

2021 Annual Report



First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

387th Annual Meeting

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First Church in Cambridge, Congregational

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Report of the Senior Minister

Let me be honest: 2021 was a slog! It was exhilarating for moments, otherwise exhausting and extremely unpredictable. It was another year marked by way too much illness and death, way too much political polarization, way too much planning and pivoting from those plans. It was a year of joyful hybrid re-opening, and then dreary Delta and Omicron induced re-closing. And yet, through it all, we proclaimed “God is good.” Why? Because 2021 has also been a year of surprising gifts, tender care, faith-filled dedication, bold witness and Spirit-led worship, as I trust you will see in the pages that follow.

Let’s start with worship, the beating heart of our life together even though we spent much of the year apart! After 18 months of live-streaming, we flung wide doors for a poignant “Come All You Thirsty” Regathering Sunday. We welcomed back our choir, thanks be to God! We began living in and into a new world of hybrid worship, with at least 60 or 70 in-person and at least double that number joining online. We heard inspiring sermons from guest preachers: Southern New England UCC new Minister and President Rev. Darrel Goodwyn, Rev. Pausa Kaio Thompson, from Karlene Griffiths Sekou, Duncan Holloman and Marianne Jensen, Joanne Paul, our Poet-in-Residence Jean Dany Joachim with several of his friends, and Bishop Brian Greene of Pentecostal Tabernacle Church. Hats off to Sarah for continuing to offer memorable times with children and to Jaz for leading a super fun and joy-filled hybrid Unpageant! We also heard stunning music from Peter Sykes and our choir (virtual and live), Issa and Marcia Bibbins, and Toussaint the Liberator, who played percussion to accompany Karlene’s preaching. In May, renowned local dancer Wyatt Jackson blessed our chancel with a powerful sacred movement offering. In November, we celebrated Peter’s 35th anniversary as our Music Director; we also began planning for a 50th-anniversary celebration and refurbishment of our beloved Frobenius organ. And, we moved worship outside our walls which proved to be a wonderful gift necessitated by Covid yet warmly welcomed by all, even when it was cold. Thanks to team efforts from Sarah, Jaz, and Lexi, our front lawn has become a familiar space for sacred gathering, with First Worship on the Lawn, Epiphany prayer walks, Palm Sunday processions around the Common, and a robust 100-person Christmas Eve Carol Sing on the Lawn. As a favorite First Church opening hymn goes, “Let there be life in this house,” and now outside it, too! And for those at home or joining from afar, we made further improvements to our livestream worship experience. We also installed two large screens in the sanctuary. Thank you, First Church, for your extraordinary patience with our technological growing pains and glitches throughout the year.

Despite efforts to reconvene in person, most of our non-worship ministry and connection continued and even grew online in 2021. In fact, we now have more small groups meeting than ever before. A partial list includes our weekly “Praying the Psalms” group led by Brent Coffin throughout the spring, our “Call to Return 2.0” spiritual reflection sessions led by Carlyle Stewart throughout the fall, weekly Biblical Justice Prayer Calls with Pentecost Tabernacle, our monthly Professional Caregivers Support call, our monthly Reparations Accountability group call, and our monthly Men’s Breakfast, and those are just the ones that I attend regularly. In addition, there’s our new-this-year Monday Contemplative Practice, with heartfelt thanks to Duncan Hollomon for convening and leading. There’s also our new-since-Covid Tuesday House Church meeting and an ongoing Thursday Night Bible Study. Add to this our seasonal Faith and Life groups around varied interests, and we should all say, “thanks be to God for Zoom!” No? Too soon? Well, then, thanks be to God for our many faithful and truly gifted small group leaders who create powerful spaces for Spirit-led sharing, study, and connection. And the same goes for our “9:30 Hours.” We can all be grateful to Hilary Hopkins and our fabulous Christian Formation team for coordinating these and other programs, and grateful

Report of the Senior Minister (continued)

to all “9:30 hour” leaders, as well. This year, Peter Sykes led a series on Race and Classical Music. Duncan Holloman led two sessions on Contemplative Practice. Alex Steinert Evoy led a series on compassion. Staff and Christian Formation team leaders co-led a Lenten study on the symbolism of ashes (as signs of creation, repentance, mortality, and the cross). Jaz and Lexi, along with Karlene Griffiths Sekou, Taj Smith, and Laurie Williams, led a series on feminist, queer, and womanist theologies. In June, we welcomed Dr. Joerg Rieger to teach us about the connections between racism and capitalism.

Other gifts and surprises of this pandemic time? Summer Popsicle Hours! They are here to stay, we hope, with thanks to Lexi for that keeper of an idea. We’ve also discovered other new outdoor ministries like Deacon and member-led prayer walks, youth group meetings in the playground, local racial justice pilgrimages, and outdoor lunches on the lawn. Thanks to Caitlin Anderson and the friends of fellowship (especially Will, Lorraine, and Hannah!) for their ongoing efforts to keep us nourished and offer hospitality despite the constraints of Covid. This year, we also made a giant leap in our communications ministry with new efforts to spread the word about all things First Church! In late 2020, we launched our new website, which has anchored several innovations in how we share our story, including pre-worship slides, an interactive bulletin and e-newsletter, a new First Church Listserv, and a more robust social media presence. Since Covid moved so much of our life together online, the timing could not have been better. Thanks especially to Sarah for leading this charge and to Lexi and Kirsten, as well. The four of us now meet weekly as a newly formed Communications team.

Still, we know some ministry works better offline. Deacons and Pastoral Care Teams, led by Susie Neubauer, continued to offer outreach through prayer, calling, visits and card-writing. Thank you to all who participated in providing his much-needed, personalized care and support, especially amidst such hard times.

Other gifts of this time include the opportunity to serve our community and to be witnesses for God’s love and compassion and mercy and justice. Our Homeless Ministries, fearlessly and seemingly inexhaustibly led by Jim Stewart and Kate Layzer, have been meeting basic human needs for food and shelter literally non-stop and 24-7 since the pandemic began! Thanks in part to Kate’s determined leadership, a hugely successful virtual Gala kicked off the year, which added to our coffers for staffing and supplies. Kate also made sure that testing, vaccinations, boosters, and flu shots were available to the Friday community through a partnership that she built with the Cambridge Department of Public Health. Meanwhile, Jim has been a staunch advocate for city-sponsored, First Church Shelter-staffed showers and has also been on the front lines of the fight for human and dignified responses to the crisis at Mass and Cass. Speaking of advocacy, Will Erickson and Phil Jones ensured that First Church was well-represented at Greater Boston Interfaith Organization’s house meetings and several electoral accountability actions. Kudos also to Jim Brown and Jaz Buchanan for revitalizing our Earth Stewardship ministry. Thanks to our Missions and Social Justice committee, these and other outreach ministries have both funding and coordination, which Deb Cunningham and Sally O’Brien have been leading beautifully.

Meanwhile, this year, in addition to sharing many conversations about Covid and staffing models, our Executive Council endorsed a powerful new Vision for Being an AntiRacist Church. The Council committed to sharing responsibility for this journey following a February anti-racism leadership retreat. You can read about our racial justice work in the Beloved Community report, with thanks to Peggy Stevens and Dave Kidder for

Report of the Senior Minister (continued)

guiding that team. Even better, notice our progress throughout these pages as more and more church leaders are taking up the call of our vision. Our racial justice work appears to be growing deeper as we move from awareness-raising to relationship building with Pentecostal Tabernacle Church, the Cambridge Black Pastors Alliance, the Cambridge NAACP, KingBoston, and more. We are also moving to specific and meaningful action. In June, with leadership from Karlene Griffiths Sekou and members of our Reparations Accountability small group, we created a new First Church Reparations Fund, which will be distributed by a still-forming collective of community members of color. We also introduced a Land Acknowledgement over two years in the making, with input on our process from Massachusetts tribe member, Elizabeth Solomon, Upstander Project filmmaker and learning director, Mishy Lessser, and Wampanoag member, gkisedtanamoogk.

These are all gifts from the Spirit from whom all our blessings flow. Our talented, collaborative, hard-working lay leaders and staff are top among those blessings. I have already named some, but there are many more! A big thank you to Nate Jones and our Buildings and Grounds team for beautifying our front lawn and landscape in time for our summer and fall regathering. Nate has also overseen the next phase of our roofing project, with financial support from a second \$100,000 Cambridge Historical Commission grant. Sadly, we said goodbye in February to our most excellent Facilities Manager, Kris McQuage-Loukas, who was also a rock with our Sunday am AV. Gratefully, Kevin Newell stepped in on Sundays, and we just (finally) found a new Facilities Manager, Lee Prouty. Lee is already unburdening Nate, Kirsten, and me of Kris's many responsibilities and tasks. Thanks, as well, to Treasurer and Finance Team Chair Rich Goode, Investments Committee Chair Laurie Burt and Stewardship Co-Chairs Steve Weller and Joanne Paul, Planned Giving leader, Bill Hsiao, and our minister of Stewardship and Finance, Karen McArthur. Gratefully, our financial health and sustainability are in their skillful, capable hands. With Steve Weller's Spirit-led moon-shot invitation, our 2021 giving increased a remarkable 10%, and we've already collected well over 100% of our pledges. First Church's ongoing generosity, along with help from government Covid relief programs, has allowed us to stretch and already achieve Phase 2 of the plan introduced by our Staff Model Working Group at our Annual Meeting in 2020.

