

2020 Annual Report



First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

386th Annual Meeting

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2020 Annual Report
First Church in Cambridge, Congregational

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Report of the Senior Minister

While “unprecedented” may be the official “word of the year” for 2020, there’s another that comes to mind as I reflect on this past year at First Church. Gratitude. Through all the political turmoil, through all the Covid-related anxiety, grief, anger and fear, through all our reckoning with racial inequality and white supremacy, through all the “usual” trials a year may bring, I have been daily and deeply grateful. Through it all, I have been grateful to God for ‘making a way out of no way!’ Through it all, I have been grateful to our beloved First Church in Cambridge community and staff for seeing it through together. Pre-pandemic and since, we have continued to be guided by our threefold mission statement. We are a community of faith that is *“grounded in God our hope and healing, growing in community with Jesus our center, acting in love made bold by the Spirit.”*

Last January and February, we began the year with rich programming and two especially memorable, in-person(!) worship services, one powerfully led on MLK Sunday by members of our late 2019 racial justice pilgrimage to DC and another that was led beautifully and entirely by our Board of Deacons. Our still nascent, weekly Praying the Psalms group was settling into a rhythm of early morning meetings in the Library. Packed into Margaret Jewett Hall for a delicious meal and our Annual Meeting in late January, we conducted our “business as usual” and received a robust report of our Staff Model Working Group. Guided by the caring wisdom of Gaylen Morgan, and in consultation with Larry Peers and Deborah Jackson, the group detailed a multi-year, benchmarked plan which includes more support for our current staff, ongoing work with Pastoral Associates, and a commitment to calling a senior-level minister of color. Early in the year, we just starting to test and tweak our new sanctuary audio and live-stream camera. We had no idea how necessary that technology would soon become nor what an enormous gift it would be.

On the first of Sunday of March, I recall former CDC exec Ed Baker pulling me aside after church and telling me to give him call if I wanted to talk about the news reports of a virus spreading and where it might lead. In the following days and weeks, Ed humbly offered just the right questions and guidance that helped us to frame our early decisions to close our building and to lead other congregations to do the same. After several conference calls with wise and wonderful leaders like our outgoing Moderator Mary Robinson, Vice-Moderator Julie Pridham, Deacon Co-Chairs Beth Spaulding and Moana Bentin, and with support of the Executive Council, we announced our building closure on March 12 just a day after the NBA’s groundbreaking shutdown. With thanks to Director of Operations Kirsten Manville and Facilities Manager Kris McQuage Loukas, we quickly developed a robust Covid response for our building and its many users and a “work-in-progress” 4 phase re-opening plan.

After a crash course in the wondrous ways of Zoom, we had, by March 16th and with dizzying efficiency, shifted our services online, along with our small group offerings, committee meetings and even our well-attended *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* Lenten series. *Making a Way Out of No Way* became an almost prescient theme for the remainder of Lent and well beyond! By God’s grace, and thanks to our extremely dedicated staff, the most important rhythms of our life together barely missed a beat. At Easter, we had almost 800 people tuning into a service that brought tears! Sarah’s always amazing “Time with Children” and online programming for kids kept our Zoom-weary families and the rest of us grateful for the time of connection and spiritual grounding! Our increased worship “attendance” and a burgeoning capacity for community building online, even across state lines and time zones, have been unexpected blessings of this time. In the early days, we offered daily check-in and prayer calls. The Deacons led two rounds of all-church calls.

Report of the Senior Minister (continued)

Our Pastoral Care Teams, thanks to PCT Coordinator Susie Neubauer and weekly team captains, continued their ministry of cards and meal drop-offs. Thanks to the public leadership expertise of Ed Baker, Bill Hsiao and Laurie Burt, we were treated to two very well-planned and well-attended after church sessions called “Perspectives Amidst a Pandemic.” We also began two ongoing small groups, one for frontline caregivers and the the offering hared reflections on Richard Rohr’s daily online devotionals. Thank you, Rev. Alex Stienert Evoy for co-leading and our weekly Bible study and so much more!

At some point in the midst of it all, I added to our list of annual overarching priorities: “Surviving and Thriving During Covid.” By the power of the Spirit which we have all come to rely on more this year, our community is in many ways thriving now more than ever! And even though we so miss that simple act of singing together, perhaps that most of all, Peter Sykes along with Issa Bibbins, Beth Spaulding, Bertrand Laurence, Laurie Williams, Emma Blanc and her brass band, Sarah Higginbotham and our occasional virtual choirs are continuing to share their amazing talents gifts with us to fill our hearts and stir our souls with music and song. Indeed, we have learned a ton along the way. When the year began, I felt like we were “behind the game” when it came to online ministry. Gratefully, this is no longer the case. Covid has forced us to make changes we already needed to make to keep our community accessible and relevant and an increasingly digital world.

All the while, staff and lay leaders have done the often heavy, behind-the-scenes lifting of maintaining and improving our institution. Thanks to Staff Policy Committee chair Julie Pridham, we have systematized our many job descriptions assuring that our salaries and benefits are equitable across our entire staff. Thanks to Building and Grounds Chair Nate Jones and Kirs McQuage Loukas, we blessed 86 new solar panels installed on our roof! Thanks to Treasure Jason Whaley, Endowment Chair Laurie Burt, Minister for Stewardship and Finance Karen McArthur, Kirsten Manville and our Finance Team, we navigated not only volatility of the markets but of cancelled rental contracts, bewildered building users and major losses of building income. Thanks to Karen McArthur especially for helping us to apply for and secure a forgivable Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loan which enabled us to pay all staff whether they were able to show up for work or not. Thanks as well to Jason Whaley for negotiating our new boiler loan and for ingeniously guiding us through a first ever split budgeting process (Budget A: in-person, Budget B: still remote, budget C: hybrid ½ and ½). And, all-hats-off to our Stewardship team, led by the ever charming, hilarious and innovative Steve Weller along with Karen McArthur and Pastoral Associate Jaz Buchanan. Though our stewardship goal tracked with the hybrid Budget C approach, Steve also put forward a zero-deficit “moonshot” goal. Having conducted our first ever digital appeal, with weekly emails, video testimony, rolling pledges, an all “Stew Crew” led service and a lovely gift puzzle to boot, we far exceeded our 2021 budget goal and made it almost ½ way to the moon! Thank you, First Church, for this amazing generosity!

Back to 2020, with PPP loans in hand by June, we were able to reinforce our program staff and not a moment too soon. We thanked Carlyle for his two years of profound and enriching ministry with us, as Ministerial Intern and then as ½ time Pastoral Associate and bid him farewell. At the same time, we were thrilled to learn that Lexi Boudreaux could stay with us as Pastoral Associate with increased hours to share her remarkable gifts for digital ministry! Lexi, we could not have made it through the year without your digital expertise or your patience with our lack of it. Lexi brought us our Water-in-the-Wilderness blog, Youtube pages and an Instagram account She expertly stitched together pre-recorded services, offered beautiful Zoom

Report of the Senior Minister (continued)

prayers, weekly spiritual practices, prayer walks and helped with virtual choirs and our Women's retreat. We also hired Pastoral Associate Jaz Buchanan who shared her joy-filled and deeply embodied gifts for ministry in preaching and worship, small group leadership, Christian formation, stewardship and more. Just when I thought I could not be more thankful for this A-Team of wonderfully talented new and veteran staff, we learned in the summer that Carlyle would be returning as our new 5 hour/week Community Minister of Racial Justice, a position made possible because of a Creative Callings grant from BU. God is so good!

Speaking of amazing, committed staff, if it were up to me, I'd split the MVP this year between Jim Stewart and Kate Layzer. For one thing, their work and that of their staff and volunteers has been most valuable ministry we have offered in the pandemic. As other shelters and meal programs closed, First Church's Homeless Ministries expanded, and then expanded again and then expanded even more to meet the needs of our most vulnerable population. It's not an overstatement to say that Jim, Kate and their co-laborers have risked their lives to save others. Like other frontline workers in our community - nurses, doctors, social workers, hospice chaplains and more - they have been knowingly heading toward risk rather than away from it, day after day. They have kept the shelter open 24-7. They have provided over 500 meals/week with help from city funding and working with local restaurants. They have pressed the city to set for temporary showers in a parking lot on Church Street and are now staffing those showers. Thanks to the Shelter Oversight Committee and its Co-Chairs Jan Lo and Don Johnson, and to the Friday Care leadership squad, for all of their truly sacrificial, hands-on support! Our homeless ministries have shown us what Christ's love and hands look like in public. Special thanks as well to all our building and support staff -- Kris McQuouage-Loukas, George Williams, Kimel Williams, Doug Casey, Rebecca LaChance and Bruce Dillinger -- for their on-going, often in-person presence and care of our building, people and ministries!

Meanwhile, Missions and Social Justice committee, with thanks to co-chairs Deb Cunningham and Sally O'Brien, continued to support other essential ministries including GBIO, Solutions-at-Work and many others. Committee member Phil Jones, and his fellow GBIO leaders Will Erickson, Seth Pate and Casey Marsh gave us all chances to weigh in with politicians as GBIO pressed hard for and won key statewide police reform measures. In her capacity as Board member of Solutions-at-Work, Alice Kidder refused to take no for an answer when pressing for more shelter beds in Cambridge. In a feat of advocacy, often from her dialysis armchair, Alice pressed the city and state to sponsor a new, desperately needs 75 bed shelter in an unused school building on Green Street. Our congregation's reach and impact this year has been truly stunning!

In a year when our nation's legacy of racial terror and white supremacy grew ever more apparent, through police shootings, voter suppression and military style crackdowns on peaceful Black Lives Matter protests, First Church's recent work around racial justice gave us substantial preparation for what we were witnessing and how to respond. In June, our Executive Council adopted a statement of commitment to have us become an anti-racist church. This called us to a Summer of Prayer, Reflection and Action. In small groups and large, through learning on your own, well over a hundred of our members responded to the call. This fall, Carlyle Stewart led "A Call to Return: Spiritual Reflections on Racial Justice," gathering 30-40 of us for ten weekly 90-minute sessions. The Spirit continues to be alive in this work, drawing us into the streets in protest, into Faith and Life groups, into prayer calls with the Pentecost Tabernacle Church and so much more. Special thanks to Beloved Community Chair Peggy Stevens for her passion in organizing and guiding so many of these efforts, and to our extraordinary many-hat-wearing Clerk-pro-tem, Nominating Committee

Report of the Senior Minister (continued)

Chair, Pastoral Care Captain, Archivist, Beloved Community leader, Dave Kidder and to all who are helping us to take these next steps on our journey. This fall, with thanks to Stef Haug and members of Benchmarks for Inclusion team, we presented a document called “Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture” in several church settings and were humbled to so readily identify the ongoing work we had to do as church. Those new Advent banners that featured Mary and Elizabeth as women of color? That’s just one beautiful example of the ways we are learning to see ourselves and our traditions differently and in ever more inclusive ways. 2021 will surely bring us more of this sacred and important work!

Last but not least, 2020 brought us a gorgeous new website! Given a soon-to-be defunct infrastructure for our 10 year old site and due to all the recent changes in our ministry, our Executive Council approved a contract with our original website designers, Theory One, to build a new website and revamp our communications. The new site which launch in December is mobile friendly, far easier to navigate and features beautiful new photos and video. We’ll soon be rolling out a new communications strategy as well. Suffice it to say, this was a ton of work. Thanks to all who submitted copy and content and thanks especially to my web teammates Sarah and Kirsten and especially to Lexi who was our project manager extraordinaire! In other communications related news, this summer we thanked Ken Ziebell for his many years of service as our diligent, detailed oriented and always delightful EVENT editor! With these changes, we are marking the end of a hard-copy newsletter era and the beginning of a new one.. These days so much of ministry is communication. Stay tuned!

