



Vision

Common Ground exists to feed those who are hungry in body, mind, and soul: hungry for bread, hungry for meaning, hungry for beauty, truth and purpose. Our worship centers around the growing, preparing, cooking, and sharing of a sacred meal. As we break bread together, so shall we sing, pray, listen, and learn together. As we till the ground with one another, so shall we learn how to feed and serve one another. Our hope is to nurture a spirit of love, respect, and gratitude for the earth, our neighbors, and the God whose good gifts we freely share.

Mission

Common Ground is a family-style, farm-to-table dinner church where we cook and eat dinner together from food we've grown or sourced locally. Over and around dinner we sing, play, share, pray, hear the Word, and take the time to respond.

But what really makes Common Ground unique is our spirit of hospitality. At Common Ground all are welcome and celebrated for the gifts of diversity and perspective they bring to us as a community.

At Common Ground everyone will be invited to take a role, whether it be setting the table for dinner, offering a response following the sermon, sharing a prayer for a loved one, or washing the dishes as part of our worship.



Pastor Sarah preaching about faith, patience, and the art of letting go

And at Common Ground we've designed the whole experience to be inclusive of all types of families, including those with children (which is another way of saying that our church isn't boring).

We don't want to send our kids away at Common Ground to do something they'd find more interesting. We want to cultivate a style of worship that is engaging for most everyone.

From the smell of fresh bread when you walk through the door, to the glow of the candles at table, to the warm tones and rhythms of the music: everything is meant to delight the senses and encourage the full participation of all who are present from the youngest child to a first-time visitor.

At the beginning of our gatherings the children have time to play and connect while the rest of us put the finishing touches on the meal.

Our liturgy is based in the ancient liturgical practice of call and response so anyone can participate whether or not they can read words or music.



Setting the tables at our very first meal



Our very own Trevor "The Games Man" specializes in cooperative play for people of all ages



Our first soup made with tomatoes and onions from Atlas Farms in Greenfield, MA

The tables are covered in paper so you can color, doodle, or take notes during the sermon.

The meal is made from locally sourced vegetables we've all helped to grow and harvest.

And you can even make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich out of the communion bread for your dinner and no one will mind.



Cheryl and Elliott's homemade communion bread.

Actually we'd encourage it because we believe that communion is a sign that in God's kingdom all are welcome, everyone has a place at the table, and no one goes home hungry.

Speaking of going home, at Common Ground leaving church doesn't have to mean leaving worship. We worship wherever we go because we believe worship is service and service is worship.

So as a church we split up into small groups and head out into the fields during the week so we can all get back in touch with where our food comes from and work together to make sure that food gets to people who need it.

There's nothing like watching kids pass out fresh carrots they've grown themselves to people at the local survival center or watching members share soup from beets they learned to can with the rest of their church family.



Genevieve showing off her blueberries

Through the ministry of Common Ground we are striving to help people of all ages and circumstance integrate the fullness of their lives and their spirituality with love for God, love for the earth, and love for one another.



George enjoying local milk at Barstow's Dairy farm.

Why Common Ground Would Work Here

One might wonder about the need for one more U.C.C. ministry here in Massachusetts given that there is already a tall steepled Congregational Church on every town green. But that iconic image says a lot more about our past than our present.



The reality for us here in the Northeast is that fewer than 30% of the population is actively involved in church anymore, and even here in Massachusetts, where you'd think the U.C.C. would be strongest,

fewer than 3% of the people in our area identify as Congregationalist.

Although we have vital and growing churches locally who are meeting the needs of a small part of our population, it is clear that there is a huge segment we are not reaching because they do not feel compelled by what we are doing on Sunday morning.

Here are some of the unique ways Common Ground will be compelling and life giving for people in the Pioneer Valley:

- Getting people out to work together on local farms and then celebrating that work by cooking the food we have harvested together, would unite us around one of our area's primary common values - the earth.



Blueberry picking with family

- It would bring families together, not just for worship and a common meal, but together outside to play in the dirt and grow things.
- Participation in our ministry would educate people about where their food comes from and help the environment by encouraging people to love the earth, eat locally, and support our area farms.
- Common Ground will foster a sense of physical and spiritual wellbeing and strengthen our sense of meaning, purpose and altruism as people work together to get the food we have grown to those who need it most.



-Common Ground will help people form not just a practical or political, connection to the earth, but a deeply spiritual one.

- Our liturgy is nourished, literally, by how we share the Eucharist as an actual meal that we eat and drink together and with Jesus. The dinner thus becomes worship and is



integrated with meaningful symbolic practices from ancient times. This brings back some of the mystery and beauty that many are seeking in worship but don't always find in the Congregationalist tradition.



- The life and worship of our community is designed to be family friendly, to give busy families a safe place to come, eat, pray, serve, and play together.



-our worship will not be on Sunday morning which will allow a whole segment of the population to worship who might want to go to church but can't make it on Sunday mornings due to other commitments.

- We would be Open and Affirming from day one, welcoming and celebrating all who come not in spite of their differences of age, opinion, background, or orientation, but because of the gifts of diversity and perspective they will bring to our community.



- We would celebrate and cultivate the priesthood of all believers.

