

United Presbyterian Church of Hornell, New York Congregational Self Study 2024



With Christ as our center, our church family reaches out to and welcomes all. Through worship, word, gifts and service, we seek to grow in faith and to nurture our community and the world.

United Presbyterian Church of Hornell
150 Main St. Hornell, NY 14843

United Presbyterian Church of Hornell

Congregational Self Study 2024

As we prepare to welcome in a new Pastor, let us “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6). While there are many questions yet to be answered concerning our future, we move forward with steadfast commitment to honor and glorify our Lord in all that we do together as the body of Christ. It is with great anticipation and hope that we look forward to learning how the Lord will reveal Himself to us, and through us, in the coming years.

When the church is seeking a new Pastor there is an opportunity to assess our current state and future needs. The Congregational Self Study process enables our congregation to listen to how God is moving in our midst and leading us toward His plan for our church. This time of transition from “what has been” to “what can be” serves as a time for reaffirmation, renewal, and rebirth.

Our charge was to produce a Congregational Self Study report as a guide to the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) in its search for our next Pastor and as support to church leaders and pastoral staff as they carry out UPC’s ministry goals. Our hope is to challenge and encourage the reader to be a part of God’s plan for United Presbyterian Church of Hornell, and to sow the gospel of Jesus Christ through word, prayer, deed, and community, in response to God’s great love and His glory.

In writing this report, we give special thanks to the session and the interim pastor Rev. Johnathan Barker for their hard work and participation in the beginning as we launched this study. We are also grateful to our families for giving us the space and time to do this work; lastly, we want to recognize our larger family, the congregation, for joining us in prayer. We are grateful to all of you.

It is with great humility and thankfulness to God for His faithfulness that we present this report.

Key Findings

The Congregational Self Study Team’s research in preparing this report uncovered a wealth of information that tells the story of God’s work in our community. This is a summary of our key findings, which includes observations, celebrations, and concerns at United Presbyterian Church of Hornell.

Our Congregation

The First Presbyterian Church of Hornell was chartered in 1832 and continued until 1967, when it merged with the Westminster Presbyterian Church to become the United Presbyterian Church of Hornell.

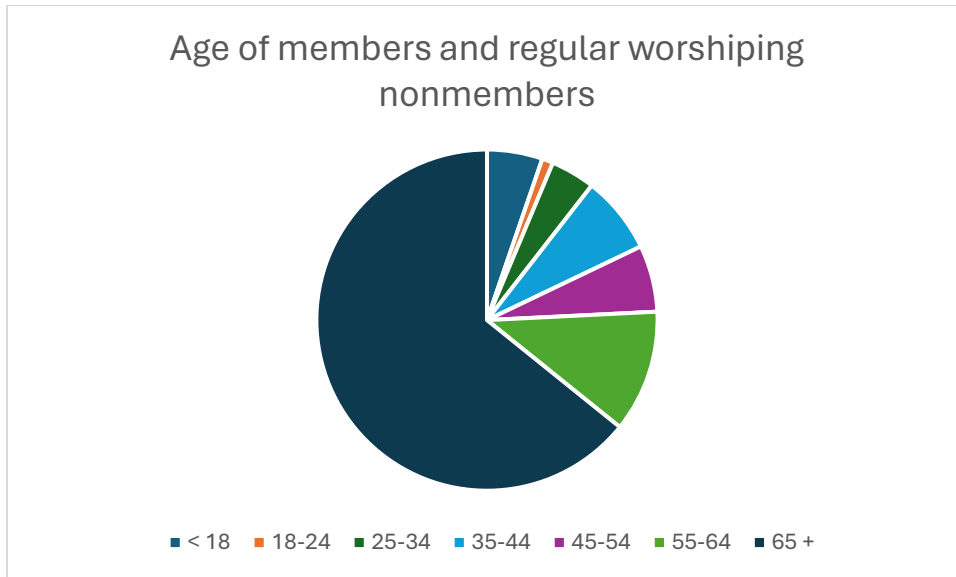
We are a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and of the Presbytery of Geneva (a district group of Presbyterian churches in the Finger Lakes region of New York State). We seek to worship God and to grow in faith and understanding, to be united in the spirit of Christian fellowship, and to serve others in the name of Christ.

In many ways our church is a Program Church based on the way that we are organized but at times we may have the feel of a Pastoral Church. Our congregation has an approximate membership of 100 but our

average worship attendance is 40. The members and attendees have grown older, and attendance has decreased over time. We have very few younger families and children currently.

In June 2023 our pastor of 8 years retired, and we have had some anxiety and pain in this transition but there is an overall feeling that we are now ready to begin our search for a new pastor.

The chart below shows the age ranges of our members, as well as children and regular worshipers.



