who remember attending the old church! This

⁵ Photo from Chelmsford Newsweekly. The little girl's name is Susan Manahan. Rev. Manwell is on the right. Also depicted is Mr. Sidney Dupee who is descended from one of the original families that were

was a state -of - the art church with modern facilities. Memories of this occasion are described in Part II of this history.

Rev. Manwell wrote about a new concern in the Pastor's Report for the 1960 Annual Report. We have a big, beautiful new church that required a huge investment.... but what if we don't get enough new people to come? He didn't have to worry for long. Membership continued to grow every year. By 1967 an additional 214 people joined the congregation bumping up membership from 404 in 1960 when the new church was ordained to a high of 618 by the end of the decade.



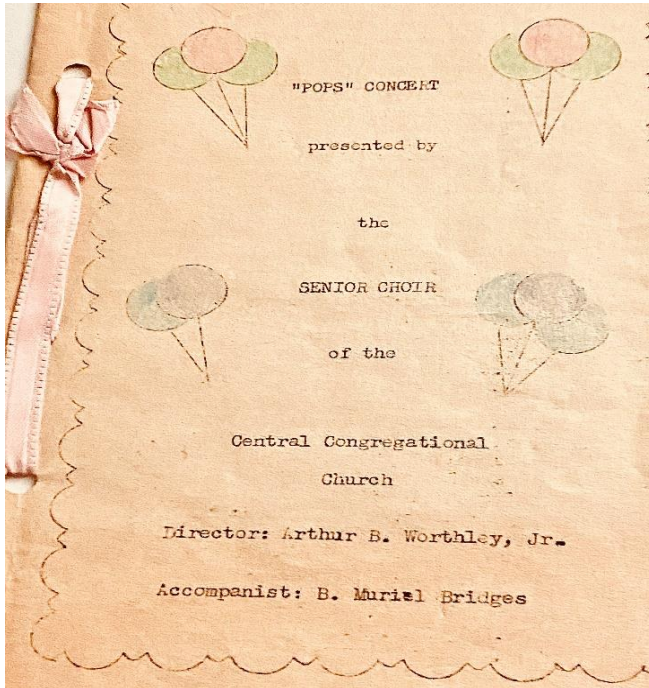
Almost immediately, CCC began hosting fellowship gatherings in the hall after church services. Coffee and light snacks were offered just as they are now. Family Nights were organized and the first church-wide supper was held.

The Senior Choir began presenting religious and classical music concerts in the Sanctuary. There was no further need to rent auditorium space from Chelmsford High School!

The Couples Club, the Men's Club, and KiSeLo jumped on the opportunity to launch more activities than ever before. There were even dinner dances accompanied by an orchestra!

the founders of Central Congregational Church in 1877. Miss Katherine Kilbourne is descended from one of the first families that joined the church in the 1870s.

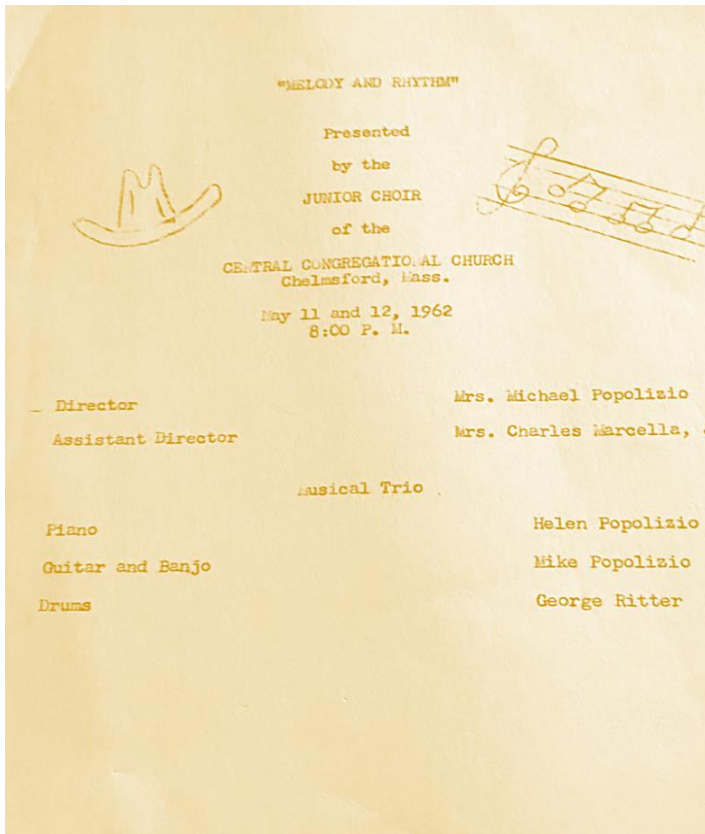
The Couples Club continued to sponsor new pop concerts and musicals requiring more space and the involvement of many church members. The size of the hall enabled them to draw in larger outside audiences and since it was their church, they could make adjustments to stage and auditorium space that may have been disallowed by the public high school.



Ticket sales were used to support the church. The members that chose to involve themselves in these pop concerts and musicals were talented and experienced people drawn from the growing number of congregants during this era. Together as a group they organized themselves into various committees (e.g., publicity, costumes, set and props) to produce each show.

Rehearsals were a time for great laughter and comradery. The annual shows were very important fund raisers, but beyond that, they contributed to the great spirit and fellowship of CCC's congregation. Because volunteers came from across a variety of committees, missions, and clubs, people got to know other members of the congregation and many new and lasting friendships were formed. Participation in these shows helped to integrate new church members. They contributed to the building of a stronger church family that Rev. Manwell was trying to foster.

In 1962 Helen Popolizio was given the go ahead to form a junior choir. At its start, the junior choir



already had so many members that a program was produced in Fellowship Hall featuring their nascent musical talents. The show had wide support from across the church including the Senior Choir, the Couples Club, and church musicians. The baby boomer children who sang and danced on the Fellowship Hall stage in ***“Melody & Rhythm”*** now range in age from their late 60s to their mid-70s. Those members of the junior choir who stayed

or came back to CCC are now the church’s “younger” set of elders!

Membership continued its growth and with that came young children of all different ages. New grammar and junior high school children joined the Junior Choir every year. Teenage choir members were becoming exasperated with the large numbers of exuberant kids constantly told to be quiet...no talking...concentrate on the music! The Director proposed that the older teens join the Senior Choir. The Senior Choir balked...they didn’t want a flood of teenagers joining them. And so, in 1965 Helen Popolizio formed a third choir for teens...the Chancellor Choir.

III. What fueled the amazing growth in church membership?

CCC was not the only congregational church that expanded to the point where a new, larger building was necessary. During the 1950s there was a nationwide boom in congregational

membership and in the construction of new churches.⁶ There was also a boom in the American population.

My interviews with church elders tell the following story. Several factors contributed to CCC's growth; most notably a take-off in economic growth with expanding new industries in the 1950s, and of course, the famous post WW II baby boom. In the 1950s Raytheon was established and employed large numbers of people that drew in professionals from all over New England and the United States. General Electric was another major manufacturing company established during the 1950s employing hundreds of people from Massachusetts and beyond. With the economic draw of these two large corporations and the development of other light industries and spin-off businesses, the population of Merrimack Valley saw tremendous growth. Chelmsford became one of the most rapidly growing communities in the northeast!

The quotation below is excerpted from the 1955 Tercentenary Souvenir Program celebrating the 300th year since Chelmsford's founding in 1655.

“Progress is more evident today than ever before. Chelmsford today is fast completing the change from a rural to a suburban residential community. With nearly 3000 homes in Chelmsford today, there is no let-up in the demand for more houses, and with the influx of population - today's figure being 11,760 - comes the demand for more business establishments, more industries, more schools, and more of everything that goes into serving such a community. This demand is being met as quickly as possible.”

Fueling Chelmsford's burgeoning population was the large number of young couples moving into the area for these new employment opportunities. They came from as close by as Lowell, from all over Massachusetts and New England, and even from the west and the deep south. Couples began looking for a town to settle in. They sought towns with good schools and churches that were close

⁶ John von Rohr The Shaping of American Congregationalism: 1620-1957. 1992

to their jobs. They wanted to settle in a town that was a good place for raising children. Chelmsford met these requirements. There were churches serving Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Unitarians; and Chelmsford was already known for the quality of its school system.

A lovely and appealing old town, conveniently located near the new industries, Chelmsford was an excellent choice. It was within easy commuting distance to Lowell and Boston. The connection of Route 3 to Route 128 in the 1950s, and its extension to New Hampshire in the 1960s, further contributed to Chelmsford's population growth. To accommodate the growing number of families that chose Chelmsford, many new developments with "starter houses" were rapidly constructed on land that long ago was dedicated to apple orchards and farming. In the 1960s the population of children outgrew the available schools. Chelmsford's old four room school houses were re-opened. The fifth and sixth grade students that were bused to these schools received their education in spacious old classrooms that could accommodate up to 60 students!

The families that came into Chelmsford from outside had very young children and were still building their families. Once they settled themselves in new homes and enrolled their children in grammar schools, they began to look for a church. Our elders grew up as dedicated church-going people in the Christian faith. Belonging to a church and attending services was (and is) a vitally important part of their lives. They wanted to find a church nearby to attend services, a church to enroll their children into Sunday School. They took the responsibility of providing religious education for their children very seriously. They wanted their children to learn about Christian values, to have faith, and to believe in Jesus Christ and in God, our Father. They began "shopping" for a church.

How did they do this? In different ways, but in most cases by visiting churches around Chelmsford to attend Sunday services and hear the pastor preach. After services they talked to the

pastor and church members to learn about Sunday school education and church activities, and to get a sense of the “personality” of the church membership. One couple tried our church because their children’s friends in the neighborhood attended CCC and they wanted to support their children’s new friendships. Some couples were specifically looking for a Congregational church.

IV. Why Become a Member?

Most of the church elders I interviewed did not become members immediately. Many began attending services once they enrolled their children in Sunday School. They found they liked the minister and the services, the Sunday School, and they especially enjoyed the friendly welcome from congregation members. Others began attending services because they were looking for a church to make a commitment to. At home, husband and wife talked it over together. They wanted a church they both felt comfortable with, that they could enjoy. Some attended services and began joining in church activities for a month before deciding to join, others took longer.

There were several important reasons they chose to become members. Couples chose CCC because they liked the pastor and the quality of the services, and they were pleased with how genuinely welcoming and friendly the members were when they first came to our church. There was a good Sunday School for their children. And they joined because either the husband or wife, or both, were raised in a Congregational Church and were happy to find one in Chelmsford. For example, one couple moved from a town that did not have a Congregational Church so they attended the local Methodist Church. When they first moved to Chelmsford in 1966, they automatically joined the Methodist Church. They were both raised in Congregational churches but didn’t realize there was one in town until someone told the wife about CCC and encouraged her and her husband to join. Soon after they obtained letters of dismissal from the Methodist Church

and immediately joined Central Congregational Church where they have been very active and devoted members ever since!

There were additional features of our church that factored in the decision of couples who finally decided to become members. Many couples were looking for a church close by, but some were also looking for a choir to join or for a congregation deeply involved in mission activities. They found both at CCC. One of the biggest draws for young couples starting families was the range of church sponsored activities for children. In addition to Sunday School for different age groups, there was also a vacation Bible school held every summer. There was a church sponsored Cub Scout troop their sons could join.

There was a highly regarded kindergarten co-op and nursery school where they could enroll their youngest for a reasonable price. One individual I interviewed said the kindergarten and the Sunday School were some of the most important reasons they chose to join our church. Parents began getting more deeply involved in CCC as volunteers for children's activities, Sunday School, or the kindergarten once they enrolled their own children. As they got to know other young couples, they found their initial impression of a welcoming and friendly congregation proved to be true. They joined the Couples Club and began making friends. They felt a sense of fellowship. And so, they became members.

I came to believe that ultimately the pastor and the quality of the Sunday service came first, although this was not clearly articulated by everyone. No matter how warmly they were welcomed, the pastor and the quality of the services were bedrock. For example, one person I interviewed told me that although she and her husband were so delighted when approached by such genuinely friendly church members, they elected to try another church because they were not pleased with the sermons and the pastor's delivery. They did not feel inspired and closer to their God. They were unsatisfied with other choices in the town they explored. The wife, on her own, decided to try CCC

again because the church was so close to their home. She found there was a new pastor and told her husband he was very good. They both returned to attend services as a couple. This made the difference in their decision to join.

V. Building a Strong Church Family

When I began interviews for this history, I knew that our elders were very involved in church management and volunteer activities having witnessed many people in action. I was about to get an education in just how serious and profound that commitment was, and still is. Each person has had a long history of substantial and continuous involvement in supporting our church in a wide variety of roles that are key to building and maintaining a vibrant and healthy church.

They informed me that serving in these roles requires serious responsibility. During the interviews more than one person noted with pride that once "our people" become involved you could count on their commitment without question. It also involves dedication to the spiritual growth and quality of fellowship for our church family. This remains the case today.

