



2026-2027

Elder Candidates



IGNITING A
PASSION FOR
JESUS IN
CONNECTICUT,
NEW ENGLAND
AND AROUND
THE WORLD.



Our members will vote to affirm Tim Blankenship, Bob Merchant, Scott Rupff and Oraine Stewart at the June 7 Annual Meeting. They will join the existing Elder Board for a total of 14 members.



Tim and Jessica Blankenship

From Southington

Born and raised in Connecticut, Tim grew up at Walnut Hill and has been attending the church for nearly 40 years. He came to know the Lord as a child and is a financial advisor with Ameriprise Financial.

Tim and his wife Jessica have two children and participate in many ministries at Walnut Hill, including youth, children, the Waterbury planning and care teams, greeting, and hosting and leading the Southington Community Group. Outside of Walnut Hill, they volunteer at Acts 4 Ministry, which helps provide families within the Greater Waterbury area with beds, furniture and other basic necessities. "There's nothing like the look on a child's face as they climb onto their very first bed."

Returning to the Elder Board for a second term, Tim looks forward to supporting Pastor Clarence and his wife Diana as they lead the Waterbury Campus. For Tim, Paul's proclamation in 2 Corinthians 5:20 that "we are Christ's ambassadors" is a powerful one. "We are tasked not only with representing Christ but also going out and spreading the message of Christ to the world. I am passionate about seeing other people come to know and surrender their lives to Jesus. How amazing it will be to enter the gates of Heaven and be greeted by a host of people who are there because of how the Holy Spirit used you."

When not serving, Tim loves doing anything outdoors with his family. "God has given us a lot of amazing things to see and do. I want to experience as many of them as possible while I'm here."



Bob and Deana Merchant

From Sandy Hook

Bob is grateful for the many believers who have invested in his faith journey but credits his dad as the biggest influence on him becoming a Christ-follower. He and Deana started attending Walnut Hill in 1997 and surrendered their lives to Jesus soon after. Bob is excited about serving on the Elder Board as a new opportunity to serve his church and grow in his relationship with the Lord.

Bob is an electrical engineering technician for PerkinElmer Corporation in Shelton, CT. Over the years, he has served on the media team and led Community Groups. He is currently on the Waterbury leadership and security teams. Bob has accepted a board position with Children's Bible Fellowship where he also volunteers with their special needs program. At Walnut Hill, Deana serves on the drama, youth, mentoring and Food Pantry teams. She is also the Director of YoungLives Danbury, a Church in Action partner and a HopeLine volunteer.

The one verse that Bob would use to describe his walk with the Lord is John 3:30, "He must become greater: I must become less." As a servant, Bob feels he has much to learn to be more like Jesus every day. "I have no choice but to be humbled by Christ's grace and mercy and to submit to His will for my life."

In his free time, Bob enjoys canoeing, biking, hunting and fixing things. He and Deana are also excited about their new role as grandparents.



Scott and Jennifer Rupff

From Southbury

Scott's mother led him to Christ at age 5, and he has felt the Lord's companionship through life ever since. Humbled by the Lord's compassion for sinners and persistent love, Scott seeks to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. "I'm not the man of God I aspire to be, but my relationship with Him continues to deepen, and I remain hopeful that God will mold me more into the likeness of Christ. In the meantime, I place my trust in the One who loves me despite my stumblings and bumbings, and who is my closest friend in life."

As a former chairman and member of the Elder Board, Scott looks forward to returning and being used by God to further His Kingdom. "Eldership offers the opportunity for greater spiritual growth and accountability. It also challenges one's thinking on weighty spiritual matters, stretches one's comfort zone in Christ, and affords one the opportunity to minister to the lost, hurting and brokenhearted."

Scott was born and raised in Long Island and resides in Southbury with his wife Jennifer. The Rupffs, who have four sons, started attending Walnut Hill in 1998. Scott, who is President for Iroquois Pipeline Operating Company, serves in Walnut Hill's Special Needs Ministry, participates in two different Crews and has served on numerous pastoral search committees. Previously, he served in the Children's Ministry and played the trumpet in the orchestra. Scott enjoys spending time with his family, golfing and working outdoors. Jennifer serves in the Special Needs and Greeting Ministries, is passionate about mentoring youth and adults in pursuit of an abiding relationship with Christ, and has served in the Alpha Ministry.



Oraine and Rebecca Stewart

From Newtown

As a worship leader at the Bethel Campus, Oraine is a familiar face and voice on Sunday mornings. Born and raised in Montego Bay, Jamaica, he enjoys singing, writing and producing music, playing soccer, and eating Jamaican food.

Oraine grew up going to church and learning about God, but he didn't have a real personal relationship with Jesus. As a young adult at a local church in the Bronx, the pastor did an altar call saying that there was someone who was not sure whether they were saved. "I knew that person was me and I truly surrendered my life to Christ that day." Since then, God has helped Oraine through tremendous trials in his life. "God has helped me through sickness, financial deficits and everyday challenges. Being a Christ-follower has helped me be a great father to my children and a good husband."

He and his wife Rebecca reside in Newtown with their two children and have been attending Walnut Hill since 2021. Oraine earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and is a business manager for Curry INEOS Grenadier. Previously, he has volunteered with the Food Pantry and the Spoken Word Ministry at Walnut Hill. Rebecca serves on our Church in Action Committee and Children's Ministry. She is also on the Parents' Fellowship Committee at Christian Life Academy.

Oraine looks forward to growing in his relationship with Jesus by serving alongside other Elders and using his gifts to honor God and bless others.

Elders are elected by the congregation and given authority to:

Oversee
the church

Provide
spiritual leadership
and oversight

**Scripturally
shepherd** the
care of the church

Oversee
the teaching of
the Word of God

Guard the
purity of the
doctrine and the
life of the church

Discipline
church members
in accordance with
the Word of God

Counsel
those in need

Comfort
the sick

Pray

In all congregational matters, the congregation is to be accountable to the care and leadership of the Board of Elders as the Elders themselves are accountable to Christ.



CENTRAL OFFICE

156 Walnut Hill Road, Bethel, CT 06801 | 203-796-7373 | walnuthillcc.org