

**Central Baptist Church
Jamestown, Rhode Island
Self-Study 2023**

Open Doors - Open Minds - Open Hearts

Overview

Central Baptist Church is a warm and inviting community of faith. We are located in the heart of an island village, which contributes to our sense of community, although a number of us live off-island. Our tradition of openness and inclusiveness is an even larger contributing factor. We have participants from many different denominations and traditions, and our emphasis on soul liberty allows for individuals to understand God in their own way. There is not one “right way” that any of us may impose upon any others. Our monthly communion table is open to all. Everyone present is invited to partake in communion, whatever their beliefs and understandings.

Similarly, formal membership is not a requirement for participation in any area of church life at CBC. According to our constitution and by-laws, nonmembers vote at business meetings, hold committee positions, and participate without impediment in worship. Membership, when undertaken, represents a decision to affiliate with CBC over an extended period of time and to affirm that decision publicly.

Preaching

The congregation at CBC strongly feels that the ability to consistently deliver meaningful and engaging sermons is among the most important qualities a pastor can possess. Coming from a wide variety of religious backgrounds, and generally well-educated, our congregation appreciates creative, thought-provoking sermons. Most well received are sermons which not only draw upon the scripture lessons but interpret them in ways that apply broadly to the world we live in, and specifically to our daily lives. The interweaving of Biblical text and modern moral and philosophical thought is an essential factor in the happy co-existence in our church family of traditionalists and progressive thinkers.

Religious Education

Currently, formal religious education at CBC is limited to Sunday School programming, which was re-introduced this year after a multi-year hiatus due to low attendance (attributable to the declining number of young families with children attending church). Additional and varied educational and social activities, especially those targeting youth and the wider community, would be welcome, and could help grow the congregation.

Worship Life

In addition to weekly services, CBC’s holiday and special services schedule includes Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, a Good Friday Ecumenical Service, an Easter Sunrise Service at Beavertail, an in-church Easter Worship Service, a Blue Christmas Service, a Christmas Eve Service, and an After-Christmas Carol Service. As with all our services, when the worship service ends, the real service (service to others) begins.

During the Covid pandemic, CBC moved to an online platform with Zoom, which had the benefit of both enabling local congregants to “attend” services and of re-capturing an audience of former CBC members

who had moved away. With our most recent pastor's retirement, we lost the technological know-how on "zooming" services; however, this is a format that we would like to restore with the encouragement of our in-coming, part-time pastor. Post-pandemic, we continue to value the ability of Zoom to expand our outreach capabilities.

Music

Music is a vital part of our worship at CBC. Walter Sage, a well-respected pianist/organist, and music director, leads a small but talented choir, preparing weekly anthems for Sunday services. Occasionally, guest instrumentalists add to the music service.

Pastoral Care

The congregation at CBC expects a pastor to provide pastoral care as needed and as his/her part-time schedule allows. The ability of the pastor to be a source of comfort and spiritual healing is a highly valued quality. Also important is the ability to perceive when and where visitation is desired and where, in some rare instances, it might not be welcome. A pastor must be open to understanding the varying needs within the congregation and must always maintain confidentiality with regard to private affairs.

Fellowship

Opportunities for fellowship at CBC have changed as the congregation ages. One event that provides rewarding and enriching interaction within the church and the community at large is the annual Christmas Fair, which attracts visitors and shoppers from the entire island and beyond. This is also our biggest annual fundraiser.

We are very open to any new fellowship ideas our incoming pastor might share. Currently, ongoing church activities are limited to a monthly Ladies Luncheon, occasional potlucks, and a weekly walking exercise group.

Jamestown has a thriving performing arts community and many members of our congregation are involved in those volunteer arts organizations, which include the Jamestown Chorus, Jamestown Community Theater, Jamestown Community Band, and CBC Players.