Our church elders have a history of active participation in most of CCC's committees, clubs, missions, and associations. Almost all of them have taught Sunday School classes at one time or another, and some for long years. Over the decades many often worked in key leadership roles such as serving as the senior deacon for the Diaconate, the Superintendent of Christian Education, or as chairs for the Council, Trustees, Finance, Housing, and Nominating Committees or as leaders for the annual stewardship drive. Some of the women I interviewed informed me that in the 1960s they were either the first or one of the very earliest women who served as members on previously all male committees that had always been run by men (Finance and Trustees). Our church elders have actively engaged themselves as leaders, directors, chairs, treasurers, and managers, and as leaders of Youth Groups, Bible study groups, and fund-raising activities. Many have organized and managed

important volunteer activities such as those involved in running Ye Old Parsonage Gift Shoppe, holding the Annual Church Fair, serving at the Soup Kitchen, selling trees for the annual Christmas Tree Sale, and preparing food contributions for collations.

More than one person remarked that our church has a strong bench of truly wonderful members



with superb leadership, problem-solving, organizational, and creative skills. People with marvelous ideas that know how to execute them. People who can provide effective leadership in church offices, committees, and for fundraising events. People who have always stepped up whenever the church has had major problems to help us work our way through to the other side. People you can have confidence in.

Just as importantly, our elders often served as volunteers for activities managed by other

members of our church family such as serving coffee and refreshments to support fellowship following church service, serving as ushers, taking care of babies in the nursery during Sunday services, making shepherd's pie for Thanksgiving, or building set designs for Fellowship Players productions. Some activities were self-initiated such as stopping by to check on church security on their way home from work.

It should not be surprising to learn that another hallmark of this group is their ability and willingness to serve in multiple positions and play multiple roles at the same time. All the while working to help support their households and raise their families. Our church elders could teach

time management lessons for the rest of us! For illustration purposes, any one of the people I interviewed may have taught Sunday School and at the same time, served as the treasurer for the KiSeLo Club or the Men's Club, was an active member of SAM, and served on the Trustees Committee.

And if this wasn't enough, our church elders could be counted on to step up to the plate whenever volunteers were required to prepare for an upcoming event or to respond to any unexpected crisis or need. An inspiring example of their readiness to take action when needed occurred in 1983, the year of the big church fire. A number of people came to the church immediately when they learned the church was on fire. Many of our elders immediately organized themselves into several committees to deal with different aspects of the extensive damage our church suffered. It required people, many people. People to talk with banks to arrange loans, to raise funds, to assess damage, to talk with insurance agents, and to lead efforts for financing, arranging, and managing. People to provide oversight for the many different kinds of repairs, replacements and rebuilding required. People to decide what color the rug in the sanctuary should be. People who could discuss acoustics for the Sanctuary.

Our church elders exemplify what it means to have initiative. They are responsible for having initiated many important programs, service, and mission activities that benefitted our church family enormously. A great many of the service activities they initiated benefit people outside of the church, from Guatemala to Lowell. There are numerous examples. The Social Action Committee (currently known as SAM) was founded by church members in 1959. It's founding purpose was to educate and inspire the church to apply Christian principles in areas of society that are suffering. SAM engaged the church in Habitat for Humanity activities, continues to organize donations of non-perishable foods to ensure Lowell's Open Pantry is fully stocked, and today is engaged in helping our church to become involved in filling the many needs of new refugees.

One of the early church precursors to SAM was the Women's Mission Club. Its purpose was to engage CCC women in mission activities for people in need in countries around the world.

Members organized church contributions to countries with large refugee populations, and to places where children and infants were suffering the effects of war, prolonged draught, or massive flooding. In 1972, the Sunday School teachers responsible for 5th grade Christian Education received an enthusiastic agreement from the class to start up the church's involvement in the International Heifer project.

Photos: Children in class at Central Co-op Kindergarten, 1987



In 1960, several CCC women took the initiative to start up the Central Co-Op Kindergarten, an enormous undertaking. The kindergarten was, and still is, hugely successful because of the many women in our church who became active volunteers to assist the kindergarten director after enrolling their young children. Some of the women I interviewed have served as directors.



The Co-Op filled a real need in Chelmsford at a time when there were few options for kindergarten. Open to the public, it quickly became a highly regarded kindergarten that attracted the attention of young parents in our town. With exposure to CCC through enrolling their children, the Co-Op actually became an important source of new church members!

In 1961, the Men's Club arranged to be church sponsors of a Boy Scout troop. The troop held its meetings in Fellowship Hall, and boys that joined did not have to be members of this church. It was the initiative of just one woman in our church that established the first Brownie Scout troop at the church. She wanted her young grammar school-aged daughter to be able to join the Girls Scouts as a "Brownie," but there was no Brownie troop. Upon bringing up the issue at church she was encouraged to go ahead and start a troop.... but with one hitch.... she would have to become the scout leader. What was her response? She decided to go through scout leadership training and then formed a Brownie troop!

VI. Why Choose to Stay for So Many Years? The Importance of Church Family and Commitment

The deep commitment to CCC and the formation of a church family based on widening networks of friendships from working together over time is at the heart of it. This is a dynamic created by the Congregation and fostered by our pastors. And I believe that the dynamic they created is what sustained our church elders' level of involvement. To understand this level of commitment I asked each person what it was that got them so involved and kept them involved over time. One person

said that when you decide to join a church you contribute. You are making a commitment to get involved and to support it. It goes without saying. Several people articulated the same firm belief. Active involvement in the church was, and is, a very important part of their lives. They know that a church does not run on its own. It absolutely relies on the participation of its members working together. Some people told me that once you start engaging in church programs and committees, you find yourself more deeply involved in a larger network of activities. Working with other members on committees, joining a Bible Study class led by a fellow member of the congregation, volunteering for a program, organizing annual church fairs, participating in church clubs and singing in the choir all enable people to get to know one another better. Good friendships were formed. The same holds true today.

Church was where our elders saw their friends and through deeper involvement in church activities



with one another, friendships became deeper and new ones were made. This has had the effect of developing a strong and friendly church that one could count on for mutual support, kindness and

understanding. Church becomes a home away from home. A place where you worship God and develop spiritually with people who have become your church family. I can only conclude that this is why so many have stayed and are proud members of our church today. Our challenge today is to keep this dynamic going!

But it is not just working together. It is working together in fellowship and worshipping together with the knowledge of a shared faith in Jesus Christ and our Lord. The willingness to do so is actually reflected in the covenant every Congregational Church develops as one of the first steps in “gathering” a church. A central part of the covenant is the statement that declares we are a group of people who by mutual agreement have decided to walk together as Christians. Our church covenant starts with these words: “*We covenant one with another to seek and respond to the Word and the will of God. We purpose to walk together in the ways of the Lord, made known and to be made known to us. We hold it to be the mission of the Church to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in all the world, while worshipping God, and striving for truth, justice, and peace...*”



But there is something else, something less tangible and with long historical roots unique to Congregationalism that may have helped foster this deep commitment. In the Congregational church, members have decision-making power in many important areas. At the same time,

members are expected to work in partnership with the pastor and to respect their opinions and decisions. Decisions can be made without resorting to higher authorities. There is no hierarchy in Congregationalism outside of the church. This power of the people who make up the congregation is one of the central pillars of Congregationalism, and has been since its beginning in England and the establishment of the first church in 1620 in Plymouth, Massachusetts. I believe that this distinguishing feature of the Congregational Church implicitly promotes initiative and proactivity among its membership and creative new ideas, as well as the means to solve problems. It engages us in working and making decisions together and with our pastor to build and maintain a strong fellowship. Because of this, we the people of our congregation, rightly know that it is OUR church. Perhaps it is also this aspect of our church culture that has promoted, in the best sense, this high level of engagement which develops lasting commitments to CCC and to our church family.

Congregationalism also promotes kindness, charity, and love for one another. Our elders have always sought to be kind and understanding to knit our church family together. And despite the large and small challenges that do occur, to keep it together. That also takes a great deal of commitment. The KiSeLo Club, which stands for “Kindness,” “Service,” and “Love” ...exemplifies this belief, and can be found across the congregation.

Our church elders have had considerable experience dealing with extremely difficult and complicated problems, most often related to our ministers, that were very upsetting and damaging to the church family more than once. Experience tells them that difficult problems will occur again from time to time. Given our 300 plus year history in Chelmsford, this is to be expected. They know such problems must be dealt with effectively and eventually resolved by members of the church who are willing to get involved. They know that a church is only as strong as the commitment of its congregation.

While many of the people I interviewed have had to scale back their activities, they often provide advice, counsel and encouragement. Some are active and still serve as leaders and volunteers. In whatever form it is, their ongoing contributions continue to make this church what it is today: a happy and welcoming place to worship for adults, young people and children. A place that promotes engagement in important church roles and activities in partnership with others and with our Pastor. They have been responsible for developing and maintaining a true “church family” that fosters genuine fellowship and deep friendships.

It is people such as these that keep our church running and vital. To keep it strong as a place where we can worship together. And most importantly, a church that people want to join and dedicate themselves to. We thank our church elders for these very important contributions. We can learn many things from them. In their own words, people said they have stayed with Central Congregational Church because:

“It’s the People!”

“It’s my Church Family”

“I have a strong commitment to CCC”

“The wonderful friendships I have.”

“I’m very proud of our church.”

“It’s where I go to see my friends.”

“The feeling of fellowship and community”

“It’s where I go to speak with God”

“The fabulous people who do great things for the church.”

“The strong fellowship we have at CCC”

“I love my church!”

“It’s a friendly church, it has always been a smiling church!”

“Our church is incredible. it has done so much to be proud of!”

“We have made many investments in this church. We have shown that we can solve any problem. It’s our church.”

CENTRAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

CHELMSFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

AN ORAL HISTORY of

CHURCH EVENTS and MEMORIES

1955 – 2000

PART II

I. INTRODUCTION

The church events presented in this section are those events people I interviewed believed should be noted and remembered. Some are large and profound, some are smaller, but all are very important and meaningful to the people who described them, and to our church's history.⁷

The table of events and narrative section for each decade includes information and statistics published in the Church Annual Reports covering 1955 to 2000, and from additional documentation found in our church archives. It also draws from church histories authored by a variety of church members, and especially by Clint Vincent, in 1958, 1976, 1998, and 2001.⁸ These earlier histories were invaluable to this effort!

Special memories recounted to me by our church elders are highlighted. They bring a glimpse of what church life was like in previous decades. Photographs from individuals and the church archives bring the history to life!

I have organized these special memories and events to create a narrative for each decade that tells a story about the variety of ways we have promoted fellowship within our church family, the growth in membership, as well as CCC's engagement in reaching out to the wider community through social action and mission activities. To the extent possible, I have included a glimpse of some trends on a national level that provide context for our own church history.

A key thing to keep in mind is that these events didn't "just happen." They all revolved around the execution of great ideas to start an activity, to build something, or to respond to a problem or opportunity. They happened because of the leadership, initiative, expertise, and dedication of all the people in CCC that were involved in each event; and because of their great faith and their deep

⁷ Accordingly, as noted in the introduction, this document should not be taken as a comprehensive history of important church events since 1955.