An unprecedented year? Yes, for sure! And with it, my unprecedented gratitude. It’s not only that the amount of gratitude seems higher as we’ve learned to count our blessings ever more dearly. The quality of gratitude has deepened too! It’s a gratitude that is not merely thankful for “our” blessings, for “our” family, for “our” health, for “our” well-being! It’s a gratitude now, I sense, that is also thankful for an increasing awareness of inequality, of privilege, of our responsibility and capacity to be part of a wider sense of “our”! And that may be a truer taste of the kin-dom of God than we’ve ever had before. So, yes, thanks be to God for our beloved First Church family and for our ever-widening circles of online and in-person relationship that are allowing us to know more deeply God’s justice and joy.

Dan Smith

Report of Pastoral Associate Lexi Boudreaux

Winter

2020 certainly not the year we all were expecting it to be. It's strange to think that over 40 women gathered at First Church for the annual women's retreat in early March of this year with not too much thought to what "social distancing" means. Margaret Jewett Hall was full to the brim with signs and sounds of warm hospitality and the apse in the sanctuary echoed as we sang together serving each other communion for the last time that year in person. The retreat could not have happened without the help of Joanne Paul, Nancy Webber, Alex Steinert-Evoy, and Susan Reynolds- a dedicated group who have a real knack for helping women explore their own spirituality in community.

When we first went into lockdown back in March, I proposed that the church start a blog. The idea for this blog came about during the first several weeks of the pandemic. Members of First Church in Cambridge were sharing such meaningful and rich reflections, poetry, and spiritual practices that were helping them make it through. This blog has provided a way for us to document our experiences and to share how we learn and grow together. Started on a separate website our blog, *Water in the Wilderness*, is now fully integrated with our main website! If you go check it out you will find posts about our current liturgical season, about ways to think about our faith in times of crisis, spiritual and practical resources, and resources specific to the needs of Children and Families. It has been a virtual space of water that nourishes our spirits in this time of desert and wilderness and will continue to be a resource for the church as we grow into who we are called to be.

As we all sheltered in our homes during Lent, Dan, Carlyle, and I finished up leading the Lenten book study of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, which would become all too resonant in the coming months. In the end, we all walked together through a live-streamed holy week with solemn liturgy that matched the state of our collective inner grief. To quote one of my blog posts referencing the importance of communally acknowledging our grief: "It feels like if we don't attend to it with God's help it will swell like a dangerous tidal wave and leave the whole world soaked to the core with its salty memory." We recognized that grief communally through a ritual and service of lamentation using bowls of water to symbolize our lament in a worship service towards the end of May. Through the Spring, Sarah and I continued co-teaching our confirmation class remotely over zoom, talking through what the first remote baptism and confirmation rite in First Church's history would look like with the deacons. As we experienced those moments in First Church history together over zoom we were reminded by a Confirmand and his family that God's Spirit is present even over an internet connection.

Spring

Each of the staff members held some sort of "connection call" during the year and mine was a spiritual practice call on Friday mornings at 8 am. A group of 5 or 6 of us gathered together on zoom weekly through the end of summer. It was a joy to lead us in centering practices from the Christian tradition in a world that was always in flux. The importance of the deep wisdom that our tradition holds for us in times of struggle and the value of practicing our faith in community was all the more visible during those early morning gatherings.

Report of Pastoral Associate Lexi Boudreaux (continued)

As we celebrated Palm Sunday, we encouraged members of the congregation to set up home altars for worship and to send in pictures for us to share on the blog so that we all might bear witness to the sacred spaces in our own homes. We have continued lighting our candles on our home altars since that Sunday, maintaining a holy link between the sanctuary on Garden St. and the sanctuaries in our living rooms, kitchens, and dining room tables. Much of this Spring and Summer I spent learning all I could about what the words “digital ministry” mean and how we can cultivate sacred space outside the church walls. I watched tutorials on how to record video correctly, on how to use video editing software, on how to harness social media to do the work of ministry instead of communicating about ministry being done elsewhere. I had the encouraging experience of being on brainstorming zoom calls with other ministers around the country just trying to figure out this crazy thing called “trying to do church in a pandemic and also learning the importance of good audio.” Collaborating with others from different churches in this strange time was so important. Sarah and I even joined a call about children and youth ministry and decided to make church at home kits from that conversation.

The Spring brought its own sense of change and transition as our Confirmands were confirmed, one of them was baptized, and along with many in the Cambridge area I graduated with my Master of Divinity degree from Harvard Divinity school remotely. At this time, I took over the management of the Facebook and YouTube accounts, exploring ways for us to use these platforms that would further our ministry in our wider community and constructing a schedule and strategy for our social media posts. Towards the end of the year I also started an Instagram account for the church, sharing more of our life together with local organizations and people who might not join our zoom calls but who benefit from the ministry we do online. Direct message us and I’ll send you an encouraging GIF!

Summer

The summer of 2020 was not a time of things slowing down as it usually is in mainline protestant churches in New England but a time of delving deeper into our relationships with one another and with God. We launched another round of faith and life groups over the summer and almost 75 people participated in a group over the course of the season. Many groups focused on continuing the good racial justice work we have been engaged in the past several years as our country en masse took to the streets to demonstrate to advocate for the black lives matter movements in the wake of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor’s deaths. We were finding that even though we were physically apart we were growing stronger in our fellowship with one another as we remained connected over the summer.

While Dan was on vacation in early July we experimented with a different form of worship. I had been learning how to video edit in order to involve more lay leaders in worship as liturgists and our first pre-recorded service on YouTube premiere was born the first Sunday of July and it was a success. Going forward we worshiped in this format about once a month or if it suited a particular style of service. Another worship experiment was the summer evening prayer service or compline, held via zoom on Tuesday evenings. A subsection of the deacons and I developed the liturgy, taking turns leading the 15 min service through the end of August.

Report of the Pastoral Associate Lexi Boudreaux (continued)

Over the summer I constructed a folder system for digital ministry at First Church in our staff google drive, which allows us to collect videos from members of the congregation and to store any graphics or pre-recorded material for worship. I also created online liturgist email scripts and pre-record worship coordinator best practices and deadlines so that we have a sustainable record of how I had been managing that process for anyone to follow if needed. With the help of First Church member Tim Brenner we devised a consistent naming system and video descriptions for all of our video content so that people can easily find what they are looking for online. At the end of the summer I provided a training on how to manage our YouTube Channel, how to create and upload videos and design thumbnails on our graphic design program to anyone on staff who wanted to attend. We recorded the training on zoom, which will remain a resource for First Church going forward. In particular, Sarah and I spent time in training so that she felt comfortable with video editing and YouTube so that she could integrate those tools into our Children's formation and Church School programming.

Fall

The Fall brought a new round of faith and life groups as well as the beginning of our work on the new website with Theory One. Part of my role was being the in-house project manager for the development of the website, meeting weekly with Theory One and Dan to make sure that the new website would be able to be launched by our deadline of the start of Advent. With focus and a lot of team work from many on staff we finished writing the content for the website on time. Towards the end, I worked with Theory One as their primary contact on finishing up formatting the content on our new website and getting it ready for launch

Another part of my role this year has been as a financial associate, giving some time to work with Karen McArthur and Bruce to input our weekly invoices and manage and input our pre-paid debit card activity for staff (Pex). Monday mornings I put on my hat of "former accounting manager" to complete these weekly tasks, learning more and more about how the church manages our money and stewards our resources.

As we all experienced, the Advent and Christmas season was unlike any other we have lived through with many of us confined to our homes. Even though the Women's community couldn't gather for a community dinner like we did last year for Advent, we gathered on zoom for a morning retreat reflecting on our relationships with and assumptions about Mary with the help of Joanne Paul, Susan Reynolds, Nancy Webber, and Alex Steinert-Evoy. Even though the Christmas Day and Christmas Eve services were not the same as other years, we were able to maintain some tradition by asking First Church members to send in videos of them passing candlelight in their homes. We edited the videos together to pass the light virtually this Christmas. Not even a pandemic can stop us from passing the light of Christ!

Here are some fun facts about our digital ministry efforts:

- We have grown our Facebook page likes from 620 to 656 in 7 months

- We created an Instagram and grew the account to 97 followers in 2 months

- We created and grew our YouTube Channel to 133 subscribers in 7 months

- We posted 134 videos on YouTube in 7 months

- We created 14 playlists for music, worship, sermons, adult formation and more

- All of these channels are available through our new website!

- We have had around 50 FCC members lead as some sort of liturgist remotely via video

Report of Pastoral Associate Lexi Boudreaux (continued)

We have all learned so much together. More than anything, this year taught us that no matter what unexpected events come our way that we continue to be the church for each other and that with patience and deep faith in the movement of the Spirit, we have seen that God does indeed make all things new. This year has also reminded us that even in our despair and collective grief that there is a place for joy and gratitude in the midst of it all. For my part, it has been a deep joy to be serving alongside you all through this unprecedented season. As I reflect on this year, so much has happened it's almost impossible to name it all, but what I do remember is that working alongside coworkers in our staff who are truly amazing and getting to do ministry with FCC members has been such a gift to me personally.

Throughout this year we have continued to live into the truth that wherever we are on this journey of life or faith, our hearts are gathered together in the Spirit and are bound together by the love of God.

In deep gratitude for our ministry together,
Lexi Boudreaux

Report of the Pastoral Associate Jaz Buchanan

Six months ago, I joined you all from my living room for my first service at First Church! I anticipated feeling frustrated because I would not see any of your faces in the sanctuary during worship. How would I get to know members of the community when I would not be able to meet anyone in person for the foreseeable future? My first Zoom coffee hour with you all, filled with warmth, energy, and compassion, put my frustrations and doubts to rest. This community embraced me with wide open virtual arms and I am incredibly grateful for all of your love and support.

Needless to say, it has been a year. The pandemic has flipped our lives upside down again and again. The horrific violence at the Capitol this month, incited by far too many in power, demonstrated how deeply rooted racism is in our nation. I know I can speak for many of us when I say that, while I'm afraid, I need only look to this community for renewed hope and faith. I see God in each of you and in all of your incredible, beautiful, and divine ministries.

I would like to extend a huge thank you to the worship team. I felt incredibly supported in my preaching and I cherished our collaboration in crafting liturgy. During the Advent season, I appreciated the sacred space to re-imagine holy lightness and darkness, and everything in between, as part of our anti-racist work as a church.

In October, I led a Faith & Life group called Dancing with God. Nine of us gathered weekly over the course of three weeks to move and groove. An embodied prayer workshop I participated in at The Society of Saint John the Evangelist (SSJE) in Cambridge inspired me to create this space where we could connect and reconnect to the Divine through movement. Sometimes words are not enough. During our last gathering, we created an embodied Lord's Prayer together that was incorporated in this year's Epiphany service.

It has also been such a joy to work closely with Sarah Higginbotham, our Director of Creative Worship & Arts. Sarah offered me the opportunity to co-lead the multi-generational creative arts workshop with her in October. It was a genuine blast to gather on Zoom and make prayer bead bracelets— I am wearing mine right now! I also had the honor of building a Faith & Social Justice curriculum for our 7th and 8th grader students, which began in September and will continue through May. We meet on the third and fourth Sundays of every month at 9:30 AM. We draw from our Christian tradition and scripture to understand the meaning of social justice and how we can be a part of God's vision of a more just world. We also take time to debrief and reflect on our experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, our divided nation, and all that is weighing on our hearts.

