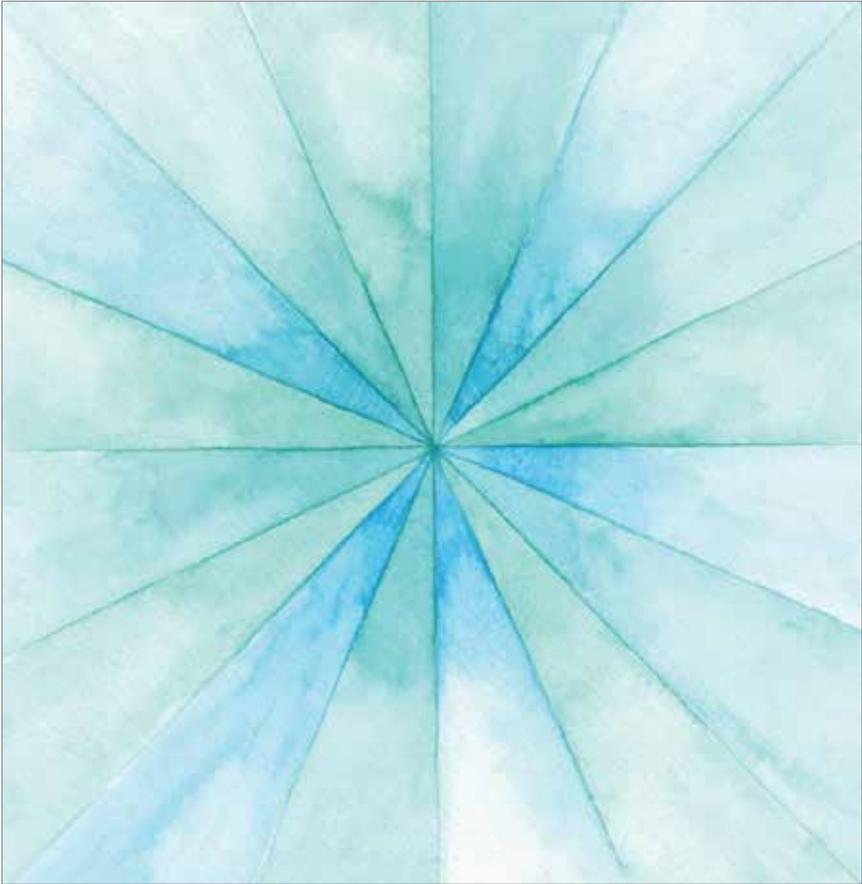


We've Been Here a While!



*Reflecting on 300 Years of Theological Imagination
at Greenfield Hill Congregational Church*

Foreword

On the Hill: In Witness to a Congregation's Living History

By Mike Moore

Chair, Adult Education Board

What does Greenfield Hill Congregational Church mean to you?

I have had the privilege of knowing many of the pastors who have served Greenfield Hill Congregational Church GHCC since the 1960s. I found them all worthy of respect. When I was a pre-high schooler, it was natural to be involved in GHCC Sunday School and the Scouts.

As I think back to that time, Greenfield Hill, often called “the Hill,” was quite a different place. I was born in 1949 and belong to the Baby Boom generation, which filled the Hill with young people. I often say that there were more bicycles on the Hill in those days than automobiles. At Fairfield Country Day School, the iron fence served as a bike rack for a hundred bikes or more. The parking lot was not nearly as busy. Halloween on the Hill brought large groups of children who filled the streets and visited houses where we knew all the parents. These homes offered generous quantities of treats. It was a particular moment in time. Things are not like that today.

In those days, we had both a Dogwood Bazaar and a Dogwood Festival. The Bazaar was a two-day event that included all kinds of rides brought in by vendors. The Festival sometimes lasted as long as three weeks. It featured mothers, many of whom we knew personally, selling fudge at card tables in front of the church. By the time I reached high school, the Festival had been shortened to two weeks, then to one. Those same mothers were now preparing meals for

visitors who arrived by bus from as far away as Albany, New York. Although the Festival became shorter over time, it also gained new features such as an art show and pre-Festival galas.

When I reached high school age, I was sent to boarding school out of state. Reverend Stanley Houston, who served from 1954 to 1983, saw an opportunity to support young people by organizing dances in the basement of the Church House on Thursday nights during the summer. Children who had grown up in Sunday School together were now playing in rock bands that provided the music. These gatherings helped us maintain friendships that had been interrupted by school separation.