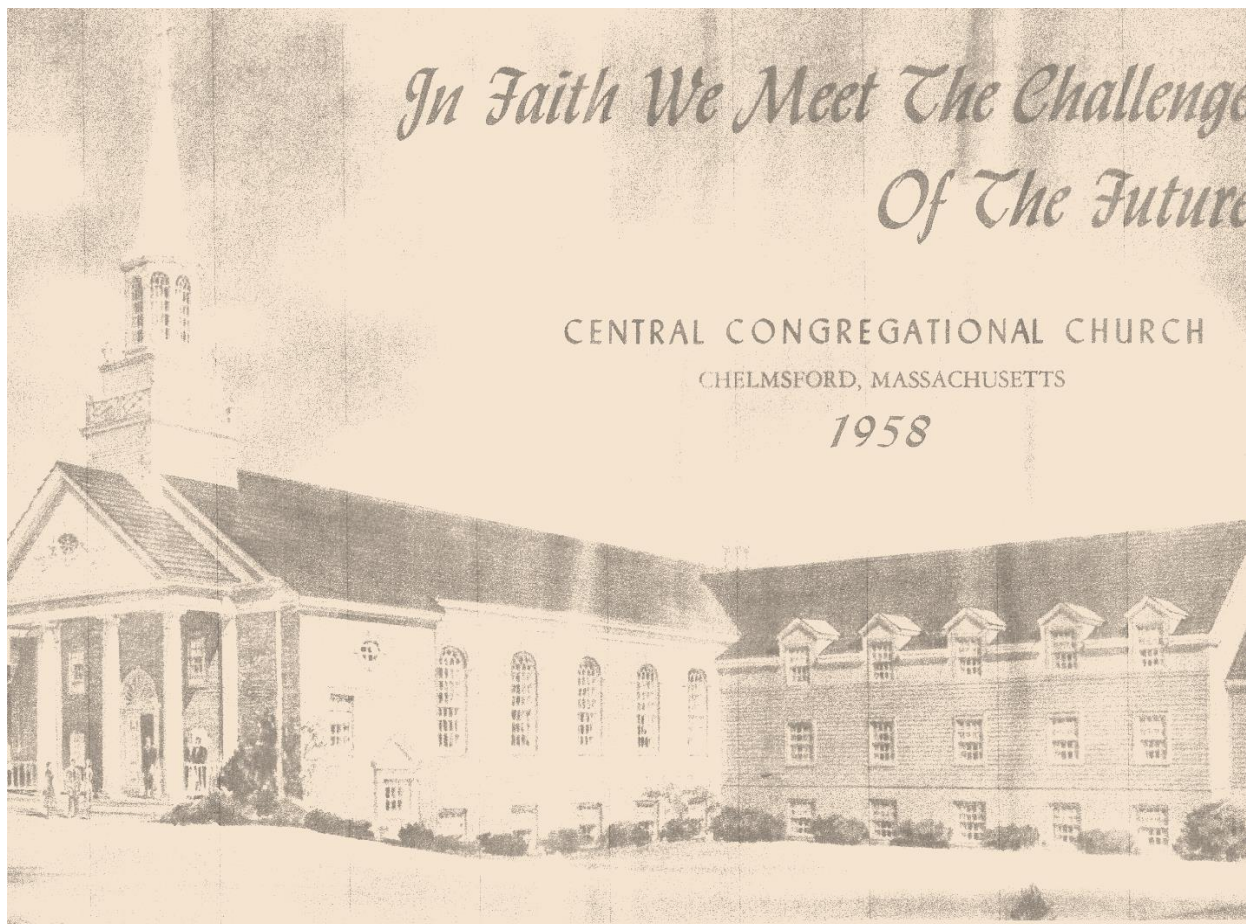
⁸ See the Annex on sources used for a listing of church histories and all other publications used for this document.

love and commitment to serve their church. Greater than all of these individual events are our members' dedication to Christian worship and expressions of faith. Our strong faith is the guiding framework for all church activities and events.

I. 1955-1959

Year	Event	Brief Narrative
1955	Church employs services of a fund-raising organization and appoints a committee to study plans for building a new church	The church has become too small to accommodate important functions with the steady growth of membership
1955-1956	Church members voted to acquire the home next door at 18 North Road as a religious education and group activities center. More room was needed	Members of the KiSeLo Club devoted a great deal of their time cleaning, repairing, and furnishing the Center to get it ready for use. Center opens in Fall of 1956
1956	Pastor begins "Church News," a monthly newspaper	The first issue includes a list of service men in Korea from our church. Congregants were encouraged to select one or two and write them letters
1957	Men's Club establishes 2 youth basketball teams: one for juniors and one for seniors	These teams are for boys only
1957	A church Cradle Roll was established to record each new baby from birth until three years of age	The roll is updated continuously as new babies are born and by 1960 the Superintendent of the Cradle Roll noted how rapidly it is growing with new members joining the church all the time
1958	The Friendly Club establishes a basketball team for girls	Carol Engel distinguishes herself on the basketball court. Said Carol, "They called me DEAD EYE."
1958	Church members were given three different designs for the new church to consider. At a Special Meeting, members voted for a colonial style church structure	A new building committee was elected at the same time. The new committee worked "hand in glove" with the Building Fund Committee and the Prudential Committee
1958	Active fund-raising campaigns for the new church began and continued through 1963. The need for funds to pay for the new church did not end on the first day of worship on May 1, 1960!	Between 1958 and 1963 each CCC group made annual pledges to raise a certain amount of money to pay for the new church through a variety of fundraisers. Some organizations contributed important church furnishings; for example, The Friendly Circle contributed chimes
1959	Groundbreaking for the new church takes place in April	Fundraising continues. Examples include special concerts, craft fairs; etc. Some of the giving was specially earmarked, such as

		donations for the cost of pews and for a new Cross for the Sanctuary
1959	A church-wide Social Action Committee was organized. This is the genesis of SAM.... Social Action and Mission Committee. This new committee is just what Rev. Manwell hoped for	One of its first actions was to unite with other churches in the state to prepare an all-out campaign organized by the MA Council of Churches against crime and gambling. SAM cites data from the MA Crime Commission that "Massachusetts is known to the underworld as a safe haven for hoodlums."



Artist's rendering of the Church Design Selected by CCC Members (1958)

In 1955, CCC was already engaged in discussions about the growing need to build a new church.

How big should it be? What functions and needs should it serve? What kind of spaces do we need?

The chancel area was so small that members of the senior choir could barely crowd in on Sunday morning. Blue prints were drafted and three different exterior designs were sketched to provide the

Congregation with choices. What should a new church look like? What do we want? What should it contain?

Once initial agreements were reached, CCC launched into fund-raising activities. The Building Committee produced a multi-page brochure (front page shown on previous page) with interior photos of the North Road church to underscore the importance of building a new church to accommodate the large and growing congregation. Details on how congregants would benefit from the new church were described. An entire wing devoted to Christian education with 20 classrooms. A new Sanctuary with a seating capacity for 300 people, a 43% increase over what their present church could accommodate. Other exciting features included a large, modern kitchen and a fellowship hall capable of seating 230 for church suppers, and 300 people for entertainment programs.... which would nearly double the capacity of their current hall. Project blue print designs were included for each floor. The brochure was an excellent motivational tool to build excitement and ownership and encourage giving. It also explained very clearly how the new church would be funded including expectations for donations from members.

There are not many people in the Congregation today who have memories about church life during the 1950s. Here are a few.

Memories: Meeting my husband: My closest girlfriends were members of CCC when I was a teen in Chelmsford. My parents, who attended another church, permitted me to switch to CCC so that I could be together with my friends. I was actively engaged in the Young Adults Club. On one evening members were supposed to meet at the Alpine Bowling Lanes for a fun night of bowling together. When I got there, I was surprised to see that no one else was there. Except for one person, a young man. He didn't understand why no one else came either! We bowled together although nobody else showed up. Something clicked. He became the man I married! Our wedding was one of the first ones held at the new church. **Carol Engel**

Memories: The Children's Christmas Pageant - 1956 It was the Sunday before Christmas.

Everyone from church was gathering in Fellowship Hall for the Christmas Pageant. I felt an excited energy all around the big hall but didn't quite understand why. Young Sunday School children were



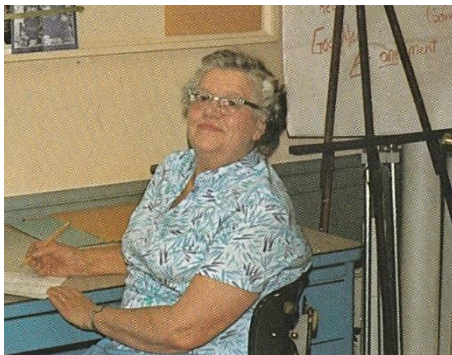
dressed in costume to reenact the manger scene in Bethlehem where Jesus was born. I was a five-year old girl and could see tall adults rushing around and taking seats in front of the stage. Fellowship Hall was darkened. I don't remember

Photo: A More Modern-Day Christmas Pageant Scene in the Sanctuary 1987

angels being part of this story, but instead of being assigned to play the part of a sheep, a wiseman, or one of the cattle lowing—I was supposed to be an angel. Even then I knew that wasn't the right role for me. In those days you minded your Sunday School teacher so there was no discussion, I'm sure. I do remember standing in the wings watching the "animals" come out on stage to join Mary and Joseph and the baby. Waiting in the darkness for my turn to come out, I recall feeling scared. Yet at the same time I remember being full of awe. In my child's mind I could tell that something very special and important happened. It was the arrival of the baby Jesus. **Pat Vondal**

Boyhood Memories of Attending Church, 1954-1960 The Clarke family moved from Carlisle to Chelmsford in 1954, and in that same year, joined CCC. Bill was just six years old. He remembers going in through the side entrance of the Old North Road church with his family and being warmly welcomed by Betty Lewis. She squeezed his cheek and said "Hi Billy!" Bill and his brother Ronald (Ronnie) served as church acolytes in the late 1950s. Their job was to lead the Sunday procession

into the Sanctuary followed by the Senior Choir and the Minister. The boys wore robes and each carried a candle. The brothers lit the candles at the alter and then went off to the side to a back pew to try to sit through the service quietly. Their mother, Eleanor Clarke, was very proud to see her boys. Another memory that stands out for Bill is when the church screened the movie ***The Robe***. Somehow a makeshift screen was stretched out in the front of the Sanctuary for the viewing. Maybe it was a sheet? What he does recall is how overwhelming and exciting it was to sit in the Sanctuary with the church family to watch ***The Robe*** together. Bill also remembers the fundraising period of 1958 and 1959. There was a large “thermometer” posted near the church entrance show-casing progress toward the goal. On that day in May 1960 when the brand-new church was ready, Bill recalls the entire congregation marched outside from the Sanctuary of the old church while singing ***Onward Christian Soldiers***, and marched right into the entrance of the new church on Worthen Street! One can imagine how stirring, how thrilling, that must have been!



*Superintendent of Church School
Betty Lewis*

Photo of Betty Lewis is from 2003

For a period of time Bill stopped going to church. But not for long. The day he came back with his wife Cathy, guess who was there to greet him as he entered the church? Once again, Betty Lewis squeezed his cheek. “Billy Clarke, where have you been?” **Bill Clarke**

Social Action in the 1950s. The Congregational Church has a long history of involvement in outreach and social action dating back to the 1840s with anti-slavery activities and support for abolitionism. In 1934 the Council for Social Action was established by the General Council of Congregational and Christian Churches. By 1940, eradication of racial discrimination became one of the General Council’s major causes. Congregational churches spoke out for the abolition of the

poll tax in the south, and against restrictive housing and employment practices and segregated use of community facilities. The church called for a “non-segregated church in a non-segregated society.” In 1954 the Council for Social Action called for implementing the Supreme Court decision to integrate public education with tolerance. In 1956, the General Council issued a lengthy statement about the imperative for racial integration in all areas of life, and Reverend Richard Manwell was hired to serve as our new Pastor. His wife was a social worker. Rev. Manwell was a man with strong convictions that people of the church should be more engaged in outreach activities, not just in Chelmsford, but in important social issues in the country.

Rev. Manwell was with CCC for just six months when it was time for him to write his first pastor’s annual report. In his report he called on the Congregation to get more involved in social action activities. He defined social action as the cooperative effort of church men and women to make their Christian faith and principles more effective in society both within and beyond the churches. *“There are many areas in our social life that are in need of intelligent application of Christian principles: temperance, war, politics, race relations, juvenile delinquency, crime, civil liberties, mental health, and others.”* He commended the Women’s Fellowship Group for its active Social Action Committee, but talked about the need for a Church Social Action Committee to provide information on social issues that need attention and to promote action on an all-church basis. *“Social Action should be a concern of the entire church as well as of the women.”* The church-wide Social Action Committee was finally formed in 1959. It was the beginning of what we know today as SAM, the Social Action and Mission Committee.

An Exploding Church Population: In the years between 1955 and 1960, CCC’s membership was increasing at a fast pace. By the end of the decade there were 404 active church members. The church school was approaching an enrollment of 300. Rev. Manwell had to face the challenges of meeting the spiritual needs of a rapidly growing church. This is what he wrote in the 1959 Annual Pastor’s Report.

“The challenge is to **ASSIMILATE** our new families – to **INTEGRATE** them into the life of the church. For this we must have a **VITAL** church program to meet their spiritual needs. More than activity is needed. It must be **PURPOSEFUL** and **RELATED** to the spiritual purpose of the church. In every group program – in every church program – it must be asked without ceasing the question, **WHY?** How does this or that activity promote the purpose of the church? What is its real purpose? How do we differ as a church group from any other group in the community? What is a church? What is our role as a Christian Church?”

