

First Baptist Church of Hanover in Etna and First Congregational Church of Hanover in Hanover Center

Background and Introduction

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Matthew 11:29-30

Our parish is located in an area rich with history, natural beauty, cultural amenities, and a strong sense of community. We are a "yoked" congregation which includes members from two rural churches: the First Congregational Church (United Church of Christ) of Hanover in Hanover Center, NH and the First Baptist Church (American Baptist Church) of Hanover in Etna, NH. Both of these churches were established in colonial times and their historic buildings have been in continuous use for services since the early 1800s. The small, rural congregations were combined in 1964 to share one pastor and eventually one worship service. It is a testament to the harmony and nurturing environment within our combined congregation and to its effective leadership that we have grown in numbers and vibrancy with only three pastors since the "yoking" commenced over 50 years ago.

This profile has been prepared by the Search Committee to provide potential candidates an overview of our church as we seek new pastoral leadership to keep our church active in worship, education and mission.

The Upper Valley Community

Etna and Hanover Center are small unincorporated rural villages within Hanover, New Hampshire, a picturesque and prosperous "ivy league" college town. As such, the Etna/Hanover Center villages share access to many amenities usually found in a larger city but within a lifestyle of a beautiful, friendly, small rural community. Hanover is a town of approximately 12,000 residents on the Connecticut River, bordering Vermont and New Hampshire and is part of the "Upper Valley" of the Connecticut River with a combined population of 70,000. Neighboring towns in the Upper Valley include Lebanon, NH, White River Junction and Norwich, Vermont. Hanover is home to Dartmouth College, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (New Hampshire's largest employer) and numerous smaller engineering and manufacturing firms, retail and service businesses.

Education is highly valued in our community. Hanover has a top-ranked public school system with considerable resources, and several quality nursery, pre-school and day care programs. In addition to Dartmouth College, the Upper Valley has two community colleges (River Valley Community College and Community College of Vermont) and is within driving distance of two state universities (Plymouth and Keene).

The area is known for its emphasis on families and community and its high quality of life. Nestled on the Connecticut River with numerous large ponds and lakes between the Vermont Green Mountains and the New Hampshire White Mountains, the Upper Valley has a range of outdoor activities including kayaking, fishing, bicycling and sailing in the summer; hiking, hunting and “leaf-peeping” in the colorful New England fall; and both downhill and cross country skiing as well as ice skating and ice fishing in the winter months. Outdoor team sports also play a large role across the population. The region has substantial cultural, educational, and art opportunities atypical of a rural community (e.g., the Montshire Museum of Science, the Hopkins Center for the Arts, Northern Stage, Opera North, AVA Art Gallery, City Center Ballet, Vermont Institute of Natural Science, Lebanon Opera House for headliner bands, etc).

The intersection of two major interstate highways makes travel easy: Boston is about two hours away; Lebanon, NH has a small airport with several daily flights to both New York and Boston; Manchester, NH (about 1.5 hours away) has a larger airport with numerous flights to major airports; and Burlington, VT is 1¼ hours away. Convenient regular bus service is available to both Boston and NYC.

Church Facilities

We have one congregation, but two separate historic church buildings which are about 2.5 miles apart.



During the school year, worship takes place in the First Baptist Church of Hanover (FBC) in the lovely small village of Etna which is located about 3 miles east of Dartmouth College and the Hanover town center. In addition to the 120 person sanctuary, the FBC has a small library and pastor’s office and is adjacent to a small playground and soccer/baseball fields. The attached parish hall is used for both church and community events and has a large kitchen, gathering hall with a stage, and five Sunday school classrooms.

The 150 seat sanctuary of the First Congregational Church of Hanover Center (FCC) building hosts summer worship and special holiday (Easter and Thanksgiving) services and is located on the beautiful village green in Hanover Center with a view of Moose

Mountain. The FCC also has a vestry and kitchen. Each church has a strong commitment to preserve and maintain its historic building.

There is also a spacious 4 bedroom/2 bath parsonage across from FBC on approximately two acres of land which has been recently completely renovated.



Membership and Demographics

During the school year the average attendance at worship services is about 85 people. Typical of many small New England churches, attendance can fluctuate during the summer months and tends to be very light, on the order of 30-50 in a Sunday service. The congregation includes a broad array of people who are involved with the yoked church, including official members, active unofficial members, and community participants. “Official” membership includes 88 resident members in the Etna FBC and 31 resident members at the Hanover Center FCC.

