Minutes of the Stanwich Congregational Church Annual Meeting
June 9, 2025

Hymn - *"Great is Thy Faithfulness"*

Devotional and Prayer - Chuck Davis, Transitional Co-Lead Pastor

"This is the Word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts." Zechariah 4:6

Pastor Chuck read Zechariah 4:1-6 and prayed that we do not trust in our best abilities and resources but offer them to the Lord to use them well, and that by His Holy Spirit He will give us unity and vision of what He wants to do and the courage and faith to follow well.

Welcome - Bill Voth, Moderator

Welcome to the annual meeting, a time when we gather to conduct the business of the church, elect officers, approve budgets for the coming year, and also a time when we hear about our vision for the community and listen to how God is calling us to know Christ and make Him known.

Establishment of a Quorum - Chelsea White, Clerk

Chelsea confirmed a quorum of members was present.

Charge to the Congregation by the Elders - Gad Lim, Elder Board Chair

When we became members of Stanwich, we assented to the Stanwich Church covenant to maintain the institutions of the Gospel, to submit ourselves to the orderly administration of the affairs of the church, and to walk together in brotherly love. So thank you for showing up tonight to fulfill our commitments to each other and to God. May every question we ask and every vote we cast and every prayer we pray be backed by faith, hope and love. Again from our covenant, we depend upon the aid of our heavenly Father, who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for our salvation, and Jesus Christ who hath redeemed us with His blood, and the Holy Spirit, our comforter and guide. So let us bring glory and honor to God in our meeting.

Approval of the Minutes of the Last Annual Meeting

No questions were raised or corrections requested, and the 2024 Annual Meeting Minutes were approved.

Approval of Annual Reports

No questions were raised or corrections requested, and the 2024 Annual Reports were approved.

Nominating Committee Report - Velma Baker, Nominating Committee Chair

The role of the Nominating Committee is to identify nominees for the offices of the church, including the Elder Board, Nominating Committee, Missions Committee, and officers of the church. The Nominating Committee has four members elected by the congregation to serve a 2-year term. This year's Committee was comprised of Velma Baker, Don O'Neill, Dan Walker, Claire Daplyn, and two Elders Elizabeth Wolf and Andrew Greco. Pastors Chuck Davis and Heather Wright served as ex-officio advisors as well as Gina Hantz. The Committee met several times beginning in January to prayerfully consider candidates, and with the Lord's help identified the following brothers and sisters in Christ to serve His church. Once again we are grateful for the love of God who provides for us. The nominees are:

Elder Board:	Elizabeth Wolf, Todd Looney, Christa Otto, Michael Nyenhuis
Nominating Committee:	Jared Kohlberger, Ted Deinard
Moderator:	Bill Voth
Assistant Clerk:	Carol Lyvers
Treasurer:	Jay Stout
Assistant Treasurer:	Carl Higbie
Historian:	Genie Wells
Assistant Historian:	Debbie Reynolds
Internal Auditor:	Mark Squillante
Missions Committee:	Jessica Fitzsimmons, Paulette Lee, Tom Crozier

After the written ballots were counted, Bill announced that the slate of officers was approved.

Update on Pastoral Search Process - Gad Lim

In this section of the meeting Chuck Davis stepped out of the room. On behalf of the Elder Board, thank you to the Search Committee who gave significant time and discernment to do this important work of the church: Greg Hartch committee chair; committee members Dan Walker, Elizabeth Wolf, Jared Kohlberger, Jen Deinard, Jon Nietzel, Kimberly O'Hara, and Pastor Richard Williams; and Mark Curtis who served as advisor. We went through a very rigorous process to identify who our next Senior Pastor would be, engaging a search firm that specializes in searches for churches. They helped conduct a survey of our congregation and contacted over 300 applicants. We narrowed the list to 6 potential candidates who were interviewed multiple times, and we brought 3 of the finalists on site to worship with us and have additional interviews. As you know, God led the Committee in the direction of Chuck Davis becoming our next Senior Pastor. We want to address some questions that were raised:

1-Stamford initiative. Although the Stamford campus is not presently a reality, all the candidates expressed excitement about the vision.
2-Age. The understanding between Chuck and the Elder Board is that this is not a short-term appointment. Chuck also assured the Elders that if at any time they feel led to go in a different direction, Chuck would step down and not take the decision personally.
3-Chuck's other ministries. The Elder Board and Chuck have agreed that he can fulfill his outstanding outside commitments that run through the middle of next year on his own time as part of his vacation allocation.
4-Remuneration. Chuck is being paid on a full-time basis as the Transitional Co-lead Pastor, and he will be paid the same when he becomes Senior Pastor with no salary increase. He is eligible for Medicare, so the church will not incur cost for his health insurance.

Questions from the floor:
Q. How long does Chuck expect to be here?
A. The Elders hope that Chuck will remain as Senior Pastor through at least our 300th year in 2031, but the agreement is open-ended so we hope he will stay even longer.
Q. What is the status of hiring an Associate Pastor?
A. When Pastors Nathan Hart and David Borden left last year, the Elders felt that the new Senior Pastor position should be filled first so that person would have input in building the team, so the hiring process has been intentionally serial not parallel. Some of our staff are currently pursuing ordination including Gina Hantz and our youth ministry team, so the Elders are currently discerning the hiring of our next Associate Pastor as well as future staffing hires and changes.
Q. What are the outside activities Chuck is currently doing?
A. Chuck's outside activities are concentrated around Global Lead, which does not have a lot of ongoing ministries but mostly new engagements that are accepted as they come in. The understanding with Chuck is that he will not accept any additional engagements from Global Lead, and any other outside activities will be done on his vacation time.

Q. Heather, how will your role change?
A. Chuck will take on the role of Senior Pastor. He has asked me to continue giving input in certain areas where I have history from the last 6 years, and when he is out of town I will act as Senior Pastor. But I will gratefully serve as your Pastor of Care and Connection.
Q. Did you consider the Five-Fold Ministry in your process for discerning the Senior Pastor, and are there gaps that remain to be filled by possibly our next hire for Stamford?
A. Beyond just our pastoral staff, our ministry staff and also a core team of 30 lay leaders for the Stamford initiative are currently going through testing to determine their spiritual gifts. The new Elder Board who is approved tonight also will go through this testing, so there is a systematic process in place to determine spiritual gifting across the entire body at Stanwich. Even within just our pastoral staff there is a lot of complementary gifting, which is part of the reason why we are seeing growth.
Q. Stanwich is a unique place and we are moving forward with a continuity candidate. What did you learn from the other candidates during the search process that we didn't already know that could apply to Stanwich?
A. The process reiterated what a great team we have in our current pastors, and that Stanwich has a wide appeal to a broad range of denominations. One of our candidates came from an Anglican background and another from a Pentecostal background, and while they both had very different styles of worship, they were both aligned in faith in Christ. It is very hard to find a church like ours that is Bible based, Spirit led and affirms the ministry of women.
Comment: We owe a great debt of gratitude to Pastor Heather for leading us through this time. She is such a caring and pastoral person and we are grateful for her leadership.
Q. Chuck was not considered a candidate throughout most of the process. What changed?
A. Up until 2-3 weeks before the end of the search process we did not consider him because Chuck did not consider himself a candidate. God is seldom early but He is never late, so just at the time when the Committee was moving towards the end of the search process, He also began moving within Chuck and speaking with Him about this. In the next week Chuck will record a video for the congregation to provide a fuller account of the process from his perspective.

Vote to Approve Appointment of Senior Pastor

The congregation voted by written ballot to approve Rev. Dr. Chuck Davis to serve as Senior Pastor.