II. 1960 - 1969

Year	Events	Brief Narrative
1960	The last sermon was given at the old church on North Road in April	The old church was not demolished until after the dedication ceremonies were held for the new church
1960	Approximately 600 people attended the dedication of the new church on Worthen Street. May 1, 1960	A dedication banquet for the new church was held on May 4. On Sunday, May 8 the service included a dedication of the Christian Education wing and of the new organ and pipes.
1960	Members of the church establish the Central Co-Op Kindergarten as a non-profit organization run by teachers and parents. The Religious Education Committee sent letters out and held several meetings with the parents of younger children to plan for the kindergarten. Twenty children were enrolled to begin with	Each day 3 mothers volunteered their time to assist the teachers. Over the years most of the volunteer mothers became CCC members. By 1962 the enrollment of children increased from 20 to 89. Our church-sponsored kindergarten remains an important institution for the development and education of young children!
1961	The Men's Club sponsor a local boy scout troop (meets at CCC) and a church basketball team. In 1962 they organized a men's bowling league	Other men in the church were also actively involved in supporting the activities of the boy scout and church sponsored sports team
1961	Women's' Association is disbanded	Closure due to dwindling members: moves, deaths, and lower level of interest in participating were the primary reasons
1961	Rev. Manwell starts an Adult Bible Study Class	Rev. Manwell admits he was embarrassed in the 1950s when new members of the church asked if there was an adult bible study class they could join and he had to say no
1961	At the Annual Meeting in January, CCC votes to accept the constitution of the United Church of Christ. This is a national	CCC became a member of UCC with the understanding that we maintain our autonomy as a local group

	merger of the Congregational Church and the Evangelical Reformed Church	
1961	An Assistant Pastor is hired to focus on the religious and spiritual needs of young people in the church and on Christian Education for youth from all age groups	Rev. Manwell could not provide for the religious needs of the entire congregation as it continued to grow in numbers each year
1962	Rev. Manwell starts the Fireside Fellowship, a small group that meets weekly with the Pastor in the parlor for discussion	Rev. Manwell designed the group to encourage spiritual renewal essential to the forming of fellowship
1962	Rev. Manwell creates a Church Cabinet with representatives from every committee and club. Chaired by Rev. Manwell, the Cabinet served as a coordinating and integrating agency for the church. During meetings, Cabinet representatives also reviewed the purpose of each church program	Rev. Manwell noted that we need <i>“continual evaluation of our church group programs in relation to our role and the overall purpose of the church. How well do they fit into that role? How can we improve them?”</i>
1962	Friendly Circle ends after many years of service to the church	Treasury was dissolved with remaining money allocated to the Building Fund, a Christmas gift for the Pastor, supplies for the church office, and a Christmas record and film for the church
1964	At the January 1964 Annual Meeting a bylaw change is made to the name of our Church: “the name of this church shall be the Central Congregational Church in Chelmsford of the United Church of Christ	In current day we use a shortened version: Central Congregational Church, UCC
1964	On recommendation of the Diaconate, CCC begins holding two services on Sunday as a means to increase attendance, and to accommodate the large and growing congregation	Success! With the additional service, church attendance is up 25% compared to same time previous year
1965	Decision made to hire a full-time Christian Education Director	The church preferred this position at the time rather than hiring a new Assistant Pastor whose focus was on young people and CE for youth at all ages
1966	New constitution developed establishing the council form of church governance by lay people	The Church Council replaces the Church Cabinet
1967	With a growing reputation for excellence, enrollment of children in the Central Coop Kindergarten for pre-school education reached 325. At its opening in 1960 only 20 children were enrolled	15 of the students were eligible for Head Start; but there was no program in Chelmsford. Parents of the kindergarten children voted to enroll those children free of charge
1968	Members of the Social Action Committee organize a summer Fresh Air Program	19 church families took children in from Roxbury and Lowell for 2 weeks or more

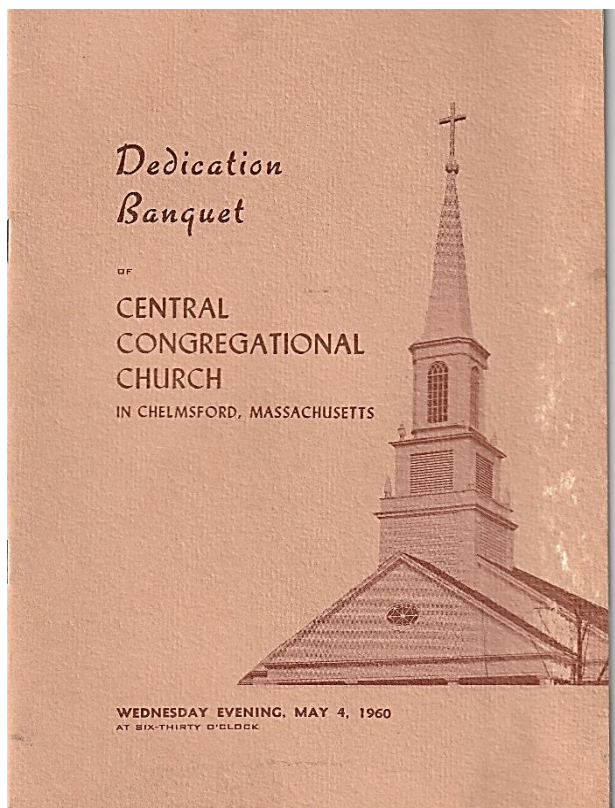
The decade of the 1960s started dramatically with the opening of our new church on May 1st. A large crowd of 600 attended the dedication service; 400 sat in the Sanctuary, and 200 people were seated in Fellowship Hall where they listened to the ceremony over the public address system.

Reading the program for the Service of Dedication on Sunday, May 1, 1960 is a moving experience. It started at 10:30 with the Ceremony of the Opening of the Doors. The processional hymn into the new church was **“Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!”** At the end of the service came the Litany of Dedication. Here are the opening words spoken by the Minister, and the closing, in which the church covenant is spoken in unison by the Minister and the People.

Minister: O God, who art present in all places of Thy Dominion, and dost graciously rejoice in the services of the children, bear us, we humbly beseech Thee, as we dedicate this house. To thy glory, O Father Almighty; To the honor of Christ, Thy Son; To the praise of the Holy Spirit.

People: We dedicate this house.

Closing, in unison: We, now, the members and friends of this church and congregation, mindful of the inheritance into which we have entered, and the glorious company, seen and unseen, whose communion we share; and deeply sensible of those bonds by which we are bound to the Lord of all life and to each other, do covenant together in this act of dedication, offering ourselves anew to the worship and work of our heavenly Father; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



A special Dedication Banquet for the new church was held at Fellowship Hall on May 4, 1960 with over 200 people attending.

Church membership stood at 403 in 1960. Rev. Manwell was doubly concerned about the integration of new members into the church family and advancing fellowship.

By 1964, CCC had 623 members!

Memories: The move to the new church was very exciting! It was marvelous! There was so much more room, modern equipment in the kitchen. Just beautiful. The old church was beautiful too, in its own way, but was no longer functional. This church was always very active, but once we moved into the new church, activities exploded! **Jessie Buchanan**

The new church was indeed exciting for all the congregants, but larger events occurring in the nation during the 1960s also had a profound effect on CCC. There was a new awakening of social consciousness in the United States when Dr. Martin Luther King started his non-violent campaign to promote civil rights for black people and justice for all.

Memories: The McKersies lived in Bethesda, Maryland in 1963. Jane McKersie tells the story of how our minister joined a bus load of people headed for Washington, DC to participate in the March to Washington for Jobs and Freedom. She suggested they meet him there, but Rev. Manwell replied that they would never find each other. On August 23, 1963 he stood with thousands of

people around the reflecting pool and heard Dr. King's stirring *I Have a Dream* speech. It made a deep impression on him. **Jane McKersie**

Memory: Reverend Richard Manwell stands up for civil rights Normally a very quiet and mild-mannered man, Rev. Manwell shocked his congregation one Sunday. Usually, our service was opened by a procession of the choir followed by the minister. On this particular day, he led the procession singing *We Shall Overcome* loud and clear. He then gave a rousing sermon filled with feeling and conviction about our Christian duty to support the civil rights movement. The Buchanans thought it was the best sermon he ever gave during his ten-year tenure at CCC. **Jessie Buchanan**

The campaign for Civil Rights and the violent reaction that ensued made a deep impression on our church members. CCC Groups began discussing and addressing social justice issues such as race relations, segregation, fair housing, better education, hunger, and poverty in the United States. Several committees and clubs⁹ also focused on the needs of the poor in Middlesex County, and through overseas missions, raised funds to contribute donations for people suffering from acute poverty and hungry in countries going through crises.

⁹ The CCC Missionary Committee, the Women's Mission, KiSeLo, the Friendly Club, and the Social Action Committee were all involved in these pursuits. In addition to raising money, clubs and committees also collected clothing and other items of need such as diapers and toiletries.



The church also enacted a major organizational change in the 1960s.

In 1966 CCC voted to develop a new constitution establishing a church council as the governing body with elected lay people. The Council replaced the Church Cabinet that was formed by Rev. Manwell in 1962. While the Cabinet comprised representatives from

each church committee and club as an integrating and a coordinating body chaired by the Pastor, the Council was designed to take on a far greater scope of responsibilities. Article VII of the new Constitution states, *“The Council shall be the policy-making body and shall be responsible for directing and coordinating all affairs, activities, responsibilities, and interests of the Church.”* The Council is led by church officers and the Pastor attends Council meetings. The photo above shows a meeting of the Church Council in May 1986. This style of governance is in keeping with early Congregational practices established in the 1600s.

III. 1970-1979

Year	Events	Brief Narrative
1971	Ye Old Parsonage Gift Shop was opened by CCC women. Its purpose was to raise funds for the church and to support CCC outreach programs	The shop sold high quality gifts made by craftspeople who brought in their creations to sell on consignment
1972	Fifth Grade Sunday School class decides to get involved with the Heifer Project	By June 1972 the class raised enough funds to send a heifer to a needy farm family overseas
1973	The CCC Mission Committee establishes a relationship with an American Indian Community College, the College of Ganado in Ganado, Arizona. Church receives a certificate designating CCC as “Friends of Ganado”	The committee donated funds to the college, and coordinated funds allocated by CCC clubs. A letter from the college administrator informed our committee that contributions from churches such as ours allowed them to expand services

Year	Events	Brief Narrative
1974	Sunday school teachers Don and Jan Brigham start a new youth group, The Beacons, for grades 6 through 9	The Brighams involved Beacon members in many service projects for ten years until they passed the torch to a new leader in 1984
1976	Church had 5 teams involving 60 boys and girls in the town's church league basketball program	Involving church youth in sports was one avenue used to engage youth and to increase Sunday School attendance
1976	One Hundredth Anniversary of CCC- A Century of Service celebrated with a special Palm Sunday service and other events throughout the day. A banquet was held at the Banqueteer	Events included a 19 th Century Musicale, a Birthday Dinner, and a drama about our church history written, directed and acted by church members
1976	The church historian, Clint Vincent, prepares a report on the history of the Church using Annual Reports from the 1800s	To share this history with CCC members in more accessible and appealing forms, Clint developed numerous shorter accounts and stories based on these Annual Reports for special church celebrations, for the Church Newsletter, etc.
1976	Led by Milli Greenhalgh, a church quilt was designed and made with the participation of many women in the church to celebrate CCC's 100 th anniversary	The quilt was presented to Clarence and Dorothy Hope to honor their years of service. The Hopes donated the quilt to the church where it now hangs
1975-77	Six CCC men join the Chelmsford Minutemen for reenactments...joining up with Minutemen from other towns whose men fought the British. Most of the men in the Chelmsford unit are from other churches in town	Their wives sewed them historically accurate costumes. Eventually the women decided to join their husbands in the reenactments dressing as wives of Minutemen (of course they made their own costumes!)
1977	200 members gathered for a Burning of the Church Mortgage Celebration. Payoff was completed one year earlier than scheduled!	To celebrate, a grand roast beef dinner was held for all church members in Fellowship Hall
1978	After many years of inactivity, a group of CCC couples restart the Adult Fellowship. One of its first activities was a progressive dinner...Appetizers were being served at the home of one couple, dinner at the home of another. Then everyone traveled to CCC to have dessert together in Fellowship Hall	Adult Fellowship had various names over time. It was known as the Couples Club when first organized in the 1950s. In the early 1970s members decided to change the name from the Couples Club to the Adult Group when a member's husband died. From this point on it wasn't necessary to be part of a couple to join. Any adult was welcome!
1978	CCC & the Central Baptist Church begin attending each other's services for July and August in turn while the pastor of each church went on vacation	The Central Baptist church was literally next door. Many people enjoyed attending services at their neighbors' church. This lasted for 6 or 7 years until churches hired assistant pastors who could fill in when the pastors were on vacation. Central Baptist

Year	Events	Brief Narrative
		gave CCC tremendous support in the aftermath of the fire of 1983
1978	Lay participants incorporated into the church service for the first time	Service includes volunteer lay persons who open the service with the Call to Prayer.... continues to be a practice today
1979	The land next to 9 Worthen Street was donated to the church by Evelyn Russell	All three church properties were resurveyed and included within one boundary
1979	Through SAM's IMPACT activity, three members keep the congregation informed on important social matters coming before the U.S. Congress	SAM members corresponded frequently with Senators and Representatives at the state and federal levels, and sometimes coordinated these actions with other churches in the state
1979-1980	The Mission Committee forms a Refugee Support Group and sponsors a refugee Cambodian family. The family is welcomed into the church. Other Church groups also allocate funds for Cambodian Relief	<i>“The benefits of such an endeavor not only demonstrated the true benevolent nature of our church but also reached into and touched the lives of most of our congregation.”</i> Annual Report 1979-1980
1979	The Diaconate started a “Neighbor Aid” program	The program <i>“provides meals on short notice for persons facing distressing circumstances.”</i> Annual Report 1979-1980
1979	The House Committee reports <i>“Heeding the plight of our many brides and other appearance-anxious individuals, we installed full length mirrors in the parlor and ladies’ room in Fellowship Hall.”</i> Annual Report 1979-80	The mirrors were set in the unused bookcase openings on each side of the fireplace

Photo: Junior Choir Processing Down the Aisle 1977



Still Growing!