Although I spend most of my Sunday mornings with our awesome middle schoolers, I did have a chance to lead a Lectio Divina at a 9:30 adult formation hour in December. I was incredibly moved by everyone's wisdom and insight as we read and prayed 2 Corinthians 4:6-12; 16-18 together. I have and continue to learn so much from you all. During Advent, Dan, Lexi and I also held three socially-distanced and masked candle lighting and prayer sessions in our chapel in December.

Throughout the fall, I also had the honor of serving on the Stewardship Committee. We were small but mighty and led a very successful multimedia stewardship campaign for the first time called "The Call to Give!" We launched how-to videos, testimonies, and emails, which reflected on giving from a theological

Report of Pastoral Associate Jaz Buchanan (continued)

perspective, as well as led the Stewardship Sunday service in November. We owe the campaign's success to the hardworking StewCrew, and to you and all of your participation.

I continue to be in awe of this church's incredible ministries and am incredibly grateful to be a part of this community.

Love, peace and prayers abound.

With tremendous gratitude,
Jaz Buchanan

Report of the Minister of Street Outreach

The Friday Café

Well, it has been a year.

Soon after our last annual report, Homeless Ministries held our first-ever joint fundraising gala, a glamorous affair with tablecloths and twinkling lights, music, fancy desserts, and a room overflowing with guests. We raised a record \$22,000 for the Shelter and Friday Café, and thought the year was getting off to a pretty great start!

Then came March. In a single week the Café moved outside, the church shut down, our volunteers went into voluntary quarantine, and we found ourselves scrambling to set up a bag lunch signup in place of our home-made casserole schedule. I'm proud to say that we somehow didn't miss a single Friday.

Some highlights of the past 10 months:

- First, a huge, huge thank you to our core team of COVID volunteers, who have shown up week after week to keep us running smoothly: Alex Steinert-Evoy, Don Johnson, Neil Peterson, Holly Marple, Devin Hansen, Robert Lew, Stephanie Westenkatz, Tom Hathaway, Jo Chao, Shelter guest Mike, Harvard junior Amaya, and LDS Elders Lott and Stokes—along with occasional helpers Ella Simons, Erica Kenny, Manuela Hanshaw, and many others. Your hard work has made the Friday Café an outstanding resource during a time of real challenge for our community.
- Our online bag lunch signup has filled up for 45 weeks running, even after we expanded it to 140 lunches to meet demand. Lunch makers include church members, Friday Café volunteers, and many Cambridge neighbors. A large group of students from Cambridge Rindge and Latin began contributing 60–80 bag lunches a week starting in December 2020! We continue to serve an average of 90 guests on Fridays.
- We also partnered with the City of Cambridge early on to include a packaged restaurant meal in every lunch bag.
- In April we began requiring volunteers to fill out contact tracing forms. So far we are grateful to report that not one of our volunteers has tested positive.
- In May, aware that many of our guests lacked access to accurate information about the virus, we enlisted a gifted volunteer, Tim Clark, to create a biweekly Friday Café COVID newsletter, full of public health facts and updates. At this writing we are up to Issue #18. Thanks, Tim!
- With high schooler Ella Simon's active encouragement, we began setting chairs up on the lawn during the summer, to bring back a bit of the community feel of the Café. The chairs are still popular, even on cold days!
- Meanwhile, with nowhere for unhoused neighbors to get a drink of water during a long, hot summer, we reached out to the Harvard Square Business Association for help, receiving several pallets of bottled water from a generous donor. Eventually the City took over and made sure that restaurants included bottled water with every meal they delivered.
- With the help of countless neighbors, we began handing out masks by the hundreds a couple of months into the pandemic. They continue to be one of our more requested items.
- In October, a new volunteer showed up and quietly transformed the clothing and material aid part of our

Report of the Minister of Street Outreach (continued)

operation. Thanks to Jo's efforts, and the amazing generosity of many donors, we are now able to meet significantly more needs than before the pandemic. Many thanks to all who have helped sort, fold, and label clothing, including the First Church Youth Group, and thanks to Don Johnson for installing additional shelving upstairs in the Loft above the Library to keep us organized.

- In October we once again teamed up with the public health department to offer flu shots; no word about vaccines yet, but we're hoping!
- In November, we moved our clothing and toiletry tables indoors—at first allowing guests to come inside for a few minutes to browse (with open doors and windows and a fan to pull air outside!), and then scaling back when the new, more infectious COVID strain began to make headlines. We are currently serving one person at a time from the Mason St. entrance to MJH. Our to-go meals continue to be served from our blue canopy outside of the Tower Room, next to the church parking spaces.
- Friday Café Christmas and New Year! Our entire volunteer crew showed up to help on both days. Thank you so much to all who donated thermal socks and assembled beautiful treat bags as gifts for our guests on Christmas: They were greatly appreciated.

All in all, it's been a busy time, full of constant adjustments and occasional stresses, but mostly immense gratitude for the work that we do. We celebrate the incredible resilience of the unhoused community as they navigate the changes the pandemic has brought about, and continue to watch out for and support each other through it all.

Rev. Kate Layzer
Minister of Street Outreach

Report of the Minister of Stewardship & Finance

Just when I thought we could coast into a relatively uneventful year financially ... Taking a cue from Heather Cox Richardson, who has been my island of sanity this year, I offer my report as a snapshot for the historical record, in the context of our triple public health, economic, and political crisis. It is truly a year like no other in the 388-year history of First Church!

When the pandemic forced the abrupt closure of the ways we had always done everything, we were, quite serendipitously, ready for it. Thanks to the generosity of two donors at the end of 2019, we had just completed the installation of our new sound system and livestream equipment, and could turn our attention to refining our online presence. We had been using online giving and give-by-text for several years, so while other congregations scrambled to set up online giving and remote bookkeeping, we were able to “turn on a dime” and keep our momentum going. The financial shift of 2020 shows primarily in three ways:

The number of online gifts increased by 50%

	Number of Gifts		Total Received		Cost
	2019	2020	2019	2020	
Cash	305	60	\$ 29,159	\$ 8,138	1.1%
Check	805	443	\$ 389,006	\$ 277,869	0.2%
Online	1,034	1,498	\$ 242,998	\$ 316,606	0.4%
Credit/Debit	5	96	\$ 125	\$ 21,790	2.2%
Stock	25	7	\$ 146,796	\$ 72,930	
TOTALS	2,174	2,104	\$ 808,084	\$ 697,332	

This year, 72% of our contributions were given through online giving accessed through our First Church website, up from 48% in 2019. This is helpful in several ways: 1) online gifts from your bank account are by far the most efficient type of gifts to process, taking only a few moments to enter into our Servant Keeper database; 2) the administrative cost of online giving is a small fraction of the cost of the other methods; 3) giving without paper eliminates the very real possibility of lost or delayed mail; and 4) electronic giving cuts down on our use of paper and reduces our collective carbon footprint.

Shelter contracts, employees, and contributions tripled.

In March, the City of Cambridge provided funding to staff our shelter during the daytime hours, provide a meal distribution service, and, beginning in October, public showers in Harvard Square. Thanks to Jim Stewart’s countless hours of advocacy and arranging, and continued extensions, we have been able to provide essential services in an especially difficult time. This means that we have increased 5 to 17 shelter employees, and are now administering four sources of funding. The January Gala was tremendously successful as well. My time working with the shelter has also temporarily tripled, made easier by zoom!

New opportunities for public assistance allowed us to maintain and expand critical outreach to the community.

Throughout the months of this pandemic, public assistance has come in many forms:

- Federal:

Report of the Minister of Stewardship & Finance (continued)

- o The Paycheck Protection Program allowed us to continue to pay our employees for their usual hours, even when our building was closed to the public.
- o Families First Coronavirus Response funds to pay any employees who are out due to a positive COVID test, waiting for test results, or caring for a family member.
- o Commonwealth of Massachusetts:
 - o Our ongoing contract to operate our overnight Shelter continues.
 - o City of Cambridge:
 - o A grant allows us to keep our overnight shelter open 24/7.
 - o Another grant funds staff to distribute meals to those in need.

A third grant pays for staff for the showers in Harvard Square.

In the midst of all of this, it was ministry as usual. We wrapped up the very successful capital campaign, distributing the last of our tithe of Mission Grants. Any future contributions received will be added to our Capital Fund, used for loan repayments and other capital projects. Year after year, the generosity of our members and friends makes our collective ministry possible!

- For the ninth year in a row, we have increased our annual pledges, to another all-time high of well over \$600,000. Thanks to Steve Weller, Susie Longfield, Nancy O’Connell, Robb Morgan, Chris Reynolds and Jaz Buchanan for creative energy and faithful support of our 2021 campaign.
- We received stock gifts and gifts from Donor-Advised Funds. Please let me know if you’d like instructions about how to make such gifts, which have the potential for tax savings for donors.
- Laurie Burt has faithfully guided our Investment Committee through a challenging year, balancing the oversight of our endowment and investments with our commitment to the sustainable growth of our current and future ministry and mission.
- We remain committed to giving 10% of our Operating income to mission and social justice through our own local and global initiatives and through our United Church of Christ. As our income changes, so does our support of local missions and social justice initiatives. In 2020, the tithe was over \$80,000.
- Our Homeless Ministries programs have raised funds from both community donors and from First Church members, as well as receiving contract and grant support:

	First Church Shelter	Friday Café	Total
Community donations	\$ 18,676	\$ 19,337	\$ 38,013
First Church support	\$ 18,779	\$ 19,224	\$ 38,003
Grants and contracts	\$ 385,130	\$ 2,000	\$ 387,130

- During 2020, we employed 41 First Church employees and as of January 2021, have opted in to the new Massachusetts Paid Family & Medical leave, which will provide a valuable benefit to our employees if they experience a time of personal or family need.
- We continue to provide generous staff benefits: for all employees, paid sick leave and access to vision care; for half-time employees, paid holidays, vacation, pension and life/disability, and access to a dental

Report of the Minister of Stewardship & Finance (continued)

plan; for our full-time staff, coverage in our high-deductible health plan, combined with a contribution to each employee's Health Savings Account. Thanks to the Staff Policy Committee for their good work supporting fair employment practices, and to Julie Pridham for her professional expertise.

As always, my heartfelt appreciation to Treasurers Jason Whaley, Rich Goode, Connie Pyle, and Art Anger, to Controller Rachel Carlson, and to Office Assistant Bruce Dillenbeck and Parish Associate Lexi Boudreaux, who each do their part to keep the details recorded from week to week, helping us to see the big picture. Even in the midst of the upheaval, so much has stayed the same: ministry and care in a church that is deeply committed to our world, our community, and to each other. The words of National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman ring true for us: "It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit, it's the past we step into and how we repair it." Being a part of First Church is more than something we've inherited – our work going forward seeks to repair the past as we face the future together. I continue to be grateful for the privilege of working with such a wonderful congregation and staff, and look forward to the new year that is dawning!

With gratitude,
Karen McArthur

Report of the Director of Music

I'm not going to take up space here repeating the obvious. Corporate worship as related to music took a body blow in March due to the pandemic, and some of the most important parts of my work among you had to cease for the duration. In March, I wrote this...

