Highlights from the FCCOG

Annual Christmas Tree and Wreath Sale

(source: Annual Reports, Financial Statements, Outreach Committee Reports, *Honor the Past)*



The Christmas Tree and Wreath Sale began in 1966 under the guidance of the Couples Club (est.1961). The official sale may have grown out of the “time honored tradition” of purchasing trees and wreaths for the cemetery, Binney Park, the Meetinghouse and Nathaniel Witherell. There is little information on quantities of trees sold or profits.

The able help of the Sea Scouts and the Explorer Scouts is mentioned from the beginning until around 1990. During the years that the Scouts volunteered the proceeds of the sale were shared with them. The Couples Club directed the remaining funds to church interests such as exchange student support and funding Coffee Hour.

In 1974 the Couples Club became known as The Congregators and the tree sale continued under their jurisdiction. Proceeds from the sale continued to fund Coffee Hour, the International Christian Youth Exchange, the Young Peoples Fellowship and began to pay for and promote “activities that might not otherwise be funded.” Projects included retreats, speakers, lighting projects, the Daniels Center kitchen, tree care and radio broadcasts.

“Congregators were unhappy to be terminated in 1989, which was mainly because the Board of Trustees disagreed with how they chose to spend their money from the annual Christmas tree sale. Consequently, the annual tree sale proceeds went back into the church budget with a Trustee heading the sale, and the proceeds going to various charities. By 1995, the tree sales were run by the Christian Outreach Committee.” (*Honor the Past*)

Interestingly, it appears that the largest expenditures by The Congregators in 1987 and 1988, prior to termination in 1989, were for bell tower repairs and the sound system. Small amounts were spent on dances, apples and flowers.

From 1990 there is no reporting on the tree sale details, except for dollar amounts in the financials, until 1999. It is unclear what chairperson, or trustee oversaw the sale or

specifically how the funds were used. In 1999, Bill Bausch submits his first report and becomes the tree sale chair. Regular reports resume. At the time, Mary Bausch was chair of the Christian Outreach Committee.

In 1994, financials show that the tree sale proceeds were assigned directly to the Christian Outreach Committee for the first time. The Christian Outreach Committee at that time had a broad range of interests and funds were given locally and internationally. The tree sale seems to have been a separate entity but continued to donate its profits to Outreach until 2006 when the two committees were combined under Chris Hartwell as chair. From 2006 the tree sale has been a subcommittee of Outreach. The Outreach chair also chaired the tree sale until 2024 when a tree sale subcommittee was established with 3 co-chairs who did not also fully chair Outreach.

Historically, tree quantities were not reported with regularity. However, 450 trees were sold in 1981. 2004 and 2005 seem to be the high years with 612 trees sold. Stands and decorated wreaths were added in 2012.

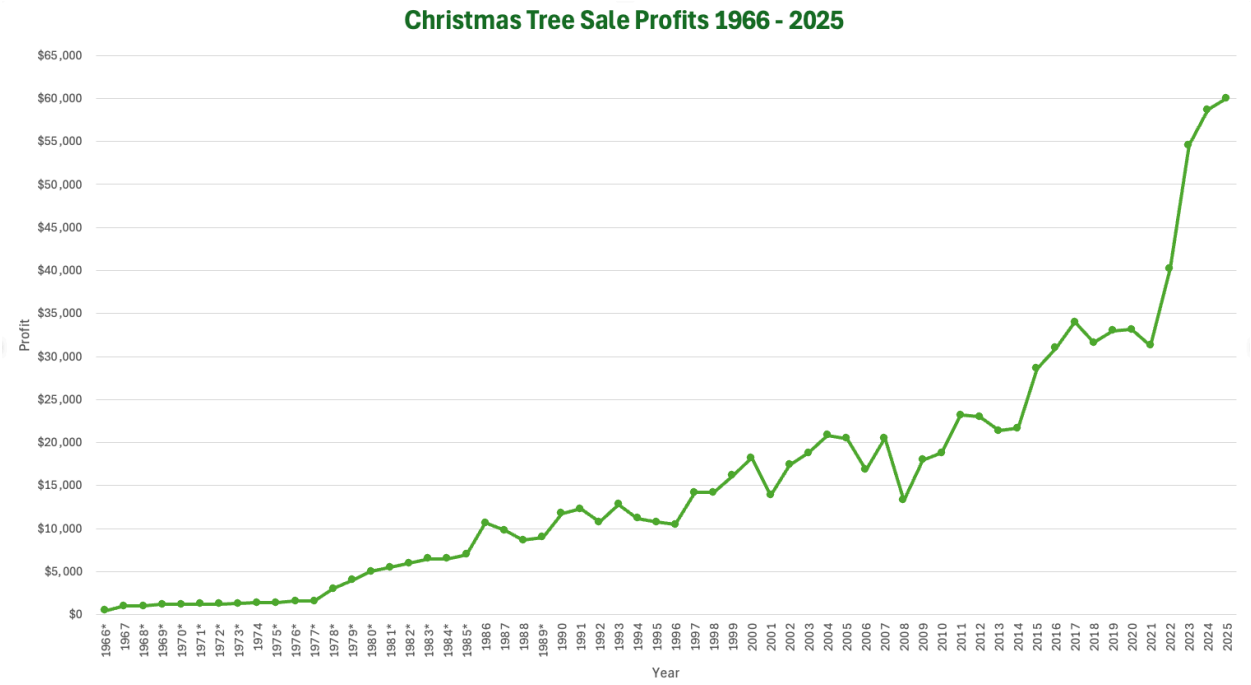
Concerning volunteers, it appears that one or two dedicated chairs have guided the sale since 1967. There is no mention of a tree sale committee ever. There are recorded comments since the 1970's regarding the need for fresh volunteers and an expanded volunteer base. Charlie Fish and Bruce Benedict were early organizers of the sale and seem to have been in charge from 1967 until at least 1981 when they are last mentioned by name. The Sea Scouts and the Explorer Scouts appear to have volunteered until about 1990. When volunteers are mentioned, the numbers range from 60 -- 80 most often, with higher numbers reported from 2016- 2019 at 110 – 150. 2020 and the pandemic brought lower volunteer numbers – 70-80 volunteers have helped from 2020-2025.

As mentioned earlier, profits from the sale supported the needs and interests of the church in the early days. In addition to funding Coffee Hour, many physical additions and maintenance projects were supported. When profits were distributed by the Christian Outreach Committee beginning in 1994, they were added into the Outreach budget and disbursed outside the church according to the goals of that committee. Funds were no longer used for church projects or needs. In 2013 it appears that tree sale profits were not added into the Outreach budget and began to be allocated separately and to local agencies. This was the first year that the recipients were announced as beneficiaries before the sale. 2015 brought a slight deviation from all local disbursements as UNICEF was included. In 2017 gifts were made to Church projects - mission trip scholarship and the Refugee Task Force. Only since 2018 have recipients been all outside local agencies.

Since 1966, the Christmas Tree and Wreath Sale has raised an estimated **$943,354** for distribution to local, national and international non-profits and funded important projects

at First Church. Despite rising costs due to increased numbers of paid workers, profits over the last ten years have increased sharply due to more market aware pricing, a larger inventory of Fraser trees and generous donations from shoppers. The customer experience and, perhaps customer retention, has been aided by expanded electronic payment systems and logistical improvements such as driveway tree loading.

See graph below.



See the appendix for excerpts from annual reports, committee reports and financial statements.