Approximately half of regular worshipers are not “official” members but support the church both financially and in taking active roles in church activities. Many active members come from outside the Etna/Hanover center villages. However, our church was aptly described by the regional director as a “community” church, and there are numerous Hanover Center or Etna residents who consider themselves part of the church and attend special services or call upon the church for pastoral support, even if they are not official members and/or don’t regularly attend Sunday services. Much of our congregation is either retired (about 1/3) or employed, with adult children. There is potential in our community for active families with school age children to become more involved in the congregation.

One of the strengths of our congregation is its fairly diverse socioeconomic representation. This partly reflects the nature of the rural village population as well as its close proximity to Dartmouth College and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. The congregation includes trades people, town service staff, retail personnel, office administrative staff, doctors and nurses, college faculty, and a range of other professionals. The church is not diverse by race or ethnicity, which reflects the broader Upper Valley community (e.g., Hanover was listed as 85 percent Caucasian in the 2010 population census).



The church also has a very broad spectrum of church backgrounds. About 25 percent of the regular Sunday worshipers have grown up in either the American Baptist Church or the United Church of Christ, but the vast majority of the congregation have come from a variety of denominations and theologies (e.g., Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Southern Baptist, Presbyterian, and Bible churches). We have fared well by our unofficial motto, “unity without unanimity.” Our differences have not broken the bond holding us to the teachings of Jesus. Our congregation is truly a kind and caring community and the wealth of backgrounds and church experiences is both a strength and a challenge for a new pastor.



Organizational Structure

Under the “yoking” agreement there is one pastor with a single weekly worship service for the combined congregation. The Inter-church Council is comprised of five members from each church and is responsible for the worship ministry of the combined congregation.

Each church has its own separate budget and officers who oversee the missions and building maintenance. The Boards of Trustees for each church are in charge of maintenance and capital improvements of the physical buildings/infrastructure. The deacons are responsible for the communion and assist the minister in pastoral and spiritual care of the congregation. Active committees include: missions, Christian education, music, flowers, nominating and the Hanover Center Fair (latter for FCC). There are several part-time paid contractual employees including: pastor’s assistant, custodian, organist, and treasurer/bookkeeper.

Church Worship and Ministries

Presently, our order of worship follows a traditional liturgy with a growing and active role played by willing and capable lay people in the church. We favor sermons with a Biblical focus enhanced by a sensitivity to parishioners’ lives and an awareness of current events. Our pastoral prayers are also the prayers of the people and as such concretely include personal, local, and global concerns.

We enjoy a strong music ministry with an adult choir previously led by our former pastor, the leadership of which has been recently adopted by an excellent choir director from within the congregation. Our worship is greatly enhanced by the beautiful organ and piano playing of our organist and other members of our congregation. We also have a Gospel band which occasionally participates in worship services and have had a youth

praise band in three of the past five years. There is a strong commitment to continue the music ministry, which is considered by many to be an asset of our churches.



Christian education for youth and children has been a primary commitment and unifying mission in our church. Because our school-year church building has five separate Sunday school rooms while our summer church building has one large vestry, we vary our programming by building. During the school year, we have a nursery for children birth to kindergarten plus grade-level classes for children ages K-12. Children age

K-12 attend the first fifteen minutes of the church service until a Children's Message and then leave church to attend Sunday school during the remainder of the service. During the summer, we have Sunday school for children ages K-5, but no dedicated program for older youth.

Because our region of the country has a very low participation rate in churches, many youth athletic programs regularly schedule games, meets, and even practices on Sunday mornings. Thus, families in the church can face difficult choices. Many of the children in our Sunday school program attend church most of the year, but not during a specific sports season. We have adapted our programming around the ebb and flow of attendance.

In high-attendance weeks, classes emphasize Bible teaching, while for low attendance weeks, we hold Service Sundays where children focus on faith-inspired service projects that include Operation Christmas Child and assembling Thanksgiving baskets for community members



who are ill or shut-in. The children and youth also run two of the services each year: the annual Christmas Pageant and "Children's Sunday" on the last Sunday of the academic year.

Adult education has included a mid-week evening Bible study which was led by the former pastor.

Our congregation has a strong sense of family, and we serve one another in love. Both the deacons and the pastor make regular visits to hospitals and homes of our church community members in need. The members of the congregation have often provided meals and other support for families of the congregation suffering with disability or illness. After Sunday church services, there is a well-attended time of fellowship with refreshments that is a focus of "family" communication and mutual support.