Speaking of our staff model, what a joy it was to call Lexi Boudreaux this year to be our full-time Transitional Minister, 'for such a time [of transition] as this,' and what a joy it was to share in the celebration of her ordination at her home church in Brookline. We were also able to give Karen a well-deserved "Part 1" of her sabbatical this past summer, even as we plan for a Covid-postponed sabbatical for Sarah this coming spring. Also, what a gift it has been to watch Pastoral Associate Jaz Buchanan and Ministerial Intern Ebony West step into and powerfully embody their new roles with us! Of course, heartfelt thanks as well to our entire support staff, from our dedicated sextons, George, Kimel, Doug, Rebecca, and our newest sexton Atul to our steadfast administrative assistant, Bruce. Finally, a deep bow to the ever unflappable Kirsten Manville, who has been our point person on all of our many building-related tasks, and so much more, and who hasn't missed a beat even when working from home.

Finally, my profound thanks to our extraordinary lay leaders who were fellow laborers in our First Church vineyard, especially amidst this year of ongoing crisis. Moderators Julie Pridham and Meredith Quinn (who stepped up after Julie moved this past fall), Vice Moderator Mary Robinson, Deacons Co-Chairs Amy Matias and Moana Bentin and all the Deacons, Covid Consultant extraordinaire and former CDC exec Ed Baker,

Report of the Senior Minister (continued)

how can I and we thank you enough for your wisdom, guidance, and presence over this past year? You were always there when called upon, always ready to lend an ear or convene a meeting. You offered invaluable support, much-needed feedback and pushback regarding our reopening plans, surveys, congregational messaging, and more! The faithfulness and dedication of our Deacons, Executive Council, and staff were my primary reminders this year of God's goodness. I wonder if the greatest gift of this strange pandemic time is that we have learned in new and memorable ways that we are always in it together, and that, despite whatever distance or distancing, we are never truly alone. I hope and pray that each of us has felt that in our very bones this year. A slog of a year, to be sure, but I can't imagine going through it without First Church. Indeed, God is good. All the time!

Rev. Dan Smith

Report of Transitional Minister Lexi Boudreaux

We began 2021 with an outdoor Epiphany prayer service, participating in outdoor worship for the first of many times this year, unknown to us at the time. We walked around Cambridge Common that night with our electric candles, bringing the light of Christ into the public square as we grappled with and prayed about the news of the insurrection at our nation's Capitol building earlier that day. There were many unanticipated moments in 2021 and throughout all the times we have had to shift our plans, or change the ways we worship and gather, we have found new ways to find joy, discover new experiences, and uncover blessings we had yet to plan for.

This summer was a time of experimentation and exploration of hybrid worship with our lay leaders and staff and also a time to reconnect in person during popsicle hours on our lawn. It was also a time of thinking through how to make our gathering practices and physical space more welcoming to all. A Regathering Group on Inclusion and Belonging met throughout the summer, with teams working on preparing different parts of our sacred space for the return of people back into our building. Leaders and staff gathered together after worship most weeks, asking for feedback about the experience of hybrid worship, the chancel set up, liturgy elements, signage and more. Thank you so much to everyone who stayed after worship to brainstorm with us, to think through how to welcome folks back to our building safely and fulsomely. A special thank you to Adam Weiss, the Matias family, Kindle Williams, Joanne Paul, Faith Ross, Moana Bentin, Beth Spaulding, Dean Eaton, and staff who were on the teams for this work. Shout out to Kindle, Jake and Alex who all stood on the top of ladders for the majority of a Saturday and Sunday to efficiently help finish painting our Narthex wall in the August heat!

In August, between Bruce Dillenbeck and I, we covered for Karen McArthur as she took the first part of her sabbatical. Throughout the fall the three of us have been working on our systems for how we manage our day to day finances. We've been developing ways to make our process more efficient, transparent, and accessible, in line with our call to be an Anti-racist church.

We regathered in September with a fully hybrid congregation for worship, some worshipping via livestream, others in the pews. Huge shout out to our Board of Deacons for their efforts in greeting on Sunday mornings with all of the covid protocols to track and educate people about, as well as figuring out how to serve and prepare communion in hybrid worship. Their support and offering of their presence and skills as we reopened was invaluable for the part of our First Church community that was regathering in person and for those gathering online for zoom coffee hour.

As we have learned this past year, communication is ministry and ministry is communication. We have lived into our new communication strategy and have grown in our ability to efficiently communicate about the ministry we do together. Big thanks to Sarah Higginbotham for keeping us on track during our meetings and as we write blurbs. We have seen growth in the accessibility of information about our life together, including the fact that our Instagram followers and YouTube subscribers have doubled the past calendar year. I have been finding hope in the good news we have been able to tell through all the new ways we connect with people online and I hope you have too.

In June of 2021 we had a congregational meeting where you all called me to serve in a designated term po-

Report of Transitional Minister Associate Lexi Boudreaux (continued)

sition as our Transitional Minister for 2 years starting in September 2021 and celebrated my ordination in October at United Parish in Brookline. Thank you to members of First Church for being communion servers, worship leaders and members of the choir. Thank you all for your presence and support throughout this process. It has meant so much to me. I'm excited to see where God is calling us all over the next year and a half, both separately and together.

This past year I've appreciated the proliferation of small groups at First Church. Whether it is a House Church group from Lent of 2020 that is still meeting weekly, to the 6-8 lay lead faith and life groups we consistently run each season, to new ongoing affinity book groups, groups meeting outdoors in nature and small groups focused on our anti-racism work and theological reflection there are spaces to connect and grow together even through this pandemic time. More accurately, these spaces have deepened and thrived due to the pandemic and have benefited from more opportunities to meet on zoom. One group that I have been working with for the first time this year has been the youth group. Thanks to Becky Moyer for co-leading for another year and for thinking up ways to support our young people through this stressful season with me. From putting together cookie care packages, to carving pumpkins, to a Christmas gift exchange we have had our fair share of fun even amidst the uncertainty of the pandemic. It's been a joy to reconnect with our youth this year.

Yes, this year has presented unprecedented challenges and unanticipated turns, *and* it has also brought so many blessings and new ways to experience the love and grace of God in community. And for that, I am grateful.

In deep gratitude for our ministry together,
Lexi Boudreaux

Report of the Pastoral Associate Jaz Buchanan

Greetings and peace to you, First Church! 2021 brought vaccines and boosters and with it some hope to return to “normalcy.” I know I did not expect the pivoting and uncertainty the year brought, after an already tremendously difficult 2020, but I continue to be incredibly grateful for the First Church community. Although we have not made it to the Promised Land yet with a pandemic safely behind us, our faith community has and continues to be a source of God’s hope, love, grace and yes, even joy.

As a church, we have leaned ever more gently into embodiment and movement. Last year during Lent, I was blessed to lead a midweek service that featured quiet, embodied meditation, soulful sharing, art, and prerecorded cello music offered by my wife, Jackie. Towards the end of each service, we prayed together through movement, meeting the Divine within us and around us.

On Palm Sunday, I felt called to create a slideshow that captured how all of you have faithfully shown up for one another and this church repeatedly throughout this pandemic –from your home altars, over Zoom fellowship and formation hours, at Black Lives Matter protests, in-person for homeless ministries, and at outdoor prayer walks and gatherings. I knew Palm Sunday roughly marked the year anniversary of First Church worshiping physically apart. Creating this slideshow brought me to tears and grounded me in tremendous gratitude for each and every one of you.

Throughout the Spring of last year, I had the honor of continuing to teach Faith & Social justice, a middle school formation class for our 7th and 8th grade students. We drew 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. I am blessed with the opportunity to continue to work with our now 8th grader middle schoolers and 9th grade high schoolers as one, among an incredible team of facilitators, for *Our Whole Lives*, a sexuality and faith curriculum, starting this January..

After sharing some divine, gender-bending, sparkly, polka dotted flare with you all on Pentecost, I graduated from Harvard Divinity School and completed my Clinical Pastoral Education at Beverly Hospital over the summer. I returned to First Church on September 1 full of joy and gratitude to serve this community of faith for another year.

It continues to be such a joy to work closely with Sarah Higginbotham, our Director of Creative Worship & Arts. Words cannot express how hard the pandemic has been and yet, I will say that it has nudged all of us to creatively do church and spend more time in nature among God’s beloved creation. In September, Sarah and I led multigenerational First Church services on the lawn on Sundays at 9:30 a.m. After serving First Church virtually for a year, it meant the world to meet more of you in-person. During these services, we sang, shared reflections, and planted our prayers in our First Church prayer garden. In early October, for the first time since the pandemic, we held an in-person outdoor Blessing of the Animals service outside. What a joy to meet our furry loved ones and members of the First Church community!

Throughout the rest of the fall, I had the honor of embarking on three holy pilgrimages with you. We traveled to the Royall House and Slave Quarters in Medford, a museum that was once inhabited by the largest slaveholding family in Massachusetts in the 18th century. In November, we walked the Black Heritage Trail and prayerfully journeyed alongside residence and community buildings that once congregated many black

Report of Pastoral Associate Jaz Buchanan (continued)

community activists who fought for human rights during the American Civil War. In December, we walked parts of the African American Heritage Trail in Cambridge, and learned about the contributions of black abolitionists, office holders, authors and educators that lived in Cambridge between 1840 and 1940. During each of these pilgrimages, we held silence, we reflected, we talked (for some it was the first-time seeing FCC friends in a long time!), we prayed, we listened, we asked: where do we experience God?

