

GUCCI Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Your GUCCI team developed this document to answer popular questions. We will continue to update it as we go along.

What is GUCCI?

GUCCI stands for **G**ranby **U**nited **C**hurch of **C**hrist **I**nterrelated. It is the name given to the group that is spearheading our current effort to explore a new future for Granby area UCC churches, particularly First Church and South Church. In May 2017 a group of eleven folks from each of our two churches met to identify core values of the two congregations, to do some visioning of what headlines might be for First and South Churches five years in the future, and to identify next steps. Shortly thereafter the Senior Ministers, Moderators and Assistant Moderators from both churches began meeting regularly to map out the process of exploring ways to increase collaboration between the two congregations and continue the dialogue about the potential for a shared future. In the spring of 2018 this group, working with the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, designed a survey which was distributed to all members of the two churches. Based on the feedback received from that survey and in response to the declining membership and financial support that both churches are experiencing, the church leaders agreed to explore more deeply the possibility of joining together as a new church entity. To assist with this effort, in the spring of 2019 the churches hired Rev. Dr. Claire Bamberg, an ordained minister and consultant who specializes in assisting churches in transition. The GUCCI group was expanded in late 2020 to include three additional at-large members from each congregation.

Why would we want to come together as one new church?

First Church and South Church have a great deal in common, including a shared past. South Church was created in 1872 when the minister and 38 members of what is now First Church left that church to start a new church in the center of Granby. The two churches today have a shared UCC denomination, and perhaps most important, a shared sense of mission to our community. This is demonstrated daily in our commitment to work to eliminate food insecurity, low income housing, care for the elderly and so much more. The two churches are the only Open and Affirming churches in the area, and the two congregations have a long history of shared worship, in person and more recently on Zoom.

Although our congregations are active, neither is immune to the trends among mainline churches toward declining membership, shrinking financial support, and, in some cases, closure. Our work together as GUCCI has helped us envision a positive and dynamic future in and for our wider Granby community. Long ago, we were one body of faith. The time seems right to come together again as an even stronger presence in our community. Together we can do so much more than either of us can do on our own.

Like many mainline churches in our nation, both churches face challenges. South Church faces the impending retirement of its long-serving minister, Denny Moon, and First Church has made the courageous decision to do something different than it is currently doing, considering five alternatives and narrowing options down over the last year.

What is the timeline for this project?

This project has already gone through several phases. The surveys in 2018 were an important step to better understand the inner workings of each congregation and identify any simmering issues. The group sessions under Dr. Bamberg's leadership were aimed at enabling us to consider deeply who we are as individual people of faith and as communities of faith. Our joint endeavors, such as joint worship services and Bible study and an agreement to sponsor a joint youth ministry, have enabled us to get to know one another better. These phases have been geared towards relationship building and information gathering. As we articulate our sense of mission and our vision for the future, we gain a better, more informed sense of whether taking the significant step of joining together as one church is the right future for us. The two churches are alike in many ways – that is the easy part! But we are also different. It is important now, in this mission/visioning phase, to name those similarities and differences so that we can address them and work to reconcile, resolve, or incorporate them into a shared vision.

The mission/visioning phase of this project is wrapping up now that we are in 2021. If we agree that we have a shared mission and vision, then the next phase will focus on practical and logistical components of creating a new church: articulating finances, governance structure, physical worship location and setting, name, and spiritual leadership.

Upcoming GUCCI Activities

We look forward to our shared worship and other activities. In addition, please stay tuned for details about upcoming GUCCI-related activities, and save these dates in particular:

- **January 10, 24 & 31** – South Church will hold a series of Q&A sessions for its members to hear about what's been done and ask questions
- **January 17** – First Church will hold an information meeting for its members to hear reports from two work groups relating to possible paths into the future.
- **February 14** – Annual and Discernment Meetings for each church. At these separate simultaneous meetings, time will be set aside to discuss GUCCI's progress and to invite the congregations to affirm the vision and work thus far. Each congregation will vote on whether or not to “get engaged” with the other.

