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## The 1848 Monterey Church building is for sale, but the congregation hopes it will remain a community hub

By Jane Kaufman, The Berkshire Eagle  
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The Monterey Church was built in 1848, initially serving as a meeting house. The building is on the market for \$295,000, but church members hope to be able to rent the sanctuary from its new owner.

MONTEREY — Built in 1848, the Monterey Church sits at the corner of Main and Tyringham roads — right in the center of the community.

That's exactly what parish leaders envision for the future use of the church — to be central to the community — even though the building itself is for sale.



The tiny congregation at Tyringham Union Church is hoping to raise \$500,000 to finish renovations at its historic building

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"With no small measure of sorrow," members of the church decided in December that they could no longer retain stewardship of the building, according to the [Monterey News](#).

But the Rev. [Elizabeth Goodman](#), pastor of the church, said she hopes the building will remain in community use under a new owner, and that the congregation might be able to rent the home it has owned and maintained for 176 years.

"We decided it's the neighborly thing to do to find somebody who is up to that task," she told The Eagle, "recognizing that we aren't and probably won't be [able to] in the near future anyway."



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It's priced at \$295,000. The off-market listing is with Claudia Crane and Rachel Louchen at Berkshire Property Agents.

There has already been interest in the building as well as showings. Potential buyers thus far understand its community use and are not interested in converting the building for alternative uses, Louchen said.

A seven-member steering committee has taken up the charge of keeping the church in community use, touting its kitchen, meeting spaces and the fact that the fellowship hall in the basement is already used by a coffee club, a supper club and the local food pantry.

The sanctuary has also has been used for concerts and music lessons.





The Rev. Elizabeth Goodman said the pipe organ is among the many things she loves in Monterey Church, where she is pastor. The church is for sale for \$295,000.

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As the town's centerpiece, the classic New England meeting house has granite steps leading up to double doors. Rising directly above is the steeple. Indoors, there is a simple sanctuary with wood floors and windows that rise to the second floor, a slightly raised altar, a large cross, a pipe organ and a grand piano. Two side staircases lead up to a second-floor balcony enclosed by glass windows.

The church today has 11 members with a parish council of four, although Sunday services tend to draw 15 to 20 people, with additional worshipers generally coming from Gould Farm.

Goodman said there was no single factor that led the church to decide to sell the building.

“Fewer people join churches,” she said. “That just makes it so maintaining those churches is a bigger task for fewer people.”





The Monterey Church at the corner of Tyringham and Main roads is for sale. It was built as a meeting house in 1848.  
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Looking back, the congregation's history actually predates the building in the center of town by 98 years.

In 1750, the Rev. Adonijah Bidwell became the first pastor of Township No. 1, encompassing both what are now both Tyringham and Monterey.



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Bidwell held services at a meeting house near his home, now the Bidwell House Museum. He is believed to have held gatherings beside the large hearths within his home. Goodman said he was known for his hospitality.

In a sort of 21st century parallel, Goodman serves two towns as well, as she is also pastor of Church on the Hill in Lenox.

She said she delivers the same sermon at the 9:30 service in Monterey as she does at the 11 a.m. service in Lenox.

Sheela Clary grew up in Monterey, although not in the Monterey Church.

She met Goodman when the two were both teachers at Berkshire Country Day School in Lenox. She had been looking for a new faith community and followed Goodman to the Monterey Church.

Now a member of the church and its parish council, she lives in West Stockbridge.

Clary was married there and her three children were baptized there.

While the congregation was already small, the COVID-19 pandemic took a heavy toll, she said.



The Bible and hymnals sit on a pew at Monterey Church. The Rev. Elizabeth Goodman said she hopes the congregation will be able to use the building even if it is sold.

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“Our community had a hard time recovering,” she said. “The serious conversations started in probably 2021 and just got progressively more realistic — looking around and just counting the numbers.”

She said no one on the parish council today lives in Monterey.

“In the past, there would have been folks coming down the road to check on the place on a daily basis, because this was their community church, and that kind of idea has died out,” Clary said. “And the folks who would have done that are now elderly and are just not in a position to be stewards of a really old, demanding structure.”

Clary has made her peace with the decision to sell the building and is confident it will not become condominiums. She hopes it won’t become someone’s private art storage space.

“The sale of the church isn’t equivalent to the death of the congregation,” she

said.



The sanctuary at Monterey Church is bathed in light pouring through its numerous large windows.

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Goodman has a deeply held fondness for the building.

"I love the acoustics of it," she said. "I love the plain beauty and the clear windows. I love the ways in which people have used wood, the color, the colors and grains of wood to accent the otherwise, kind of whiteness of it. I think the cross is very beautiful.

"And the pulpit is very beautiful. And the curves of the pew arms are lovely," she said. "And I love the way that the pews themselves kind of curve in a little bit, so there's there's a gathering feeling in the building. It's not simply pews on the square."

She enjoys standing in the pulpit and recounted how she has stopped services to notice fire vehicles going to emergencies.

"It's a beautiful gathering place," she said. "It has been a huge blessing in my life."

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