Over the years, GHCC has consistently found pastors who were able to create meaningful new ways of building community. Reverend Timothy Haut, who served from 1974 to 1980, was the first pastor I saw dress up in a Superman suit. He was a youthful and gifted communicator. Reverend Gary Ritts, who served from 1982 to 1987, also had a particular gift for connecting with others. I deeply appreciated the thoughtful and educated leadership of Reverend George Bland, serving GHCC from 1983 to 1995.

The church changed along with the times, and the residents on the Hill changed as well. Even so, young people are still very much present. They participate in the Nursery School, the Youth Groups, and especially the Appalachia Service Project (ASP). They may not all be immediate neighbors, but they do not come from too far away. The church continues to be filled with the energy and involvement of children and youth, who bring life to its daily rhythm.

The Sanctuary has always been at the heart of church life.

This was true during my youth and remains true today. People need places where they can find rest and renewal. Yet this Sanctuary offers more than peace and comfort. Through worship, events, and gatherings, it nurtures a vital sense of connection with others. The following pages offer an expansive reflection on how Greenfield Hill Congregational Church continues to engage its vibrant community through a shared mission of faith and service.

We've Been Here a While!

Reflecting on 300 Years of Theological Imagination at Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

By Christopher Fatherley

Congregation Member, Theologian in Practice

The Covenant of the Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

“We Covenant with the Lord and one with another, and doe bynd ourselves in the presence of God, to walke together in all His waies, according as He is pleased to reveale Himself unto us in His blessed word of truth.” (Salem 1629)

We purpose to devote ourselves to the study, the practice, and the spread of Christianity.

We will endeavor to be loyal to his fellowship, to help one another in the Christian life, to support the work and attend the services and meetings of this church, and in every way strive to make it a power for good in the service of God and man.”

Adopted in 1921

Welcome

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church (“Greenfield Hill”) was founded in 1725 on land historically stewarded by the Paugussett peoples, now represented in part by the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation, and later by the Pequot peoples, whose descendants include the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation. Like many colonial New England churches, the origins of Greenfield Hill reflect the disjunction between professed Godly idealism, shaped by belief in Divine entitlement, and the ruinous consequences of settler appropriation. While historical facts cannot be rewritten, the Greenfield Hill community today seeks to honor the story of this land by acknowledging the lasting impact of European settlement on Indigenous peoples and their territories.

This reflection traces Greenfield Hill’s journey across three centuries of Christian witness in Fairfield, Connecticut, from its earliest formation to its present-day ministry. It offers not a fixed account, but a spacious and thoughtful narrative shaped by faith, historical complexity, and the Spirit’s enduring work.

Rather than presenting a linear chronicle, it invites remembrance and renewal by exploring how spiritual commitments have deepened over time.

At the heart of this history is the concept of Covenant, a freely chosen commitment guided by the Spirit and continually renewed through shared grace. Covenant has been central to Greenfield Hill’s life together, holding worship, community, and service in creative tension with changing cultural and social realities.

To explore this history, the reflection moves through six transitional periods, each spanning an average of fifty years. These eras are marked not only by significant events but also

by the evolving theological atmosphere of their time. Each raises fresh questions about faith, identity, and belonging. Rather than offering final answers, Covenant has cultivated theological imagination, understood as the capacity to discern God’s presence and to articulate faith with both creativity and conviction amid changing circumstances.

Sermons and hymns drawn from Greenfield Hill’s worship traditions, including selections from the *Chalice Hymnal* (1996) and broader United Church of Christ practices, have been consulted for inspiration. These musical and spoken testimonies reveal how belief has been expressed and reshaped across generations, offering insight into a living tradition still unfolding.

For readers interested in primary research, a curated selection of documents related to this conversation are available through the Greenfield Hill Congregational Church’s *GHCC Celebrates 300!* website page; please refer to the “Historical Documents” section.

The six transitional periods:

Date Range	Theological Atmosphere
1) 1725–1800	From Covenant to Conscience
2) 1800–1865	Conviction and Division
3) 1865–1920	Witness and the Work of Repair
4) 1920–1957	Grace after Certainty
5) 1957–2000	Faith and Belonging in a Changing Church
6) 2000–Present	Sacred Presence in a Fractured World

¹ Reference sources supporting the “Settler Appropriation” history: Bridgeport Library, Bridgeport History Center, Connecticut Humanities, Connecticut General Assembly, Connecticut State Department of Education, Fairfield Chamber of Commerce.