To say this year has not been easy feels like an understatement. Each decision we make in our day-to-day life is complicated. I was delighted to spend more time with the youngest among us during Children's worship in late November and early December. I know in-person worship was not possible for some families with young kids, grandparents caring for grandchildren, and for caretakers in our community. This prompted me to want to create multigenerational videos to stream on our YouTube account for the season of Advent. Each week, I focused on a different time of day – morning, noon, evening, and nighttime – and invited folk (especially kids!) at home to quiet our minds, hands and feet with me and center ourselves in the love of God.

We are holding a lot, dear church, and I know the climate crisis is just one among many. This fall I joined the Earth Stewardship committee, and it has been a blessing. We held a meeting in mid-November to discern next steps for the 2021-2022 year. We shared fears and anxieties for the future, a desire to lift up local accomplishments to spark divine hope, an interest in First Church's climate justice history, and a yearning to know steps one can take, no matter how small. Thanks to this meeting, we now have a new Earth Stewardship website page that includes the latest advocacy options folk can take and a list of upcoming faith and climate crisis events in the New England area.

Worship has been rich and full of God's abundant love and grace. I want to extend a huge thank you to the worship team, including our Deacons! I felt incredibly supported in my preaching and I cherish our collaboration for Sunday morning worship services. I especially enjoyed collaborating with our tech support, Kevin Newell, and with the congregation to create a truly hybrid Unpageant service. Mary, Joseph, and Jesuses (Jesus was a twin this year!) all Zoomed in. Angel Gabriel teleported from Zoom to in-person worship. Our shepherds, sheep and wise ones joined us from the pews. There were pre-recorded videos, Facebook statuses, and thanks to Peter Sykes and the choir, soulful music.

I continue to be in awe of First Church's ministries, and justice commitments 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 Stewardship & Finance

We are living into this new world in exciting ways. During this past year, we have innovated, expanded, and positioned ourselves toward the new day that is dawning, a new horizon, a new normal, or whatever metaphor you're in the mood for. We continue to build on the new opportunities and challenges that we have discovered over the past two years, resulting in an organizational structure that can support the expanded ministry that we are being called to.

Financial Reporting

In 2004, I began working with First Church as a consultant, setting up a financial recordkeeping system that was more versatile and transparent so that the church could make informed and prudent decisions about its ministry and mission. When I was asked to provide bookkeeping services sixteen years ago, I was able to complete all of the bookkeeping for the church in less than 8 hours per week (!). We had a budget of \$900k and 43 employees. This past year, 2021, we also had 43 employees, but a budget that is double the size. What has changed? And where are we now?

Fifteen years ago, almost everything was on paper: one weekly deposit of cash and checks, paper paychecks, one weekly check run, and printed financial reports. We had one shelter contract, two bank accounts, and one investment account. Software came on disks with instruction books. It almost seems quaint. Fast forward to today, and we receive contributions every day via several electronic methods. Payroll is direct deposit with an app for hourly staff to clock in and out each shift. Including the Shelter's "temporary" 24/7 operations, our employees logged 35,394 hours, a 50% increase over 2006. Many expenses are paid with debit cards issued to staff and volunteers, with the receipts uploaded via an app and the transactions downloaded into QuickBooks. We now have a digital archive of invoices attached to our QB file for easy reference. Most of our bills are paid electronically, so our weekly check run is smaller. We are managing five state and city contracts, a few grants, and many donor-restricted funds, tagging each expense to the relevant income source. We have added employee benefits and complied with new employer requirements. Monthly financial reports are available online for lay leaders and staff; full financial reports are available on the Church Finances page of our website. Once each detail is properly entered and tagged, then the resulting reports show a vibrant and thoughtful congregation, paying attention to financial sustainability as we leverage the gifts entrusted to us for ministry in our time.

Financial Staffing

To keep up with all of these activities, opportunities, and requirements, we now have a finance staff of three people: Bruce Dillenbeck in the office receiving mail, recording income, and overseeing check printing; Lexi Boudreaux recording expenses and organizing digital records; and myself working on payroll, personnel, policies, procedures, approvals and staffing the Finance, Stewardship, Investment and Staff Policy committees. Between the three of us, we are working 35 hours per week.

Who knew that Lexi had experience as an accounting manager prior to divinity school (?!?). I am very excited about the role she is defining during her two years with us as Transitional Minister. Together, the three of us are building a digital system of recordkeeping and communication that will be able to keep up with the church's growing ministry, while also providing backup for each of the financial responsibilities. We tested that last summer, when I took the first month of my much-appreciated sabbatical time. (Thank you all!)

Report of the Minister of Stewardship & Finance (continued)

As always, my heartfelt appreciation to Treasurers Rich Goode, Larry Evans, Connie Pyle, and Art Anger, to Controller Rachel Carlson, to Committee Chairs Laurie Burt, Stephen Weller, and Joanne Paul, and to our creative and hardworking staff. It is collaboration at its best, and a joy to work together in a church that is deeply committed to our world, our community, and to each other. I look forward to our future together, and -- although I'm a bit wary to say it -- whatever the new year may bring!

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen".

Report of the Director of Music

2021 began with glimmers of hope. A vaccine had been approved, and although difficult to obtain, was available, although there was still much uncertainty and needless controversy over its use. We were still offering worship only online, which was to continue until Regathering Sunday on September 12. I had become familiar and somewhat adept at creating virtual choir videos, and was joining other worship leaders every Sunday for our livestreamed services, providing archived recordings of choral music from previous services, and occasionally inviting soloists to contribute to the services. Church staff meetings were, like so much else, still conducted over Zoom, and we continued weekly Thursday night Zoom sessions for choir members to stay in touch, a gathering that stayed strong throughout; the choir manifested its faithfulness even in a virtual way. And on September 12, we did indeed regather in person! We developed a protocol for choir participation that mitigated risk, and even through masks, choral music shone forth once again and touched many hearts both in person and through screens. We now rehearse on Sunday mornings in Jewett Hall, moving into the Sanctuary for the service, which allows for participation for those who cannot rehearse midweek – the choir has actually grown since September with new and enthusiastic members. Issa Bibbins and soloists played and sang for worship in March, May, June and August; for Easter, Beth Spaulding sang a beautiful work by African-American composer Margaret Bonds, and for the Unpageant on December 21, the Choir sang three Christmas spirituals. And on November 7 we commemorated my thirty-six years of service as Music Director! We anticipate the fiftieth anniversary of the installation of our Frobenius organ in 2022 with a project to fund some much-needed cleaning and maintenance. (It's interesting to note that in 1872 when our sanctuary was built, a new organ was installed; fifty years later, it was extensively rebuilt, and fifty years after that it was replaced.) The Frobenius needs no changes; indeed, its beauty and usefulness has only increased over the years, but like anything else, it needs periodic attention in order to remain in first-class condition. In all of this, I have continued to feel the hands of God on my shoulders, and arms embracing us all, as we continue to sing forth our joy and our pain in the beautiful and broken world in which we all live. I give thanks for all that is First Church – staff colleagues, choir members, grateful listening congregants all. How can we keep from singing, indeed...

Peter Sykes
January 2022

Report of the Director of Creative Worship & Arts

As I sit down to write my 2021 Annual Report, we are almost a full two years into this pandemic. The spread of highly infectious variants continues to wreak havoc on our planning and decision-making about our lives, and we wrestle with uncertainty about the future. I will confess that I am exhausted, and I imagine that many of you are, too. Yet even under stress, First Church in Cambridge continues to be a place of creativity and connection where we can find solace and strength in community.

Looking back at the winter and spring programming of 2021, I am impressed by the remote spaces we created for wondering, learning, sharing, and being together. Our monthly Read-Alouds from the Children's Book Corner continued to include voices from across the congregation. Our Church School Zooms showcased Godly Play stories, Bible 101 lessons, and Faith & Social Justice discussions. Our multigenerational Lenten "Church at Home" kits provided materials for exploring growth and mortality through seeds, charcoal pencils, poetry, and finger labyrinths. You can return to our remote formation offerings on our YouTube channel at any time. I am very grateful to all the First Church folks who contributed to our successful programming throughout the year—thank you!

As the weather warmed and vaccines became available, we gathered outside for walks, youth group activities, popsicles on the lawn, and more. We made plans over the summer for our September Regathering, which included new outdoor worship opportunities to meet the needs of those not yet ready to gather indoors, due to Delta and the lack of vaccines for all ages. We gathered under our new blue tent, which continued to serve us well through Christmas Eve, as we ended the year on a surging wave of Omicron.

Throughout 2021, I worked alongside the other members of the First Church Communications Team to grow into our new communications strategy, anchored in our redesigned website that went live in Advent 2020. We developed a streamlined system for collecting and sorting copy and images to share across various platforms, including our e-newsletters, blog, social media, and a refreshed Sunday bulletin. As our reliance on virtual connection continues, First Church's strong online presence allows us to keep our community informed, while sharing our stories and ministries with those seeking a faith home.

It was a full year for sure, as the pandemic challenged us to be flexible as we pivoted from one plan to another. In thinking back on all the discussions and brainstorming sessions, I continue to give thanks for my amazing colleagues at First Church. I could not imagine getting through this trying time without the supportive work environment we share.