How Our Church Is Organized

At the congregational level, the governing body is called the Session. The Session is made up of the pastor of the church and all elders in active service (selected by a nominating committee and elected by the members of the church). Session meetings are moderated by a called pastor and minutes are recorded by the elected clerk. This body takes care of the guidance and direction of the ministry of the local church. The session also oversees the work of the Deacons, a congregational-level group (along with the pastor) whose duty is “to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith.” The Board of Trustees oversees the fiduciary responsibilities and overall maintenance of the church and manse.

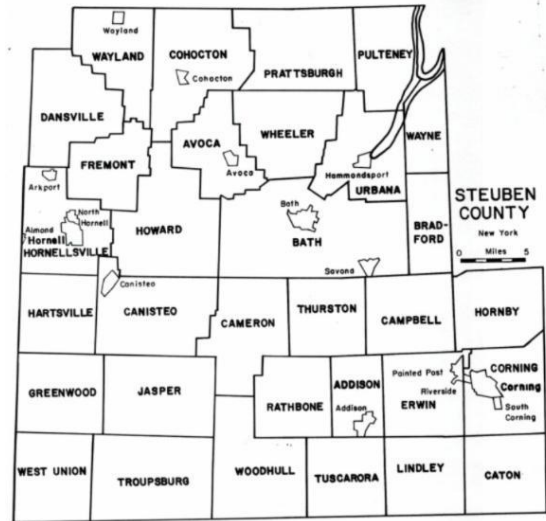
UPC employs a part-time treasurer and administrative assistant, as well as a custodian, a Director of Music, and musical accompanist.

Our City

Hornell is a small city in Steuben County in Western NY about one hour south of Rochester. Hornell has approximately 8,000 residents who are primarily white with an ancestry of Irish, German, Italian and English.

We also have smaller towns around us, (Arkport, Alfred, Almond, Canaseraga, Canisteo, Fremont, Hartsville, Howard) that are an opportunity to minister to and may also be a source of members and attendees.

The city downtown is undergoing revitalization in 2024. New sidewalks and other infrastructure are being installed, and a new downtown community park was recently completed. We enjoy a prime location on Main Street.



A major employer in town is Alstom, Inc. They are a world leader in manufacturing high-speed trains, metros, monorails, and trams. Locomotives, traction motors and train car assemblies are manufactured in Hornell. Recent contracts have led to an influx of international families, creating a more diverse community.

The Hornell area is rich with higher education institutions such as Alfred University, a leading institution in ceramic engineering and ceramic art, as well as Alfred State College (part of the State University of New York). St. Bonaventure, Houghton University, and Colgate Rochester Crozer School of Divinity are all within an hour's drive.

Our Hopes and Dreams

As a congregation we want to include and assist our members as they are growing older and to also bring in new and younger families. We want to be able to continue community assistance and Mission outreach.

We plan to continue to meet the spiritual needs of our congregation through meaningful Sunday worship and Christian educational programs for all ages.

Our Fears

We are afraid that as our congregation ages we will no longer be a viable church. It is vital that we bring in new families and members in order to fulfill the church's Mission. UPC has much to offer, and church growth and congregational support are top priorities for us and for our new pastor.