1725–1800: From Covenant to Conscience

When Greenfield Hill was formed in 1725, its theological identity was shaped by the ordered cadence of New England Puritanism. In that era, Covenant was practiced as a sacred and intentional framework for communal holiness, mutual accountability, and shared spiritual discipline. Congregational life extended beyond weekly worship; it was a carefully structured pursuit of collective faithfulness, clearly defined by Divine authority and ethical expectation.

By the mid-eighteenth century, Congregationalism's established spiritual rhythms began to encounter significant cultural and religious shifts. The Great Awakening introduced passionate revival preaching that emphasized one's own experience with God rather than the measured traditions of communal formation.

While this revivalist fervor stirred spiritual renewal for many, it also created tensions. Emotional conversions began to displace the slower, disciplined habits that had long shaped Congregational life.

At the same time, Enlightenment brought intellectual advancements to New England. Themes of reason, individual conscience, and social contract increasingly shaped sermons and religious teaching. Ministers began to explore ethics and virtue with greater philosophical depth, gradually stepping away from the inherited orthodoxy of earlier generations. Revolutionary ideals further transformed religious language, infusing civic and spiritual life with the vocabulary of liberty, justice, and personal responsibility.

Through these transformations, the meaning of Covenant began to shift. It was no longer primarily defined by doctrinal alignment or rigid communal expectations. Instead, it came to

emphasize integrity, reflective discernment, and inward sincerity. Hymns and prayers echoed this change, becoming more introspective and attuned to individual faith.

Yet even amid change, the core Congregational impulse remained. The desire to practice faith in community, to discern Divine guidance together, and to support one another spiritually continued to shape church life. Covenant did not dissolve. It persisted as a living promise, resilient enough to embrace new convictions and accompany the faithful through transformative times.

1800–1865: Conviction and Division

Entering the nineteenth century, Congregationalism encountered increasing theological diversity and rising social unrest. Revivalism surged again, igniting widespread spiritual passion and renewed commitment to reform. Emotionally charged calls for repentance and conversion stood at the center of these revival movements. Yet a persistent question remained: could such fervent experiences sustain the deeper, long-term cultivation of Christian life?

At the same time, Congregational thought broadened. Liberal Protestant voices emphasized human potential, the promise of progress, and a hopeful view of social change. Others remained rooted in traditional Reformed convictions, affirming Divine sovereignty, human limitation, and grace as the foundation of redemption. As these contrasting paths developed, churches found themselves navigating a widening landscape of belief and practice.

The national crisis over slavery brought these tensions into greater relief. Congregational churches responded in varied ways. Some became outspoken advocates for abolition, producing antislavery literature, supporting education for

freed African Americans, and leveraging their social influence to change public sentiment. Others moved more cautiously, reluctant to divide their congregations or confront prevailing cultural norms. Slavery emerged not only as a political issue but as a profound spiritual and ethical reckoning. Churches were compelled to ask what it meant to pursue justice, extend mercy, and live in faithful witness.

Worship reflected the urgency of the time. Hymns embraced themes of repentance, justice, and moral awakening. Sermons diverged, with some addressing national sin directly while others urged restraint or unity. Covenant, once viewed as a straightforward commitment to belief and practice, took on new meaning. It became an assurance of mutual accountability in disagreement and a call to discern God's presence together in the midst of division.

Throughout these decades, the church's role evolved. It could no longer rely on consensus alone. It had to become a space for reflection, dialogue, and responsive action. Some congregations fractured under the weight of these challenges. Others remained connected through careful listening, honest conversation, and enduring devotion. Covenant was not abandoned. It was tested by conflict, reshaped through experience, and renewed in the ongoing pursuit of clarity, courage, and shared integrity.

1865–1920: Witness and the Work of Repair

Following the Civil War, Congregational churches confronted difficult questions about their role in a nation scarred by deep division and moral uncertainty. The devastation's wake compelled faith communities to reassess their commitments on account of widespread social disruption. The Covenantal tradition, once focused primarily on the internal life of the

church, began to expand outward, calling communities toward collective involvement in societal healing

A central challenge during this period's Reconstruction (circa 1865-1887) was how to respond faithfully to the newly affirmed rights of emancipated African Americans. After the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, many Congregational churches joined efforts in education, mission, and advocacy through organizations such as the American Missionary Association. While shaped by the assumptions of their time, these efforts reflected a sincere desire to live out Covenantal values through meaningful social engagement. The pursuit of justice, service, and compassionate presence became integral to a church's witness.