What does “getting engaged” mean?

Just as when a couple gets engaged, engagement means a commitment to get married, but recognizes that there is a lot of work that must be done prior to the marriage and that in the course of doing that work it is possible for the couple to decide to break things off. If the two congregations both vote to get engaged on February 14, we will then establish working groups to tackle all of the “nuts and bolts”: finances, properties, worship, governance, staffing, a new name, and of course planning the big wedding party.

If we “get engaged”, when would we “get married”?

We expect that the engagement process is likely to take the better part of a year. One of the unknowns, of course, is how the pandemic will impact our ability to move through the process.

What if one or both churches decides not to “get engaged”?

We hope that we will still “stay friends” and continue to find opportunities to collaborate. We will continue along our current path to sponsor a joint youth ministry.

Who is in charge of this project?

This project has evolved over the past several years as a result of the church leaders meeting together and seeking input from each congregation. With assistance from Dr. Bamberg, more and more people from each church will need to be involved for the work to be successful. The current GUCCI members are:

Position	First Church	South Church
Senior Ministers	Todd Yonkman	Denny Moon
Moderators	Bob Giles	Becky Sielman
Ass't Moderators	Lisa Reinhardt	Heather Sinon
Members At Large	Heather Dobbert	Charlene Bordonaro
	Jill Ford	Jamie Scotto
	Don Shaw	Pat VanInwagen

How can I stay informed without serving on GUCCI?

We know that effective communication is vital to this effort. In addition to announcements in worship and in our separate electronic and printed communications, GUCCI will send periodic updates (which will be sent by mail to those who do not use e-mail). The GUCCI committee can't do this work alone. As the effort continues, *WE WILL NEED YOUR HELP*. Stay tuned for more!

Is this a done deal?

Absolutely not. The choice to create a new church together ultimately lies with the two congregations. Only if and when both congregations agree to move in the direction of starting a new church in Granby will this project move to completion.

I don't understand why this process has to take so long. Why don't we just skip all of this visioning talk and combine right now?

In projects like this, some people are always ready to charge through the gate, while others are reluctant even to consider going to the show. Our churches have long histories, strong traditions, and many voices that need to be considered and heard as we embark on such a significant step. Creating a new church, too, is not the same as opening another franchise of Burger King. We need to know, and agree on, *WHY* we are doing it, in our hearts, and not just in our bank accounts. Dr. Bamberg has shared with the GUCCI committee several startling examples of churches she has worked with that rushed into a joint arrangement out of convenience and that now face numerous and unpleasant challenges because they put *WHAT* instead of *WHY* first.

How are we going to pay for this process?

Each church is contributing to the costs of Dr. Bamberg's consultant fees. If we move forward with a new church, our project will be eligible for several different kinds of funds, including "New Church" funding from the United Church of Christ and facilities funding from Partners for Sacred Spaces, a private foundation that funds the renovation and rehabilitation of historic houses of worship to meet modern needs. Working out the day-to-day finances is one of the many logistical tasks that await us in the next phase.

If we are creating a "new church," where are we going to worship?

From an emotional standpoint, one of the most difficult decisions that will need to be made by the new church will be deciding where the new congregation will gather and worship. If we can step aside from the deep emotional connection that each congregation has to its current spaces, the decision of where we gather and worship as a new congregation is one of the least important decisions to be made. Of far greater importance are things like what new programs are put in place to reach out into the community to expand our mission and to attract new folks. The decision of who is hired as the ordained leader of the new church is more important than where worship is conducted. The real property of the two existing churches is fairly extensive and offers opportunity to dream big as well as the opportunity to repurpose some of the existing space. Imagine if we could build new gathering and worship spaces that incorporate the needs of churches in the 21st century – flexible seating, technological capacity to reach out to folks via the Internet, high tech audio and lighting systems, multiple screen video projection capability, multi-purpose spaces versus single use spaces. The guiding principle here is that churches are people and programs, not buildings. As a new church, the opportunity to do something new and creative is enticing.