Mission

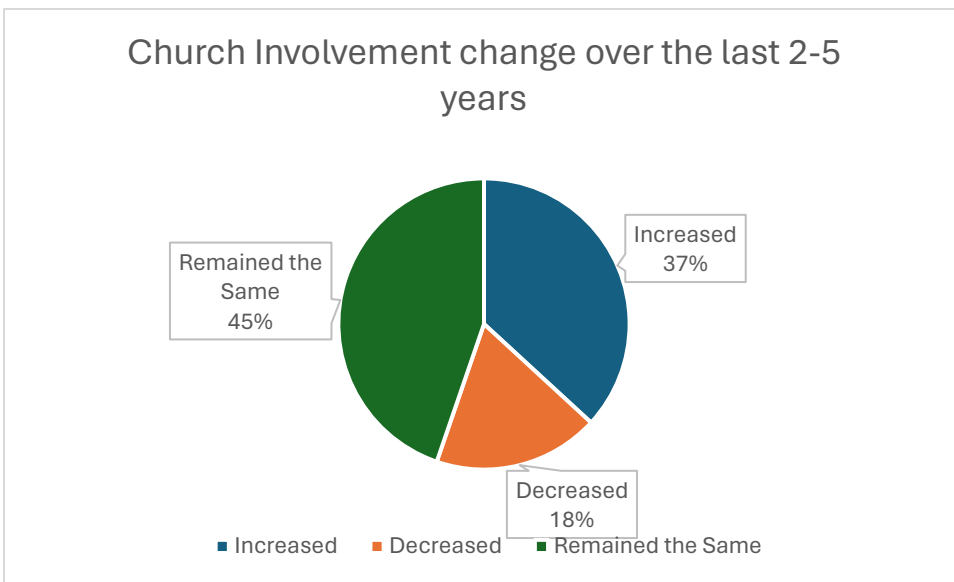
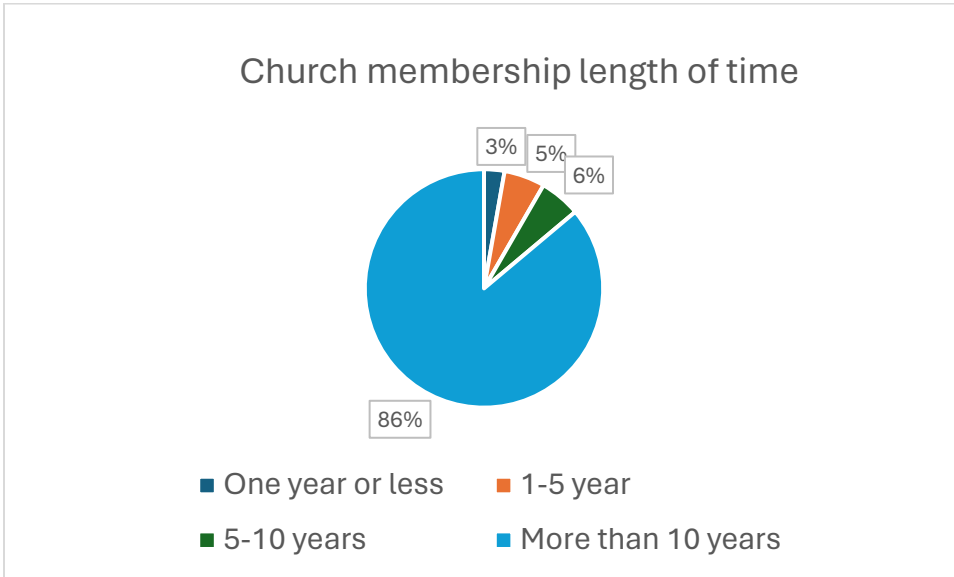
We have (had) numerous possibilities for local and global Mission service.

- Faith in Action
- Sunday Meals Program
- Heifer Project International
- The Alternative Holiday Market
- "Dime-a-Day" hunger assistance
- The Agape Fund

- Hornell Community Garden
- Presbyterian Disaster Assistance
Our church regularly receives offerings to help victims of natural and man-made disasters. The best known is the One Great Hour of Sharing, usually received during Lent.

United Presbyterian Church Survey Results

We conducted a survey of UPC members in February and March 2024. The results of that survey are summarized below. Open-ended responses are listed, while other data are presented in pie chart form.



Increased involvement was due to more time available, or members having accepted an office or position on a church board. Some stated they had a more positive attitude about the church. For those members whose involvement had decreased the stated reasons were less time available or they had given up a responsibility in the church. A few said that they had a more negative attitude about church.

The vast majority of our members said they were originally attracted to our church because family or friends attended here, and the pastoral leadership was good. Several stated that they were interested in programs for children and youth, or the music program.

When asked what keeps our members as an active part of this congregation the vast majority, 83%, said friends and family are also members. Other important aspects for worshipers are the music program, our social outreach, Missions, Sunday worship style and the pastor.

Survey respondents listed the following committees and groups on which they have served:

Deacons: 22
Bazaar: 18
Church property and maintenance: 13
Christian Education: 12
Manse maintenance: 11
Choir: 11
Sunday Meals Program: 10
Finance: 11
Personnel: 9
Music and Worship: 9
Handbell choir: 8
Mission: 7
Building use: 7
Stonework committee: 6
Nominating committee: 6
Fellowship: 6
United Presbyterian Women: 5
Parish Life: 4
Sunday School: 4
Memorial committee: 3
Office volunteer: 3
Community garden: 2

Two questions asked what we would change about morning worship. The majority of the members would like a scripture-based sermon that is applicable to their current daily lives.

One congregant responded that they would prefer a lesson rather than a lecture. Members felt that worship should be kept to an hour. One response said to stick to the script while another said we need less ritual and a more updated style. Other suggestions mentioned the music program-incorporating more contemporary music along with traditional hymns, more use of the organ. A warm and welcoming pastoral presence is needed.

Another survey question asked what changes respondents would make regarding UPC's involvement in the community near the church. These are reproduced in their entirety below.

