

## Notes from Church Council Mtg. Dec. 14, 2025

Present: Rev. David Jones, Moderator Nancy Marshall, Treasurer Ann Gibson, Clerk Wendy Pree, Trustee Chair Ted Murray, ACT/Communications/Stewardship rep. Annie Cheatham, Deacon Chair Bruce Bennett, Office Administrator Virginia Wiswell. And Guests: Transformation Team Rep. Holly Wescott, and those working on follow up from our church's decision to be an Apartheid-Free church: Berkeley McChesney, Sherrill Hogen, Caroline Mack.

Nancy opened the meeting with a prayer and the notes from our Oct. 5th Church Council meeting were approved.

### Brief Updates as needed

- Deacons / Bruce: preparing for pastoral coverage / worship services for two services following baby Jones' arrival (due date 1/6/26; will be counted as David's vacation time) and also 3 months paternity leave, starting after Easter '26. Virginia to add more columns to our spread sheet, allowing for more information to be added to our weekly worship plans.
- Rev. David: main focus is on today's discussion - re: apartheid free. Notes Transformation Team will meet with Navigator on Dec 18.
- Trustees/Ted: Working on proposed draft budget for '26; "near break-even point" at this time. Still looking for more pledges to come in.
- Treas./Ann.: So far have 35 pledges totaling \$86,000 for '26. Had 61 pledges totaling \$100,300 in '25. Still have outstanding pledges for '25. Expecting more pledges to come in for '26.
- Stewardship/Annie: Sent out letters to 225 Ashfield residents asking for a donation to the church (not a pledge); have received 2 donations so far.
- M&SJ / Food Pantry (Randy away, sent in report): The need for Food continues and is increasing, including providing food for the Mary Lyon Foundation deliveries. M&SJ to sponsor Harvest Supper to be held March 6, 2026, with special guest farmers Sam and Charlotte Perkins / Bug Hill Farm.
- ACT/Annie: Sent out another update re Ahmadi family. Have another \$1,000 for the family; money and note to be sent to the family before Christmas.
- Communications/Annie: Communications recommends, and Church Council does not object - remove bulletin board near kitchen, to minimize number of bulletin boards we have and prepare for painting the room. If needed, bulletin board can be reused in church if needed.
- Food Pantry Garden / Annie: Sam Perkins sent in a wonderful annual report. Grew and delivered 2550 pounds of produce to the food pantry in '25. Hopes to have more church people involved next year - perhaps drivers from farm to church on FP distribution days.
- Pastoral Review: still trying to meet. Leslie F. in charge of getting the meeting together.

### New Business

Discussion focused on this Sept. 7, 2025 congregational vote to become an Apartheid Free church, adopting the following pledge (below).

*It is moved that the First Congregational Church of Ashfield, UCC adopt the following pledge in support of the Apartheid-Free network:*

*We affirm our commitment to freedom, justice, and equality for the Palestinian people and all people; We oppose all forms of racism, bigotry, discrimination, and oppression; and We declare ourselves an apartheid-free community, and to that end, We pledge to join others in working to end all support to Israel's apartheid regime, settler colonialism, and military occupation.*

After the 9/7/25 Congregational vote, a few people started meeting together, exploring what this vote means for our church, and how to go forward. They have considered sending out a press release (one of the action suggestions in the Apartheid Free literature), but are torn about doing this. Did we, as a congregation, really spend the time needed to explore what this means? Have we really fully adopted this pledge? (In light of this vote, the Trustees started to look into our church's investments, as an example). This small committee is bringing the issue today to the Church Council, wondering where to go next. Deep discussion followed.

Church history includes having several meetings over a period of two years exploring becoming an Open and Affirming Church (ONA). This was a momentous pledge. When you compare that history to the few times we gathered and discussed the idea of voting on becoming Apartheid-Free, the preparation seems inadequate. What does being an Apartheid Free Church mean? How do we live that decision? What does it look like? Questions need to be looked at, discussed, explored, examined, and implemented. Maybe then, or maybe not, we would make a public announcement - but only after we have thoroughly adopted and lived this decision.

After this all-engaging discussion, we decided we do not wish to notify the press. We're not ready as a congregation. We need to educate ourselves, figure out / explore what this pledge means to us. We ask this small group to continue meeting and perhaps work with the Transformation Team so we can incorporate this new pledge into our church governance / structure / overall sense of how we function as a church family. However, since we are listed as being part of the Apartheid-Free network on the Apartheid-Free website, we asked Rev. David and moderator Nancy to be the church contacts for any questions from the Press. (They will meet and think about how to describe just where we are as a church, having adopted the pledge, but not yet ready to be spokespersons for it).

Rev. David led us in a closing prayer and Nancy ended the meeting. Next Church Council meeting March 8, 2026. Annual Congregational Meeting Feb. 1, 2026 Wendy Pree, clerk