Who will lead our new church? Is South Church trying to force Denny Moon into retirement? Is First Church trying to force Todd Yonkman to move on?

Denny is going to retire whether or not South Church and First Church decide to create a new church; he entered the path to retirement prior to this process. Todd's position is intended to help First Church transition to its next phase. BOTH churches will need new pastoral leadership within the next two years. If the churches do decide to create a new church, the **new church** would ultimately call a senior minister who would have an opportunity to make a difference in the community, just as all our forebears have done. The new church would initially hire an interim minister and then form a Search and Call Committee to find a settled minister. None of the current ordained staff of either church will fill this role. Decisions on the staffing of other positions – Administrator, Music Director, Sexton, Youth and Children's Program Leaders, and Associate Ministers will be made by the combined congregation.

What are the financial conditions of the two churches?

Both First Church and South Church are currently in a position where pledge income combined with rental and investment income is not adequate to cover annual operating expenses. This means that both churches will need to dip more deeply into their assets if their annual operating expenses stay at current levels. The combined non-property assets of the two congregations currently exceeds \$1.5 million. Personnel costs for the two existing congregations makes up 65-70% of total expenses. The new church would not need duplicate staff such that there would be

substantial potential savings in personnel costs. Depending on what decisions are made regarding the properties currently owned by the two congregations, there is also the potential for significant cost savings in property related expenses. It can be reasonably predicted that annual operating expenses of the new church would be covered from income sources and would not require a continued draw-down of assets.

What are the benefits related to our youth programs if we come together?

We are confident that we can be stronger and more vibrant/vital together. The impact we can have on the community together is so exciting: through pooling our finances, talents, and energy, we can do great things! Here are just two areas that a working group from First Church identified:

- Increased critical mass of children/youth
 - First Church has had a very small number of kids regularly attending Sunday school, whereas South Church has had a large number of young families regularly attending.
 - Increasing the mass of kids is CRITICAL to attracting new families. Most families only attend church 1-2 times a month. Simply attending just one Sunday school session with no other children present would likely turn-off potential new families.
 - The pool of children/youth/families in Granby is too small to populate two UCC Churches. We have seen the numbers. Population growth in Granby is expected to remain flat in coming years.
 - The children from each congregation are attending the same schools. They know each other. It just makes sense for them to “church” together.
- Potential to better serve our LGBTQ population
 - We are the only two Open and Affirming churches in Granby.
 - Our progressive standpoints are important to so many in younger generations. We would perhaps have the resources to increase our outreach efforts to attract LGBTQ people. They have a HOME here.

How would our Mission, Service and Outreach programs be impacted?

Here, too, we believe that investing in each other and working together opens powerful paths to growing our future, and fulfilling our commitments to mission, service, and outreach. Both churches have strong existing groups that are actively working to follow in the way of Jesus by:

- Celebrating the lives and dignity of all people
- Lifting up the lonely and down in spirit
- Welcoming the stranger
- Treating others as we would want to be treated, and
- Feeding, clothing, and sheltering neighbors in need, near and far

Being a member of South Church / First Church means a lot to me. I don't think I'm ready to give up that identity.

Being part of this effort does mean taking risks, like being willing to consider a new identity for yourself as a churchgoer. We have the opportunity here to think hard about what aspects of our current selves mean so much to us and to make sure those elements find representation in a new church. We also have the opportunity to leave behind aspects of ourselves or of our church that maybe we could just as easily do without.

What do we owe to tomorrow?

Rev. Dr. Stephen Ray, president of Chicago Theological Seminary, thinks that we owe the future more than just hoping things will turn out. In our past, leaders of both churches made decisions for the future built on faith and hope. We now are being asked to make a choice on a future path, one that will have an impact long after many of us are gone from this earthly plain. We owe the future the giving of our lives, our hope, and our faith as if it means something, because it does! Our decisions become the seedbed of someone else's tomorrow.