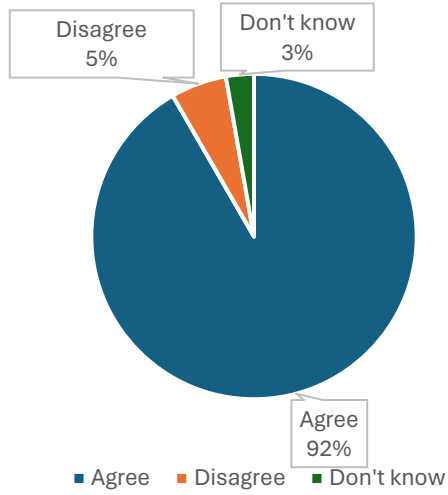
- Time church events with Hornell community events and Hornell Partners for Growth events. Capitalize on the increased traffic to showcase who we are and what we can offer.
- The Sunday meals is a wonderful program. I'd like to see a weekly collection of things for the school Backpack Program (a bag of food for weekend hunger for children).
- Make sure we are involved in the community and things that take place on Main Street.
- More events to involve the community and try to attract new members.

- Outdoor signage. Main Street is getting a huge facelift, no better time to improve ours to be more welcoming.
- Reestablish Ecumenical Clergy and congregation outreach.
- Our greenspace is underutilized. Maybe a yoga or stretch session outside, with the Great Room available in event of inclement weather?
- Open house during community events.
- Informal worship opportunities during the day (early morning; lunch time)
- Offer water and perhaps other beverages plus cookies and a place to sit during community events in our area.
- Collaborate with YMCA and public library. Host music on the back lawn with Pizza King and other vendors.

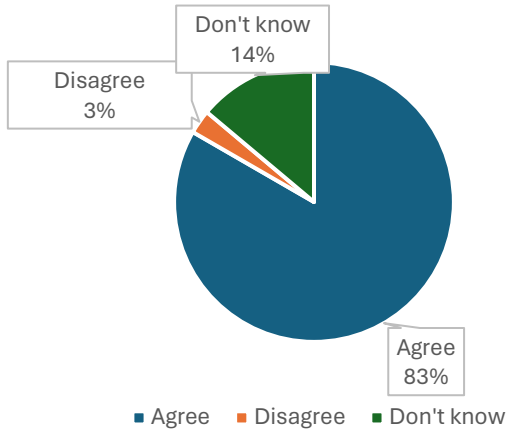
Another survey question asked what improvements, if any, would you like to see be made to our church buildings and grounds? These are reproduced in their entirety below.

- Install an electronic marquee in the front/Main Street
- Love our church building. Wish it could be used more.
- I would like to see the choir stay in the choir loft on either side.
- We have a beautiful church and have Krug Park where we could have strawberry festival or other events which might attract new members and especially younger people
- The building is beautiful!
- Enough going on now in keeping up good maintenance procedures Too many jobs to keep doing Someone always has an idea but not always volunteering to assist.
- The crèche needs desperate work.
- More involvement from members; paying for lawn care is a drain on the budget.
- Replacing the front lawn sign. Our church is beautiful!
- We have a beautiful space and location. Our trustees and maintenance people do a great job with this!
- Gazebo off parking lot. Maybe benches or picnic tables.

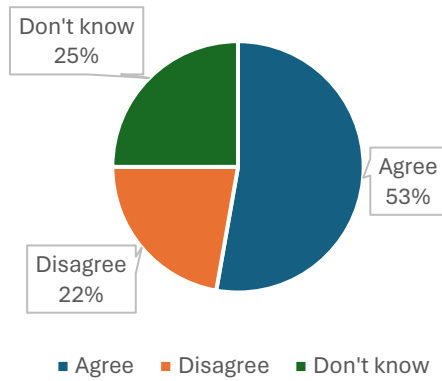
UPC is a welcoming place



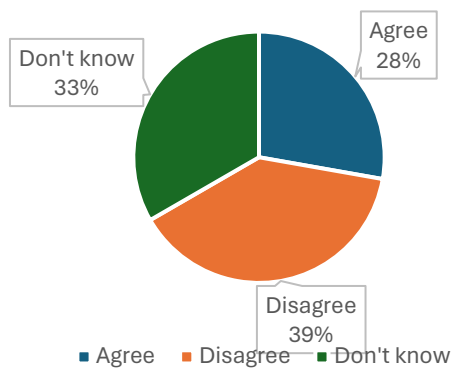
Important decisions of the Church are prayerfully considered



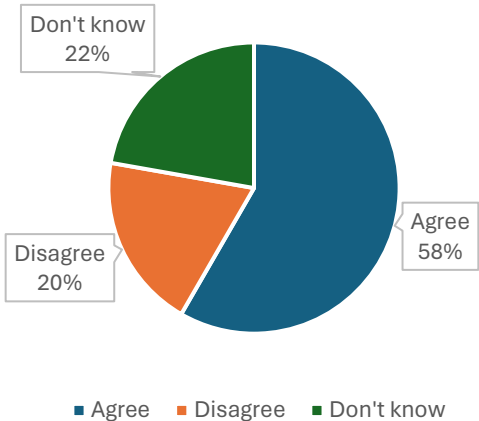
Members are well informed about what various committees and groups in the Church are doing