ON SINGING TOGETHER

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps - How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? - Psalm 137

The world we live in - for now - is a foreign land indeed. The pandemic has brought devastation and calamity on many fronts, and one casualty – for now - is singing together. It's been well established that choir rehearsals and congregational singing are among the riskiest activities for infection; singers, even amateurs, are 'super spreaders' because of their athletic breathing and projection. Simply put, as long as we must have social distancing we cannot have ensemble singing. This is a tragedy for now – but it is for now. Nothing keeps us from singing together in family circles. Nothing keeps us from singing along to recordings, or on Sundays to the organ accompaniment on our livestreamed services. Nothing keeps us from singing when on our walks outside. Singing will continue, and when we come together again there will be a joyful noise of gratitude heard all over the world as we blend our voices in a chorus of wonder, love and praise.

These words were never more true...

My life flows on in endless song;
Above earth's lamentation,
I hear the sweet, though far-off hymn
That hails a new creation.
Through all the tumult and the strife,
I hear that music ringing
It finds an echo in my soul
How can I keep from singing?
No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that rock I'm clinging
Since Love is Lord of heaven and earth
How can I keep from singing?

I love you all. We will sing together again. – Peter

And I hope for this, even more fervently, now.

That all said, the Choir has produced and presented a number of 'virtual' presentations for worship, and that will continue as long as necessary. As difficult as it is for each of them, the combined result is worth it as a contribution to our sense of community and as an acknowledgement of the power of music as a transcendent experience. We will get through this, together, and hopefully before too long will be able to make music together....

Peter Sykes

Report of the Director of Creative Worship & Arts

My first step in writing my annual report every January is to go back and read what I wrote last year. The first line of my report on 2019 was:

In some ways, 2019 was an unremarkable year in my tenure at First Church.

I confess, I laughed out loud as I read that! Here I sit after a decidedly REMARKABLE 2020, watching the first week of 2021 bring continued news of unprecedented and, frankly, unbelievable events in our nation. It was a year like no other, and this report will confirm that.

When everything changed in mid-March, we angled the Communion Table to face the relatively new camera affixed to a pillar in the pews, and we haven't moved it back since. Worship staff pivoted to livestreaming from the sanctuary, learning as we went. In the early weeks of pandemic worship, I brought Godly Play materials into our worship space and created stories about our community living through a strange and different time. Using the power of storytelling and play as tools for making sense of the world around us, I sought to help our youngest members work through their thoughts and feelings about their experiences.

Like most of the ministerial and program staff, I hosted Check-ins and Prayer Times via Zoom throughout the spring, gearing my weekly gatherings to children. A core group of kids zoomed in to share their prayer requests, describe what they saw through their windows, tell jokes, make silly faces, and spam the chat—a fun time was had by all, even as we connected through our frustration, sadness, and anxiety.

While our Godly Play classes and all-Church-School activities went on hiatus during the spring, our Confirmation Class completed its curriculum via Zoom, and our Bible 101 and Middler classes held a few virtual gatherings, as well. We celebrated our first remote baptism and remote confirmation rite on Pentecost; five Confirmants joined the church that day! A few weeks later, we marked Children's Sunday with a pre-recorded Gospel Play from our Bible 101 students, along with the strong and confident voices of several Middlers leading our liturgy. I am deeply grateful for the collaborative spirits of my Confirmation co-leader Lexi Boudreaux, my Middler co-teacher Sam Menapace, and the intrepid Bible 101 teaching team of Nate Jones, Samantha Riley, and Cathy Garnett. Their efforts kept our formational programs afloat and provided much needed connection for the older children of our community.

Summer is usually a quieter time in my work, but this year I found myself kept busy with both weekly worship leading and planning for the upcoming program year. With input from parents, experienced church school teachers, and the Christian Formation Committee, we developed a plan for Remote Church School that included both familiar elements and new initiatives.

On Regathering Sunday, we rolled out a plan for newly configured Godly Play classes, including a multigenerational GP opportunity each month. Godly Play teachers began recording stories and discovering best practices for facilitating Zoom rooms for wondering and feasting together. I give thanks for the commitment, compassion, humor, and hard work of our amazing Godly Play team, including Erika Abbas Hanna, Will Erickson, Phil Jones, Susie Longfield, Lindsay Ludwig, Casey Marsh, Lisa McCarty, Gaylen Morgan, Joanne Paul, and Lauren Yockel. These folks have provided the important support, feedback, innovation, and all-around good energy that make our remote GP program thrive!

Report of the Director of Creative Worship & Arts (continued)

A new Bible 101 class began their two-year journey through their curriculum under the excellent guidance of Phil Jones, supplemented by pre-recorded mini-lessons by yours truly. Pastoral Associate Jaz Buchanan took on the challenges and joys of creating a new “Faith & Social Justice” curriculum for our 7th and 8th graders who were unable to participate in Our Whole Lives this year, due to the obstacles that prevented an online version of OWL’s sexuality education curriculum. Phil and Jaz have done incredible work in developing and maintaining connection among our tweens and young adolescents, and I am ever-grateful for the gifts they share with First Church.

Rounding out our Remote Church School offerings have been monthly multigenerational creative arts workshops and monthly picture book read-alouds for our youngest friends. Crafting on Zoom has been remarkably engaging, from beaded prayer bracelets to DIY saint puppets, as well as a virtual Advent Workshop that brought light and laughter to all who participated. Grateful thanks to Nancy Cyr for providing her expert guidance and support to our crafting, especially in Advent. And to those who volunteered to share a picture book with our children: THANK YOU! I appreciate the talents of Hilary Hopkins, Laurie Williams, Kate Layzer, Mary Robinson, Karen Korn, Kirsten Manville, Marianne Jensen, Lisa DiNardo, and Stephen Weller. This series of videos is so delightful; I hope everyone takes a moment to browse through and enjoy the Children’s Formation playlist on our YouTube channel.

As the year came to a close, I was especially moved by the hilarious and heartfelt contributions that made up “The UnPageant 2020.” It was an honor to pull together the creative talents of 28 First Church members and friends (and two very important cats) into 14 minutes of Christmas joy.

In addition, I can report that I enjoyed coordinating our Newcomers’ welcome over the second half of 2020, meeting a handful of lovely people who have found meaning and connection with us, even in the midst of this time of isolation. I also increased my time and focus on First Church communications, learning digital ministry skills and taking on more of an editorial and design role in our various modes of contact with you and with the world. I look forward to continued collaboration on honing our communications strategy as we live into a new way of engaging with our redesigned website and our growing online presence.

As always, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to serve the First Church community alongside my colleagues. May we continue to grow together in a new year that, I pray, ushers in new hope for health, peace, justice, and compassion.

Faithfully,
Sarah Higginbotham

Report of the Director of Operations

Like many of us this past year, any plans I thought I might have had when it came to my job changed completely when the pandemic shut everything down in March. Up until that point, 2020 was off to a usual start. The building was busy with concerts, 12-step groups, dances, and the like. I was planning on continuing my church systems work, specifically moving forward with some ideas we had started to implement in 2019 with the Fellowship Committee.

Once we were in the throes of Covid-19 though, everything shifted. My primary focuses became the building (shutting it down and then designing a reopening plan, along with policies regarding safety around the virus) and working with the rest of the staff to figure out how to move all of our offerings to the virtual world.

Closing the building meant notifying those folks who were scheduled to be in it, whether they be long term tenants such as Newtowne School, or one time building users who were scheduled for a specific event. It also meant working with finance, as many of these users needed refunds for their events that didn't happen, or asked to apply space use fees they had already paid towards future events.

Facilities Manager Kris McQuage-Loukas and Senior Minister Dan Smith and I all worked together (along with input from other staff and leaders) to create a phased re-opening plan. Following guidance from the CDC, the commonwealth of Massachusetts and city of Cambridge, we re-opened the building over the summer, with limited hours. As the year continued we were able to expand those hours. I am grateful to Kris and the sextons for staffing the building when it is open. Safety has been of utmost importance. People who do come in and out of the building are required to be masked and practice physical distancing.

Moving worship and other offerings online has been quite a project. Thankfully we had upgraded our audio/video system in the sanctuary in 2019, and now have the ability to live stream Sunday services. I, like most of the country at this point, have learned a lot about the video conferencing software Zoom. And all of us have learned at least a little bit about video editing and YouTube. I am proud of the many ways we have been able to keep folks connected online during this time.

Because so much of the church's communications are now virtual, we also took this opportunity to re-do our website. Working with Dan and Director of Creative Arts & Worship Sarah Higginbotham and Pastoral Associate Lexi Boudreaux we hired Theory One to redesign the First Church website, and it went live in early December of 2020. We hope that this more streamlined site will be helpful to both current members of the church community who are looking for how to participate in events and activities, but also to folks who are searching for connection and may be able to find it at First Church. In addition to the website, we also began working with Theory One on a new communications infrastructure and strategy.

In September I started an online Church Administration certification course, taught by folks from The Church Network. The first module was 8 weeks long, and the second 8 weeks will start in January of 2020. So far we have covered aspects of human resources, communications, strategic planning, and more. I have found both the content, as well as the connection to other church administrators, extremely helpful. I have some good ideas that I hope to put into action at First Church when the time is right.

Report of the Director of Operations (continued)

The building of course was not at all as busy as it usually is. Cambridge's gathering size restrictions are quite strict, and even if they weren't we would not feel comfortable letting groups into the building. There have been a couple of live streamed concerts and many individual musicians have taken the opportunity to use the sanctuary for some recording. So we brought in some income from space use, but certainly nowhere near what we would usually do. Newtowne has been in the building operating at a reduced capacity, but our other long term tenants have been in only sporadically. The good news is that many organizations have been in touch about booking for the 2021-22 season. Assuming we can gather again by the fall, we should be hosting many concerts, dances, and more, just like we have in the past.

I am very grateful for all the work the administrative and operations staff has put in this year. All of them have been putting time in at the building itself, helping to keep it open and running for the folks who need to be there. I already mentioned the sextons above, but they have been staffing the building and interacting with the public since we re-opened in June. It has fallen to them to make sure people are abiding by our safety protocols, on top of carrying out strict cleaning procedures. I try to remember to thank them as much as I can. Office Assistant Bruce Dillenbeck has been coming into the office two or three days a week as well. He checks the mail, processes checks, answers the phone and does other tasks that simply can't be done from home. I am extremely grateful for his willingness to do these things. Finally, Facilities Manager Kris McQuage-Loukas has been in the building weekly, sometimes fulfilling sexton duties and also overseeing maintenance projects - such as installation of new boilers – and interfacing with Newtowne and the Shelter. More details about projects he has undertaken can be found in his report. He has also been a great partner as we have found our way through this pandemic, making sure we are keeping people safe and the building as secure as possible. I am very thankful to have his input on all matter of things.

As we move into 2021 it is impossible to know exactly how things will unfold, and when we will be able to fully re-open our building and regain our role as a popular venue and gathering place. As we have been since March of 2020, we will take things one day at a time, always consulting with each other and the data provided by the health department. I am hopeful that I will be writing at least a somewhat different report at this time next year. Although I have settled into a routine of working remotely, I miss being in the building. I miss seeing my fellow staff members, the people of the community who are in and out of First Church for various reasons, and of course all of you in the congregation. I look forward to the time when we are able to do the work of First Church again together and in person. May you all be well until then.

Respectfully submitted,
Kirsten Manville

Report of the Facilities Manager

In 2020, obviously a lot of the building concerns were dominated by COVID-19 and maintaining a safe and healthy work environment for the FCC congregation, staff, and building users. After the initial shutdown in March, we added hand sanitizer in key locations throughout the building, as well as began locking the exterior doors at all times to limit building access and to increase contact tracing if an infection were to occur.