The 1970's found CCC highly engaged in a wide and diverse number of new programs and activities that animated many members.

Membership continued to rise in the 1970s. One church elder said, *“Church school grew so large that we used St. Mary’s CCD building for our Sunday School overflow!”* In 1971 the Council’s Annual Report expressed some of the same concerns Rev. Manwell voiced during his tenure from 1955-1965. They reported that the Council was constantly searching for new ways to promote Christian fellowship within the Church Community. *“If you have any ideas, please bring them to the Council.”* (Annual Report, 1970).

Social Action: The momentum of social action in the 1960s continued building in the 1970s. The decade saw an increased level of involvement in social action activities and the pursuit of social justice across the United States. Many churches were actively involved in social causes and CCC was no exception. Our church was involved in outreach activities and social issues at a local, regional, national, and international level.

UCC builds participation of member churches in national and international issues Can one church on its own effectively promote social change on a national or international level? Maybe we would like to say yes, CCC can do anything it sets its mind on. What we have done is to unite with other UCC churches in meetings of working groups and task forces to research social issues, recommend actions to the larger body, monitor issues, and keep up the pressure on Congress to enact changes.

In 1972 CCC sent two delegates to join working groups associated with each of the following UCC organizations: the Bushwick Andover Association, the Northeast Coordinating Committee, the Massachusetts Conference, and the General Synod. Their report back to the church is included in the 1972 Annual Church Report; and clearly shows that the issues addressed in these working groups reflected the deep concerns of the time. Priority issues included combatting racism, continuing the peace effort to end the Vietnam War, empowering the poor and disenfranchised, saving the environment, and improving the quality of life for everyone. Task Forces gave reports

on Anti-Personnel Weapons, especially in relationship to Honeywell's continued development and production of such weapons; and on the pronounced brutality of the white minority towards South African blacks. A resolution was passed to ensure that the issue of apartheid in South Africa would be brought up at next meeting of the General Synod. The Massachusetts Conference passed a resolution to request President Nixon to meet with a group of American religious leaders for a discussion of ethics and morality in government in light of the Watergate events.

A good example of our church's direct involvement in outreach and social mission activities on an international level is our engagement with the Heifer project. In 1972, Sunday School teachers Jan and Don Brigham were looking for a special program their fifth-grade class could get involved with.



They suggested the international Heifer project which provides poor families around the world and in the United States with valuable farm animals. The animals also provide families with a living source of income and food.¹⁰ The Sunday School class was very excited about the program and decided their first fund-raising activity would be for the purchase of a heifer. A heifer can provide up to 80 cups of milk each day.

The class combined their annual Easter Breakfast for adult church members with their first fund raiser for the purchase of a heifer. Their enthusiasm for the project spread through the church and

¹⁰ The program is more complex than can be described here. But central to the program is the idea that any family receiving a Heifer animal is obligated to pass on its "offspring" to another household in their village. For example, when Klarabelle gave birth for the first time, the baby heifer would have been given to another family to contribute to their needs for income and food.

even to friends and families outside the church. This clipping from The Lowell Sun in April 1972 shows members of the Sunday School Class getting to know the heifer they named Klarabelle. Pictured from left to right are Richard Brown, Brad Kercher, John Van der Heide, and Glenn Brigham. By June the class met their fund-raising goal and had to say goodbye to Klarabelle as she was sent off to her new home. CCC's involvement in the Heifer Project became an annual mission program for Sunday School students.

In other activities, the Mission Committee established a new mission program of fundraising to support the development of the College of Ganado, an American Indian Community College in Ganado, Arizona. The Committee coordinated funds received from the congregation to donate to the college. The college used the funds from UCC and other churches in many beneficial ways. For example, the donations allowed the college to build up their library, and to expand extension classes for their adult education program into more remote rural areas. The Social Action Committee continued to monitor and educate the Congregation on important social issues, sought church donations for targeted causes such as the Nestle Boycott Project and for the work of the Southern Poverty Law Center, and engaged in outreach and service activities for Lowell's orphans, newly arrived refugees, the elderly, and to the poor and hungry.

Promoting Church Fellowship CCC members were also highly engaged in activities that contributed to the development of greater fellowship among members. Examples include volunteering for annual church fairs and spring clean-ups, and participating in Christian retreats or in Bible study groups led by other congregants. Some activities also contributed financially and materially to maintaining our church and to the funds for mission and outreach activities and programs. One important example was the opening of Ye Old Parsonage Gift Shop in 1971.

Memory: Opening up Ye Olde Parsonage Gift Shop Once the house at 9 Worthen Street was no longer used as a parsonage for ministers and their families, discussion began about what to do

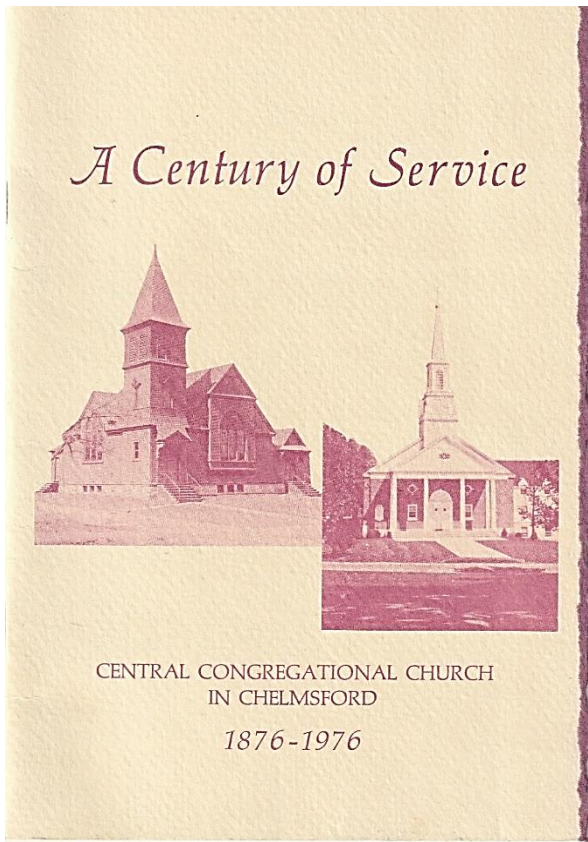


with the house. Several women in the church got together and came up with a proposal to use the house as a non-profit craft and gift shop. The idea was to attract local crafts people willing to sell their high-quality items on consignment at the shop. The women pledged to donate \$1,000 of the sales proceeds to the church each year. They in turn would decide which church activities or needs to donate the remaining money. The Council was enthusiastic about the idea. They agreed to the proposal and provided the group with \$200 to

start up operations. The shop opened up for business in 1971 and was a success from the start. The shop began getting known as a great place to buy unique crafts items and other quality gifts. Volunteering in the shop proved to be an excellent activity for elderly ladies in the church who could no longer be on their feet for very long. As volunteer saleswomen, they could sit down and talk with one another, and interact with people who came into the shop to buy a gift or to sell their craftwork. It was a great way to break up what might otherwise be a long, quiet day at home. As a side-line fund-raising activity, the shop volunteers also baked strawberry tarts for sale to the throngs of people who came to Chelmsford Center on the fourth of July. The Shop, managed by a

Director of Volunteers, was very profitable and provided a reliable source of funds for the church budget every year until it finally closed in 1985 after 14 years of operation. **Judy Buswick**

Our church history from the 1870s is brought to light in the 1970s Clint Vincent was our



church historian when he discovered a number of huge leather-bound journals in our church archives. When he realized that these were our church's annual journals dating back to the 1870s, Clint was thrilled! We have Clint to thank for spending two long years trying to read the handwriting and make sense of the long, flowery language that was common in that period. The journals were so large that Clint had to lay them out on his dining room table and stand above them! Clint produced a 30 page carefully written distillation of these records in modern day

English. His document covers some of the key events of the time and details about building the old church on North Road. But there was more to be discovered in these 100-year-old church journals.

Clint wondered how he could make this history interesting and accessible to the members of the Congregation. As a historian, he knew that what he finds compelling and fascinating would just be dull reading for the general public. Clint's answer was to write up pieces of the history as vignettes which were included in the Sunday Service church programs and in issues of the Crusader. He also contributed to church histories that were written to celebrate special events such as the Church

Centennial celebration. By closely examining dates, names, and church events Clint uncovered some intriguing information. Among these are a romantic tale he was able to reconstruct of a bachelor minister, rare at the time.

Rev. Ernest Bartlett, who previously served as our interim pastor while he was completing his senior year at Andover Theological Seminary, became our full-time pastor in 1895. He was so well-liked the vote to hire him was unanimous. In May 1898, three years later, Miss Clementine A. Sheldon was admitted to membership by a letter of transfer.

As he continued to read, Clint noticed that the names were listed together under the Marriage section in the same church journal. Recognizing the names of the new couple, he decided to work his way back through the records to put together a very plausible story of love found by a bachelor minister long ago. On September 13, 1898, Rev. Ernest Bartlett and Miss Clementine Sheldon were united in the bonds of holy matrimony! There was a full congregation “well filled by friends and well-wishers of the two”. It was certainly a whirlwind courtship.... they married after just four months of meeting each other. One can imagine them encountering each other after services and during church events. Clint did! It’s all in the details! Clint also wrote up a synopsis of our church history for the occasion of our church’s 100th anniversary. One can read it in the bulletin shown on the previous page.

Memories: The Beacons In 1974 CCC did not have a youth director and the church lacked a



youth group specifically for pre- and young-teens. Characteristically, Don and Jan Brigham saw the need and jumped right in to start a new youth group for grades 6 through 9.

The Beacons engaged in many worthy service projects but the Brigham's thought it was also important to engage this exuberant age group in outdoor activities such as visits to conservation parks to combine talk about Christianity while

learning about environmental issues. The photo shown here captures the group during a Reflection Session after one of their first outings, a retreat in Hollis, New Hampshire (June 1974). At the end of each outing, the group would sit down together for a Reflection Session to discuss what they learned and what it means to live a Christian life. It was during the session shown above that the members chose to call their group the Beacons.



The Brigbams also wanted the kids to have fun! An overnight trip to New York City was planned. The Beacons held fund-raisers to pay for the trip, and when they had enough money, engaged a driver and bus transportation in a brand-new coach! Twenty kids and seven adults went on the trip to NYC. The bus driver, John Love, was a native of the city and he knew exactly where to bring the group to enjoy the

sights and spirit of New York. He brought them to Radio City Hall, the UN building, and they even climbed up the stairs to the top of the Statue of Liberty! At the end of the trip, he brought the group to a friend's restaurant where they were treated for a meal. John Love, what a perfect name, the Brigham's remarked, for this wonderful and caring man. The Brighams enjoyed leading this youth group for ten years! The couple stepped down in 1984 and gave the Beacon torch to someone else to lead. **Don and Jan Brigham**

Memories: The Church Quilt Have you ever wondered about the history of the quilt hanging on the wall of the second floor directly across from the elevator? The idea was conceived by artist and church member Milli Greenhalgh. Milli had taken a quilting class the previous year. Many women were interested in getting involved but had never made quilts before. Milli put together a package of materials for each woman. Each one contained a square of cloth, materials, and careful directions. The design included a space for each quilter to sign her name. The overall quilt design commemorates the 100th year anniversary of CCC. In the middle of the quilt there is a large square depicting our church. Don Brigham, a highly talented and skilled carpenter, built a wooden rod heavy enough to hang the quilt on the wall. The completed quilt was presented to Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Hope, long time church members, to honor them for their important volunteer work and commitment to the church over the decades. **Milli Greenhalgh**

IV. 1980-1989

Year	Event	Brief Narrative
1980	The Fellowship Players inaugurated with annual dinner theatres	Ted Buswick and John Smith lead the effort
1980	Music director purchases silver bells and cases fulfilling a long-time wish of members of the congregation	CCC formed a new Bell Choir that still performs to this day