Faithfully,
Sarah Higginbotham

Report of the Director of Operations

I had high hopes that when the time came to write my 2021 annual report, things in the world would be in a much different place than they were in January of 2021. Unfortunately, it does feel like it at the moment. We are in the midst of another Covid surge, more remote work, event cancellations, and the like. The positive aspect though is that the summer and fall of 2021 were much different than the summer and fall of 2020, in a very good way.

I spent the first months of 2021 attending the Church Network's second module of zoom classes on Church Administration. I had completed the first module in the fall of 2020. Now that both modules are complete I have five years to do the work involved in becoming certified in church administration, if I choose to go that route. I found the classes very useful, and the connections I made with other administrators even more so. I have not decided yet if I will continue on for full certification, but I certainly haven't ruled it out.

I also started working with the rest of the Communications Team on revamping our whole communications process. With the new website up and running in December of 2020 it was time to figure out the best processes to make sure we are communicating the news, events, ministries and more of First Church to the congregation and to the wider community. We have come up with a system that works very well, and we also continue to refine it, as we go along. Many hours and much energy go into making sure we are consistently messaging the work of the church across many channels and platforms.

Once the spring of 2021 rolled around and more and more people were vaccinated we started the work of reopening the church building. Staff started to work more in the building again; I began to work 3 days a week in June, once I was fully vaccinated. Over the summer months we had some smaller events and 12 step groups meet in person but kept somewhat limited hours, and then in the fall we opened back up again with our normal pre-covid hours, with no restrictions – other than following whatever guidelines the City of Cambridge has in place at a given time.

As you can imagine, opening a building back up quickly reveals the issues that cropped up while it was closed. Luckily, there wasn't anything too major that we had to address. We had to replace some parts on various pieces of equipment, and do some deep cleaning of different areas. The biggest challenge has been rodent control. The little mice certainly came up to play while they could, and we worked to clean up any mess they had left, and continue to work on controlling the mouse population. I am happy to report it has been improving.

The building itself was quite busy in the fall. Not only did we have hybrid worship, with people back on Sundays, Newtowne is running a full schedule of classes and many music and dance groups have been rehearsing and performing as well. We partnered with a company called Musae to assist performance groups that also want to livestream their concerts as well as have an in-person audience. There were a few kinks to work out at the beginning, but overall that partnership has gone well and I expect it will continue. Longy continues to use the building for some events, and we have also had some classes, Wiccan Sabbat celebrations, and private parties take place, too. The biggest challenges have been communicating to all the building users what the current city protocols are (we started the summer without a mask mandate, but one went back into place in September) and the still constant changing waves of the pandemic. I had to re-do more than one contract in the fall as people restructured their events depending on whether or not Covid cases were trending up or down.

Report of the Director of Operations (continued)

As usual I want to express my gratitude for the staff members I supervise. Sextons George Williams, Kimel Williams, Douglas Casey and Rebecca LaFrance were a constant presence in the building, even when it was closed. They all helped with the reopening, noticing and bringing my attention to issues that needed to be resolved. Rebecca left her position in September due to her school schedule, and Douglas left in December to concentrate more fully on welding. Both remain on our sexton substitution list, so you may still see them around. We hired a new sexton, Atul Singh, at the end of December and are happy to have him join us.

Facilities Manager Kris McQuage-Loukas was also hugely involved in the planning for the building's reopening. He left the position in March to become the full-time administrator at University Lutheran Church. I am very thankful for all he did this past year, and his full three years as Facilities Manager. And I am happy he is not too far away; he and I continue to communicate and run ideas by each other.

We held off hiring a new Facilities Manager over the summer, when the building was still pretty slow. It became apparent in the fall, however, that with the increase in people in the building we definitely needed a new Facilities Manager. It became impossible for me to cover both jobs. I am happy to say that in December we hired Lee Prouty as our new Facilities Manager. We worked with Harvard Epworth Methodist Church to be able to provide him with full-time hours. He is working 24 hours for First Church, and 16 hours for Harvard Epworth. So far Lee is proving to be a huge asset to the First Church team, and I look forward to working with him.

Office Assistant Bruce Dillenbeck has also been a constant presence in the building over the past year. Even when closed, Bruce would come in and check the mail, print checks, make deposits, and do other work that just can't be done from home. I am grateful for his willingness to be the person to make sure all those necessary things were being done.

I can't describe how nice it has been to be able to work in person again with the aforementioned employees, as well as all the other First Church staff. (And it was a glorious couple of months when I actually got to see their unmasked faces!) I am grateful to all the staff for the support we have all given each other over another incredible difficult year. And I am so grateful to the congregation as well, for all different ways in which you have supported us in, and expressed your gratitude for, the work we do. It is one of the main reasons I love my job, and continue to feel privileged to do the work I do. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,
Kirsten Manville

Report of the Shelter Director

2021 found guests and staff at First Church Shelter doing what all of us have been doing since the onset of the pandemic; adapting and coping. For nearly three years now the shelter has made the changes and adjustments needed to provide a safe and healthy place for 14 men, through all the surges, variants and general uncertainty.

Fortunately, the City of Cambridge and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has, for most of the ongoing public health emergency, recognized the increased vulnerability of poor people experiencing homelessness and provided enhanced support and assistance to those in need as well as those offering them assistance.

Thanks in large part to the priority status given to vulnerable citizens (and those who serve them) by both the city and the Commonwealth, all shelter guests and staff are both 100% vaccinated and boosted. We recently received, and helped distribute to other providers, a generous supply of Rapid Tests. These tests help us maintain a safe and healthy space for everyone involved with the shelter.

The Commonwealth approved and made available a one time, pandemic related 10% boost to the FY21-22 contract that supports the overnight shelter. The City of Cambridge continues to partner with us to offer shelter to our guests during the day as well as the shower program which we operate in the basement of the University Lutheran Church. City support for the evening meal program that operates out of the Tower Room each Wednesday is expected to end soon.

Our partnership with the Tuesday Night Meals Program at First Parish, Cambridge is winding down. The program is now re-established and fully supported by the people of First Parish.

Recently we recently received funding from the City of Cambridge to hire a housing search “Navigator.” Navigators help unhoused people find their way through the almost ALWAYS plodding, complex and frustrating process of securing benefits, housing and other services that most of us take for granted. Cherry Russell (a recent graduate of Salem State University’s School of Social Work) has been with us for several weeks and is getting oriented to the various protocols and procedures that they will need to make use of as they assist individuals at the shelter, Friday Cafe, the Material Assistance and Advocacy Program (out of Friends Meeting House on Brattle Street) make their way out of homelessness and into healthy and more stable living situations.

First Church Shelter continues to be part of the advocacy work being done to help make safe consumption services an option for those in Massachusetts struggling with Substance Use Disorder. We have also been called upon to speak out about, and offer assistance to, those who are part of the “tent” community in Boston’s Mass and Cass neighborhood.

Though I seem to be the only one ever recognized, over a dozen other people provide the day in, day out, work of the shelter. Dennis Kaveney, Steve Brown, Joe Freitas and Kevin Benitez were “getting it done” for the shelter long before the onset of the pandemic. Since 2020, they have been joined by Sophia Doescher, James Gullberg, Kevin Newell, Chris Benavides, Mac Perkins-High, Sofia Estrada and Shosh Lovett-Graff, as well as First Church community members Alex Ball and Nathan Wilson Braun.

Report of the Shelter Director (continued)

First Church was ably and generously represented by those who serve on the Shelter Oversight Committee. We should all thank Don Johnson, Jan Jeffers Lo, Jane Matthews and Brian Funck for taking the time to make sure the shelter was run well and had what it needed to serve those who depend upon it.

The work and witness of the First Church Shelter is done, in the name, and would not be possible without the support of, the people of First Church Cambridge Congregational, UCC. On behalf of all of us directly involved with First Church Shelter, let me say thank you for continuing to make it possible for this important work to take place`

Sincerely,
Jim Stewart
Shelter Director

Report of the Moderator *pro tem*

As I read through these pages, my heart is filled with gratitude.

Thank you to the ministers and staff who support our community's flourishing. Thank you to the members and leaders of committees whose reports follow. Thank you to the deacons, who have nurtured our spirits online and in person.

Thank you, First Church, for showing up in so many ways for each other.

Much gratitude to Julie Pridham, who continued to serve as our Moderator even after moving to Arizona. And deep thanks to Mary Robinson, who stepped back in as Moderator for many months.

We are indeed blessed. 2021 was hard. But it is good to be in it together.

Submitted by Meredith Quinn, Moderator *pro tem*

Report of the Board of Deacons

In this report of the year 2021, a year of continued growing geopolitical tensions and almost two years of the ongoing and evolving Covid-19 pandemic, we found ourselves deepening our connections with one another and the spirit in service to our congregation.

We started the year with the addition of Leslie Pelton-Cairns and Adam Weiss. We are deeply grateful for your willingness to adapt to a new way of providing ministry. To our continuing deacons Dave Dyer, Dean Eaton, Beth Spaulding, Taj Smith and Nora Willcutts thank you for your leadership and flexibility, your deep faith, and sense of humor through a year of changing procedures as we moved from fully remote to hybrid worship half-way through the year and once again to fully remote at the close of the year.

One of the notable events for the congregation is having the privilege of Carlye Stewart's leadership in "A Call to Return," through which he has helped us focus on relationship building and visioning our long term anti-racism work at First Church in Cambridge. This was made possible through a grant from Boston University and continued to offer spiritual and theological depth to our antiracist work!