As industrialization and urbanization accelerated, Congregational churches encountered new responsibilities. Economic inequality, labor unrest, and growing social divisions prompted deeper reflection on structural injustice. Influenced by the Social Gospel and emerging currents in theological modernism, churches increasingly viewed Christian life as inseparable from public concern for poverty, workers' rights, and community welfare. Sermons and study groups during this era highlighted equity, human dignity, and ethical accountability, extending the reach of Covenant into everyday social and civic life.

Changes in worship reflected these priorities. Hymns and prayers became simpler and more grounded, articulating both a call to compassion and a deeper awareness of human suffering. Organizationally, Congregationalism strengthened its regional and national coordination, fostering cooperation while maintaining the local autonomy that had long defined the tradition.

World War I introduced further complexity. Promoted at the

time as “the war to end all wars,” it was presented as a noble effort to establish global peace and uphold moral order. Yet its vast destruction, the brutal evolution of warfare, and the murky alliances behind the conflict forced churches to reconsider the relationship between patriotism and Christian discipleship. Congregations debated questions of violence, nationalism, and the nature of moral courage. Even when unpopular, many communities offered a thoughtful and sometimes prophetic voice, calling others toward honesty, nonviolence, and the difficult work of truth-telling in public life.

Throughout these years, Covenant shifted from an inward discipline to a shared call toward outward commitment. The life of the church was no longer measured solely by belief, but by practices of healing, humility, and sustained solidarity. Doctrinal certainty gave way to spiritual integrity, animated by the steady pursuit of justice and reconciliation.

1920–1957: Grace after Certainty

The decades following World War I brought profound changes to American life and to Congregational communities. The confident moral clarity of earlier generations gave way to a more reflective spiritual posture, shaped by the weight of global conflict, economic hardship, and deepening social unrest. Faith was no longer expressed just through certainty. Congregations began to understand it as a steady companion through ambiguity and loss.

During this period, theological reflection became more introspective, grappling with themes of grace, suffering, and human limitation. Reformed thinkers such as Reinhold Niebuhr challenged prevailing optimism, emphasizing the sovereignty of God and the persistence of sin. This was understood not simply as personal wrongdoing, but as a

reminder that even well-intentioned action is shaped by limited vision, self-interest, and the brokenness of systems. The broader influence of postmodern thought contributed to this shift, fostering skepticism toward absolute claims and encouraging more open-ended approaches to meaning and belief.

Worship practices reflected this inward turn. Silence, contemplation, and sacramental depth found new expression. Hymns focused on endurance, humility, and God's abiding presence. Preaching often centered on faithful companionship with God through doubt, grief, and waiting.

This was also a time of growing ecumenical conversation. Congregational churches entered into sustained dialogue with the Evangelical and Reformed Church, leading to the formation of the United Church of Christ in 1957. The union affirmed shared commitments to spiritual openness, mutual care, and local autonomy rather than requiring doctrinal uniformity.

World War II and the Korean War brought additional theological challenges. While both conflicts were framed more clearly in moral terms than World War I, they still raised enduring questions about violence, justice, and national identity. Many Congregational churches responded with both patriotic support and measured concern, offering a Christian witness that called for peace, accountability, and humility before God.

Covenant, during these years, was not a formula to be followed but a presence to be lived. It took shape through communal discernment, honest worship, and shared responsibility. As questions grew more complex and certainty less attainable, the church held fast to a faithful way of living

together, grounded in trust, grace, and the hope of God's enduring promise.

1957–2000: Faith and Belonging in a Changing Church

With the formation of the United Church of Christ in 1957, Congregationalism entered a new chapter shaped by a growing awareness of community, belonging, and theological diversity. The marriage of Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church rested on shared commitments to Covenant, spiritual openness, and the autonomy of the local church. For congregations, this denominational alignment affirmed a broader understanding of faithfulness. It was not defined by agreement alone, but by a posture open to dialogue, difference, and evolving expressions of belief.

The second half of the twentieth century brought sweeping cultural changes that deeply influenced congregational life. The Civil Rights Movement called churches to confront entrenched patterns of racial injustice, prompting sustained reflection on what genuine inclusion and equity require. Liberation theology, in all its forms, invited communities to reevaluate long-held assumptions about leadership, worship, and spiritual language, encouraging space for new voices and fuller participation in church life.

These developments unfolded against a backdrop of ongoing global conflict, including the Vietnam War and the growing fear of nuclear confrontation. In this atmosphere, interfaith awareness grew, along with a posture of spiritual humility. Congregational communities gradually shifted away from cultural dominance, choosing instead to engage complexity through reflection, dialogue, and attentiveness. Faithfulness began to mean listening more deeply and welcoming tension

without demanding quick resolution.