Update on the Stamford Initiative - Chuck Davis

Before we get to the what and how, it is always good to go back to the why. When Peter stood before the council in Acts chapter 4, he said "there is no other name under heaven by which a person might be saved." He was referring to the name of Jesus. And later Paul, who was the greatest church planter in the first century, said "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Then he goes on to a declaration of questions: "how can they believe in the one they have not heard; how can they hear unless someone speaks to them; how can they speak to them unless they are sent? How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." So historically, the church has had to cross boundaries and take risks in faith to bring Good News to people who have not received it. The best way for people to come to Christ is when a new lampstand is planted, a group of people who shine as the light and live in such a way that Christ becomes accessible.

Stamford has grown by 18,000 inhabitants since we first had the idea of going to Stamford. Not only the South End but also the city center has experienced incredible growth. Of the over 136,000 people in Stamford, 75% are estimated to have no religious affiliation or their previous connection to a church is dormant. That's almost an entire city of people who need to hear the Good News. Within 2 miles of 252 Atlantic Street there are only two Bible-believing evangelical churches, one a self-proclaimed black church that has no desire to cross boundaries, and the other an Assemblies of God church that is trying to cross boundaries but not having much success. Within 2 blocks of our building is a college campus and plans for an additional 1000 new housing units to be built, many of which will be occupied by young professionals trying to figure out life. Barna statistics report that Next Gen's are having a spiritual revival and desire to get back to a solidly faith oriented foundation and want a vibrant church. They need lampstands.

Gina Hantz has been leading a core team of 30 people who have been pressing into our gifting and how we will lead and serve in Stamford. We will be sending out a survey to our congregation, but initial feedback we have been receiving is that another 50-60 people from our church plan to attend Stamford when it opens for worship. Chuck has been working for over a year with a task force on a relaunch strategy. Yet even with our due diligence and planning, every launch strategy must be held loosely knowing that the Holy Spirit can lead us at any time in directions we did not plan.

The exterior shell, roof and walls of the new building are nearly completed, most of interior framing is up, and HVAC, electrical and plumbing are underway. The congregation had the opportunity to write Scripture on the framing just as we did when we built our current church. The anticipated schedule, which of course is subject to change, is that the building will be completed by spring of 2026.

The project budget is $22.3M and funds raised to date are $20M. We will continue to pray and invite people to give to raise the remaining funds needed.

Report from the Missions Committee - Mauri Clarke, Director of Stanwich World Missions

This past year the Missions Committee hosted 16 opportunities for the congregation and others to walk alongside our missions partners and community at large. Over 250 people attended or donated to these events. Clearly, missions is an integral part in the life of our church. The members of the Missions Committee work faithfully to be ambassadors to our missions partners, including ongoing prayerful dialog, in-person meetings, organizing and participating in missions events, and carefully reviewing and discerning fiduciary accountability of each grant application.

The goal of missions is to Give, Pray, Serve. We aim to be relationship builders, and depend on the congregation to share your involvement with worthy ministries and encourage the Missions Committee to support projects you discover and value. We are a church that devotes time, treasure and talent to glorify to God. Thank you for generously supporting the Missions Fund.

I am stepping down as Director of Stanwich Missions effective next month. When former Senior Pastor Nathan Hart offered me this position, I agreed to a 2-year term and have now served for 3 years. I feel proud to have succeeded with your help to grow our missional engagement and build deeper relationships with our missions partners. In addition, I believe the Mission Committee is operating on a higher level with an approved direction and focus that augments our commitment to pray and support ministries near and far.

After Mauri's presentation, Pastor Heather expressed deep gratitude on the behalf of the congregation for her amazing leadership. Mauri has expanded our missions engagement, and through her our church is even more missions minded. Heather and Chuck prayerfully discerned who would take on this role after Mauri, and welcome Travis Piegat as the new Director of Stanwich Missions Committee. Mauri has been working with Travis over the past few weeks to help with the transition. He currently works as telecommunications vice president of workforce management, and has experience working as a full-time pastor for 2 years and as a bi-vocational minister for 11 years. He and his family were very involved in urban ministry in Denver. Travis will shepherd the Missions Committee and also will be involved with our Stamford initiative with a focus to bring a heart for missions to Stamford. Please keep Travis and Mauri in your prayers as they transition, and for all the things God has in store for them.