2020 also saw the full implementation of our livestreamed worship from the Sanctuary. While the system was installed in late 2019, we began to fully utilize the system after in-person worship was halted due to the pandemic. The sanctuary worship setup was adjusted to better play to the camera, and we added Joe Welker to our staff as a worship AV technician. Joe, unfortunately, finished up his time with us in December of 2020, but we are grateful for the time and work he contributed to us.

The boiler replacement project that began during the final months of 2019 is now complete. Our five boilers have been replaced with four more high efficiency model. These new boilers, along with variable frequency drives added to the boiler system pumps, are expected to save us around 24% of our energy cost year over year. Unfortunately, with building use being such an anomaly in comparison to years past, we cannot get concrete answer to the exact saving we are getting.

Finally, we have completed the replacement of the deteriorating parsonage wooden gutters with a more durable material. This will prevent water damage that was occurring on some walls and fascia boards that had led to bubbling paint and holes that resulted in an infestation of squirrels. We also began the process of inspecting and cleaning the flues, with a plan to replace one of the two flues in 2021.

Kris McQuage-Loukas

Report of the Shelter Director

This past year was just about entirely consumed with responding to the demands presented by the COVID 19 Public Health Emergency.

First Church Shelter staff-permanent and Work Study-stepped up immediately and strong. They recognized the special challenge and adapted to meet it. When it became clear that the shelter could not provide safe, socially distanced space for our guests in the bunk room, the lay and ordained leadership of First Church Cambridge approved and helped prepare expanded space for guests in Sage Hall.

Shelter Oversight Committee Co Chairs Don Johnson and Jan Jeffers Lo extended themselves generously; getting the expanded space set up and making sure shelter guests had access to sufficient food and appropriate, personal hygiene products.

First Church's efforts to provide a safe space for shelter guests was given a timely and much appreciated "boost," when the City of Cambridge agreed to provide funding necessary to keep the shelter open during the day. The shelter has been 24/7, since just about Day One of the pandemic. The City of Cambridge also sought to address the lack of access to food resulting from the municipal and state ordered shut down of congregate feeding programs, contracted with local merchants to provide catered meals to the shelter and, other, projects offering assistance to our community's hungry and homeless.

First Church's efforts, in partnership with the City of Cambridge, has made it possible for the shelter to remain (as of 12/25/20) covid free; for guests and staff.

In early April, the Cambridge City Council asked First Church Shelter to help the city respond to the unmet nutritional needs of poor and unhoused residents. We agreed and have been distributing, often upto 120, city purchased meals, four evenings a week from the doors of the tower room.

The lack of access to hygiene facilities for the city's unhoused was greatly exacerbated by the restriction of capacity (necessitated by the pandemic) at most service providers. Once again, First Church Shelter was approached by the City of Cambridge to help staff and operate a public showers project on Church Street, in Harvard Square. The project took much longer to get up and operating but, since October 14, has been offering hot showers, in heated trailers.

At this time, it appears that our three partnership projects (Day Shelter, Meal Distribution and Showers) will continue until, at least March 31, 2021.

Shelter guests and staff are eligible for Covid Vaccination in Phase 1. We have been informed that, following completion of vaccination of First Responders and Covid Facing healthcare staff, residents and staff of those in "congregate settings" will be scheduled for vaccination.

The work done at the shelter since the onset of the pandemic would not have been possible without the conscientious and courageous efforts of those I work with; Dennis Kaveney, Steve Brown, Kevin Benitez, Janella and Davina Kang, Nate Wilson-Braun, Alex Ball, Kevin Newell, Joe Welker, Lindsay Sandwald, Sophia Doeshner, James Gullberg; and over the summer, Brent Lo and Megan Lo.

Report of the Shelter Director (continued)

The shelter is grateful for our partners in this work, Friday Cafe, and the support and guidance we received from the Shelter Oversight Committee; Don Johnson, Jan Jeffers Lo, Jim Leone, Jane Matthews, Jean Carr and Brain Funck.

Getting through the last 9 months would not have been possible without the work put in by our fellow, First Church employees; lay and ordained.

On behalf of all of those who are served by, or are employed at, the First Church Shelter, please be assured of our gratitude for what the women and men of First Church Cambridge Congregational, UCC has made possible during this past, challenging year, and for the previous 33 years as well.

Jim Stewart
Shelter Director

Report of the Moderator

You don't need me to remind you of the many challenges 2020 dropped in our laps. Who could have imagined it? **Yet, in recalling our year as a church, I am inspired and deeply encouraged by how we have responded as a community, and the ways that God has generously provided the wisdom and inspiration we needed.**

Our sanctuary is closed, but we continued to gather for nourishing worship. (We even found a way to enjoy the un-pageant and pass the candlelight on Christmas Eve!) We folded in a number of folks seeking a new spiritual home. Old friends settled afar continued to stay connected, able to access worship, coffee hour, and activities online. Our amazing deacons and the pastoral care committee made calls, wrote cards, dropped off meals, and led outdoor meditative walks.

The hungry in Cambridge continued to find food and listening ears at our Friday Cafe, and the 14 men in our First Church Shelter received sustenance, protection, and the support they needed to get back on their feet. Working with our partner University Lutheran Church, we have continued to provide needed sanctuary for a vulnerable family.

Our learning together has been profound -- in many new Faith and Life Groups, in summer reading and eye-opening discussions about what it means to grow into a church with an anti-racist vision, and in Carlyle's weekly reflection sessions on a Biblical vision of racial justice. Our children have enjoyed being read to, fun community crafts, Godly Play classes, and social justice programming.

Our amazing new website is up and running. (Do check it out if you haven't yet visited!) Our community stepped up to a very successful stewardship campaign. All this was shepherded skillfully and creatively by our beloved staff and lay leaders.

In the end, First Church has so much to be grateful for. And with God's grace, may it continue.

It has been a privilege to serve as church Moderator for these two years. I look forward to supporting Julie Pridham as she assumes the role of Moderator.

Mary Robinson

Report of the Board of Deacons

We begin this report with words of gratitude:

To Bruce Hoppe, Julie Pridham, and Meredith Quinn, who completed their service to the Board of Deacons at the beginning of the year. Their service is greatly appreciated, and they know that “once a deacon, always a deacon”!

To Dean Eaton and Nora Wilcutts, who began their term in a very different year. Their willingness to adapt and open to new ways of administering their roles as deacons has been a gift to us all.

To Carlyle Stewart, who continued to meet with us until his return to Detroit. His presence and thoughtful contributions to our meetings were so meaningful, and we are thrilled that First Church has been able to maintain a relationship with him and benefit from his gifts.

To Jaz Buchanan, who came to be a Pastoral Associate in unprecedented times and has risen to the occasion with grace, inspiring hope and act in her preaching, and a loving ministerial presence.

To Lexi Boudreaux and her continuing presence and ministry to the deacons and entire congregation. We cannot thank her enough for her spiritual maturity, her seemingly bottomless well of ideas, her creative and innovative ways of leveraging available technologies to increase community connectedness to our online ministry and her incredible sense of humor.

Last, but certainly not least, our continuing and overwhelming gratitude to Dan Smith, who has ministered to and with all of us with heart, spirit, and generosity. His steady leadership helped us consider new ways to live into our calling as deacons in these uncertain times. We could not be more grateful.

We began the year with an entirely deacon-led and deacon-planned worship service. We thank Meredith Quinn for starting us on that journey at the end of last year, and were thrilled to have outgoing, current, and incoming deacons take part. We hope to offer another worship service at some point in the future.

When the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns began, the deacons called all First Church members to check in and see how we might be of help. Later, we called again to check in and see how First Church members were feeling connected to our online worship services and online gatherings. Our thanks to former deacon Bruce Hoppe for providing the infrastructure needed to make that happen!

Switching from in person to online services, deacons continued to assist our staff in identifying and recruiting liturgists for service leadership roles. We are grateful to all who answered the calls to lead and their willingness to be mentored and coached on how to participate live via Zoom or prerecord greetings and readings in a timely way so our staff have time to put them together.

We also, with the guidance of Dan and Lexi, began to look at new ways of being deacons during this time, which led to our “Strolling for Solace” walks. We held several walks around Cambridge, most often at Mount Auburn Cemetery. We loved being able to spend time with some of our congregation outside of Zoom boxes, enjoying the fresh air and each other. We see this as a ministry that could easily continue post-pandemic.

Report of the Board of Deacons (continued)

This year First Church continued the work of becoming an anti-racist congregation, and we as deacons have had hard conversations about how to be supportive of and contribute to these efforts. We were honored to be part of the process of procuring new Advent banners created by the artist Janet MacKenzie, brought to us by the generosity of Andrea Seek and Laurie Williams. We as deacons have more to do, and we will gladly continue to have the hard conversations and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We also sent Christmas cards to the entire congregation, with a beautiful design by our own Joanne Paul, depicting our wonderful tradition of the Un-Pageant.

We save our final gratitude for our current deacons. To Dave Dyer, Dean Eaton, Amy Matias, Joanne Paul, Taj Smith, and Nora Wilcutts, we can't thank you enough for your flexibility, willingness to think outside the Zoom Box, your deep faith, and your sense of humor. We loved just being with you!

The Board of Deacons looks forward to the new year and ministering to and with you all, online and in person, whenever possible!

Respectfully submitted,
Moana Bentin (co-chair), Beth Spaulding (co-chair), Dave Dyer, Dean Eaton, Amy Matias, Joanne Paul, Taj Smith, and Nora Wilcutts

Report of the Christian Formation Committee

Members: Ariel Ackermann, Audrey Bellinger, Nancy Cyr, Hilary Hopkins (Chair), Faith Ross.
Clergy/staff: Sarah Higginbotham, Dan Smith, Lexi Boudreaux, Jaz Buchanan

The Committee, like other First Church committees, had only one meeting in person in 2020, this year of Covid-19; all the rest were via Zoom. We met monthly except in December. Listed below are some highlights of the Committee's work during 2020.

1. Preparation of a broad framework for Christian Formation throughout the church year which might serve as an organizing principle going forward, especially if/when we can return to meeting in person.
2. Preparation of a brief questionnaire to be submitted to the congregation, asking for preferences and wishes for formation topics, times, etc. Like much else, this plan did not come to fruition on account of covid logistics. We will hope for a later distribution!
3. Decision to offer a monthly "alternative" 10:00 Hour—arts/craft, movement, music, etc. for adults/children together. Note: agreement to go to a 9:30 time instead, to give staff/clergy time to prepare for worship.
4. Spring offerings facilitated by committee members or people recruited by the committee:
 - Tongues of Fire craft workshop at 9:30 hour
 - video and discussion on compassion at 9:30 hour
 - illustrations of the Creation story in Genesis, presented at worship
5. Fall and early winter offerings and activities facilitated by committee members:
 - 4 sessions on Plymouth's Pilgrims (curriculum from Congregational Library) at 9:30 hour
 - participation in committee discussing benchmarks in our journey toward hiring a minister of color
 - videoed "read-aloud" of story for youngest children, presented at 9:30 hour and on FaceBook
 - making of Advent wreaths and lanterns for Epiphany at 9:30 hour
 - making of "Ideal Wheels", a craft about New Year resolutions, at 9:30 hour

At each of our meetings, Sarah Higginbotham kept the Committee informed of the many and wonderful offerings for children and youth. Sarah and her teachers turned on a dime at the start of the year—from in-person Church School as always to virtual as now, in light of covid constraints. Truly a remarkable and devoted effort! Our families with young people are so very fortunate.