Year	Event	Brief Narrative
1980	Celebration of the Lord's Supper Maundy Thursday in Fellowship Hall around a table in the form of a cross	The celebration was concluded with a memorable reenactment of the Office of the Tenebrae
1981	SAM member Helen Glinos takes the lead role on behalf of CCC in organizing a permanent food bank in Lowell called the "Open Pantry." It is managed and stocked by a "consortium" of churches in the greater Lowell area	Open Pantry still operating (2022). Under SAM's coordination, regular donations of food are provided by SAM members, KiSeLo Club members, Sunday School classes, Youth Groups, and church membership writ large
1981	Church school classes continue the tradition of raising money to buy animals for donation through the International Heifer Project	These young people voted to raise funds to donate a "Heap of Sheep," a "Float of Goats," and to "Make Rabbits a Habit"
1981	A week-long ecumenical vacation church school was held at CCC with a program put together by Aldersgate Methodist, Central Baptist, Central Congregational, and St. Mary's churches. 140 students registered	The staff for the church school was from each of the four churches. Members met in January and decided to have another five-day program in summer 1982
1983	In April 1983 a fire in the church was set off causing extensive damage. Church members led the effort to make the extensive repairs and improvements required. Our "sister" churches in Chelmsford and the town fire and police departments were all thanked for saving our "home" and providing support	Our friends at the neighboring Central Baptist Church graciously welcomed us to use their church for worship after their own Sunday Service. This arrangement lasted until CCC was ready to be used again
1983	SAM and Mission committees merge and become the Social Action and Mission Committee	In the Annual Report, SAM notes that the 6 ½ years boycott of Nestle products ends with success! Nestles was promoting the sale of their infant formula packages to women in Third World countries ¹¹
1983	In September our repaired church is finally re-opened! Almost 6 months after the fire occurred.	The Pastor led a parade of Congregants from Central Baptist Church into CCC for the first time since the fire broke out
1985	Pioneer Club for girls was established by Linda Lis, Diane vanBuren, and Marilyn Nieuweboer following approval from the CE Committee, CE Director, Sunday School Superintendent, and the Minister. The purpose was to provide additional CE for children beyond Sunday School	The Voyagers Club, tailored for girls in first and second grades, is launched. Aims are to learn how to use their Bibles, handle leadership opportunities well, attend all meetings and special events, serve the church and reach out into the community, and reach out into families
1986	Pioneer Club membership expands. Motto adopted is "Christ in Every Phase of Life"	Two additional age groups were added: the Lavaliers and the Trailblazers clubs.

¹¹ Nestles had some great success in convincing women that feeding their infants with the Nestles formula was healthier for their babies than nursing them with their own milk. Not only was this patently untrue, but poor women could ill afford to purchase the formula and it had to be mixed with water. In most of the countries where Nestles marketed their formula, the supply of water was not safe for drinking. In some countries, access to any water was very difficult.

Year	Event	Brief Narrative
		In 1988, a fourth group, the Shikaris were added
1987	CCC member Don Brigham, a skilled carpenter, removed 1/3 of two pews in the rear to provide room for wheelchairs in the Sanctuary	This work was part of an overall plan to make the church more handicap accessible
1987	A new baby grand piano was purchased for use in the Sanctuary. A six-foot, satin ebony, conservatory series “Yamaha” piano to be precise. It was dedicated in April 1987	The Music Committee spear-headed the successful fund-raising for purchasing the piano
1987	Centennial celebration for Center Congregational Church in Chelmsford. It was 1887 when the church was built on North Road	The church itself was started in 1877 by Chelmsford people who had been dispossessed from the old church. For ten years, until their church building was completed, worship was held in a variety of places in Chelmsford
1987	Church votes to use donated land to build a memorial park in honor of John Carson, Jr.	The park was dedicated in 1990
1988	Church decides to get involved in the Stephen Ministry program of lay care. The Stephens Series training equips lay persons to minister to others in the church who are in need. They serve as “adjuncts” to the Pastor	In 1988, this model of lay ministry was operating in 2000 congregations, agencies, and military base chapels from all over the U.S., Canada, Australia, the Canal Zone, Germany, and the Middle East
1989	Church votes to give Bob Moore the go-ahead to build a gazebo in honor of his wife in Memorial Park	Construction of gazebo begins and it is completed in 1990
1989	Crafter’s Club “refounded” by Associate Pastor Laurene Powers with Gigi van de Kraatz serving as President	First major project: A communion table cloth. 18 club members worked on making the cloth, meeting twice weekly

Church Membership Church membership began increasing once again in the 1980s. In 1981 there were 369 full members, and just two years later the pastor noted that we passed *“the magical number of 400, which is said to be a critical figure. We can no longer think of ourselves as a small neighborhood church where everybody knows everybody else unless we devise ways to personalize our group relationships.”*¹² By the start of the new decade in 1990, CCC had 590 full (not all active) members. Our church became the second largest congregation in the Massachusetts UCC membership.

¹² 1982-1983 Annual Church Report, pg. 2, Minister’s Report.

Social Action Activities and Merger of the Mission Committee and the Social Action

Committee CCC continued to be heavily engaged in social action and outreach activities and missions throughout the 1980s. There were two different committees in the church with similar missions in which members could participate. In the 1980 Church Annual Report, the Social Action Committee writes that it is concerned about the small size of their membership given the expansive number of programs and activities. They cite “pressing family obligations and full-time jobs” as two of the reasons for the low membership. None of the present numbers feel they have enough time to carry out such an active program in the coming year. Both committees report on significant activities for the Refugee Support Program¹³. In 1982, the Mission Committee report adds a post script note that comes close to indicating a competition between the two committees which read as follows: *P.S. The Mission Committee experience provides practical and down-to-earth people-to-people fellowship, as well as Christian witness. A spirit of cooperation and support assures that no one member is over-worked in our program. Speak to any of our committee members – we’d like to have you join us!* It is not surprising to learn that the two committees merged in 1983 to form one large “Social Action and Mission Committee.”

Memory: Establishing the Open Pantry in Lowell The purpose of the Open Pantry is to provide a source of free food for the poorest and hungriest citizens of Lowell. It originated in the 1981 when a pastor from a church in Lowell began calling suburban churches, including ours, to organize and maintain an “open pantry” for Lowell’s poor, and to contribute food on an ongoing basis. Our pastor asked Helen Glinos, who was serving as the Chairman of SAM at the time, to lead the church’s involvement in what would become known as the Lowell Open Pantry. She did

¹³ The Refugee Support Program focused on the large population of Cambodians refugees who had been brought into Lowell for resettlement by the U.S. Government following the end of the Viet Nam war and the establishment of the Pol Pot Regime in Cambodia.

so, but more than that, Helen organized and ran a planning meeting at our church with representatives from participating churches in the Lowell area. Helen was instrumental in leading the development of the plans to start up, stock, and manage the Pantry. Until then Lowell did not have a food bank although the need was great. The committee rented a building on Central Street in Lowell to run the program. SAM is actively involved with the Open Pantry to this day. Church members are encouraged to donate canned food when they come for Sunday Services. The KiSeLo Club solicits specific types of food items from its members when they have their monthly meetings. Our church's ongoing involvement in the Open Pantry, for almost 50 years now, is a wonderful example of CCC's Christian service activity to address the needs of people outside of our church family. The need for food is even greater today. *Helen Glinos*



This 2008 photo shows Helen Glinos in the Open Pantry with Sunday School classes from the 3rd and 4th grades.

The children are exposed to the purpose of the Open Pantry and gain a direct experience about the importance of engaging in outreach activities.

Promoting Fellowship in Our Church Family Achieving a strong and vibrant congregational church family that people want to be a part of requires effort on the part of the congregants. In the 1980s our church engaged in a number of activities and programs that, while not always explicitly stated, did indeed serve to strengthen fellowship among our church members.

The Stephen Ministry is a powerful example of how individuals can be trained to strengthen the church family from within by offering church members caring support and guidance when called on. In April 1988, our congregation decided to involve itself in a program of “lay caring ministry” by enrolling in the Stephen Series, a system developed by the Stephen Ministries, a religious and educational organization based in St. Louis.¹⁴ Stephen Ministers are lay people recruited from within the church, but these church members must be willing to make a strong commitment of their time and must have a “strong will to serve the Lord and the Congregation.” Stephen Ministers are people who are very people-oriented, caring, and empathetic. To become a Stephen Minister, individuals must undergo an intensive training program which includes 50 hours of training in Christian helping skills that equip them to care for the needs of church members experiencing crises or serious difficulties in their lives. Examples include helping persons ...on a one-on-one and extremely confidential basis... with issues such as dealing with old age, separation or divorce, illness, and bereavement. These lay ministers are trained by a CCC Stephen Leader who has gone through an intensive Leader Training Program at the Stephen Ministries organization in St. Louis. When individuals have completed the training program, they are commissioned into active caring ministries and are ready to care for the needs of people who approach them for help by offering “effective and caring ministry.” Stephen Ministers receive on-going education and support from Stephen Leaders, and are trained to know when to call on the church Pastor should the individual’s need for help be so great as to be of concern. The Stephen Ministry served our church, with a few

¹⁴ This description of the Stephen Ministry Program is paraphrased from annual reports of the Ministry in a number of our church Annual Reports from the late 1980s and from the 1990s.

breaks in time, from 1988 until the last 2000s. It greatly impacted those individuals who became Stephen Ministers as well as those persons in CCC who received their counselling.

Memories of a Stephen Leader¹⁵ “The Stephen Ministry program was wonderful, just wonderful. You were helping people, and caring for people in a special way. Getting them from here to there. It was so caring!” **Ginnie Hall**



Photo: Members of the Stephen Ministry with Pastor Zachry, 2006

Top Row from left: Dory Toppan, Bob Moore, Geoff Bryant, Scott Lavoie, Mary Horne

Second Row from left: Susy Rogers, Jean Montgomery, Mona Odom, Shirley Zachry, Linda Lis

Front row from left: Ginnie Hall, Karen Papenfuss, Linda Wellman, Pastor John Zachry, Linda Carson

¹⁵ This author is very grateful for the compassionate support from Stephen Minister Ginnie Hall to help her stop smoking. Ginnie Hall was one of the original members in 1988, and served as a dedicated Stephen Leader in our church.

Memories: The Fellowship Players Three couples from the Adult Fellowship Committee met to discuss ideas for new activities to really engage members. One idea that surfaced was taken up immediately. Why not hold annual dinner theatre productions in Fellowship Hall? Surely there must be plenty of people who were willing to get on stage to perform, and it would be a great fund raiser for the church. The idea caught on; it was 1980 and The Fellowship Players were born! Ted Buswick and John Smith were active leaders in launching the group. Each had significant experience with theater productions. Ted, an avid member of the Senior Choir, had directed many high school plays. John had significant experience acting in community theatre. During the initial years Ted picked the plays and directed; and John served as the producer. They were to switch these roles on and off during the years. The shows were comedies that had played on Broadway. The Fellowship Players were an immediate hit. Because of their theater experience, productions were at a whole other level of sophistication compared to the variety shows and musicals the Couples Club produced in the 1950s and 1960s. People who never thought they would act on stage found themselves doing just that. If anyone was missing their lines during dress rehearsals, Ted or John would work with them. They were an amateur group, but the quality of the shows still mattered to everyone. It was a community of church people sharing an experience and bringing



out one another's talents. During the many rehearsals you got to know people better, how others were feeling. Friendships deepened. People who expressed worries were helped or given emotional support and shown kindness. We became stronger as a community. And we had fun! Many people participated

and each year one or two additional church members joined the Fellowship Players. These dinner theatres were so popular they were held on three consecutive evenings! **Judy Buswick**

Photo Above: *Pictured from left to right are Cathy Clarke as "Helga," Rachel Vondal as "Queen Liz," Rosemary Rich as "Hilda," and Beth Jarok as "Heidi."*

Memories: The Church Fire of 1983 Thirty-nine years ago an angry, destructive young man broke into the church one morning and set off a fire in the office on the second floor. It would take almost six months for the church to be fully repaired and ready for use again. The Chelmsford Police knew who probably did it, but learned the suspect left town quickly. He was never caught. Church members who lived near CCC noticed the fire as they passed by on their way to work. Ginnie Hall saw the cloud of smoke from a distance as she drove toward Chelmsford Center. She followed the smoke to see the source and was shocked to see it was our church. She parked her car and walked over to join other church people standing by mutely and in shock while watching the fire department do its job. Jane McKersie was one of them. The Pastor was there. Everyone was in tears. They were joined by Dick Papenfuss who arrived on the scene just as the fire department had put most of the fire out. Fortunately, calls went into the Fire Department before the fire had a chance to immerse the entire building in flames. Several people called, including a friend of Jean



Montgomery's. There was a window of time for a few people to go in and rescue some important documents and the choir's music. But when the firemen yelled at Jane McKersie to go away when she ran in to rescue the church silver service, she kept right on going, got the silver¹⁶, and ran out again!

Dick Papenfuss, who was the Chairman of the Trustees Committee at the time, played the lead role in managing, coordinating, and overseeing the enormous efforts that were undertaken to bring our damaged church back to the congregation. The preponderance of the damage was to the building. One of the first steps taken to repair the church was to hire ServPro for cleaning the smoke, heat, and water damage. Next was to hire Coluntoni Construction to handle the repairs. There was significant heat and smoke damage in the Christian Education wing, in the parlor, and the sanctuary. Fire damage was limited to the church office and choir room.

