



**Rocky Hill
Congregational
Church**
United Church
Of Christ

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May 25, 2012

A Special Meeting of Rocky Hill Congregational Church, United Church of Christ is called by the Council for Sunday, June 10, 2012 immediately following worship to seek the congregation's vote to affirm recommendations to improve accessibility of the sanctuary for all who come to worship God and journey in faith.

Dear Members and Friends,

An elevator...assisted listening devices...large print bulletins...handicap accessible lavatories...an automated door. These are all ways our congregation, through the years, has improved the accessibility of our church building and worship services.

Over the last 12 months, a subcommittee for the Council has investigated ways to improve the accessibility of the sanctuary for persons with mobility difficulties—including people using wheelchairs, walkers, canes, and crutches. Their planning has been guided by a common vision: to be a faith community of extravagant welcome, accessible to all who desire to worship here. After months of thoughtful investigations, observations and conversations, the committee has made the following recommendations:

Recommendations to Improve Accessibility of the Sanctuary

- **Remove the 'Amen pews' on the right-side of the sanctuary (as you are facing the pulpit).** Doing so will create a flexible, open seating area nearest the exit closest to the elevator. High quality upholstered wooden chairs will be obtained for this space.
- **Remove the first 2 front rows of pews on both sides of the sanctuary.** Doing so will eliminate the narrow pathways across the front of the sanctuary and around the communion table.

These changes, while meaningful and noticeable modifications, will have little impact on the beauty and character of our historic sanctuary. The benefits of creating a more accessible worship space are far more significant:

Benefits

- 1) It is difficult to navigate the narrow pathway around the front pews and column. Access to the entrance/exit is restricted (the exit closest to the elevator). Removing these pews will create wider pathways, improving accessibility for people using walkers and wheelchairs, including large powered wheelchairs and scooters. There will be safer access to the entrance/exit.

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Benefits (continued)

- 2) Some people find it difficult to get-into and out-of the pews. New chairs will offer an alternate seating option for people who cannot sit in the pews. The chairs can be arranged so that persons seated in wheelchairs can sit with their family members and companions.
- 3) While we extend an invitation to participate in an open communion table, in practice the space surrounding the table is so small that it restricts movement around the table...restricting accessibility to the table. The proposed changes improve the physical openness of our communion table.
- 4) What does it say when our town buildings and schools are more accessible than our church? As Christians, we are called to respond as a church of generous hospitality, creating a place at the table for everybody, where all are recognized and utilized for each other's gifts. These changes will improve the accessibility for members, friends, visitors and guests, ensuring that our sanctuary is a place where all people can join in worship, weddings, and memorial services.
- 5) As a secondary benefit of these changes, the larger space in the front of the church becomes more versatile without restricting access or compromising safety. The larger space will make it easier to organize special worship experiences including the church orchestra, drummers, visiting choirs, and the participation of children.

The Trustees will oversee the removal of these pews—which can be accomplished at a minimal expense. Repairs will be made to carpeting, walls, and decorative trim in these areas, some of which may require the services of a skilled carpenter. The Trustees also anticipate replacing the sanctuary carpeting in the next couple of years.

This planning has the support of the Board of Trustees, Board of Deacons, pastors and the Council. If you have any questions, I encourage you seek out one of the following people:

- Lynne Lataille, Board of Trustees
- Stephanie Heneghan, Board of Deacons
- Marsha Hoffman, Council
- Bob Inderbitzen, Moderator
- Rev. Donna Manocchio, Senior Pastor

These recommendations bespeak a church of extravagant hospitality, reaching out to all people who seek God's love and support. For with each barrier we remove, we invite another to worship God in our sacred space.

I look forward to your participation at the Special Meeting on June 10.

God bless you,



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