These lists do not begin, really, to capture the rich and creative discussion at each meeting. The committee members are not short of ideas, and are willing to work to bring them to fruition.

Thank you, Ariel, Audrey, Nancy, Faith, Sarah, Dan, Lexi and Jaz. Together, with the congregation, we will see it through.

Respectfully submitted,
--Hilary Hopkins, Chair

Report of the Building & Grounds Committee

To say that 2020 was an unusual and challenging year would be an understatement. We decided to put planned historic preservation work on hold due to uncertainty surrounding the church's finances in these uncertain times. The closure of the building in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic put many other maintenance projects on hold, although required routine maintenance of critical infrastructure like fire systems was performed as scheduled.

Thanks to two very generous donations, the church made improvements to the sound system and installed a video camera in the sanctuary late last year. These changes allowed the church to transition to virtual services seamlessly and immediately following the sudden closure of the building in March. We made additional improvements over the course of the year to improve sound quality and allow camera movement and installed a laptop feed to allow prerecorded videos and other content to be added to Sunday services.

In response to the pandemic, the church installed hand sanitizer dispensers throughout the building and purchased three HEPA filters for use where needed. These have been crucial to reopening plans. Although Sunday services are still virtual and building use is still down significantly, staff and tenants continue to access the building. The Friday Café has been offering meals and other needed services out of the Tower Room, Newtowne School reopened at reduced capacity in the fall, and the shelter has been open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week through most of the year.

We're very excited to report that solar panels were installed on the roof of the church this year. With the building mostly unoccupied, we have only begun to receive the full benefits of the panels, but the panels are expected to reduce the church's energy consumption by up to 30%. This will both save the church in the long run and reduce our carbon footprint. The expected annual reduction in greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the panels is equivalent to 70,000 miles driven by an average passenger vehicle. We also replaced the five old, inefficient boilers with four energy efficient, modulating condensing boilers, which will reduce our natural gas consumption by at least 25%. The church's water heater, which had reached the end of its useful life and had been working overtime due to the shelter being open 24-7, was also replaced in the fall.

Early in the year, the gutters at the parsonage were replaced after a squirrel destroyed a significant portion of the deteriorating gutters. Other work at the parsonage this year included repointing the front steps and cleaning the chimney flues.

The historic preservation work that had been planned for this year, which includes replacement of the cloister roof and repairs to the sanctuary slate roof and masonry, will move forward in 2021. In December 2020, we asked three highly qualified contractors to provide proposals for this work, which are due in January 2021. B&G anticipates that the work will be completed during the late spring or early summer of

Calculated based on an estimated 39,541 kWh of electricity production annually and using the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator, available at <https://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator>.

Report of Building & Grounds Committee (continued)

2021. The Cambridge Historical Commission has indicated that they will still honor the grant received for this work and pay for half of the cost of the planned renovations.

Many thanks to the contributions of Kirsten Manville; Kris McQuage-Loukas; our sextons George Williams, Kimel Williams, Douglas Casey; and Rebecca LaFrance; and Buildings and Grounds Committee members Peter Byerly, Cathy Garnett, and Kindle Williams.

Respectfully submitted,
Nathan Jones, Chair

Report of Shelter Oversight Committee

As reported by Jim Stewart in his Shelter Director's Report, the majority of the work during 2020 involved dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on the First Church Shelter. After providing only overnight shelter for 32 years, suddenly we needed to offer services 24 hours a day in an attempt to keep our guests safe, not only from being homeless and hungry, but from the rampaging virus as well. A dramatic ramp up occurred over a very short period of time last March: new staff had to be hired and trained, more meals provided, extensive cleaning protocols were put in place and the shelter area needed to be enlarged to provide for social distancing. We are blessed that shelter guests and staff have stayed well, and that two guests have even moved into permanent housing. We are very grateful for the unselfish and dedicated work from the shelter staff during this health emergency and we also recognize the tremendous amount of hard work and amazing accomplishments Jim has achieved this year on behalf of First Church for the guests.

We send our heartfelt gratitude to First Church members and friends, for cooking and donating food and for monetary donations to the shelter; we were able to make some essential repairs as they arose. We are so grateful to local food rescue organizations, and the many community neighbors and friends who donated meals, baked goods and financial donations; many are new connections made during the pandemic. All these gifts made everyone at the shelter feel cared for and connected to our community. We also give thanks for funding received from the First Church's Mission & Social Justice Committee, Citizen's Energy Fund and the Episcopal City Mission Fund.

We also want to recognize Jim's homelessness mission work and leadership in initiating and operating the Harvard Square shower trailers, providing his consulting to help set up other Cambridge shelters and his efforts to get legislation to authorize Supervised Consumption Sites in Massachusetts. Jim's extensive experience, ability to anticipate needs and problems, and effective collaboration with city and state officials allowed more services to be delivered more quickly to not only our shelter guests but also the wider community of homeless and food insecure people.

The Committee is greatly appreciative for the many years Jim Leone & Jean Carr have been members. Jim brought not only his enthusiasm as a committed member of the First Church community, but the wise and relevant insight he has gained from decades as a community-based psychologist. Jim was always ready to put on an apron and pickup kitchen utensils to help prepare and serve food for shelter guests during Christmas and Easter breakfasts.

The Shelter Oversight Committee was fortunate that Jean was willing to include the Committee to the First Church activities she supports. Jean brought a rigorous and experienced eye to the shelter's financial and personnel matters. She always found ways to contribute to the Committee's work. Shelter holiday breakfasts were also "upgraded" through her contributions and participation, as well.

The Committee will continue to work alongside Jim to be steadfast in keeping the shelter staff and guests safe during the new year. We are currently working with the Friday Café leaders to produce the First Church Homeless Ministries' 2021 Virtual Gala scheduled for February 20. Tickets and program description can be found on the church's website. The proceeds will greatly help our vital missions. Please attend and spread the word!

Report of the Shelter Oversight Committee (continued)

Respectfully submitted for the Shelter Oversight Committee:

Jan Jeffers Lo and Don Johnson, Co-Chairs

Jean Carr

Jane Matthews

Brian Funk

Jim Leone

Karen McArthur, Ex-Officio

Jim Stewart, Ex-Officio

Dan Smith, Ex-Officio

Report of Beloved Community

2020 has been a year of profound racial reckoning for our country. First Church has responded by committing to develop a new identity as an Antiracist Church (by vote of the Executive Council in June, 2020) and by examining the systemic racism underlying our church culture that is a barrier to living our lives according to the example of Jesus.

Summer of Prayer, Action and Reflection

The Beloved Community, a working group of the Executive Council since 2012, led the church in its 2020 efforts to become an Antiracist church beginning with the “Summer of Prayer, Action and Reflection” that invited people to “take on a spiritual practice aimed at disrupting our complicity with white supremacy, ending our silence about police brutality and racial inequality, and acting toward real change” on at least two of the following levels of work: Soul Level (personal transformation); Congregational Level (participation in making First Church a diverse, inclusive, and anti-racist congregation); Community Level (including policing reform and supporting and following the lead of BIPOC community leaders); and National Level (the Poor People’s Campaign).

In 2020, more people in First Church than ever before participated in Beloved Community groups and events such as book groups, workshops, courses, and Sunday discussions. Approximately 100 people participated in multiple groups and multiple sessions on topics ranging from “Feeling Newer to the Conversations on Race” to “How to Be An Antiracist.” More First Church members than in previous years joined with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization to exert political pressure, particularly regarding policing reform.

The Call to Return: Spiritual Reflections on Racial Justice

In September, under a grant from Boston University School of Theology, we were able to hire Carlyle Stewart as the Community Minister for Racial Justice. Carlyle had served as one of the church’s ministerial interns during the previous two years. In the fall, Carlyle presented well-attended weekly sessions that he described as “our opportunity to locate our work of racial justice, and God’s call to engage in it, by exploring Christian theological and spiritual texts. This will help us to understand how racial justice work is not simply a ministry that churches and religious communities can choose, or choose not to engage in, but it is an absolute necessity if we are to walk the spiritual path and return to God. As Americans and Christians this work is required if we are to heal and atone for the sins of the past, and also to move forward to a better and more hopeful future. First Church has done a lot of this work already. We have explored the history of race relations in America, done pilgrimages, done personal assessments and explored our own experiences, and also read a lot about how to be antiracist. But now we will have the opportunity to take things a step further and explore the theological side of things to understand how this work is a major part of our faith.”

Assisting the Executive Council in Becoming an Antiracist Church

In addition to inviting people to participate in programs, the church moved towards examining and changing the systemic racism embedded in our own church culture. The Beloved Community led a time of discussion at nearly every meeting of the Executive Council, the governing body of the church.

Before the pandemic started, the Executive Council had asked the Beloved Community group to develop some benchmarks to help the church assess how and when we would be ready to hire a Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (BIPOC) to be a senior-level minister as part of a multi-year staffing plan. The Beloved Community

Report of Beloved Community (continued)

decided first to examine what other predominantly white churches had done to create an atmosphere where a BIPOC minister could thrive. BC held a series of discussions in May and June on the Book, *Mistakes and Miracles: Congregations on the Road to Multiculturalism*. Following these discussions, a group of representatives from Executive Council and the Beloved Community group were convened to develop benchmarks to guide the church's work not only to be ready to hire a senior-level BIPOC minister, but also to help us develop steps for becoming an Antiracist church. A draft was completed and sample benchmarks were introduced in November in areas such as decision-making, relationships, and communication within First Church and First Church's relationships with communities outside of the church.. The benchmarks will be considered in more detail in a Leadership Retreat in February.

Public Remembrance Project

In 2019, First Church engaged in "a project of public remembrance related to our history of complicity with Northern slavery." This *Public Remembrance* led to discussions linking remembrance to the need for reparations. However, little progress was made on this project in 2020 because the church was closed for 10 months due to the pandemic and it was difficult to engage with others in the community, particularly those most harmed by Racism and White Supremacy with whom we had just started building relationships. Karlene Griffiths Sekou, who was hired to hold Focus Groups with diverse group of people, continued with that work to the extent possible.

Participants in the Beloved Community group this year included Peggy Stevens, Chair, David Kidder, secretary, Dan Smith, Alice Kidder, Linda Ziebell, Karlene Griffiths Sekou, Abby Shuman, and Stefanie Haug. Participants in the Benchmark Planning Group included Faith Ross from Christian Formation, Moana Bentin and Amy Mathias from Deacons, Deb Cunningham from Social Justice, as well as Kerri Ratcliffe and Jim Cairns. The Beloved Community is also grateful for volunteers who led additional programming throughout the year.

Peggy Stevens

Report of Discernment & Formation Task Team

Despite the pandemic and with gratitude for the technology of Zoom, First Church's three candidates in Discernment made great strides in their progress toward ordination this year.

Katie Omberg held her Ecclesiastical Council in June. It was a spirit filled event and Katie is now circulating her profile in search of a settled position in parish ministry. She is currently serving as a bridge pastor for the Saugus UCC Church. It is small congregation and Katie has been challenged in getting to know the members, and they her, but she has felt welcomed and is enjoying her stay. One of the upsides of having her EC on Zoom was that many of Katie's family and friends, who live outside of the Boston area, were able to come to her Council, and as a result, there were about 90 people who attended! Gathering in the breakout room during the Council's deliberations was one large reunion for Katie.

