

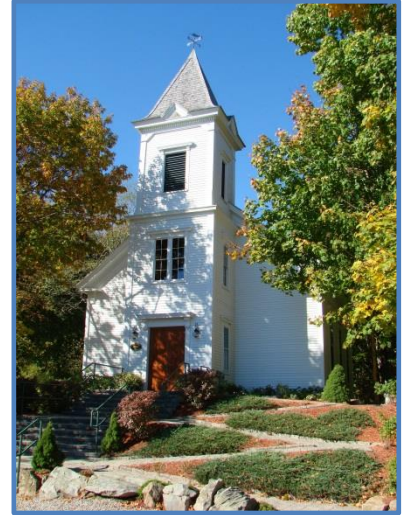
Union Church

~ a place of peace and Presence by the sea

Church Profile

Document Purpose

This document is a tangible snapshot of our church today; a narrative created by the church community as a whole in a series of *Story Gathering* sessions. Its purpose is to realistically convey the essence of a holy place and its people so that we may find the best possible fit in an Interim Pastor and/or Settled Pastor, and similarly, so a candidate may decide his or her own degree of fit-ness.



Union Church's Core Values – Who We Are

These are the foundational beliefs and philosophies that provide guidelines for how the church functions, how we interact with each other, and the kinds of decisions we make in fulfilling the purpose of our existence.

❖ We are inclusive and non-judgmental

- People are loved regardless of color, creed, sexuality, gender, country of origin, age, or other weirdness
- We have inclusivity, not only in who we welcome, but in our use of worship language (not exclusively Patriarchal)
- Our perspective is both/and, rather than either/or
- Both curiosity and questioning are welcome
- We show respect for, and appreciate individual differences
- We are apolitical
- We are comfortable with complexity and are open to listening

Illustrative Prelude to Worship Song:

"You are welcome here.
You are welcome here.
You are welcome here.
So open your hearts and
listen. So open your hearts
and listen.

You are welcome here.
You are welcome here.
You are -- welcome."

~Wiley Beveridge, musician

❖ We are accepting of a diverse set of ideas and approaches, building upon the strong foundation of Jesus's teachings and His loving actions

- We believe the Sacred is broadly defined:
There are many pathways to the Divine, and all faiths have equal access
- Our viewpoint is *Wide Christianity* – not narrow; we celebrate in traditional and non-traditional ways
- We focus on the teachings of Jesus – in how he lived
- We are long on love and gratitude, and short on dogma
- We are open to prophetic voices (i.e. wisdom keepers) and ideas from all faiths and from science
- We integrate the intellectual and the spiritual
- We are focused on good, positive things, not guilt and sin

“When I finally found Union Church, I found a family. I consider us a progressive church. We focus on kindness and helping people. We focus on welcoming God into our lives and being guided by spirit, without condemning people as sinners.

Union Church also is home to people of different types of beliefs. Some people take the Bible pretty literally. Others see it as symbolic teachings. Our current Pastor speaks to both equally. She doesn't make anyone feel excluded. Somehow by including everyone and their individual faiths, she doesn't end up wishy washy or lost in the middle. She finds just what we need.”

~ Sharon Gaudin, church member

❖ We are Spirit-led; open to changing and improving our lives; we are flexible as a community, and embrace the challenge of growing in consciousness

- One feels the spirit of the church when one enters the building
- We remain open to mystery and the creative spirit
- The church is like the sea – open and inviting, affirming, refreshing, and flowing freely
- We provide a home for seekers at any stage of seeking
- We are on a personal growth journey



together – both as individuals and as a church whole; we share a responsibility to each other, believing we are stronger together

- We focus on making our lives and the lives of others better; we think deeply, learning from each other; we willingly open our hearts and minds to God and Spirit

❖ **We are a lively, generous family of faith with a loving network, and strong lay leadership**

- “I come because of the honest warmth and graciousness, and interest in me by the members”
- “Being a member of this church holds me together during challenging times; there is a genuine outpouring of support whenever it is needed ”
- Union Church has created strong bonds of community; there is a camaraderie and a real feeling of belonging to a “tribe”
- We cherish the act of praying with others in community
- The pastoral care is strong and loving, supported by active and dynamic lay leadership
- We are a very generous congregation — generous with our time, money and emotions
- We treat each person as a sister or a brother



A question – about our *Union Church Personality* – engendered this artistic response:



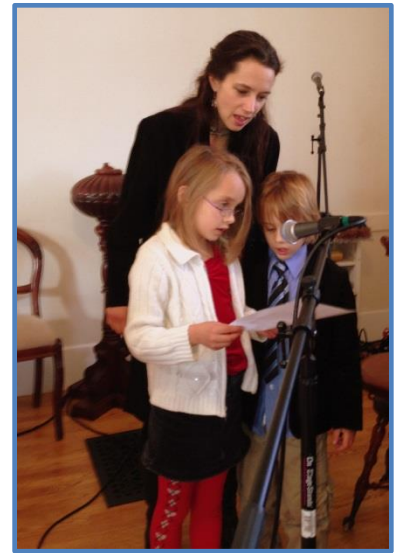
We hold one worship service at 9:30 (summer) or 10AM (winter). Our services:

- ❖ ...are uplifting and cohesive experiences, with diverse music, spontaneity and humor, and thought-provoking sermons amidst a balance of silence, and prayerful reverence
 - The feeling you take away from church stays with you for the week
 - Our pastor prays in the moment; there is a spontaneous calling of the spirit

Illustrative Sermon Titles

1. "Created for Love"
2. "A Nest that God Built"
3. "In Pursuit of Peace"
4. "Blessed is the Church that Loves"
5. "Moments of Radical Amazement"
6. "Seriously Jesus?"

- We're as comfortable with reverential silence and meditation as we are with music and prayer
- Our pastor's sermons are relevant, interesting, funny, and engaging commentaries, with a warm invitation to apply the teachings to our lives
- There is a cohesive message around a theme that is supported a children's story, Bible readings, the music, the sermon, and a reflections page on the bulletin
- The music is the "best in town", and is offered by gifted people: A blend of traditional and non-traditional ranging from gentle and meditative, to boisterous and uplifting, to grand and mellifluous
- There is an informality here; worship can include skits, poems, and plenty of laughter, all of which fosters joy and participation
- We are playful and have an ability to laugh with each other; our pastor's sense of humor invites a "happy faith"
- The fellowship in and after worship is genuine and loving



❖ ... honor the sacredness of all creation

- We recognize the place we hold in nature as a reciprocal partnership; we walk together with, and are not in dominion over, all of God's creation



- Our faith leads to the conviction that all are equal, and so we respond to all needs of humans and beings alike -- from caring for the elderly or the orphan children in Haitian slums, to the merciful treatment of bears, mustangs, cats and dogs.

- We appreciate that God can be experienced in all of creation – in nature, art, music, story-telling, poetry, and laughter.

❖ ... integrate children's messages that inspire children of all ages

- We accept and recognize the contributions of children

- Children's stories parallel the sermon theme
- Children's crafts are creative and contain special teachings

Within Our Community

Church members come from a wide-ranging area -- Biddeford Pool, Hills Beach, Biddeford, Fortune's Rocks, Saco, Old Orchard, Ocean Park, Kennebunkport, and Kennebunk. Our presence and impact is similarly wide-reaching.

❖ We are known as *the little church with the big heart*

- Our Mission is to help those less fortunate; we offer hope for people in need in the community
- There is a willingness to 'stretch" ourselves for mission projects that appear to be beyond our reach
- We believe and live the ripple effect
- Money is spent on others in need, and not on the church



Illustrative local mission partners:

- Saco Meals Program
- Stone Soup Food Pantry
- Seeds of Hope Neighborhood Center
- Ever After Mustang Rescue

- We have mission partners (long-term relationships) not scattershot efforts

- We have a wonderful reach locally — from making and collecting food, to taking special collections, to finding ways to volunteer

- It's not just money; we are the hands and feet of Jesus

- We are very contemporary -- responding to what's going on in the world,

and raising awareness to help others

- We are a leader in the greater non-profit community of York County



- ❖ We maintain a treasured historic building, and are a significant part of the Biddeford Pool community's legacy
 - The Church building is an icon and a focal point, with historic significance

- ❖ We hold the arts as sacred acts
 - We hold and honor creativity as sacred, be it poetry, special guest sermons, art, music, poetry, or skits
 - Our annual Summer Speaker Series draws people from all over the area; it demonstrates our leadership in, and support of, the arts, and provides intellectual growth and learning

- ❖ We act as good citizens, supporting a vital business and arts community
 - We are instrumental in helping to create vibrancy in downtown Biddeford and beyond
 - We inspire excellence in our personal and business lives, supporting creative, personal, and business endeavors

Our Vision

When we gather to think strategically about where our Church is heading, we gravitate to the powerful metaphor of an ancient tree. We seek to continue to *preserve our roots* while *expanding our reach*, growing in size and in the impact we have on individuals, our community and on our planet.



Summary

In summary, we desire a Pastor who can fulfill our intention to preserve our roots – as a distinct, loving, open, and meaningful presence in the community and upon this earth, and additionally, help us to expand our reach as a growing, vibrant, seeking-and-learning community of faith.



Truly a place of *peace and Presence by the sea*, Union Church occupies a special, historic place within a unique and beautiful landscape.

We dare to think differently about what it means to be a living embodiment of God's Divine Light and Love upon the earth.

We dream of a peaceful planet in which all beings are accorded respect and all needs are attended to with equal fervency. We act by trusting in the Infinite Possibilities that arise when we allow ourselves to be instruments of the Divine.

~ Coalesced by Union Church's Executive Leadership Team from "everyone's input" in the congregation.