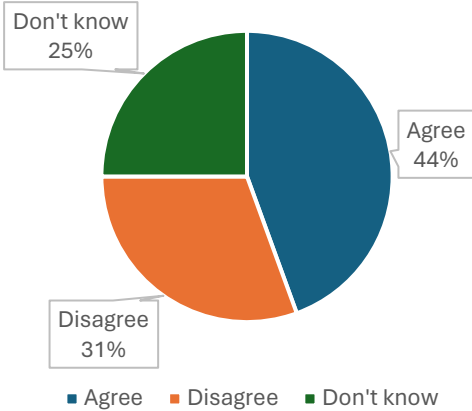
It is easy to summarize for visitors and non-members how our congregation differs from other congregations in the area



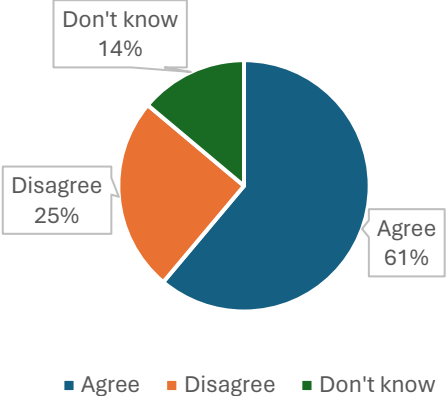
The current morale of the church membership is high



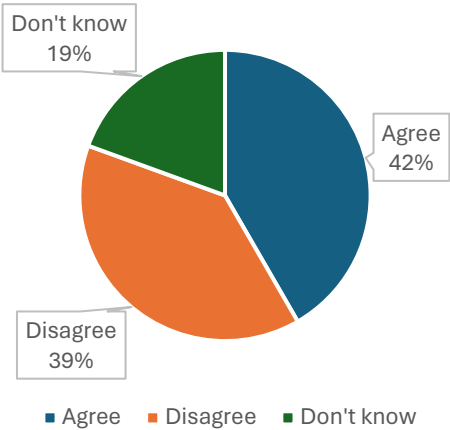
There is a sense of excitement among members about our Church's future



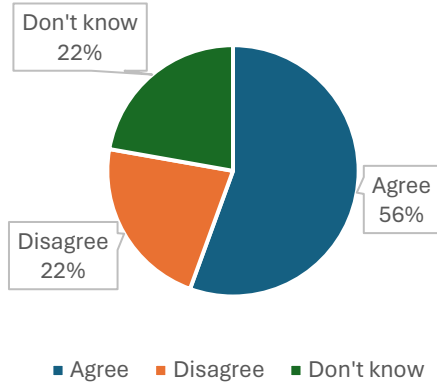
Important decisions about the life of the church are made with open discussions by church leaders and members



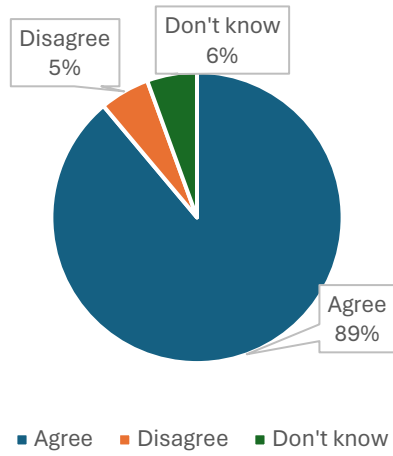
Our Church's involvement in our community around the church is sufficient



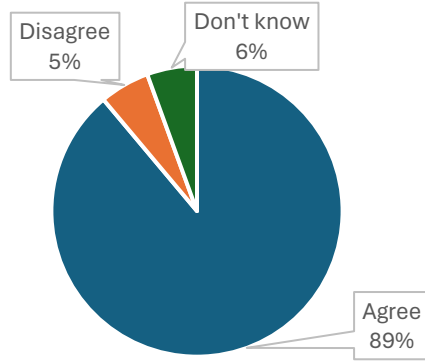
Our Church does a sufficient job creating partnerships with other local churches and community organizations