Deacons are deeply grateful for the congregation's decision to call Lexi Bourdreaux as Transitional Minister. 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. Lexi was joyfully ordained in October, 2021. We are also blessed for Jaz Buchanan our Pastoral Associate for rising to the occasion with grace, inspiring hope in her preaching, and loving ministerial presence. The deacons and the congregation have benefited from their wisdom and considerable gifts as we give thanks for their continued leadership.

One of the benefits of serving in the role of deacon is the additional perspective on the thoughtfulness and generous way Dan leads the deacons and the congregation as a whole. Dan understands our congregation as individuals and as a community and is sensitive to all of these needs. The deacons have deep gratitude for Dan's steady leadership in this challenging time of transition.

In addition to his spiritual tending, Dan spearheaded a charge to revise and update our video capabilities for online and hybrid service. This includes upgrading the sanctuary with the installation of two viewing screens and upgrades to our sound system with the support of Kevin Newell our technical expert. It cannot be understated how much Dan, Lexi, Sarah, Jaz, Peter, Ebony and the entire staff have had to manage to make hybrid worship possible and then lead us in the myriad of decisions to open in-person after 79 weeks online during the pandemic. The pastoral team as a whole has had to learn to pivot at a moment's notice with the variety of technical challenges and continued changing landscape of the Covid-19 pandemic. We are deeply grateful for the careful thought and care Dan and the rest of the staff have shown the congregation during this time.

Deacons have engaged in our continued work toward being a more radically inclusive and diverse faith community. Our ongoing exploration into how white supremacy culture is present at First Church and taking actions with the participation and direction of the Beloved Community to challenge these systems in the way leaders and committees function at First Church. Lexi has been very active in enacting values of inclusivity in her work in our congregational life, and along with Dan and Sarah Higginbotham led a charge to make changes to spaces inside First Church to make it more radically welcoming and inclusive. The deacons split

Report of the Board of Deacons (continued)

into subcommittees to update the narthex, sanctuary, and other gathering spaces to make our church a more welcoming physical space when we reopened to in-person worship in September, 2021. One notable exciting addition was the creation of banners depicting persons of color that have been placed at the front of the sanctuary with the leadership of Laurie Williams, Moana Bentin and the deacons. In addition to being a more welcoming physical space, Deacons assisted staff along to thoughtfully created Covid-19 protocols for in-person gathering. These include masking, social distancing, sanitizing, ventilation procedures and limiting numbers of congregants allowed in person, taking collection and communion, continuing to host virtual coffee hour, balancing attention to online and in-person participants. A special acknowledgement to the Deacons that have been “all hands on deck” this fall to help make these decisions and ensure these protocols were carried out with little disruption to ministry practices.

One of our biggest challenges was the decision to cancel in-person Christmas Eve service for the second year in a row in response to the surge in Covid cases around the region and the country. We wish to express our gratitude for the careful thought and collaboration of the staff, deacons, committees and many other people in the wider community that made this possible.

As a continuation to our anti-racism work and in response to Covid-19 the staff led us in making major changes to our online presence. Funds were dedicated to hiring a team of professionals to aid us with updates to our website. These efforts focused on how to communicate our vision to the wider world and make us more accessible and inclusive online. Some areas that required updating, include how we take collection and communion, how we communicate online and in-person participation, coffee hour and the many gatherings that take place every week clearly accessible. Much gratitude to all who participated in these ongoing and very changing efforts, in particular to Dan, Sarah, Lexi and Jaz.

Gratitude is also expressed to Lexi for her continued effort supporting spaces for women’s spirituality to flourish and also youth spirituality in her with our Confirmation Class.

Acknowledgement to the leadership and deacons for efforts to keep us connected in this time of isolation and transition, including assisting with hosting coffee hour and ongoing opportunities to meet outside for “deacons walks.”

To our outgoing Deacons Taj Smith and Davis Dyer and co-chair Moana Bentin, it was wonderful working with you all this past year. Thank you for your leadership.

We look forward to welcoming incoming Deacons Peggy Bendroth, Gandhi Solank and Jean Dany Joachim.

Peace and blessings for a wonderful 2022.

Amy Matias and Moana Bentin (Deacons Co-chairs)

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, met only via Zoom during this second year of the Covid pandemic. We met eight times during the year. Listed below are some highlights of the Committee's work during 2021.

1. Several Committee members offered read-aloud video presentations for children
2. Several Committee members hosted 9:30 hours, Faith & Life group meetings, and outdoor walks during Lent. The intent was to offer more participatory and hands-on opportunities, rather than solely intellectual.
3. A summer Book Group, hosted by a Committee member, read and discussed Sarah's Long Walk: The Free Blacks of Boston and How Their Struggle for Equality Changed America.
4. Several Committee members led summer and fall multi-generational walks/hikes around the Boston area.
5. A Committee member participated in facilitating Advent crafts activities.
6. The Committee discussed and reflected on the Indigenous Peoples' Land Acknowledgement statement, which was then presented to the Congregation for its consideration at Annual Meeting.

At each of our meetings, Sarah Higginbotham kept the Committee informed of the many and wonderful offerings for children and youth. Even with the ups and downs of Covid restrictions, Sarah and her teachers remained agile and creative in offering what they could during this extremely difficult and constantly-changing time. The Committee are in awe of this devoted effort. Our families with young people are so fortunate.

And also on offer were pilgrimages to local important Black history sites; fellowship "popsicle hours" on the lawn in summer; 9:30 hour talks and discussions about reparations; viewing and exploring films on Indigenous history;, and much else. First Church does not limit itself in the means of Christian Formation! The Committee hopes to continue offering varied avenues toward faith.

Thank you, Ariel, Audrey, Nancy, Faith, and Dan, Sarah, Lexi and Jaz. Thank you also to the congregation of First Church in Cambridge for your enthusiastic participation in Christian Formation of all kinds. Let us keep on keeping on in these challenging times.

Respectfully submitted,
--Hilary Hopkins, Chair

Report of the Building & Grounds Committee

2021 started with the work of preparing the building for continued reopening. The building was forced to close entirely for a brief time in January due to COVID. During the closure the entire building underwent fogging disinfection. Don Johnson performed a Sanctuary Airflow Study and determined that sufficient ventilation can be achieved with Sanctuary doors closed during cold weather if certain recommendations are followed. These measures were put into place starting in November (prior to that the sanctuary doors remained open during Sunday worship and other events in the Sanctuary). Pest control continues to be a challenge following the prolonged building closure during 2020.

New sod was installed on the Garden Street lawn in the spring to be ready for outdoor events in the summer and fall. There were several work parties in July, September, and October to catch up on pruning and weeding and to install mulch in landscaped areas. We also cleaned out gutters that could be reached with a ladder. Thanks to Perry Neubauer, the sign in front of the church received a refresh. We repaired the damaged frame, and Perry repainted and re-lettered the sign.

The historic preservation work for which we received a grant from the Cambridge Historical Commission in 2018 and which we intended to complete in 2019 moved forward in 2021. The work, which is close to complete, included full replacement of the cloister roof structure and repairs to the sanctuary slate roof and masonry.

Additional projects at the church included repairing a leaking boiler pump, replacing the crash bar for the Parish Hall main entrance, replacing a failed sump pump in the basement, and repainting the fire escape. Several projects were also completed at the parsonage including chimney flue relining, window sash repainting, replacement of the refrigerator, and interior painting (much of the painting was done by Dan and Nancy). A tree fell and hit the parsonage during a storm in late October, damaging the new copper gutter. Thanks to the efforts of Don Johnson, the tree was removed and cleaned up quickly.

We applied for and received a \$16,000 rebate for new our new energy efficient boilers, and we replaced our waste hauler in April, significantly reducing our annual cost for waste management.

To support the work of Building the Beloved Community, we began discussions about what the Committee can do to further the goal of becoming an anti-racist church, both through the direct actions of the Committee as well as supporting other committees' work through their building use. We prioritized minority owned businesses for new contracts and reviewed existing contracts. As the Committee in charge of the grounds, the Committee acknowledges that the church sits on stolen land. Committee member Kindle Shea Williams attended a meeting of the Community Purchasing Alliance – a cooperative that leverages the buying power of community institutions to accelerate progress towards sustainability, equity, and justice. The Committee continues to explore this and other opportunities.

Our former part-time Facilities Manager, Kris McQuage-Loukas, left us in March to pursue a full-time opportunity at another church, and former sexton Rebecca LaFrance left at the end of August to focus on school. We wish them the best in their new endeavors. Replacing staff has been difficult due to labor shortages, and our Director of Operations Kirsten Manville and remaining sextons, George Williams, Kimel Williams, and Douglas Casey, have had to pick up the slack. Many thanks to them and all church staff for their extra efforts in 2021.

Report of the Building & Grounds Committee (continued)

Thanks also to the contributions of Buildings and Grounds Committee members Peter Byerly, Cathy Garnett, and Kindle Williams.

Respectfully submitted,
Nathan Jones, Chair

Report of the Earth Stewardship Group

The mission of the Earth Stewardship group once again embraced growing interest in the working of nature and its lessons for contemporary human dilemmas relevant to climate and the environment. Having absorbed the indigenous wisdom of Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* at the end of 2020, the Eco-faith book group continued the first part of 2021 reading Richard Powers's *THE OVERSTORY*, a remarkable novel describing the intersections between individuals' lives and nature. One theme that powerfully resonated with the group was the trees' and other plants' amazing capacities for communication and cooperation among themselves. Awareness of these capacities underlined the conflicts and neglect often present in human groups, most notably in Environmental Justice communities.