During the course of repairing the extensive damage, the church upgraded facilities where ever possible. The Trustees started a Capital Improvement Fund to be used in conjunction with money from the insurance settlement to pay for the upgrades. For example, major repairs were made to the church's main electrical supply system to eliminate a possible fire hazard. A new roof was built

¹⁶ The silver service was carried over from the old church on North Road once the church on Worthen Street was built in 1960. You can view it in the locked cabinet of our church parlor. Does anyone know its origin?

on the education wing. New lighting was installed in the second-floor hall, stage, and rear entry ways. The fire doors were upgraded with magnetic catches so that doors are automatically released and closed.

The interior of the entire Christian Education wing had to be repainted. Drop ceilings with panels were installed in the hallways to give access to electricians to make electric improvements or repairs. In the sanctuary, the ceiling had never been painted and had smoke damage. It required three coats of paints entailing 128 gallons of paint! Fortunately, an examination of the church organ revealed there was no heat or smoke damage. The leather bellows, un-damaged, had been installed in the organ in 1950! The Sanctuary carpet was replaced with a new, high-quality carpet that helped muffle the sound of feet., especially when the carpeting was extended across the front of the Sanctuary. To the joy of the choir director and members...the extension of the carpeting actually improved the acoustics! The parlor was furnished with new carpeting and upholstered furniture.

Jane McKersie and Dick Papenfuss decided on the color of the new carpet; and because no one else wanted to choose colors for the rooms in the Christian Education wing, together they selected a different color paint for each room! By the time all the repairs were done, our church was redecorated from top to bottom!

While the church was being repaired, the Administrative Assistant and the Pastor made temporary use of Ye Old Parsonage Gift Shoppe to conduct routine business. The Central Baptist Church next door graciously offered CCC the use of their building to hold Sunday Services. It was almost

six months before our church was habitable again! During that time period, we were allowed to



hold our services either an hour before or an hour after the Baptist Church held theirs.

Photo: Reverend John Minott, Central Baptist Church of Chelmsford 1984

When the church was finally ready to be used again, the pastor led a parade of the entire congregation from inside the Central Baptist Church into the front door of our newly rehabilitated and decorated church. We were joined by our friends from Central Baptist. It was a day to celebrate.



Photo: Parading with members from the Central Baptist Church into our “new” church building for the first time after rehabilitation was completed. 1983

To thank our generous friends, the pastor, Rev. Minott, and the entire Central Baptist congregation were invited to come to a dinner in Fellowship Hall. We also gave them a set of handbells to start their own bell choir.

If you take a look at the Annual Report for 1983-1984, you will see that Dick Papenfuss was



presented with the church's first ever Distinguished Service Award for his outstanding leadership in rehabilitating and repairing the church. We thank Dick and all of the CCC members who contributed to the repair of our church.

Photo: Presentation of Bells to the Central Baptist Church of Chelmsford 1983



Memory: Carson

Memorial Park:

In the year 1987 John and Linda Carson experienced the worst kind of shock that a couple can have.....the tragic death of a beloved child. John's ("Johnny's")

unexpected death at age 17 took everyone's breath away. A wonderful teenager, John had already accomplished so much and was so full of promise. Our church family grieved with the Carsons, and it was the outpouring of loving concern and support that helped them with their heavy grief. David Beaton, John's best friend, a fellow runner and member of CCC and of the CCC-sponsored Boy

Scout troop, approached the Carsons about building a memorial park in John's memory on church land as an Eagle Scout project. This land had been donated by a neighbor, Ms. Elva Russell, but the church hadn't done anything with it for over 12 years. It was a virtual jungle of about one third of an acre in size....so overgrown with vegetation one couldn't walk through it. The church voted to dedicate the land as the John R Carson Memorial Park. But a tremendous amount of work was needed to bring the idea to fruition.

A large group of volunteers comprising CCC members, Boy Scouts, high school classmates of John, and family friends united to build the very beautiful and uniquely designed park we enjoy today. The design and layout were created by a professional designer, Brenda (Dudley) Ball, a member of CCC. Church member Walter Lewis brought in his tractors to clear the land, and arborists came in to take down large trees past their prime. Topsoil was donated by Dr. Rodger Currie, and a professional landscaper advised on the selection of trees and shrubbery that would be suitable for replanting the land. CCC members donated funds to purchase and plant the new trees. The lovely gazebo located in one section of the park was designed and built by Bob Moore in memory of his first wife Barbara. Church fundraisers were held to support other financial costs. It took two long years of hard work to complete. The John R. Carson Memorial Park was dedicated in 1990.

For over 30 years now, congregants and local residents have used Memorial Park for collations, fellowship gatherings, Bible reading classes, discussions, Sunday School classes, weddings, and more. It is truly an extension of our church.

V. 1990 – 2000

Year	Memories	Brief Narrative
1990	Dedication of the John R. Carson Memorial Park and the gazebo built by Bob Moore in memory of Barbara	Several hundred people contributed to building the park through financial donations, lending their professional skills, and by volunteering their labor

1990	The Junior Choir participated in their first ever statewide Chorister Guild Festival	The festival was held at CCC. 175 young singers performed in our sanctuary
1990	The Massachusetts Conference of UCC holds their 91 st annual meeting	CCC was the recipient of an award for the greatest percentage increase in membership growth among UCC churches in Massachusetts
1990	Habitat for Humanity of Greater Lowell is organized and SAM decides to make this their special project Originally a program started by the 5 th grade Sunday School class, Heifer International becomes the special project for the entire church school	SAM and the Christian Education Committee coordinated with church school students to increase support for the Heifer project through requests for donations and holding fund raisers. The project provides a hands-on education for the children on the importance of the church's mission outreach programs
1991	CCC members join an International Mission Group going to Haiti	Purpose was to build Habitat for Humanity houses in Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere
1992	Senior Choir performed in the international church concert at the Salzburg Musical festival in Austria Following this performance, five additional people joined the choir bringing membership to 35 people	CCC competed with other churches around the world and won a place because they chose to submit a tape recording of the choir singing American gospel music. Most choirs sang and recorded German hymns for the competition. The judges were delighted with CCC's recording
1993	New Adult Christian Education Class begins	4 members of the class subsequently joined CCC
1994	A second preschool class was added	A significant increase in preschool age children made this necessary
1995	New Adult Fellowship club formed	The kick-off is started by holding a "Progressive Dinner"
1997	Church choir performs at Wells Cathedral England	A number of the performers enjoyed tours of England, Wales, and Scotland after the concert
1998	Pastor/Parish Relations Committee formed	Purpose was to serve as an advocate for both the Pastor and the Parish members; and to create a communication link between the two
1998	KiSeLo Group celebrates its 60 th anniversary! Men of the church serve the members a lovely luncheon	KiSeLo served a different purpose when it was founded in 1938. Members were young women newly graduated from high school. Their goal was to engage greater involvement of children in church activities
1998	First year of church's participation in the Lincoln/Cabbel Appalachian Work Camp in West Virginia with a group of teens and adults. In the 2000s, John Carson had an idea to begin a similar work camp experience in Maine where he had contacts. This work camp was tailored for	Youth and volunteer adults have joined this work camp every year since its inception Note: <i>the initiation of the DownEast Workcamp is outside the scope of this oral history covering 1955-2000. However, the Appalachian and DownEast workcamps are very similar activities</i>

	middle-school age youth group members. Working together with Peter White, the Down East workcamp in Lubec, Maine was launched	<i>and share the same mission and purpose. Both provide meaningful mission experience to youth groups, often cited during testimonials as “transformational”</i>
1998	Our church collected \$1,838.00 through a special offering to aid people suffering in Honduras and Guatemala following the destruction from Hurricane Mitch	Council voted to add an additional \$1,000.00 to this donation. KiSeLo members put together health kits to send to the people of Guatemala and Honduras
1998	Stephen Ministry reintroduced	Stephen Ministers and Leaders provide adjunct aid to people in need that wish to be seen on a regular basis
1999	Capital campaign, Lift Up Our Faith, was launched. The purpose was to raise money to make the church building accessible to the handicapped. Construction was completed in 2001	A rampway was installed from the parking lot to the back door entrance of the church. A 3 story, wheel chair accessible elevator was installed directly across from the back door. The elevator also benefits people using a walker or a cane, parents with baby carriages, and virtually anyone experiencing difficulties walking up the church staircases
1999	Over a five-year period, children’s membership in CCC’s two youth programs increased from 96 in 1996 to 195 in the year 2000. A third CCC youth program was created due to the increased demand from young people who want to join. The activities were tailored by age group	Youth programs included one for 5 th and 6 th graders, one for 7 th and 8 th graders, and one for high school age students. The annual report for 1999-2000 notes that with the increase in children, additional CE teachers are required and more space for church school classes must be allocated
2000	The 125 Committee was formed to begin plans for the Church’s 125 ^h Anniversary	To commemorate the anniversary, a brief church history from 1877 to 2000 was compiled



Photo: Confirmation Class of 1992 poses in front of the Gazebo in Carson Memorial Park

Memory: The Glory of Participating in Summer Work Camps. Ellen Kunkel made a decision to participate in the annual West Virginia Workcamp. She eagerly joined the CCC group of teens and adults. Ellen doesn't claim to be a house rehab expert but found herself repairing doors and

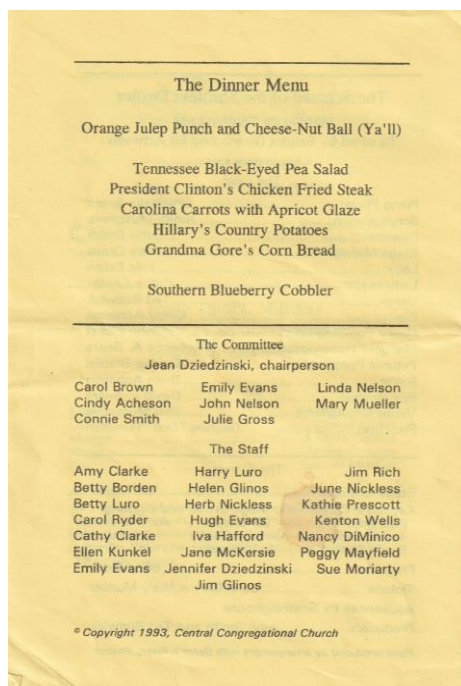
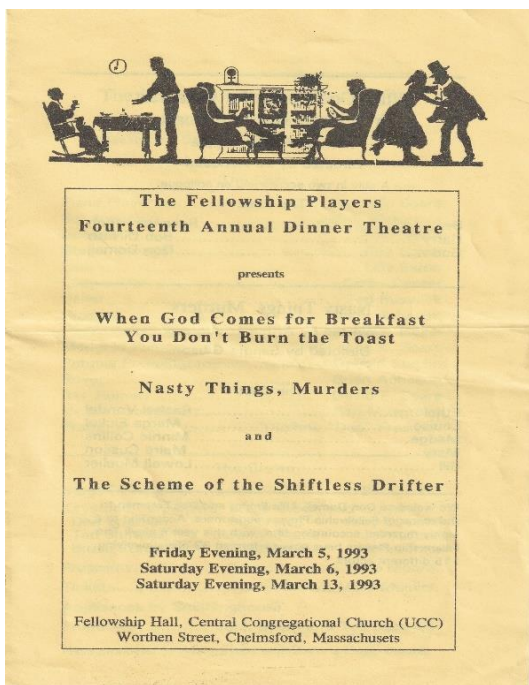


Photo of CCC West Virginia Work Camp Participants Summer 2003

learning new skills. It was hard work but the growing fellowship among participants was energizing. The real purpose was to do God's work by carrying out mission activities

outside the church to serve people in need with kindness and love. The young people were engaged in discussions on the meaning of Christianity in action. Small groupings of 2-3 workers stayed at the homes of local residents who volunteered to “put them up.” Ellen said it was a singular experience. They were exposed to how people live in another part of the country that she would never otherwise have met. There was the opportunity, if you were open to it, to immerse yourself in another culture by breaking bread with host families and talking with them each evening. Ellen described her participation in the West Virginia summer workcamp as transformational.

Memory: Fellowship Players A total of 67 church members were involved in the production of



the 14th Annual Dinner Theater in 1993. The Fellowship Players put on three short plays featuring different actors in each one.

This gave 23

church members the chance to earn their acting “chops” as they “trod the boards” under the direction of Sandra Gibson and Ed Acheson.¹⁷ John Smith and Ted Buswick were the producers and Bill Clarke was the Stage Manager. A group of ten church members comprised the Keystone Carpenters, Stage Crew, and Lighting committee. An organizing committee gave direction to a 25-

¹⁷ The cast included Marge and John Eickel, Minnie Collins, Marie Cusson, Rachel Vondal, Lowell Mueller, Permelia, David, and Rebecca Sears, Bob and Judith Musgrove, John Smith, Roy Gross, Lilla Eaton, Cathy Center, Ted Buswick, Brian and Cindy Acheson, Debbie Staplin, Daphne Freeman, Rosemary Rich, Bob DiNitto, and Don Domeij.

person “Staff” involved in any number of supporting activities such as ushering, waiting tables, selling tickets, setting up tables, and so forth. As usual, the dinner menu was inspired by the play and the location of action where it took place. The program shown above gives details of the dinner menu featuring southern food and drinks such as orange julep punch, Tennessee black-eyed pea salad, and President Clinton’s chicken fried steak!