Our Church's identity is one with which I feel comfortable

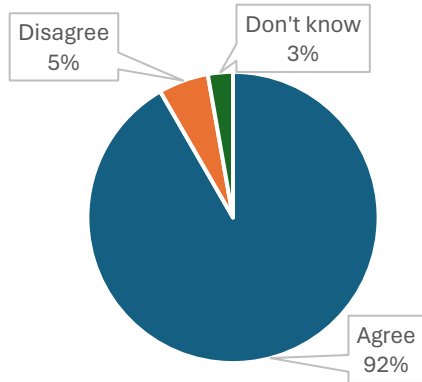


I have a strong sense of belonging to our congregation



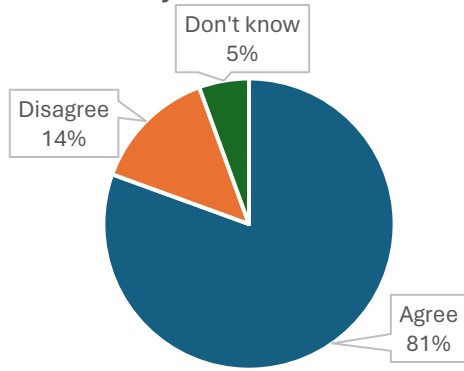
■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't know

I feel that UPC has made a difference in my spiritual life



■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't know

I have a clear understanding of our Church's identity and what we stand for



■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't know

Importance of qualities for a future pastor on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being least important and 5 being most important.

Quality	Average Importance
Warm. open personality	4.7
Sincere spiritual leader	4.8
Expertise in biblical/theological matters	4.3
Formal/traditional style	3.0
Presents global/international challenges	2.2
Good communicator/listener	4.9
Addresses changes in my life	3.9
Contemporary style	3.2
Missions minded	4.1
Open to new ideas	4.6
Motivator	4.7

Other comments:

A person/minister cannot be good at everything. I think first is to regain family atmosphere with genuine warm desire to improve our " church family" and move and grow from there

Genuine compassion

Sincere and genuine compassion

Makes a connection with children

I would like to see a pastor who is really wanting to be a leader who is just loving toward all.

Willing to lead in taking our suggestions, our dreams for UPC, our faith, and our community to the next level. Rolling up sleeves to guide or to help with the work just as UPC members would as well. Be more than a guide on the side.

Needs to know how to use communications technology effectively

Mutual respect, ability to listen, involvement in church activities, involvement with social justice in our community and beyond

Ratings of the importance of job responsibilities for a future pastor on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being least important and 5 being most important.

Potential pastoral job responsibilities	Average Importance
Ability to communicate faith and beliefs through inspirational speaking skills based on scripture	4.6
Participation in community activities	3.9
Visiting the sick and grieving	4.5
Visitation of potential and new members	4.4
Working well with individual groups in the church; committees, elders, deacons, trustees	4.8
Supporting Missions, both local and abroad	4.1
Care and concern for individual members	4.8
Strong spiritual support and witness to members	4.6
Emphasis on teaching the congregation	4.0
Encourages and works with youth programs	4.3
Promotes a variety of worship settings/services	3.9
Skilled administrator/manager of church staff and programs	4.1
Continues to develop theological and biblical skills	4.1
Supporting a team approach to ministry	4.0
Developing and strengthening lay leadership	4.1
Has strong commitment to the ministries of the church	4.5
Works regularly in development of stewardship growth	4.3

Finally, and most importantly, the congregation members were asked what they are personally looking for in a new pastor, and what should be prayerfully considered during our search. Respondents are hopeful that we will find a pastor who is sincere and caring, trustworthy, compassionate, a strong leader, a spiritual guide, teacher and motivator. Someone who is approachable, open to all members without regard for how much they do or have done for our church, able to communicate effectively and be a good listener. Also, a pastor should be open-minded, able to read the needs of our congregation, and respects our values and traditions. We would like someone who may see changes that need to be made but is willing to take things slowly and not make drastic changes all at once.

Our hope is for a new pastor who will deliver Bible-based sermons that are personal and relevant to the present, interpreting scripture that will help us in our daily lives. Someone who provides strong spiritual leadership through their messages and loves our church.

Members are seeking a leader who will be involved in church and community activities, interacting with members and boards, while helping us retain current members, welcome old members back and seek new members. This will be someone who values the growth of our congregation and youth programs and is willing to make a long-term commitment to the congregation and the community. We hope to have a new pastor who will help us to use our programs to best promote UPC to the unchurched, and to bring meaningful help to our community through Missions and programs.

Some additional adjectives offered by responders to describe our new pastor include builder, music lover, passionate about religion, tech-savvy, efficient, organized, focused, down-to-earth, and inspired to open up our church to exciting new events.

When queried “is there anything else you want us to know?” one of our members noted the recent stonework project and its success, and inquired how we can “develop outreach programs that will generate similar enthusiasm and commitment, both personal and financial.” Another offered we “keep on keeping on.” One member said they feel there is “too much ritual in our service because we have always done it this way.” Yet another respondent said, “We must not be short-sighted or selfish. We need to talk things over and work it out in order to be effective and vital as a congregation.” And one member said, “We have a strong congregation with commitment to our goals, ideas and religion – and a positive leader can improve what we do.”

Finally, more than one of us is looking for “someone who inspires me to be a better person.”