Earth Day 2021 was celebrated via a walk down to Longfellow Park followed by a service of songs, poems, and prayers, aided by Susan Redlich's drumming. Being outside in the springtime enabled a special awareness of our members' devotion to nature. As well, increasing notice was given to those who struggle to limit the deleterious influences of hydrocarbons.

During the summer worries about the twin threats of the pandemic and climate (in the form of wildfires and extreme weather) were expressed simultaneously during Sunday service.

Following regathering in September, Earth Stewardship was excited to welcome Pastoral Associate Jaz Buchanan. Whereupon she has taken a key role in generating ideas for activities and worship. In October, Earth Stewardship got together for a general meeting to discuss plans and achievements. Notably several individuals spoke of ways in which the climate crisis has affected them personally.

Over the course of the year, Earth Stewardship voiced prayers and support for a variety of climate related issues. Examples of support include UCC and SNEUCC environmental ministries' virtual events, and efforts suppressing climate change such as the struggles against pipelines on indigenous lands.

Additionally, the convener of Earth Stewardship contributed a blog to First Church of Cambridge's *Water in the Wilderness* that was based on the story of Jesus and the disciples on the Sea of Galilee in the fourth chapter of Mark. Jesus exhorts them to employ their faith to confront and solve a fearful storm.

Plans for 2022 include a lecture on the Miyawaki Garden in Danehy Park, a laboratory in and of itself in sustainable management of indigenous plants and resources. Increased focus as well will be given to the increasingly frightening warnings about the effects of the climate crisis. The group hopes to be a source for ways in which our Christian beliefs can and will respond to this challenge.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Brown

Report of Homeless Ministries

If you've been back to church sometime in the past 4 months, you might have noticed something different about the narthex—that intermediate space between the outside world and our life of community prayer. During the pandemic lockdown of 2020, we moved a refrigerator into it.

It was supposed to be a temporary measure. We were serving 500 meals a week from the doors of the Tower Room, and we needed a way to keep food cold.

But the fridge has stayed, now decorated with pictures of loaves and fishes created by some of our children. For the community gathered around Jesus, praying for people and feeding them go hand in hand. Food prepared by neighbors and local restaurants is still coming in through those Tower Room doors and going back out again in the form of take-out meals on Wednesdays and Fridays. Homeless Ministries has pivoted operations many times in the past two years, but thanks be to God, our work has gone on, with the help of many local partnerships and the extraordinary generosity of our donors. In fact, our annual fundraising gala in February 2021 raised a record \$42,000! Thank you to all who have contributed financial gifts, food, clothing, and other resources to keep our programs flourishing. Our next gala is coming up soon, on February 4, when we will welcome guest speaker Dr. [Danielle Allen](#), Professor of Government at Harvard and author of many books, including *Our Declaration*. Stay tuned for event details!

And now on to our Homeless Ministries reports.
Kate Layzer, Minister of Street Outreach

Report of the Shelter Oversight Committee

This past year at the First Church Shelter was a busy one with the ongoing operation of the shelter on a 24/7 basis. We appreciate a strong echo from the shelter's founding; the Shelter began as a way to meet the need during a short term crisis, yet has now been in operation for 35 years. This anniversary was marked on December 3 last month. Likewise, the 24/7 Day shelter program has continued on far beyond the expected time frame, but the need to offer guests a safe and warm location to be during the day as well as the nights is as important as ever. While we all hope that the resolution of the pandemic will soon occur, the ability to adapt, respond and serve remain foundational characteristics of the First Church Shelter. Our great thanks are extended to Jim Stewart, Shelter Director, and the Shelter Staff: Alex Ball, Kevin Benitez, Steve Brown, Sophia Doescher, Sofia Estrada, Joe Freitas, Jim Gullberg, Dennis Kaveney, Shosh Lovett-Graff, Kevin Newell, Mac Perkins-High, Cherry Russell, and Nathan Wilson-Braun for their hard work and dedication to their jobs and the guests. Staff members contribute to the comfort, cleanliness, food preparation and clean up of the shelter; they interact with the guests and keep a calm and friendly atmosphere in the shelter. The staff also maintain protocols that protect everyone's health and safety.

Other programs managed by the Shelter Director included the Meals program (dinners supplied 2 evenings a week to the food insecure community, the Harvard Square Shower Project (now located at University Lutheran Church), and the Navigator project (see the Shelter Director's Report for more details). These programs are arranged for and funded by the City of Cambridge and have been staffed by the shelter. This arrangement has been highly convenient for the City of Cambridge, beneficial to the Harvard Square homeless and food insecure populations, and provides employment for many in our community. We thank Karen MacArthur for all the related HR and bookkeeping that these contracts have added to her burgeoning responsibilities. We are so thankful for the expanded ministry and services that First Church is able to provide to the people in need who live in the community just outside our doors.

During 2021, 3 guests have been able to move into permanent housing, and one more has been approved and is waiting for placement. The process is slow, and made more so by the ongoing pandemic's effects on those working to help find housing.

The Shelter has been blessed with many contributions during 2021. The local community began to take notice of the shelter operating in their midst at the onset of the pandemic and have been faithful in giving in response to our ongoing needs. Many in the First Church community also give generously and we are so grateful for this aid. The Homeless Ministry's Gala that was held last February was a great success, and the funds received by the shelter will be crucial to repairs and maintenance of the shelter. Given the extensive use of the shelter over the last 22 months, many repairs and upgrades are needed. The Shelter entrance was refinished and weatherized this year and the shelter showers have needed repairs, as well. Other repairs will occur after the Day Shelter program ends, whenever that occurs.

We encourage all to participate in this year's Homeless Ministry's Appeal, featuring Danielle Allen. Proceeds support both the Friday Cafe and the First Church Shelter in all their ministries.

The shelter guests received 3 meals every day due to generous meals donations and the city's pandemic meals program. Brian Funck, who coordinates the meal donation signups, remarks at our meetings of the steady stream of signups. The home cooked meals, especially casseroles, are very well appreciated by the guests. We anticipate that our need for contributions will grow as the City of Cambridge reduces its provi-

Report of the Shelter Oversight Committee (continued)

sion of prepared food later in the year.

We are also very grateful to those of you who donated complete Thanksgiving and Christmas meals and desserts. And very grateful to those who donated money toward the shelter guests' Christmas gift cards. The guests are very appreciative of your caring support and wish you a Happy New Year!

In October, at the annual Mitch Snyder Awards, we paid tribute to the following community partners (including neighboring churches) who embody the homelessness work of Mitch Snyder to provide essential resources to our neighbors in need.

- Joe Finn - Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance that advocate to end homelessness in our state.
- University Lutheran Church Cambridge – After the closure of the Church St portable shower trailers, UniLu stepped right in to offer showers for the homeless.
- Tehya Johnson – Boston Healthcare for the Homeless ensures that homeless people (around 11,000 individuals each year) have access to comprehensive healthcare.
- Laurie Howell and Judy Siemen - Harvard Square Churches Meals Program provides a community supper each Thursday evening in nearby Christ Church.
- First Parish Cambridge – Tuesday Meal Program provides a community meal every Tuesday evening.

Next year the Committee will begin to consider hiring an assistant for Jim. The purpose of the assistant is to have another person with the skill set to direct all the shelter's operations. This will allow Jim to have time off for vacations, to substitute in case of illness and to prepare the shelter for Jim's eventual retirement. The assistant position would be funded by the combination of shelter general funds, the state contract and appeal proceeds.

The smooth running of the shelter made the job of the Oversight Committee a very easy one this year. We are sorry to see Jane Matthews retire from the committee, after 4 years of service. Jane contributed to many shelter events with food, preparation, serving and cleanup, as well as taking on writing notes to contributors of food and donations during the covid years. We look forward to welcoming Marianne Jenson, Hanna Bliska and Claire Cocroft to the committee to help take on the challenges that will surely arise in 2022. We will pray for God to guide our hearts, hands and minds as we serve these homeless guests in the year ahead.

Respectfully submitted for the Shelter Oversight Committee:

Jan Jeffers Lo and Don Johnson, Co-Chairs
Jane Matthews
Brian Funk
Karen McArthur, Ex-Officio
Jim Stewart, Ex-Officio
Dan Smith, Ex-Officio

Report of the Friday Cafe

It has been another year of changes and adaptations at the Friday Café! Over the summer, we began making plans to transition back to something like our old pre-pandemic indoor Café life in September—only to put those plans on hold when the Delta variant came to town. Instead, we put a new hybrid system in place starting in early September: homemade food, made and delivered by neighbors, warmed in the First Church kitchen, and served cafeteria-style by in-person volunteers—but in to-go containers. Doors and windows open, fans keeping the air moving, plastic barricade tape to help maintain social distance, limited numbers of guests in the hall at one time. No indoor seating. Under the hybrid setup, our clothing and toiletries distribution moved to the chapel (with ventilation and strict number limits). We also updated our hours to 12:00–3:00.