In November, Domenik Ackerman had the first of his three meetings with the Association's Committee on Ministry. The discussion focused on his theological paper was robust and well received. Domenik will meet with them again in March and then hopes to have his Ecclesiastical Council in June after completing his third and final meeting in May. Domenik, with his wife Ariel, became first time parents to Sylvester, born in June. He is also completing his doctorate in religion at Boston College and serving as a pastoral assistant at the UCC Church in North Andover. With a sense of humor, solid organizational skills, and the faith that this is what he is to be doing, he manages it all well.

Karlene Griffiths Sekou completed her two meetings with the Committee on Ministry this fall and will have her Ecclesiastical Council on February 2, 2021. With the second of the three meetings that a candidate has with the COM the candidate is asked to lead a 20 -30 minute worship service. Karlene's was a spirit filled service complete with two friends participating with singing and drumming. Karlene is working on her doctorate at Harvard, is active with Black Lives Matter and other anti racial groups in the Boston area and has been working with First Church as we strive towards being an anti racial community.

With gratitude I want to thank the Discernment and Formation team, Susie Neubauer, Alex Steinart-Avoy, Lindsay Miller, Ken Ziebell, and Dan Smith, for their work and dedication as they accompany our future pastors on their journey toward ordination. I think that I can safely say that we all feel that it is privilege and a blessing to do this ministry.

Linda Ziebell

Report of the Archives Committee

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic affected the Archives Group as it did everyone at First Church. We found new ways to do our work while remaining socially distanced. The Archives Room itself has been closed since March. Here is what we did accomplish.

We received a grant for a Roving Archivist to make a strategic assessment of our collection and advise us on development policies, disaster planning and preservation. This award was made possible through the Massachusetts State Historic Records Advisory Board (MA SHRAB) and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grant program.

We applied for the grant in February. By the time we received it, the Archives Room was closed, so the three Archives co-chairs met with Irene Gates, our Roving Archivist, on Zoom. Her first recommendation was to develop a written collection policy to define the scope of what the Archives includes and does not include. The policy would clarify what material the Archives accepts as donations and prioritize what material we actively seek. The policy would also spell out procedures for acquiring, deaccessioning and loaning materials.

We agree such a policy is crucial since, over the years, the Archives Room has become a repository for books and manuscripts that, while fascinating, have no direct relevance to the history and activities of First Church. In addition to protecting what we have, we want to collect material to help future generations understand what happened here during the pandemic and to document the congregation's efforts to become an antiracist church.

In 2020, three "From the Archives" columns appeared in the First Church newsletter EVENT. For the February issue, Kate Judd and Jacqui Gates delved into records of the Ladies' Home Missionary and Church Aid Society, which was active at First Church from 1891 to 1919. They found that at almost every monthly meeting, these women heard reports about black schools, churches and clinics, in the South and North, that they supported with time and money. In 1900, one guest speaker was African-American anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett.

In September, Chris Reynolds found inspiration in photographs made by Mac Howland in 1972 to document the installation, pipe by pipe, of the Frobenius organ in the First Church sanctuary. Her report included accounts by Wells Grogan, Art Anger, Perry Neubauer and Peter Sykes of the multi-year effort to bring the first organ by the famed Danish company to the U.S. In October, Lindsay Miller reported on the Roving Archivist grant and a new book by historian Lori Rogers-Stokes about Thomas Shepard, First Church minister from 1636 to 1649.

In the coming year, the Archives team hopes to develop a robust presence for the Archives and the history of First Church on the excellent new First Church website.

Kate Judd, Lindsay Miller, Chris Reynolds, co-chairs
Art Anger, Cathy Garnett, Jacqui Gates, Hilary Hopkins, Susie Neubauer

Report of the Gifts Discernment/Nominating Committee

The Gifts Discernment/Nominating Committee recruits persons to fill positions as officers, and chairs and members of standing boards and committees, as required by the First Church bylaws. At the request of the Moderator and/or Executive Council, we are also available to help recruit special task teams, work groups and other entities not named in the bylaws that are usually gathered for specific, short-term purposes.

We were challenged, as were all of us at First Church, by the pandemic and its impacts on church life. Aside from completing a draft slate of positions for 2021, we engaged the congregation with two events: a July ZOOM meeting with breakout rooms to discuss participants' general feelings about their relationship to First Church: what brought you to First Church, what are you doing at First Church that feels right? What is missing?

In October, Member Beth Loomis recorded a ministry moment focused on general areas of need (e.g., finance, physical plant, stewardship, etc.) This video was included in the October 4 worship service.

We also drafted position descriptions for all the Officers, Board and Committee Chairs and members. These are available as shared files on Google Docs.

The 2021 slate that follows is the slate that was approved by Executive Council. Some vacancies remain unfilled. The Committee will continue working to fill these vacancies. If you have an interest in any board or committee, please contact any member of the Gifts Discernment Committee. Long term, we also encourage you to express your interest in (or curiosity about) a future position on any of the boards or committees listed in the slate. Let us know, and we'll be happy to follow up with you.

Respectfully submitted

Dave Kidder, Chair, Pauline Fennel, Devin Hansen, Beth Loomis, Jim Rissling, Dan Smith, Senior Minister

Report of the Gifts Discernment & Nominating Committee (continued)

Slate of Officers, Boards and Standing Committees Bold font means new to position

OFFICERS

Moderator	Julie Pridham
Vice Moderator	Mary Robinson
Clerk	Chris Reynolds
Treasurer	Rich Goode
Associate Treasurer	Larry Evans
Assistant Treasurer	Art Anger
Assistant Treasurer	Connie Pyle
Controller	Rachel Carlson
Member at Large	Lisa Dinardo

BOARD OF DEACONS

Moana Bentin, Co-Chair
Amy Matias, Co-Chair
Beth Spaulding
Taj Smith
Davis Dyer
Dean Eaton
Nora Willcutts
Leslie Pelton-Cairns
Adam Weiss

FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

Caitlin Anderson, Chair
Fellowship Coordinators: Martha Dyer, Sara Hendren, Brian Funck
Cookie Solicitors: Sara Hendren, Brian Funck and Pauline Fennel

MISSIONS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Deb Cunningham, Co-Chair
Sally O'Brien, Co-Chair
Jim Brown
Alice Kidder
Molly Baker
Phil Jones

Report of the Gifts Discernment & Nominating Committee (continued)

CHRISTIAN FORMATION COMMITTEE

Hilary Hopkins, Chair
Nancy Cyr
Karolyn Feeks Maws
Faith Ross
Ariel Ackermann
Audrey Bellinger

SHELTER OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Jan Lo, Co-Chair
Don Johnson, Co-Chair
Brian Funck
Jane Matthews

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS COMMITTEE

Nate Jones, Chair
Cathy Garnett
Kindle Williams
Chris Blanc
Peter Byerly

STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

Stephen Weller, Co-Chair
Joanne Paul, Co-Chair
Susie Longfield
Nancy O'Connell
Meredith Quinn

GIFTS DISCERNMENT/NOMINATING

Dave Kidder, Chair
Beth Loomis
Jim Rissling
Pauline Fennel
Devin Hansen
Susan Gere

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Rich Goode, Treasurer, Chair, *ex officio*
Rachel Carlson, Controller, *ex officio*
Larry Evans, Associate Treasurer, *ex officio*
Stephen Weller/Joanne Paul, Co-Chairs of Stewardship, *ex officio*
Laurie Burt, Chair of Investments, *ex officio*

Report of the Gifts Discernment & Nominating Committee (continued)

INVESTMENTS (SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE)

Laurie Burt, Chair

Marc O'Brien

Rich Goode, Treasurer, *ex officio*

Elizabeth Lovance

FINANCIAL OPERATIONS (SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE)

Larry Evans, Associate Treasurer, Chair, *ex officio*

Rich Goode Treasurer, *ex officio*

Rachel Carlson, Controller, *ex officio*

Report of the Missions Committee

“Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Proverbs 31: 9

This year, Missions and Social Justice focused upon easing the heavy burdens of racial injustice and Covid-19, as well as continuing to support our long-term partners in social justice work in the Boston area and across the world.

Racial Justice

Our efforts this year included helping to fund organizations with a direct commitment to racial justice work. These included Black Lives Matter Boston, the Virtual Walk-a-Thon (normally the Mother’s Day Walk for Peace), and Primary Source (whose HistoryThon supported the development of antiracist curricula for K-12 schools). Advocacy was equally a focus this year; committee members mobilized, and helped to mobilize others, to lobby for re-establishing the Mashpee Wampanoag reservation and putting its land back into federal trust; applying pressure on the MA state government to pass legislation for decarceration in light of Covid-19; and advocating for passage of police accountability legislation at the state level.

Homelessness and Low-Income Support

One of our focus areas in 2020 was homelessness and support for low-income individuals and families. With many of the groups working on services to the homeless, we supported both specific projects and general programming. Organizations to which we donated were:

Friday Cafe, which served meals and provides donated clothing to over 100 people each week. Many members also volunteer to work at the Cafe.

First Church Shelter, which provided meals as well as shelter for 14 men

United Church of Christ, which provided emergency aid and, this year, supported a program called RIP medical debt. Hospitals sold debt for a fraction of what they initially charged; as a result, \$100 relieved \$10,000 of medical debt.

Cambridge Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition, which supported a family in sanctuary.

City Mission Society, which carried out a new clothing drive before Christmas (to which many of our First Church members contributed) and met other needs of impoverished people.

Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, which sponsored a program called Clergy and Laity for Affordable Housing, which we have supported with both funding and volunteers. This group builds and renovates houses to expand affordable housing.

Bethel Tabernacle Pentecostal Church, which sent new books purchased by First Church to children for Christmas.

Solutions at Work, which supported a meals program in Cambridge and on an ongoing basis runs a

Report of the Missions Committee (continued)

center where people can get clothing and accessories appropriate for job interviews. They also run a children's clothing, books, and toy exchange. Before Christmas this year they asked for donations of new toys, some of which were provided by people from our congregation.

Greater Boston Interfaith Organization

Missions and Social Justice supports and advocates for the causes sponsored by GBIO each year. This year brought a focus on advocacy in three areas:

Housing: Protections against evictions, foreclosures, and receiving bad credit ratings

Criminal Justice: Lowering jail and prison populations to protect against extensive Covid-19 infections

Health: Protections for healthcare workers including adequate PPE at reasonable cost.

International/Global

First Church's most significant initiatives this year involved supporting the Latin American ministry of Monica Maher (chiefly in Ecuador), sending relief funds for Hurricane Iota victims, funding Father Frank Mukiliza Kivumbi's orphanages for Ugandan children, funding Kids For Peace, and supporting Jubilee USA's work on Covid-related debt cancellation for the poor. We also donated to several environmental organizations, while also encouraging First Church members to sign the pledge to be Creation Care voters.

United Church of Christ as a Church of "Contemplatives in Action"

Missions and Social Justice presented a proposal to the First Church Executive Council to sign on to becoming a church of "Contemplatives in Action." This resolution was endorsed by the Executive Council and will now be presented at the UCC Synod in Summer 2021, with First Church as one of several co-sponsoring congregations.

The Committee welcomes anyone who wishes to suggest needs for social justice activities to contact the Co-chairs, Sally O'Brien and Deborah Cunningham.

Report of the Stewardship Committee

I would like to thank everyone who heard some portion of our Call to Give pledge campaign for 2021 and took the opportunity to reflect on their spiritual practice of giving. As of January 22, here are the financial details of our congregation's material response to the campaign:

- We have received 126 pledges or gifts from 178 people, totalling \$543,185
- 17 new pledges
- 90 increased or continued pledges
- 19 decreased pledges
- We anticipate receiving 47 additional pledges from 70 people who have given regularly in the past. This will lead us to the highest ever pledge results of \$630,000 from 248 people in 173 pledges or gifts.
- Our previous high figures were 156 pledges (2011) from 230 people (2018), \$521,945 pledged (2020) and \$558,942 given (2020).