CONGREGATIONAL SELF STUDY COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS

JEREMY PALOTTI, Superintendent of Hornell City School District

Interviewed 2/28/24

Mr. Palotti has a decade of experience leading schools in the Canisteo Valley, first at Canisteo-Greenwood Central, and for the last six years with the neighboring Hornell City School District. He describes the area as having much opportunity and potential and has witnessed that with the growth of Alstom Manufacturing, which has also enabled many connected small businesses to be established. District academic programming has also expanded to fit current workforce needs and to ensure civic, workplace and college readiness.

The community and schools have benefited from the diversity that increased hiring has brought. While there is a need for more, this has also triggered a focus on developing more middle and upper middle-class housing in the area.

When Mr. Palotti is recruiting teachers and staff to the Hornell area he focuses on its many pluses: our new hospital, community arts center and programs, wind ensemble, community chorus, skiing and access to Finger Lakes recreation and culture.

He cites successful faith-based partnerships with the school system: a large yearly food drive at the primary school, an after-school "Club Can Do" using Intermediate school classrooms and tutoring for older students. If a faith group approaches the district with an idea, they do their best to partner for success.

SHAWN HOGAN, former City of Hornell mayor and former City of Hornell Industrial Development Agency board member

Interviewed 3/14/24

Shawn Hogan has a rare long view of Hornell, its history and needs. A native Hornellian, whose father also served as city mayor, Shawn retired after 32 years as Hornell's mayor in 2018 and in 2023 ended his long consultancy with the Hornell IDA.

Mr. Hogan fondly recalls the impact of the Hornell faith community on quality of life in the city. In some cases, the impact has not continued, such as the community-wide Thanksgiving service that rotated between churches and synagogue, and the once-active local ecumenical council. Hogan describes the Hornell community as very caring, needing again intentional leadership to fully harness the positivity that exists.

The Hornell area exhibits economic paradoxes- poverty exists alongside numerous job opportunities, the transportation-based local economy is contract-based and cyclical. Housing stock tips toward working class reflecting a century as home to the former Erie-Lackawanna Railroad shops. Hogan made attracting industry and revitalizing the housing stock as cornerstones of his time as mayor, and also oversaw the construction of the new URMC-St. James Hospital.

Hogan says of his political career "I've always tried to be an optimist and preach about the importance of staying positive and not negative." At every opportunity he speaks of the importance of civic involvement as the key to a positive quality of life.

KRISTOPH KOCAN- Hornell Area Family YMCA CEO

REBECCA WEAVER-HAMM- Hornell Area Family YMCA Director of Music, Arts and Association Advancement

Interviewed 2/22/24

Both YMCA administrators agree that there are many positives in nonprofit service in the Hornell area, citing evident support for schools, businesses, and athletic teams. Issues of concern are scarce middle- and upper-class housing in the city proper, along with those facing much of the U.S. today such as daycare availability and affordability and close-by mental health services. Social support for families and seniors aging in place and for caregivers are key considerations moving forward for the Y and other nonprofit and social service agencies.

Both Rebecca and Kristoph cite the influence of the faith-based community on the Hornell area. They join with the Y for fundraisers, benefits, idea collaboration, and hosting musical programs for the YMCA music programs. The Y provides music and physical education classes for the local private elementary school, St. Anns Academy.

When discussing work and life in the Hornell area with potential staff and potential members, they emphasize the following: friendliness, great state parks (Letchworth, Stony Brook), natural beauty, and trails. International Alstom hires and other newcomers remark that the community is welcoming and a draw for families desiring their children to grow up in a diverse community.

JOHN BUCKLEY, City of Hornell mayor

Interviewed 3/5/2024

Mayor John Buckley began his second term of office on January 1, 2022. Prior to holding the office of Mayor, John served as City Alderman for 8 years, during which 4 of those years he was also the Deputy Mayor. Mayor Buckley first got involved in Hornell government while serving on the City of Hornell Zoning Board of Appeals.

Mr. Buckley noted that one of the strengths of the city is the Hornell faith community and its diversity. Hornell is home to a variety of church denominations, representing a wide range of religious beliefs. Many churches are located in the city center and offer Sabbath services for members and visitors alike. These congregations include Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Jewish and Episcopal denominations.

He emphasized that churches provide spiritual guidance and support to their members as well as the community at large. They offer programs such as youth groups, Bible studies, worship services and other events such as holiday celebrations and the annual Christmas Cantata which bring people together to share their faith and build relationships with one another.

While most of Hornell consists of the working- and middle class, there is also an element of poverty in the area. Many area businesses are actively looking for part- and full-time workers. Alstom, Inc. has many skilled trade workers that enjoy good paying jobs.

Buckley made attracting business, industry and revitalizing the housing stock as priorities as mayor.