We worried about being able to recruit enough help, after 18 months outdoors with just a handful of volunteers. But within a couple of months, both of our signups were booked solid. Not only did some of our former regular volunteers return, including our old friends at Harvard Epworth United Methodist Church, but a whole new batch showed up as well! Showed up, and then came back, again and again. Generous neighbors dropped off an abundance of delicious homemade food every week, a most welcome change for guests after 18 months of bag lunches! Special thanks to our partners at Community Cooks, the Harvard Square Churches Meal Program, St. Peter's parish, and Christ Church, and to the many individuals who have made sure we had plenty of nutritious food to serve throughout the pandemic.

We operated in hybrid mode through the fall and all the way to Christmas. But in the last week of 2021, with community infection rates climbing rapidly, we reluctantly suspended our hybrid signups, reactivated our bag lunch signup, and moved back outside. We will return to hybrid mode as soon as we can do so safely.

We continue to fill many critical needs for clothing, shoes, boots, sleeping bags, blankets, and toiletries, thanks to the generosity of our donors. Donor gifts have also made it possible for us to purchase supplies to support our hybrid operation, such as new warming trays and eco-friendly take-out containers, and to take on our first-ever work study student in the fall. For the ongoing support of our community, we give heartfelt thanks. Two of our volunteers even ran their first Boston Marathon this year and raised \$400 in pledges for the Friday Café!

We are especially grateful for our ongoing partnership with the Cambridge Public Health Department. In 2021 we teamed up to offer 2 on-site vaccination clinics, a flu clinic, and a booster shot clinic. We continue to reach out to CPHD for advice about COVID protocols, and we recently received a supply of rapid-test kits for guests and volunteers.

This year I was honored to serve as a member of the Mayor's Ad Hoc Committee on Homelessness, chaired by Councilor Marc McGovern. We heard testimony from local service providers, national experts, and participants with lived experience of homelessness, culminating in a first round of concrete recommendations about next steps. A report on this initial work is expected soon.

As always, I would like to thank First Church staff for their ongoing support for our program, and to Café leaders Don Johnson, Alex Steinert-Evoy, Devin Hanson, Neil Peterson, Carmon Davis, Pat and Dave Demme, Theresa Norris, Kathy Hess, Jo Chow, Manuela Hanshaw, and Sam Humphries. Amazing work, team. I am grateful for you all.

Report of Beloved Community

Jemar Tisby, writing in his 2021 message to American Christians “How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey toward Racial Justice” describes his “ARC” model for this fight: A (awareness), R (relationships) and C (commitment). It’s tempting but not realistic to see this as a linear model (awareness before relationships, awareness and relationships before commitment). In practice things often move together (for example, as I build relationships across racial boundaries, I gain greater awareness of my own racist instincts and behavior).

Over the past decade, Beloved Community has organized programs at First Church to make us all aware of our First Church ancestors’ past complicity with Northern slavery, of the case for reparations, of the persistence of systemic racism and of First Church ancestors’ participation in the genocide of indigenous peoples in New England. At the same time, we have made cautious attempts to build relationships with individuals and communities impacted by racism in the Greater Boston area; an example was a series of “Soup and Stories” with friends from Mattapan and Dorchester held at the Parsonage several years ago). First Church has committed to demand policy that addresses social and economic needs through many years of political action with other congregations in the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization.

What’s different about 2021?

First, initiative and momentum in First Church’s racial justice work is no longer driven mostly by Beloved Community. Executive Council, the committees of the Church, Church members who participated in Road to Freedom pilgrimages, participants in Faith and Life Groups who discussed anti-racism and planned for a reparations fund, the 30 plus First Church folks who joined Carlyle Stuart’s Return to God sessions all have brought new ideas and energy to the cause. Beloved Community retains its role as a forum for considering new initiatives (many of which originate outside of Beloved Community) and for offering resources, ideas, and strategies on the journey of becoming an anti-racist church. Beloved Community is also a keeper of the record of First Church’s racial justice ministries.

Second, as a Congregation, we began to shift emphasis in our racial justice work from gaining awareness to building relationships and making commitments. Here are some examples.

Anti-racist goal and training

In February, over 30 members of Executive Council, other church leaders and church staff members attended a Leadership Retreat on the theme of Becoming an Anti-Racist Church. All participants made specific commitments at the ways they would work with their committees or in other leadership roles to advance First Church in becoming an anti-racist church.

Subsequently, Executive Council set us a specific goal of becoming an anti-racist church. In support of this commitment, EC invited its members to engage in anti-racist training, individually or in groups. Over the next year, this invitation to engage in anti-racist training will be extended to all members of First Church.

First Church Reparations Fund

Executive Council also approved the establishment of a First Church Reparations Fund. This Fund offers an opportunity for First Church members to commit resources toward repairing the damage of systemic racism. The idea of establishing a Reparations Fund at First Church was introduced in a Faith and Life Group formed

Report of Beloved Community (continued)

this year to study reparations. The Public Remembrance Project (PRP) provided a framework for implementing the Fund.

The PRP is an ongoing program that seeks ways to publicly remember First Church's complicity in Northern slavery and systemic racism and to work to repair our broken society. In the last two years, PRP began building bridges to communities in Greater Boston most impacted by systemic racism. Rev. Karlene Griffiths-Sekou completed a series of focus groups in Cambridge and Boston designed to provide feedback on the PRP, particularly on the idea of reparations. Along with delivering a report on findings from the focus groups, Karlene recruited a "Collective" of participants who agreed to accept the assignment of designating what community organizations should receive payments from the Fund. The Collective will implement a PRP principle that First Church should relinquish control over these payments, leaving these decisions to communities most impacted by racism. Accordingly, money contributed to the Reparations Fund will be distributed to non-profit organizations (501(c)3 organizations) identified by the Collective and in amounts designated by it.

In addition, some members of the focus groups expressed interest in opening conversations with First Church members. This, together with Rev Dan Smith's outreach to Pentecostal Tabernacle in Cambridge, followed by First Church members participation in Pentecostal Tabernacle's weekly Social Justice Prayer Call, offer new opportunities for creating meaningful relationships between First Church members and members of the wider community. Recently, after Dan preached at Pentecostal Tabernacle, Bishop Green preached at First Church, followed by a (socially-distanced) fellowship lunch in Margaret Jewett Hall, hopefully the first of many such gatherings.

Despite COVID, First Church has moved ahead on many fronts over the past year in confronting our past and planning our future. More detail on programs, events and opportunities for involvement is available on the Racial Justice page of the First Church website. Interested in joining us? Contact Dave Kidder (David.e.kidder@gmail.com).

Peggy Stevens and Dave Kidder, Co-Chairs

Report of Discernment & Formation Task Team

It has been an exciting and fulfilling year for the team and for the candidates. It is also the first year in at least 18 years that there are no candidates in the discernment and formation process.

Karlene Griffiths Sekou had her Ecclesiastical Council in February and was approved to seek an ordained position. She has decided that she will complete her doctoral degree from Harvard Divinity School before she seeks a pastoral position. Apart from her life as a student, Karlene continues to be active in the work of social justice and has been a valued member of the our Beloved Community group.

Domenik Ackerman had his Ecclesiastical Council in September and was ordained on November 14th. He is serving as an associate pastor at West Parish in Andover. Domenik is also working on his doctorate at Boston College and expects to graduate in 2023. Domenick's focus on ecumenism with all faiths can only serve to strengthen his congregations inclusiveness and understanding of others in the community at large.

It has been a joy for the team -- Susie Neubauer, Alex Steinert Evoy, Lindsay Miller, Ken Ziebell, and Dan Smith -- to work with these outstanding individuals. It gives great assurance to us that the future of the Church is in excellent hands with people such as Karlene and Domenik providing ministerial leadership.

Note - To give some understanding of the process a candidate goes through to ordination - The last step prior to ordination is the Ecclesiastical Council. It is made up of members, lay or ordained, from at least 8 local churches in the Metropolitan Boston Association. The candidate presents an overview of their theological paper. This paper has specific topics the candidate is expected to address explaining their theology of that topic. After the presentation, the Council members then question the candidate. Questions may be requests for further clarification of a topic, or the candidate's approach to ministry. The Council then votes on the question of readiness for ordination.

It is hoped that this is not the last report of the Discernment and Formation Team, and that there are individuals hearing the call to be ordained servants.

Much gratitude to those who have served on the Team now and in previous years -- their dedication and commitment to being mentors and guides to ministerial candidates have been gifts to the Church.

Linda Ziebell

Report of the Archives Committee

In 2021, one highlight for the Archives Group was receiving a treasure trove of information from Irene Gates, “our” Roving Archivist. Her work with us – and a half dozen other small archives -- was supported by grants from the Massachusetts State Historical Records Advisory Board with funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

In February, Ms. Gates made a socially-distanced visit to the Archives Room, which contains 300 linear feet of church records, books and other material. She also met with Archives Group co-chairs on Zoom calls. She advised us on best practices, including the need for formal mission and collection policy statements. She provided advice on archival supplies and techniques, which are summarized in the “Strategic Assessment and Program Review” she prepared for First Church. We chronicled her work with us, fulfilling a requirement of the grant. Ms. Gates encouraged us to apply for a regrant. We requested funds for archival supplies for two categories:

(1) Church bulletins, calendars and newsletters dating from 1887

These materials demonstrate how worship services, sermon topics, music, and church activities change over time. They provide a first-hand view of First Church's response to local, national, and world events. Bulletins from 1887 to 1957 are bound in hardcover volumes; later bulletins were put in three-ring binders or other inadequate housing.

