BHC-MSS 0019
Guide to the Records of the First United Church of Christ, Bridgeport
By Meghan Rinn
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Descriptive Summary
Creator: First United Church of Christ, Bridgeport
Title: Records of First United Church of Christ, Bridgeport
Dates: 1900-2016 [bulk 1950s-2016]
Quantity: 3 manuscript boxes, 1 record carton, 6 oversize boxes
Abstract: Bridgeport has been the home to a large and proud Hungarian population for over a century. Focusing on the First United Church of Christ, Bridgeport, this collection documents both the church and the larger Hungarian community in Bridgeport up into the 21st century.
Collection Number: BHC-MSS 0019
Language: English, Hungarian
Repository: Bridgeport History Center

Biographical Information or Administrative History
There has been a strong Hungarian population in the city of Bridgeport, with extremely active community members who are connected to their religion. The very first church built to serve the Hungarian population was a Greek Catholic Church built in the 1860s, coming out of the Saint John's Lodge of the Foresters of America.

Originally called the First Reformed Church, the church was founded on November 24, 1894, although they were unable to open their own building until 1896 which stood on Pine Street. At that time, the pastor was Reverend Casper Brunner, and he was assisted by the reverends Gabriel Dokus and Alexander Kalassy. Brunner was a member of the German Reformed Church, and in the early years, a number of ministers were sent to help with the congregation.

In 1907, demand and population saw the church move buildings to 227 Pine Street. Around that time, at 1910 at the latest, Reverend Alexander Ludman was the primary minister there. Membership continued to thrive, and in 1937, Reverend Emil Nagy began to assist Reverend Ludman. Likewise at this time, English services were offered in addition to services in Hungarian.

Due to events in Hungary in 1956, there was an additional boom in membership. Not coincidentally, a new church building was constructed in 1959, seeing the congregation move to 717 Clinton Avenue. Reverend Nagy remained in charge at this time, and the church continued to

serve worshippers.

In 1964, the church's name was changed to the First United Church of Christ, Bridgeport. This was due to a merger of the Congregational Christian churches with the Evangelical and Reform Church, also called the German Reformed Church. Merging with the United Church of Christ ensured the group was a part of mainstream Protestantism in the United States of America.

Reverend Emil Nagy began to look towards retirement in 1978, and saw the addition of Reverend Antony Szilagyi in order to assist him until Nagy finally did retire in 1981. (He died in 1984.) The church continued to serve parishioners, and celebrated 100 years in 1994.

Due to changing trends in the 21st century, the First United Church of Christ, Bridgeport, began to downsize, moving to having a part-time minister in 2004. Reverend Susan Prefial filled that job starting in 2010. The declining membership saw the church close in December of 2016, 120 years after its first building being constructed in 1896 and after 122 years of being founded.

The church's anniversary booklets contain additional detailed activities of the church through the years.

Scope and Content Note
The contents of the First United Church of Christ, Bridgeport contain a robust mix of ledgers, anniversary booklets, photographs, and records relating to consistory meetings. These meetings are the governing body of the church, and are made up of the pastor, elected elders, other individuals, and a youth representative. They are responsible for seeing to day-to-day activities, volunteer work, and work associated with operating the congregation. In this collection, these records take the familiar form of meeting minutes, although it should be noted that the earliest records from the 1900s are in Hungarian rather than in English. Likewise, a number of early ledgers contain Hungarian.

It should be noted that the anniversary booklets are rich in regards to history of the congregation, containing detailed timelines and giving exact names of major individuals who were active in the church.

Arrangement Note
Material is arranged by genre and series have been assigned accordingly. When handling plaques, caution must be used due to rusty nails.

Photographs are unprocessed, as we are awaiting former Church members to come in and offer information regarding dates and identities.

Provenance
Donation of Jake Bajko, 2017. Accession number 2017.11; John Van Epps, 2024.19

Name and Subject Tracings

Corporate Names

United Church of Christ

Subject headings

Bridgeport, Conn.
Congregational churches
Congregational churches in the United States--History
Emigration & immigration--Hungarian

Administrative Information

Preferred citation

Records of the First United Church of Christ, Bridgeport, (BHC-MSS 0019), Bridgeport History Center.

Box and folder listing

Box 1
Series I, annual reports
1. Annual Reports, 1940-1944 (Hungarian)
2. Annual reports, 1955-1957
3. Annual reports, 1962-1963
4. Annual reports, 1964-1965
5. Annual reports, 1966-1987
6. Annual reports, 1968-1969
7. Annual reports, 1971-1972
8. Annual reports, 1973; 1975-1976

Box 2
Series II, consistory meetings
1. Consistory meeting minutes, 1984-1994
2. . Consistory meeting minutes, 1995-2002
3. . Consistory meeting minutes, 2003-2016

Box 3
1. Unknown document in Hungarian, 1900
2. Unknown document in Hungarian, 1935-1948
Series III, ledgers
3. Ledger, 1953-1958
4. Ledger, 1958-1963
5. Ledger, 1964-1975

Box 4
1. Ledger, 1974-1979

2. Ledger, 1975-1987
3. Ledger, 1986-1998
4. Ledger, 2000-2007
5. Ledger, 2007-2014

Box 5
Series IV, anniversary books and additional ephemera
1. 45th anniversary book, 1926
2. 55th anniversary book, 1949
3. 75th anniversary book, 1969
4. 90th anniversary book, 1984
5. 100th anniversary book, 1994
6. 120th anniversary book, 2014
7. Church directory, 1994
8. Church directory, 2016-2017
9. Hungarian Festival books, 1994; 2000
10. Church stationary, c. 2000s-2010s
11. News/clippings, undated.

Box 6
Series V, photographs
Contains 10 folders of photographs awaiting further identification

Box 7
Contains 9 oversized photographs awaiting further identification

Box 8
Series VI, plaques and other hardware
1. Plaque in appreciation of John Nagy
2. Plaque in memory of Alexander J. Vincze
3. Plaque in memory of Stephen Olah Sr.
4. Plaque in appreciation of First United Church from Bridgeport Tabernacle Braveheart Pathfinder Club
5. Plaque in appreciation of First United Church from Braveheart Pathfinders Club, November 30, 2014
6. Plaque in appreciation of Emil and Anne Nagy
7. Plaque in appreciation of Andrew Mako
8. Plaque in appreciation of Ethel Egry, organist and choir directory
9. Plaque in appreciation of John Sombati, chief elder, 1968-1978
10. Plaque in appreciation of Ethel Egry and her 50 years of service, February 12, 1989

Accrual, October 2024

Box 9
1. Ledgers, vols. 1-2, 1896-1965: birth, marriage, death entries

Box 10
2. Ledgers, vols. 3-4, 1896-1965: birth, marriage, death entries

Box 11
3. Ledger, 1971-2008: baptisms

Box 10
1. Ledger 1, July 1987-January 1992: financial, disbursements
2. Ledger 2, November 1993-January 1997: financial, disbursements

Box 11
Binder 1: Consistory Notes: 1969-1972
Binder 2: Consistory Notes: 1973-1983