SUSAN HOOKER, Executive Director of Hornell Area Concern for Youth

Susan Hooker is Executive Director of Hornell Area Concern for Youth, a position she has held for forty years. She is a life-long resident of the Hornell area and is very knowledgeable about social and human services agencies and resources available to our youth and families. Hornell Area Concern for Youth offers supervised youth recreation programs as well as prevention and intervention programs, including drug abuse counseling, aimed at helping these individuals identify and make better choices for their activities and lives.

Susan has seen first-hand the needs of our area and has some ideas about how our church could better support local individuals and families. When asked how churches contribute to the well-being and sense of community for Hornell and Steuben County, Susan responded that churches offer a belief in the moral order for our community, direction and guidance for those making decisions that affect our community. They are integral collaborators for those projects that are community wide. They offer a haven for many and a source of comfort and leadership.

Susan feels our congregation can reach out to assist in ways such as opening our space for community use and offering classes on a host of topics. She also believes there are parents with children who want to find a way to add religion into family life, and older adults who are homebound or would like to reconnect with a group. There are some activities she thinks our church could participate in to better connect with our residents and encourage community involvement. She lauded the Juneteenth celebration, and the community dinners in which we participate. She feels activities for individuals or families that are substance free, including picnics where modeling can take place and potential friendships result are needed.

Offering use of our space to sponsor community events to bring people in, possibly in collaboration with other agencies, would be useful. Checking in to determine the needs of our area non-profits to see what type of help we can provide is another way she feels we can better integrate with and meet the needs of our neighbors.

When asked what challenges she thinks the people in our community may face when it comes to participating in church activities, Susan said that some people may not feel comfortable coming to our space. She suggests we invite and welcome newcomers. Depending upon the event, assisting with or offering childcare and/or transportation if needed.

DENISE SMITH, Howard Hanna Realty

Interviewed March 8, 2024

Denise feels the main strength of Hornell is that it is a small community but still offers nice amenities. One of the main concerns and challenges as a real estate agent in Hornell is that Hornell doesn't offer a lot of newly built homes. It has a lot of charming old homes with lots of character, and those two are totally different styles. People coming from a more suburban background are often challenged by the lack of suburban style living and newer homes. Most newcomers to the area come for existing employment offers or are seeking employment opportunities. They are a mix of professionals, (Alstom/medical/educational/other) and or production/retail workers.) They are a mix of married/dual income, single, and families.

What is important to newcomers to the Hornell area? I think what is important to them is economic opportunities, the quality of the schools and local educational opportunities, and recreation. Access to health care services also ranks high. Fewer potential clients are interested in the faith community and culture of the area. Most of these newcomers tend to purchase their homes in the city center. Those seeking new housing who currently are Canisteo valley residents tend to be first time homebuyers and looking for improved housing. A few are looking to downsize their household or change to a more amenable living arrangement as they are getting older. Most of my clients are able to secure financing without a problem. The housing inventory in Hornell tends to be older homes, many more than a century old. For those looking to rent there is not enough availability of rental properties in the area. They do vary widely in cost and you get what you pay for. Most people looking for rentals are young people without credit and newcomers who aren't sure they want to buy yet.

In the community I see the educational opportunities as improving. The Hornell City School district is a great district with good leadership. I feel the economic situation in the area is improving, businesses seem to be surviving, despite the poor national/world economy. For healthcare availability we have the newest hospital in New York State and we have brought in a lot of new staff. People seem happy with the local healthcare, and the ability to quickly get to Rochester for more complicated issues.

In general I try to paint a realistic view of our community to any potential newcomer. I explain there are lots of different opportunities, activities, and things to do in this community. You just have to find it, reach out and get involved. Hornell is a very welcoming and warm community to live in.

Notes for 14843 zip code area:

Current home average sale price is \$120,653.

There are 51 properties listed for sale.

According to the 2020 census, the population of the City of Hornell was 8,300.

The average household income was \$46,735.

Resident ages: 0 -19 23% 20 -34 21% 35 -59 29% 60+ 27%

VALORIE WHITEHILL, Hornell Partners for Growth

Hornell Partners for Growth (HPG) is a civic organization encompassing over 300 local businesses and not-for-profits in the Greater Hornell Area. HPG acts as an organizer, promoter and clearing house for local community events. They provide free advertising on the HPG Facebook page through co-hosting events and provide space on their website and the Discover Hornell App. They also offer a Marketplace site for postings and networking.

Valorie Whitehill, the current Executive Director, has been with HPG for about 5.5 years. She has close ties with the community and a strong working relationship with the church.

HPG, along with the CanisteoValley Community Outreach Committee (CCOC), represent valuable and often underutilized, community resources to be explored and exploited by the church. Strong community presence is vital to our outreach and growth.