Worship began to reflect these wider movements. Hymns, liturgies, and sermons became more inclusive, drawing from a broader range of experience. The *New Century Hymnal* (1995) exemplified this shift, weaving together theological continuity with imaginative openness to many voices. Worship was no longer centered only on repetition of tradition. It became an act of hospitality, shaped by reverence and renewal.

Through these decades, the meaning of Covenant matured. No longer restrained by uniformity, it emerged in the everyday practices of mutual presence and care. Belonging was not simply inherited. It was cultivated through honesty, shared intention, and communal integrity.

By the close of the century, congregations had embraced a layered vision of community. Covenant came to signify not the end of disagreement, but a lasting promise carried forward through grace, shared responsibility, and faithful living in an ever-changing world.

2000–Present: Sacred Presence in a Fractured World

As the twenty-first century began, Congregational churches found themselves ministering within an increasingly fragmented cultural landscape. American society experienced rapid technological change, a growing distrust of institutions, deepening political division, and evolving patterns of religious engagement. In this environment, Congregationalism reexamined and reaffirmed its Covenantal identity. This was not a retreat into nostalgia, but a conscious commitment to remain faithfully present amid uncertainty.

Major events, including the September 11 attacks and the

global disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, challenged the church to reimagine its ministry. Congregational worship quickly adapted by moving into online formats, expanding the reach of community fellowship. Pastoral practices were tailored to meet people where they were. These shifts did not discard tradition but brought renewed expression to it, revealing that Covenant is embodied through real acts of care and accompaniment.

Theological life during these years emphasized presence and sincerity. Worship became less formal and more welcoming, extending visible hospitality to a broader and more diverse community. Sermons encouraged shared reflection rather than conclusive answers, inviting the congregation into dialogue and mutual exploration. Music, prayer, and liturgy created space for honest questioning, spiritual curiosity, and connection across differences.

Public witness remained active, settled not in ideological alignment but in theological conviction. Ministries of service, such as feeding the hungry, supporting education, addressing social injustice, and offering compassionate support, affirmed the dignity of every person. These efforts expressed Congregationalism's desire to reflect God's love through the action of compassionate care.

Throughout this time, Covenant took the shape of dependable presence and relational faithfulness. Congregationalism chose connection over isolation, offering a grounded witness in a world marked by fragmentation. Sacred presence involved deep listening, trust-building, and the cultivation of resilience through grace-informed service. Faithfulness was not evaluated by influence or certainty, but by the strength of nonjudgmental love and communal responsibility.

Covenant continued, sometimes quietly and without being named, yet always practiced in shared prayer, thoughtful conversation, and mutual support. In a world filled with instability, faith communities remained a steady witness to God's nearness, open to the Spirit's continuing work.

The Covenant That Still Holds

Across three centuries of change, Covenant has expressed a shared trust that continues to shape the vocation of Greenfield Hill Congregational Church. It has endured not because conditions stayed the same, but because each generation has been drawn into a way of living in, participating through, and being formed by Christ. In worship and hardship, and in the quiet strength of those who stayed near in conviction and purpose, the faithful have responded by embodying what Covenant calls forth.

The words first spoken in 1629 and reaffirmed in 1921 are more than distant echoes. They speak into the present, reminding the congregation that faithfulness is not inherited but cultivated through practices of compassion, courage, attentiveness, and service.

The sermons and hymns inspiring this work show how these commitments have taken form in different moments and voices. They offer not nostalgia, but a glimpse of a tradition listening for the Spirit, one that lives as a reflection of Christ's welcome.

In a world often shaped by disconnection, Covenant remains a grounding presence. It does not dispel uncertainty, but it makes room for grace. It welcomes belonging not based on sameness. It fosters generosity, invites humility, and opens us to trust God's abiding nearness.

This is not the end of the story. Covenant continues through those who gather in hope, who see the splendor of eternity in one another, who love even in sacrifice, and who respond to God not with answers, but in faith. They do not hold to Covenant to preserve the past; they hold to it to take part in the unfolding works of God's redemption – a redemption still rising among us, still worthy of praise.

Prayer of Gratitude

Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me!

O Lord, be my helper!

You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;

you have loosed my sackcloth

and clothed me with gladness,

that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.

O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!

Psalm 30: 10-12 (English Standard Version)

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1

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Congregational Library & Archives - Boston, MA.

Connecticut State Library - Hartford, CT.