MORE MEMORIES!

There is not enough space to describe all of the wonderful memories our church elders shared with me. Here is a selection of some of those special times our people described during interviews.

- Attending special services during Lent and the Holy Week
- Attending Easter Sunday Sunrise services to celebrate Christ’s rising in the early dawn. He is Risen! After the service there was a pancake breakfast in Fellowship Hall served by Youth Group
- Christmas caroling for the seniors at Sunny Acres and then returning to church to warm up with hot cocoa
- Enjoying the fellowship of friends and playing softball at the annual church picnics



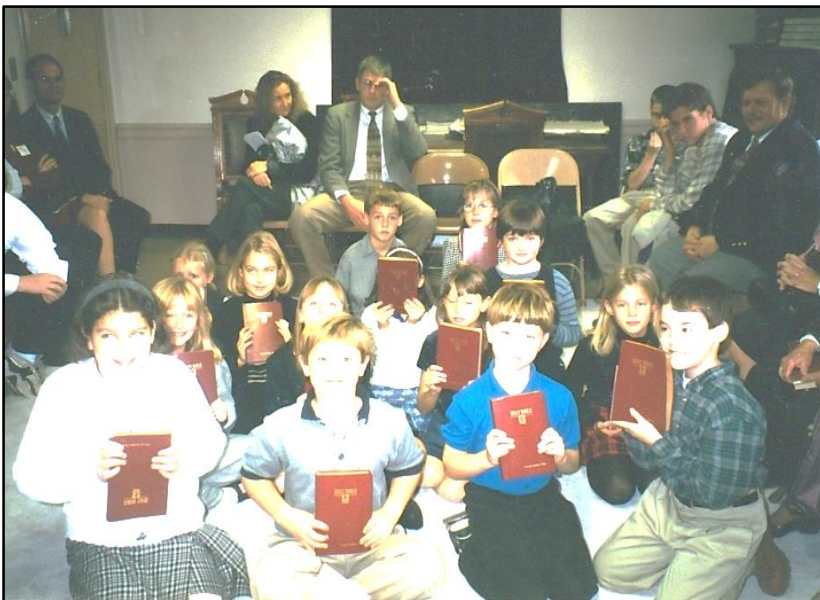
Photo: Church picnic. 1985

- Sponsoring a newly arrived Cambodian family
- Bob Moore's annual Valentine's Day Luncheons for widows in the church
- The purchase of a large dishwasher for the kitchen freeing up people from hand-washing massive numbers of dishes after pot luck suppers and dinner theatre productions!



- Participating with other church members in the Chelmsford Minutemen during the bicentennial year

This 1975 photo shows some members of the CCC contingent of the Chelmsford Minutemen. Guess who that is up front with the drum? Why, it's Clint Vincent of course!



- Sunday School children receiving their first Bibles

Photo: Bible Sunday, November 8, 1998



- Progressive dinners ending with desert at Fellowship Hall

Photo: Rosemary Rich and Dick Papenfuss about to enjoy a piece of frosted cake in Fellowship Hall for the last course of a Progressive Dinner 1993

- Summer fellowship in Carson Memorial Park after Sunday service
- Ministers carrying newly baptized babies from the front to the back of the Sanctuary for everyone to meet!
- Hearing testimonies from teens about their experience at the West Virginia workcamp
- The start-up of the Down East workcamp in Lubec, Maine for younger teens

- Men singing to their wives and mothers in a special tribute for Mother's Day



Photo: Men's Chorus Performance for Mother's Day, 1996

First Row: Harry Luro, John Smith, Warren Buchanan, Jim Rich, Bill Clarke, Jeremy Clarke

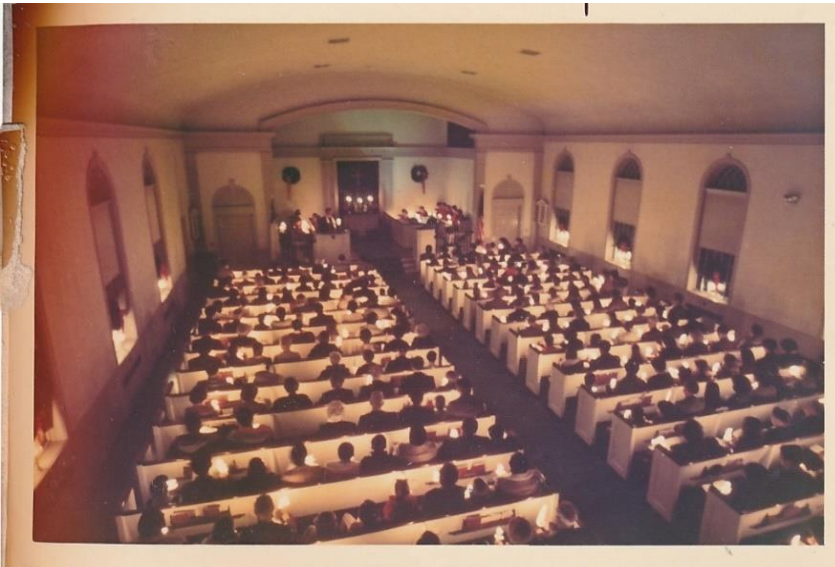
Second Row: Bob Musgrove, Neal Swanson, Dick Burt, Gary Pichette, Mike Clayton, John Eickel, Brian Acheson

Back Row: Bruce Greenhalgh, Harold Grant, John Carson, Howard Usher, Jack Deeley, Al McKersie, Dick Aseltine, Clarence Hope, Dick Papenfuss, Glenn Greenhalgh, Alan Greenhalgh, Ed Acheson, Matt McGillick, David Sears. Also present: Bruce Sandberg



Photo: Performance at the Musical Festival in Salzburg, Austria in the 1992 Concert of Church Choirs

- Performing at the Music Festival in Salzburg, Austria. Thirty CCC choir members participated. They are standing in the front row in black robes with red stoles in back of the musicians on the left side



- Attending Candlelight Services on Christmas Eve

Photo: CCC sanctuary on December 24, 1977

KiSeLo 60th Anniversary 1938 - 1998



1997 - 1998 Officers
 Connie Smith, Secretary
 Jeanne Neal, President
 Jessie Buchanan, Vice President
 Nancy Sandberg, Treasurer



1997 - 1998 Officers & Executive Board
 Seated: Jeanne Neal, President; Nancy Sandberg, Treasurer - Standing: Connie Smith, Secretary; Irene Usher, Communications Chair; Jessie Buchanan, Vice President; Mary Mueller, Karen Papenfuss, and Rosemary Rich, Programs; Pearl Manahan, Hospitality Chair - Not pictured: Eleanor Moore, Sunshine Secretary and Grace Johnson, Auditor



January 1998 - Meeting Attendees

This is the front cover of the church publication commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the KiSeLo Club. 1998. CCC men served KiSeLo members a wonderful luncheon to mark the occasion

Final Reflections

Reflecting upon all the memories and events covered in each decade, one comes to the realization that taken together they show a Congregation strongly engaged in acting out its faith through involvement in a continuum of activity. It is through such actions that we promote fellowship; and it is through the promotion of fellowship that we have created and maintained a church family. It is through the fellowship we create that enables us to rebuild and strengthen this family when more purposeful action is required to keep it healthy. We have our church elders to thank for this.

Achieving a strong and vibrant congregational church family that people want to be a part of requires sustained effort on the part of the pastor and the congregants. It requires people with skills that are dedicated and willing to invest their time to coordinate with others to manage the church so it can thrive as an organization. It requires a desire to promote fellowship among members of the church through purposeful creation and engagement in church activities and events. As a leader or director, as a member, as a worshipper; through prayer groups, worship and song; through acts of kindness, caring, and thoughtfulness; through engaging in mission and outreach activities; and by volunteering, creating, and organizing. It requires a constant stream of engagement of people from each generation in both new and on-going church activities and needs that crisscross throughout the church. This is what gives life to Central Congregational Church and builds a strong and supportive church family that we can never take for granted.

ANNEX I: ADDITIONAL SOURCES

This is an oral history based on interviews I held with church elders between January 2021 and April 2022. They kindly and patiently described key church events and their significance, and shared some of their best memories. I hope they had as good a time during their interviews as I did! To support the oral histories with more detail, I used a variety of print sources and photographs.

Print Sources Used

The print sources I used draw heavily from materials stored in our own Church Archives. The archives contain rich materials thanks to the many faithful church historians that “religiously” collected annual baptism records, church membership records, church histories written by CCC members, special pamphlets, reports, scrap-books, newspaper clippings, notes of meetings from committees, clubs, councils and missions, monthly newsletters, Sunday bulletins, program announcements, press accounts from the Lowell Sun and the Chelmsford Newsweekly, and other documents that I’m sure I forgot. These materials were used to assign specific dates, additional details of the events, and background information on trends that provide context to the history of our church events. Below is a list of the ones I used.

Church Histories

Milestones in the History of Central Congregational Church, 1958, in a specially prepared publication: “In Faith We Meet the Challenge of the Future.” 1958

Transcriptions from old Church records: Volumes I – VII, compiled by Clint Vincent

A Century of Service Chelmsford Congregational Church 1876-1976, Clint Vincent, 1976

KiSeLo Publication for the Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the KiSeLo Club: 1938-1998, compiled by various members of the KiSeLo Club, 1998

Central Congregational Church in Chelmsford 1876-1976 - A brief history of our church written by Clint Vincent and members of Team 125. 2001

Some notes about these histories:

In 1958, CCC published a document detailing plan for the new church and how costs will be met. There is a brief section called Milestones in the History of Central Congregational Church. It covers the building of the old church on North Road, a brief history of the old church, the parsonage, and the events leading to up to 1958.

As church historian in the 1970s, Clint Vincent took on the hugely enormous task of transcribing old church records from the 1876 to 1898. Mr. Vincent found seven huge leather-bound Church Record books that talked about the daily “goings-on” of the church, financial details, members,

events, marriages, and the details of building the church we know as the “Old Church” facing North Road in the 1880s. Mr. Vincent drew from these records and other materials found in the archives to write an abbreviated church history for the Centennial Celebration of our church in 1976.

The last history of our church was compiled and written in 2000-2001 in time for the celebration of CCC's 125th Year Anniversary. Anyone can obtain a copy from our church office. It's called Central Congregational Church in Chelmsford 1876-2000. Mr. Vincent wrote the history covering 1875 to 1965 drawing from the old church records he transcribed. He used our church archives to write up a brief history of important events and milestones covering 1900 to 1965. Members of “Team 215” wrote the history of our church from 1965 to 2001, again, drawing from our church annual reports and other documents found in our church archives

Additional Sources: Books, Reports, Program Documents, Photographs

Chelmsford Tercentenary Celebration Souvenir Program 1955

Chelmsford Newsweekly photo clippings about CCC activities and events from 1950s and 1960s

Church service program for the Dedication of Central Congregational Church in Chelmsford, May 1, 1960

Church service program for the Dedication of the Christian Education Wing, May 8, 1960

Church service program for the Dedication of the Organ and Pipes, May 8, 1960

Program for the Dedication Banquet of Central Congregational Church in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, May 4, 1960.

Couples Club Programs for Pop Concerts: 1960s

CCC Variety Shows and Musical Programs: 1962

CCC Annual Reports: 1955-1956 through 1999-2000

Lowell Sun Photo clippings and stories

Fellowship Players program: 1993

A variety of print materials from the libraries of Judy Buswick and Don and Jan Brigham

John von Rohr The Shaping of American Congregationalism: 1620-1957. 1992

Photographs are from the collections of Jane McKersie, Rachel Vondal, Don and Jan Brigham,

Milli Greenhalgh, and from the numerous photos in the church archives, photographers unknown.

ANNEX II: OUR MINISTERS from 1955-2000

Warren M. Chandler*	1946-1955
Richard F. Manwell	1956-1965
Robert P. Bell	1963-1965 Associate
William L. Parsons	1965-1970
Robert D. Witham	1966-1969 Associate
D.A. Windemiller	1970-1972 Interim
K. Bradfield Campbell	1970-1972 Associate
K. Bradfield Campbell	1972-1974
C.C. Meeden	1974-1975 Interim
Hugh W. Evans	1975-1995
Laurene Bowers	1989-1991 Associate
Joseph Nevill	1995-1997 Interim
Richard Giragosian	1997-2001

*Pastor Warren Chandler's tenure as our Minister overlaps this history by one year (1947-1955)