



LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE
State Street UCC Portland, Maine
Music Director

Maine Conference United Church of Christ

March 22, 2024

Introduction to State Street UCC



“God is able to provide you with every blessing, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:8)

State Street United Church of Christ (SSC) is an urban church, located on the peninsula of Portland, Maine. When asked why we walked through those doors the first time, most will say the sheer grandeur of this space pulled us in. Yet when asked why we have stayed, many of us will tell you the same thing: We feel loved and welcomed always by this church, and we feel a common sense of yearning for justice and a sense of awe at God’s grace.

After a few visits to State Street, the history and beauty of this building is simply a bonus. You’ll come to realize that even though our Chapel Hall looks like the great dining hall at Hogwarts, the true magic rests in the people who gather here. If you sit long enough in Chapel Hall, you will hear the clanging of place settings and seats being arranged at the Maundy Thursday supper or other potlucks; the kitchen conversations as the coffee hour crew cleans up; children zooming in and out between the legs of silver-haired adults (the children fueled by Oreos and adults fueled by “State Streeter” coffee-and-hot-cocoa beverages).

You may hear singing echoing from the sanctuary as the choir rehearses or the resonance of the great pipe organ resounding through the building. Who knows...you might even hear the centuries-past movers and shakers who founded this church — some of the families for whom Portland’s roadways and parks are named. If you sit here and listen to the silence long enough, you can understand the legacy of faith in this place. You can savor the beloved community in fellowship, spending time strengthening their relationships with each other and their God. You can sense the love and devotion to each other, and the world, this congregation shares. You will know that we strive to share and show God’s grace in Portland and beyond.

What we value about living in our area:

Portland is a small, progressive city with an idyllic location on Casco Bay, just about 2 hours north of Boston. Foodies love its numerous eclectic restaurants and craft brewpubs. Outdoor enthusiasts love its proximity to sea, forest, and mountains. It is home to the Sea Dogs Minor League baseball team, Maine Mariners hockey team, the Portland Symphony Orchestra, and the Portland Museum of Art. Our city is shaped by the sea and cradled by the wilderness.

A Q&A FOR STATE STREET CHURCH



“What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.” (1 Corinthians 14:26)

What is the current size of your membership?

As of the 2023 Annual Report, State Street Church’s membership tally is 155. Our church is growing and we see new faces amongst the worshippers every Sunday. One exciting element of this growth is the diversity in ages of the people visiting SSC. The Kid’s Sermon portion of church is becoming pretty lively – and we love it that way!

Who currently serves on the church staff?

Pastor – Rev. Bryan S. Breault

Office Administrator – Celia Wilson

We currently have a small staff and look forward to adding a Music Director/Organist to the roster. State Street Church’s previous Minister of Music, Dr. David Maxwell, served the church for 43 years. David passed away in the summer of 2023, and served SSC until shortly before his passing. David conducted the choir, was a prolific composer, and loved SSC’s Roosevelt organ. His classical musicianship and improvisational abilities were greatly admired, as well as his ability to jam on some jazzy spirituals and really get the Steinway rocking.

In addition to the church staff, we are blessed with several members of the congregation who share their time and talents on a regular basis. It is important to SSC that congregants are encouraged to share their gifts – and that extends to the music program as well. Our current leaders of the music ministries provide their considerable talents as we search for a new Music Director. Our new director will also benefit from church members who play the cello, specialize in folk music, and are classically-trained vocalists. These individuals are happy to volunteer their talents on a regular basis. In a recent congregational survey, respondents requested that the Music Director continue to engage members of the congregation in providing their musical abilities and a variety of instruments to our worship music.

What joys, frustrations, key events, or celebrations illustrate what it's like to be a part of this church?

Our congregational persona is one of love and caring – both for each other and for the community at large. Identifying as an Open and Affirming church, it is a joy to know that the work we do brings a safe space and acceptance to those around us. Frustrations arise when we hear Christians characterized as hateful or exclusionary people. Kindness and inclusion are guiding principles for our congregation, and the UCC faith as a whole.

A key event in our church provides both hope and frustration. SSC has embarked on a journey to create a shelter space for unhoused families. As it is with most construction projects, we have encountered delays which have limited our ability to fulfill our mission to serve more members of the Portland community who need a safe place to sleep at night.

Celebrations almost always involve worship, conversations, and a potluck. Whether we are celebrating a somber occasion like Maundy Thursday, or gathering for our Annual Meeting, we share food and conversation as a community beforehand.

In what ways is the music program of the church affected by the community? In what ways does the program involve the community?

SSC looks to the greater community to provide inspiration for our music. Music groups are often formed to engage parishioners and friends. Not long ago, our bluegrass band “No Strings Attached” was a favorite provider of music to our services. We also enjoyed a short-lived African choir that brought new rhythms and tonality to our congregation. The photo at the beginning of this section shows a visiting ukulele band. We would love to see more of that type of offering in the future.

The Portland area music scene is vibrant. If your passion is for a classical style of music, there are multiple ensembles that focus on chamber music, early music, and (of course) Bach. Community choruses abound, including the highly regarded ChoralArt. Venues such as Blue and One Longfellow Square offer jazz and folk vibes in intimate settings. Finally, if your tastes lean more toward dancing and rocking out, you can see bands indoors at venues like the Cross Insurance Arena or the State Theater and enjoy outdoor concerts at Thompson’s Point in the summer.

As with many communities, the music program is affected by the busy-ness of our lives. It can be difficult to attract and retain choir members when they have so many competing priorities. We invite people who love to sing to join the choir, regardless of their abilities, or offer their talents as would bring them joy. Even with the inclusiveness, our choir, and overall music program, is smaller than we would like. On occasional Sundays the size of the choir may be as small as six or seven, and on special services (e.g. Christmas Eve and Easter) it may swell to sixteen or more.

What opportunities and challenges does your congregation offer to a Music Director, Organist, or Minister of Music?

Our new Music Director will serve a congregation that values music as essential to worship. There is

great respect for the musical offerings provided and parishioners actually sit quietly at the end of each service to enjoy the postlude. The Roosevelt organ, which is briefly described in the following section, will provide our organist with an instrument that carries rich history and an even richer tone.

Challenges and opportunities are intertwined, as we look to bring new types of music to our worship and inspire more members of our church community to become involved with the music ministries of State Street Church. Our hope for the future Music Director is that they will be able to help us to bring in more choir members and opportunities to grow our musical offerings in new ways.

THE INSTRUMENTS AND RESOURCES



“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn – shout for joy before the Lord, the king.” (98 Psalms 1:7)

State Street Church values its 38-rank Hilburn Roosevelt organ, placed in 1893 in the rear balcony with the console and quartet choir. In 1950, a local organ builder removed the rear console and installed one from Austin in a newly-enlarged chancel. The choir was also relocated to the front with an enclosed division of 11 Austin ranks added to accompany them. The Roosevelt is thought to have been more or less left in its original voicing. With the exception of releathering the major rear windchests, no further changes to the instrument have since been made. Specifications are available on request.

State Street’s pianos include 1 Steinway baby grand in the sanctuary, 1 Steinway baby grand in Chapel Hall, and an upright Chickering in the choir room. The music library houses a large selection of choral music.