Fairfield Museum and History Center - Fairfield, CT.

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church - Fairfield, CT.

Pequot Library - Fairfield, CT.

Yale Divinity School - New Haven, CT.

Appendix 2

GHCC Ministers: 1725–Present (By Date Range and Theological Atmosphere)

Note: Any time gaps between designated Ministers in service is due to no known historical record of the period.

1725–1800: From Covenant to Conscience

- John Goodsell (1726–1756): 30 years
- Seth Pomeroy (1757–1770): 13 years
- William Mackay Tennant (1772–1781): 9 years
- Abraham Baldwin, Visiting Minister (1781-1783): 2 Years
- Timothy Dwight (1783–1795): 12 years
- Samuel Blatchford (1796–1797): 1 year
- No Pastor (1797–1803): 6 years

1800–1865: Conviction and Division

- Stanley Griswold (1803–1804): 1 year
- Horace Holley (1805–1808): 3 years
- S. David Austin (1810–1811): 1 year
- William Belden (1812–1821): 9 years
- Richard Varick Dey (1823–1828): 5 years
- Nathaniel Freeman (1832–1841): 9 years
- Thomas B. Sturges (1842–1867): 25 years

1865–1920: Witness and the Work of Repair

- Thomas B. Sturges (1842–1867): 25 years
- Rufus Piercy Hibbard (1868–1872): 4 years
- Henry B. Smith (1873–1877): 4 years
- Isaac Ogden Rankin (1878–1879): 1 year
- Chester Bridgeman (1879–1881): 2 years
- Dwight Nelson Prentice (1882–1883): 1 year
- Gardiner Spring Plumley (1884–1894): 10 years
- Joseph B. Kettle (1895–1900): 5 years
- William Henry Gane (1901–1908): 7 years
- Edgar Hammond Olmstead (1908–1914): 6 years
- Frank E. Carlson (1915–1918): 3 years
- Benjamin S. Winchester (1918–1925): 7 years

1920–1957: Grace after Certainty

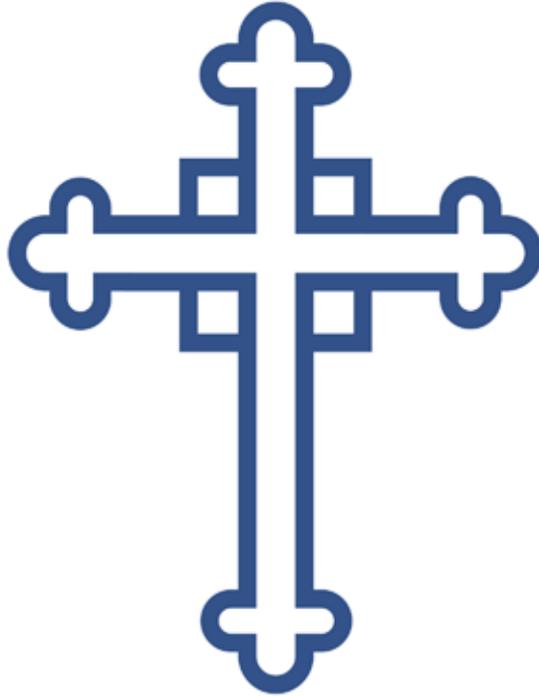
- Benjamin S. Winchester (1918–1925): 7 years
- John J. Scott (1926–1930): 4 years
- Carlos C. Rowlinson (1930–1935): 5 years
- L. Reinald Lundeen (1935–1939): 4 years
- Orin E. Dice (1939–1942): 3 years
- Leon Arthur Dean (1943–1953): 10 years
- Stanley Lyon Houston (1954–1983): 29 years

1957–2000: Faith and Belonging in a Changing Church

- Stanley Lyon Houston (1954–1983): 29 years
- George Everett Crandall, Associate (1964–1973): 9 years
- Timothy Edward Haut, Associate (1974–1980): 6 years
- Paul Spear Fraser, Associate (1980–1982): 2 years
- Gary A. Ritts, Associate (1982–1987): 5 years
- George Coxe Bland, Jr. (1983–1995): 12 years
- Carolyn and Scott Lovaas, Associates (1987–1988): 1 year
- Alida Ward (1989–Current): 36 years
- David Johnson Rowe (1997–Current): 28 years

2000–Present: Sacred Presence in a Fractured World

- Alida Ward (1989–Current): 36 years
- David Johnson Rowe (1997–Current): 28 years



Greenfield Hill Congregational Church, 2025
Fairfield, CT
Images from iStock