Fiscal Year 2024 Financial Results to Date and 2025 Budget - Dan Miracola, Executive Director

Treasurer Jamie McNab usually presents the financial results and details for the proposed budgets, but he was unable to attend tonight's meeting so Dan is presenting the information.

The Missions Fund is currently only $3000 short of their annual $350,000 goal, so praise God for your giving to the Missions Fund. The Missions Committee proposes an overall budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 that is the same level as last year given market volatility and geo-political uncertainty. They are making small adjustments within the allocation amounts to increase funding for local missions partners, especially those that serve youth in our area. They also are increasing the unallocated budget in order to meet any crisis or unforeseen need. Missions Committee Treasurer Steve LaSala has more details about the allocations for each partner, so please reach out to him with any questions.

Thank you to our financial staff Sheila Hyland and Claire Daplyn for managing the daily financial activities of the church. Thank you also to the Elders on the Finance Committee, Elizabeth Wolf, Jon Nietzel and Tim Lukes, and to Treasurer Jamie McNab, Assistant Treasurer Carl Higbie, and Internal Auditor Mark Squillante, for their oversight and wisdom for the year ahead.

Our church is committed to full and open transparency regarding budgeting and the investment of your gifts. Internal and external audits are performed every year and have clean opinions. Proposed budgets are distributed to the congregation for discernment and feedback at "Ask the Elders" sessions. Audited financial statements for FY 2024 are available on our website, and FY 2025 audited financial statements will be available this fall.

As of June 9 our operating budget deficit is $781,089, which is similar to our status at this time in prior years. Our expenses are fairly constant throughout the year while a big portion of our giving occurs near the end of the fiscal year in June. During this past year, giving to the Operating Fund has been lighter than anticipated, most likely due to several factors:

-Sacrificial giving to our Stamford capital campaign may be impacting regular giving, similar to what we experienced during previous capital campaigns. This should diminish in impact as we near completion of the building and raise the remaining funds needed.

-Leadership in flux can often generate uncertainty about the future and hesitancy to give, which should diminish now that we have approved Chuck as our Senior Pastor.

-We are growing as a church, but new families often require some time to get acquainted and gain trust before committing their giving.

To all of you who have given, thank you! You are making a great impact, and great things are happening here. Just yesterday we had 9 people baptized and 26 adults join as members. We received one unrestricted gift of $774,000 that the Elders have set aside in their discretionary fund so they can discern how best to allocate those funds to support the initiatives of the church. Praise God that He always provides for our needs and has shown up abundantly during this season of transition and preparation for opening our Stamford campus.

The proposed operating budget for FY 2025 is $3,100,958 compared to $2,903,415 for FY 2024. The 6.8% increase is due primarily to inflation that continues to drive up the cost of ministry, maintenance and insurance. The staff worked prudently over the past year to minimize spending wherever possible to reduce expenses, and the Finance Committee worked hard to minimize proposed budget increases for the coming year while also anticipating increased expenses for the Stamford Relaunch, including building and worship expenses and hiring a Stamford Lead Pastor and part-time sexton and receptionist.

Approval of Budgets

A written ballot was distributed to vote on the motion to approve the proposed budgets for FY 2025 as presented. After ballots were counted, Bill announced that both the Operating and Missions budgets for FY 2025 were approved.

Items from the Floor - None

Closing Prayer - Rev. Heather Wright expressed several special thank you's before closing the meeting in prayer:

- to the Search Committee for all their hard work and sacrifices of time to accomplish this important mission that we celebrated tonight.

-to the Elders for stewarding this season of transition so well. It took steady hands and confidence not only that we would keep going and the ship would stay righted but that we would grow and flourish. Thank you for your leadership and discernment.

-to the staff for maintaining joy and ministry momentum even with expanded duties, and for remaining open to whatever God had in store for you both personally and professionally.