In 2018, CBC Players produced *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, casting members of our church along with others from the community and semi-professional actors from off the island to fill out the cast. All four performances were sold out and received standing ovations from the community. Theater critic David Kirschner remarked afterward that the CBC Players production was "the best production I've seen of this play."

Previously, CBC Players also produced *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, *Godspell*, *Inherit the Wind*, and *The Enchanted April*. While Covid halted any further performance plans, we hope to revive the CBC Players in the future.

Our Church Information

- 1) Jamestown is an island community of roughly 5,000 year-round population, slightly higher in the summer months.

- 2) Central Baptist Church is centrally located in the island village, so except for a small number of off-islanders, the congregants live within a ten-mile radius.
- 3) We are best described as a small-town church.
- 4) Our average weekly attendance is 40 members and participants.
- 5) While most of our members and participants are ages 55 and older, our regular attendees include a family with three children and a grandparent/granddaughter unit.
- 6) The approximate racial/ethnic mix of our congregation.
 - a) 2% African American
 - b) 98% European American
- 7) Our congregation is diverse, including members and participants with adult children, children at home, or no children. They include single, married, divorced and widowed individuals with varied backgrounds, employment history, hopes and dreams. We do not collect information on our members and participants, but regularly celebrate and support their joys, concerns and transitions. We are family.
- 8) Boards and Committees: Executive Committee, Trustees, Deacons, Pastoral Relations, and Hospitality. It is worth noting that these boards and committees regularly interact and often share members, so there is more of a sense of cooperation, rather than a hierarchy. One of the areas our incoming pastor could help lead is the revision of our church constitution, which was created for a much larger congregation and is no longer applicable or relevant for our small church community.
- 9) Financials:
 - a) The current total budget of our church is \$128,450.00.
 - b) The current average income of our church participants: N/A
 - c) The current expenses of our church are \$130,638.00.
 - d) The annual mission giving is \$2400.00. One Great Hour of Sharing and Christmas Fair: \$5,000.

Our History

The year our church was organized: 1841

What led people to establish your church? The Baptist Society of Jamestown was formed in 1841. In 1867, it became the Associated Baptist Church, and was soon renamed Central Baptist Church. The building was erected in 1891. Central Baptist Church has served as a spiritual foundation in our area for generations. It was founded to serve both as a place of worship and as a unifying influence within the community.

Who are the people (laity and ministers) who stand out in the story of your church? What contributions have they made?

Norman Newberry – Organist and Choir Director for 50 years, through 2018.

Walter Sage – Organist and Choir Director, beginning 2018.

Ministers: Dr. William Litterick, 13 years; Dr. Robert Morton-Ranney, 17 years, led our congregation through a period of unprecedented growth through 2005.

CBC Players and CBC Singers, 1990s and 2000s, performed inspirational drama and music at CBC and in the wider community.

Nancy Mason, Church Historian, until her death in 2022.

Significant Moments and Turning Points in Our Church History:

The church flooded in 1932.

The parsonage was sold for financial reasons in the 1990s as it was not in use at the time.

During the period of growth mentioned above, a new “gathering space” with kitchen was added to the building. The new space was renamed Clarke Hall and dedicated to the memory of Fred and Dorothy Clarke, long-time members and strong supporters of CBC. The contributions of the Clarke family and others also enabled the church to pay off its mortgage!

From 2001-2013, a large number of CBC members participated in mission trips to Maine for Habitat for Humanity, to LaRomana in the Dominican Republic to provide medical care and assist in the construction of a hospital, and to Honduras.

In 2020, worship services transitioned from in-person to Zoom due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

In 2021, a fire in the church basement caused worship services to revert to Zoom for three months.

In 2022, a legacy brick patio was installed adjacent to Clarke Hall.

In 2023, the basement was renovated to create a state-certified commercial kitchen available for rentals, providing an additional source of income.

Our History, Section 2

The Story of Pastor/Church Relations:

List the last three installed pastors of your church and their tenure.