The church has strong community traditions and is active in the life of both villages. For example, the FCC has hosted the Hanover Memorial "Muster" Day service as well as the Hanover Center Old-Timers' Fair on the village green in June (the major fund raiser for the FCC) and the October Chicken Pie supper.

The congregation also organizes Thanksgiving baskets for community members in need. In past years, we have hosted square dances, gospel sing-alongs, and youth-led pasta dinners. There are several women's groups which run their community activities within the church facilities, including the Etna Ladies Aid Society and the FCC Women's Fellowship. These women's groups are active in caring for the church and in responding to community needs.

Our two churches have long engaged in a number of service and missions projects, locally and internationally. Locally, we provide goods and services to neighbors in need. One night each month, we send a team to cook and host a community dinner sponsored by a local social service agency. Internationally, we have supported a Compassion International child financially and with letters for several decades and participate in Operation Christmas Child each year. We also provide support for a school in rural Zimbabwe. In the structure of our churches, *benevolences* are material help to those in need, which typically has no spiritual or evangelistic element, while *missions* include evangelism and may or may not include material help. This distinction between benevolences and missions allows for smooth functioning of our yoked churches that have differing emphases in these areas. The deacons of each church oversee benevolences. Each of our congregations has its own missions committee.

Financial Matters

The “yoked” congregation has a combined budget of about \$100,000 for pastoral and worship expenses for the two churches with 80 percent covered by the FBC and 20 percent by the FCC. Each church has a separate budget for building maintenance and missions/outreach (about \$42,000 for the FBC and \$14,000 for the FCC). Income for the FBC is about \$85,000 from offerings and about \$29,000 from endowment income/gifts and rentals. The FCC gets about half of its operating income (about \$20,000) from the proceeds of the Hanover Center Fair and half from offerings (\$19,000). The FCC has a capital reserve and the FBC has an endowment. Other than a relatively small temporary mortgage to finance the parsonage renovation, both churches are debt-free.



What We Believe



Both congregations own a covenant. While the language of expressing our faith may have changed, our belief in God the creator, Christ the redeemer and Holy Spirit is clear. We practice both Believers' Baptism and Infant Baptism and serve communion once a month.

Hopes and Aspirations

We wish to remain a beacon of abiding faith in God and to offer welcome, comfort and community.

We offer opportunities for engagement and growth in mutual ministry. We are committed to appreciating our pastor's gifts and skills and will work together for the well-being and continued peace and harmony of our diverse congregation. We hope that our future pastor can inspire involvement from the deep pool of talent and commitment that already exists within our congregation. We anticipate that together we can strike a healthy balance between the responsibilities of worship, pastoral care, education, mission and administration.

We are seeking a pastor to provide leadership in the following areas of ministry:

Worship

- Leading weekly worship which includes readings, prayers, and sermons with a Biblical focus as well as reflecting an awareness of people's lives and current concerns in the world.
- Working with a worship committee securing ushers, greeters, candle lighters, communion servers, readers, children's story tellers and the crafting of liturgies in keeping with our traditions and changing church seasons.

Christian Education

- Strengthening our Sunday school programs for younger children and families.
- Planning adult education e.g. Bible study, study groups, and topical conversations.

Congregational Life

- Developing youth programs, including possible collaboration with other area churches.
- Facilitating confirmation / baptism activities.
- Visitation of homebound and ill persons with occasional meetings and study groups in homes, assisted by members of the congregation.
- Providing pastoral care and counseling for those in need.
- Offering opportunities for fellowship and community building, including opportunities for intergenerational activities.
- Enhancing communication to reach both the congregation and greater community through our website, e-mails, church newsletters, worship bulletins and local media.
- Recognizing our various backgrounds and outlooks and joining us in engaging our faith according to our respective values.

Outreach

- Providing leadership for increased community outreach.
- Assisting the congregation in growing our mission outreach.
- Facilitating congregational participation in denominational gatherings of both the American Baptist Church and the United Church of Christ and raising awareness of denominational missions.

In Closing

We have a great capacity to love our pastor and our church. We want our pastor to love us and this ministry. We want to remind one another and to be reminded regularly that we are blessed. We strive to “Increase our love for one another, be of good courage, hold fast to that which is good and go forth into the world to serve God with gladness.”



Contact e-mail: pastorsearch.fbchcc@gmail.com