Even before COVID arrived, 2020 did not look promising for the Stewardship Committee. In 2020 there were only two committee members listed at the annual meeting to work with our two staff members. We had also just concluded a three-year campaign and were in need of a new way forward.

With COVID came unpredicted challenges and unexpected generosity.

- Building revenues declined; giving increased
- Our in-person ministry was shuttered; our virtual community grew

Our committee also grew with the addition of Pastoral Associate Jaz Buchanan and the addition of Nancy O'Connell. Robb Morgan returned to our conversations and deliberations, even though not on our committee list. Once again, Christine Reynolds assisted us with our graphics and themes and Bruce Dillenbeck assisted with much of the final work of recording the pledges.

Together we leaned into the unexpected, puzzling together a plan that would continue to celebrate our ministries and deepen the practice of giving within our faith community. In addition to setting a pledge campaign goal that was in line with our prior commitment to seek a 3% annual increase in pledges, we invited the congregation to consider what unexpected gifts they might be able to make this year. We shared a "moon shot" goal that put a firmer foundation under the future of our ministry. We also shared a token of gratitude to those who answered the call by sending a jigsaw puzzle that people could assemble and be reminded of the spaces where we gathered together, before we were forced to gather apart.

In 2021 we plan to continue supporting the ministry the congregation will call us to provide in 2022. After being interrupted by the events of 2020, we also plan to return to conversations about how to provide for a Fifth Century of ministry at First Church in Cambridge.

Please be as grateful for the gifts you have given and received as we are grateful to share and receive the gift of serving on this committee.

Respectfully submitted:

Susie Longfield, Robb Morgan (unofficial member), Nancy O'Connell, Stephen Weller (Chair)
Rev. Karen McArthur, Rev. Dan Smith, Pastoral Associate Jaz Buchanan

Report of the Investment Committee

First Church began the year 2020 with \$3,305,202 in its investment accounts at Charles Schwab with investment management provided by O'Brien Wealth Partners (OWP). At the end of 2020, the value at Schwab was \$3,496,907, an increase of \$191,705. The change in the investment account balance reflects inflows of

\$134,580 in gifts, \$74,343 in income from investments net of fees, and net gains of \$345,866 in investments, offset by distributions of \$343,000 to the Church treasury. Distributions to the treasury included \$168,000 in normally recurring contributions, currently approximately 5% of the Investment balance. The additional

\$175,000 in distributions is attributable to transfer of cash for stock gifts, scheduled and unscheduled capital improvements and other miscellaneous operating expenses. Please see the Treasurer's report for specific numbers in 2020 Church expenditures.

First Church investment returns were generally in line with benchmarks established for each asset class. This is quite exceptional given the Covid-19 pandemic's severe impacts on the economy throughout 2020 and on markets in the first quarter. It is noted that the intentional higher than normal cash on hand at the beginning of 2020, in anticipation of capital expenditures (boiler replacements), turned out to provide important security during the early days of the pandemic against the sudden loss of Church revenues and early market declines due to the uncertain effects of Covid. Overall, the Church's investment portfolio largely recovered by the end of the year, with a respectable year end value and balance. Based on investment activities alone, investments increased by 13.16% on a time-weighted basis with a net market value gain of \$345,866. The asset allocation at year end was 67.6% in a globally diversified portfolio of stock funds, 18.6% in fixed-income or bond funds, 8.3% in alternative assets and 5.5% in cash, within the ranges established in our Investment Policy guidelines. The diversified stock portfolio increased by 17.10% in 2020. Returns on indices for comparable categories of stocks were gains of 16.25% for the MSCI AC World Index, 18.40% for the S&P 500 (large cap stocks), 19.96% for the Russell 2000 (US small cap stocks), 18.31% for the MSCI Emerging Market stocks, and 7.82% for the MSCI EAFE (international stocks).

The fixed income portfolio increased in value by 8.37% compared to a gain of 7.51% in the Bloomberg Barclays US Agg Bond index. Alternatives, in our case consisting primarily of funds invested in mortgages and a hedged equity strategy, increased by 8.24% compared to a 2.49% gain in the Credit Suisse Hedge Fund Index.

During the year, the Investment Committee took several further steps to align the portfolio with investments in corporations judged to be leaders in positive Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices as determined by fund managers specializing in ESG investments, without sacrificing investment performance. The ESG equity portfolio, initiated in the third quarter of 2016, has achieved returns generally and consistently equal to or better than the standard portfolio. For the calendar year 2020, the ESG equity portfolio slightly outperformed the standard portfolio returning 18.38% versus 16.20% (gross of fees).

Asset allocation for ESG equities was held at or near the targeted level of 40% (year end at 41.9%), an increase authorized in 2019 from the initial target level of 10%. has gradually increased its portion of the equity portfolio from 10% to a targeted level of 40% in 2019., The Committee continues to require the screening of holding for any carbon related assets in line with the Sustainability In-

Report of the Investment Committee (continued)

vestment Policy Guidelines as measured by Carbon-Tracker and is able to report that the percent of the portfolio invested in companies on the list was less than 1% (0.59% down from 1.15% as of 01/09/20).

The Committee continues regular quarterly and annual evaluation of the overall performance and asset allocation of the Church's portfolio in ESG equity investments since inception of the Sustainability Investment Policy guidelines, including consideration of ESG investment in other asset classes. The investment outcomes have been encouraging, as the ESG portfolio has outperformed the traditional portfolio slightly over most of the time periods since its inception. We are committed to continue a course of disciplined learning and improvement in these sustainable investment practices and will report any revised asset allocation and updates to the guidelines to Executive Council in 2021.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Burt, Chair, FCC Investment Committee

Jill Fopiano, O'Brien Wealth Partners LLC (Investment Managers)

The Committee notes the incredibly positive step taken last year to formalize the standing Finance Committee, on which the Investment Committee participates. The Finance Committee has improved coordination regarding budgets, stewardship, cash flow and capital needs replacements and long-term financial plans to project revenues needed to sustainably support the operations and capital needs of the church consistent with its mission. This coordination, in turn, has enhanced the Investment Committee's ability to more effectively anticipate and plan for church needs from the portfolio during volatile market conditions.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Burt, Co-Chair, Investment Committee

Jason Whaley, Member and Treasurer

Jill Fopiano, O'Brien Wealth Partners LLC (Investment Managers)

Report of the Treasurer

Entering 2020, First Church had taken steps to “bend the curve” of its long-term deficit spending, intending to continually increase income slightly more than expenses. Maintaining such a commitment will make the church financially sustainable on an ongoing basis. The church has started down that path by reducing its actual deficit from \$235,885 in 2018 to \$116,215 in 2019, and with the 2020 budget showing a planned deficit of \$99,222.

2020 Results

Actual events of 2020 were not as expected. The COVID-19 pandemic, resulting building closure, economic recession, and volatile financial markets all affected the church in one way or another, and our financial life was no exception. We realized these extraordinary impacts on our finances:

The building closure reduced our donations for building use by approximately half, with income limited to long-term tenants, who were themselves under financial pressure from the same events

Despite the recession, we the congregation responded by *increasing* our giving to the church beyond what was pledged and budgeted

The stock market decline in March temporarily reduced the value of the long-term investments we rely on for annual funding, but the subsequent market recovery increased the value even more

The Federal government responded to the COVID crises with the CARES Act in April, which created the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), providing money to employers to help them keep paying people despite quarantine restrictions. The church qualified for 125,000 as a forgivable loan under PPP, meaning the church will not be obligated to repay it.

As the life of the church moved online, EC made the decision to invest in a new website to upgrade our digital infrastructure. This required an unforeseen expense of \$32,000.

The net result of all of these unexpected changes was itself unexpected: instead of a budget deficit of \$99,222, we actually had a budget deficit of about \$60,000 (final numbers not available at the time of writing), and the value of our investments increased to \$3.496MM from \$3.305MM.

Impact of Building Improvements

During 2020 the church made two improvements to the building which may reduce expenses in the future: First, we entered into an agreement with a solar developer to install solar panels on the roof (over Margaret Jewett Hall). The church does own these panels, but purchases the power they produce, at a price that is lower than our utility rate and is locked in for 20 years. The total impact is uncertain but we will definitely have lower electricity costs than we otherwise would have had going forward.

Second, the church installed new high efficiency boilers. We expect this to reduce our gas bills by \$4,000 per year or more, beginning in 2021. These boilers were financed by a \$168,216 zero-interest loan under the Massachusetts “HEAT” loan program, which is payable in equal monthly installments over seven years.

2021 Budget

Budgeting for 2021 was complicated by the uncertainty surrounding the ongoing COVID quarantine and when we’ll be able to make full use of the building. The committees budgeted for two scenarios: one fully

Report of the Treasurer (continued)

remote, and one fully in person. In November the congregation approved a budget that blended those two scenarios 50/50.

The deficit, assuming remote for the first half of the year and in-person for the second half, is budgeted at \$123,785.

The budget includes pledged gifts of \$600,000, an increase from the actual gifts of roughly \$582,000 in 2020. Responding to a challenge from the Stewardship Committee, pledges appear to be coming in closer to \$640,000, which would keep the church on the same sustainable path envisioned in 2018 and 2019.

Jason Whaley

Congregational Roll 2020

Active Roll Reported for 31 December 2019: 391

Net additions to resident membership, baptisms and marriages:

New members:

By affirmation of faith:

Claire Hunt
Casey Marsh
Joe Welker

By confirmation:

Bridget Allan
James Blanc
Allison Korn
Christina Korn
Jake Matias

Removals from membership, by death:

Eric Reidel
Dudne Breeze

Removals from membership, by letter of transfer:

None

Baptisms in the Church Universal:

Bridget Allan
Liam Edward Joyce
Lydia Narayan

Marriages:

Kirsten Manville and Tim Foley
Jaime Bonney and Charlie Rigg
Christina James and Michael Fox

Active Roll on 31 December 2020: 397

Communion of Saints

During 2020, the following persons completed their lives among us

Dudne Breeze*	Robert H. Keith
Ruth Buschmann	Marc Kilburn
David M. Campbell	Peter Marks
Marcella Campbell	Sharon Marshall
Charlie Cross	Phyllis McCann
Charles "Sonny" Denicola	Carl Iver Ohman
Fran Early	Pikachu
Aubri Ester	Benjamin Hunter Placella
Dante Fiorillo	Rev. Avery Post
James Freeman	Albert Puell
Mattie Greer	Bill Rangnow
Anna Mae Hardwick	Eric Reidel*
Paul Haroutunian	Don Reynolds
Phyllis Hollinshead	Nancy Sanders
Jeff Hopkins	Andrew Shuman
Gloria Hunt	Jean Marlene Stewart
Jean Roger Joachim	Clara Jean Williams
Brian Johnson	Mattie Bell Williams
Jan Johnson	Bong Ki Yoon
Carmen Flores Korn	

O Lord, you are my light and my salvation
the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

One thing I ask of you, Lord, this I seek:
to live in your house all the days of my life...

For you will hide me in your shelter
in the day of trouble,
you will conceal me in your tent
and set me high on a rock...

I believe that I shall see
the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.



FIRST CHURCH IN CAMBRIDGE, CONGREGATIONAL

United Church of Christ

11 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA 02138

617-547-2724

www.firstchurchcambridge.org