1. Dr. Robert Morton-Ranney Served from 1988 to 2005
2. Rev. Kathryn Palen Served from 2006 to 2014
3. Rev. Kurt Satherlie Served from 2015 to April 2023 (retired)

Name the primary strength each of these pastors brought to the ministry of the church.

1. Dr. Morton-Ranney brought strong family involvement to the church community as well as the wider community. He had a young family, which in turn attracted other young families into the congregation. He delivered meaningful and engaging sermons, which played a key role in growing the congregation.
2. Rev. Palen initiated programming, including a popular Bible study group. Her strong organizational skills were an asset. Her openness to diversity and her efforts at community outreach and mission work strengthened the fabric of the CBC congregation.

3. Rev. Satherlie brought an increased focus on mission work to the church community. With his encouragement and support, the congregation opened a community food pantry, spearheaded the Jamestown Ukrainian Relief Project, continues to host an annual visit/concert by the Matsiko World Orphan Choir, and financially supports a Matsiko alumnus' medical studies.

If a previous pastor is currently a member of the church, describe his/her role in the life of the congregation. N/A

Our History, Section 3

Have any of the last three installed pastors left involuntarily or under pressure? No

Indicate, if you can, which of the following best describes the congregation's behavior toward a minister prior to his or her leaving. You may check more than one.

- civil kind compassionate supportive
 sad harsh indifferent angry
 hurt other

Describe what your church has learned from the experience about itself and its relationship with persons who provide ministerial leadership.

We learned that wider community involvement and thought-provoking sermons are essential for congregational growth.

Our Vision and Congregational Priorities

As a key factor in the work of our search committee, a survey was created, shared during a weekly service and also distributed via email. Overall, the views expressed were consistent with the conclusions reached in our committee's own discussions and helped create the following description of our strengths and weaknesses and what qualities are deemed most important in a future pastor.

1. Pastor should be creative and willing to experiment with new ideas.
2. Pastor should be open to diversity of all types.
3. Pastor should have administrative skills and technology know-how.
4. Strong preaching is important.
5. Pastor should interpret the faith in terms that can apply to one's life.
6. Church growth is a high priority.
7. Pastor should provide pastoral care as needed and as his/her part-time schedule allows.
8. Pastor should lead preparation of the worship service.
9. Pastor should be supportive of our music programming.

Additional ministry qualities expressed as high priorities by our congregation and search committee:

1. Pastor should identify and connect with all ages.
2. Pastor should be open to members of other traditions, both Christian and non-Christian.
3. Pastor should be supportive of church missions.

Our strengths and weaknesses:

The strengths of CBC are the welcoming and caring nature of the church family, the music program, the variety of religious backgrounds, and the church's support of local and global causes. In the past, we have made mission trips to the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Maine. Before the pandemic, a church member led a group that sewed dresses for the Little Dresses in Africa project. Continuing missions include adopting a family and providing gifts at Christmas, annually hosting the Matsiko World Orphan Choir and providing financial support for a Matsiko alumnus' medical studies. Locally, Central Baptist Church took the lead in establishing and helping fund the Jamestown Community Food Pantry, which is housed in our building, and we contribute funds to local causes such as the Jamestown Community Farm and a women's resource center. The building provides a venue for the local Community Chorus practices and concerts, yoga classes, and a weekly walking group. Another strength is the renovation of our kitchen as a RI-certified commercial facility that is available for use by local and statewide organizations/businesses. Beyond local missions, a group of church members play a key role in organizing and leading the Jamestown Ukrainian Relief Project and we contribute financially to natural disaster relief funds.

The size of our congregation is both a strength and a weakness. Our strength is that we are a close-knit unit in which no one is anonymous. We are an interconnected church community invested in each other's spiritual growth and well-being. The downside is both the limited number of young families contributing to church growth and the small core group of congregants doing most of the work.

We have listened to our members and friends, and we hope that this information, combined with our own research and insights, provides a useful profile of CBC Jamestown as a community of faith.