(2) Membership records dating from 1829

These records provide invaluable information about individual members: when they joined, where they lived, and the dates of births, marriages, and deaths. We receive many queries seeking such information. We have sorted these records by year. Our long-term goal is a searchable database. The immediate goal is to get fragile records into archival boxes.

In September, Dr. John Warner, Archivist of the Commonwealth, notified us that First Church had received a regrant of \$1089. Co-chair Kate Judd ordered supplies and, starting in December, she and Archives volunteer Jacqui Gates started putting them to use.

In June, the Archives Group sponsored an online after-church talk by Dr. Lori Rogers-Stokes about her book, “Records of Trial from Thomas Shepard’s Church in Cambridge, 1638-1649.”

An 1873 photograph of the First Church cockerel weathervane and sexton Benjamin Wyeth was published in the book *American Weathervanes: The Art of the Winds* by Robert Shaw. It was also featured in an exhibition with the same name at the American Folk Art Museum in New York. The author received our permission to use the photo. We received a copy of his book.

December brought the last printed edition of EVENT, the church newsletter whose first edition, we discovered, was dated June 1, 1968. The new First Church website is admirably providing more up-to-date information on church activities and reaching a broader public. A challenge for Archives and First Church leaders and staff is how to preserve digital content for the future.

Kate Judd, Lindsay Miller, Chris Reynolds, co-chairs, First Church Archives Group

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, Beth Loomis recorded a ministry moment focused on general areas of need (e.g., finance, physical plant, stewardship, etc.) Beth's 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 2022 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.

Report of the Gifts Discernment & Nominating Committee (continued)

2022 Slate of Officers, Boards and Standing Committees

*Bold font indicates new to position

OFFICERS

Moderator	Meredith Quinn
Vice Moderator	Moana Bentin
Clerk	Chris Reynolds
Treasurer	Rich Goode
Associate Treasurer	Larry Evans
Assistant Treasurer	Art Anger
Assistant Treasurer	Connie Pyle
Controller	Rachel Carlson
Member at Large	Claire Hunt

BOARD OF DEACONS

Amy Matias,
Beth Spaulding
Dean Eaton
Nora Willcutts
Leslie Pelton-Cairns
Adam Weiss
Jean Dany Joachim
Peggy Bendroth
Gandhi Solanki

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
Holly Marple

Report of the Gifts Discernment & Nominating Committee (continued)

CHRISTIAN FORMATION COMMITTEE

Hilary Hopkins, Chair
Nancy Cyr
Faith Ross
Ariel Ackermann
Audrey Bellinger
Carol Wilson-Braun

SHELTER OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Jan Lo, Chair
Brian Funck
Jane Matthews
Hanna Bliska
Claire Cocroft
Marianne Jensen

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS COMMITTEE

Don Johnson, Chair
Cathy Garnett
Peter Byerly
Robb Morgan
David Torrey
Johanna Wendelin

STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

Joanne Paul, Chair
Nancy O'Connell
Winnie Yip
Susan Ohman
Caroline Newton

GIFTS DISCERNMENT/NOMINATING

Beth Loomis, Co-Chair
Dave Kidder, Co-Chair
Devin Hansen
Gail Breeze
Mary Robinson

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Rich Goode, Treasurer, Chair, *ex officio*
Rachel Carlson, Controller, *ex officio*
Larry Evans, Associate Treasurer, *ex officio*
Joanne Paul, Chair 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

Stephen Weller

FINANCIAL OPERATIONS (SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE)

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

Rich Goode Treasurer, *ex officio*

Rachel Carlson, Controller, *ex officio*

Respectfully submitted

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

Report of the Missions Committee

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

Proverbs

This year Missions and Social Justice continued to focus on areas that had been prominent in our work last year. These areas included Racial Justice, Housing, Food, and Financial Insecurity, and our support for Long Term Partners.

We also worked on a Land Acknowledgement Statement and began to develop relationships with Indigenous People in our area. We supported a local chapter of a national environmental stewardship organization.

Racial Justice

Our efforts included helping to support a direct commitment to racial justice work.

These included setting up a reparations fund to support local black community organizations, rebuilding the Martin Luther King Jr. Presbyterian Church, affinity groups for clergy of color, the Virtual Mother’s Day Walk for Peace and Bethel Tabernacle.

Homelessness, Food Insecurity, and Low-Income Support

Organizations to which we donated were:

Solutions at Work, which started a 70-bed shelter in Central Square, Supported meal delivery, and supplies clothing and Christmas toys.

United Church of Christ, which provided emergency aid.

Cambridge Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition, which supported a family who moved from Sanctuary into regular housing.

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

Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, which sponsors 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. It became a vendor for the City of Boston this year.

Cambridge Mutual Aid, which provides small grants to local residents in Need.

Harvard Square Meals Program, which provides Thursday night dinners to people in need.

Greater Boston Interfaith Organization

A law on Police Reform passed and GBIO was looking forward to monitoring its implementation. Another law which lowered jail and prison populations to protect against COVID infections had passed

Report of the Missions Committee (continued)

and GBIO was following up on that law's implementation.

Environmental Stewardship/Mothers Out Front

Mothers Out Front Cambridge is a local organization which is part of a national one. It supports legislation such as requiring green roofs, and individual actions such as using alternative energy companies.

International/Global

First Church continued to support the Latin American ministry of Monica Maher, sent relief funds to an organization in Haiti, and continued to fund Father Frank Mukiliza's orphanage in Uganda.

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

We must admit, it was disappointing that we could not gather in November to bless the pledges, share a meal, and have our congregational meeting. Amazingly, even that disappointment was fleeting and there are so many blessings we are grateful for:

We thank Caitlin Anderson & family for making the chowder that we could not all share in that day, and we are particularly grateful that it was a gift shared with staff, with our shelter guests, and with our Friday Café guests.

We are grateful to all who shared testimony about their own giving practice during our services this fall. We thank Christine Reynolds & Sarah Higginbotham for helping us capture our and share the images and language of our campaign.

We thank Bruce Dillenbeck for his help recording the pledges.

We thank the entire congregation for being on this journey with us.

As you will see in the financial report we are on our way, but not yet at our pledge goal for 2022. We also enter 2022 with funds other than our general fund that people feel called to give to. The Stewardship committee continues to see abundance of opportunity and will strive to keep the Spirit at the center of all we do will do in the year ahead.

As always, please know:

Whatever you pledge, **have faith** your pledge is welcomed because YOU are welcomed.

Whatever you pledge, **trust** your pledge is enough because YOU are enough.

Whatever you pledge, know we **give thanks** for your pledge because YOU are a gift.

Amen? Amen!

Respectfully submitted:

Stephen Weller (Co-Chair), Joanne Paul (Co-Chair), Susie Longfield, Nancy O'Connell, Meredith Quinn, Winnie Yip, Rev. Karen McArthur, Rev. Dan Smith

Report of the Investment Committee

First Church began the year 2021 with a balance of \$3,496,907 in its investment accounts at Charles Schwab with investment management provided by O'Brien Wealth Partners (OWP). At the end of 2021, the value was \$3,758,635, an increase of \$261,728. The change in the investment account balance reflects combined activities of inflows and outflows, including \$144,579 in gifts, \$82,837 in income from investments net of fees, distributions of \$309,000 to the Church treasury (including recurring contributions for operations, transfer of cash for stock gifts, scheduled and unscheduled capital improvements and miscellaneous operating expenses), and market value gains of \$343,313. Please see the Treasurer's report for specific numbers in 2021 Church expenditures.

First Church investment returns were generally in line with benchmarks established for each asset class. This is commendable given the Covid-19 pandemic's continued grip on the national and global economy throughout 2021, as vaccinations became more widely available, businesses started to reopen, jobs increased, demand outpaced supply, prices increased, wages began to trend upward, and people coped with the volatility and impacts of two new Covid variants. Overall, the Church's investment portfolio largely recovered from the initial market impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, with a respectable year end value and balance for 2021. Based on investment activities alone, investments increased by 12.49% on a time-weighted basis.

The asset allocation at year end was 67.0% in a globally diversified portfolio of stock funds (equity), 19.7% in fixed-income or bond funds, 10.2% in alternative assets and 3.0% in cash, within the range of asset target allocations established in our Investment Policy guidelines. The diversified stock portfolio increased by 17.62% in 2021. Returns on indices for comparable categories of stocks included gains of 18.54% for the MSCI AC World Index, 28.71% for the S&P 500 (large cap stocks), 14.82% for the Russell 2000 (US small cap stocks), 11.26% for the MSCI EAFE (developed international stocks), and -2.54% for the MSCI Emerging Markets. The fixed income portfolio increased in value by 1.26% compared to a loss of -1.54% in the Bloomberg Barclays US Agg Bond index. Alternatives, in our case consisting primarily of a hedged equity strategy, increased by 13.24% compared to a 6.20% gain in the Credit Suisse Hedge Fund Index.

During the year, the Investment Committee took 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 FCC account continues to have both an ESG equity portfolio and non-ESG equity portfolio (traditional). The Committee continues to require the screening of holdings for any carbon related assets in line with the Sustainability Investment Policy Guidelines as measured by Carbon-Tracker and can report that the percent of the portfolio invested in companies on the list remains less than 2% (0.84%). The ESG equity portfolio, initiated in the third quarter of 2016 and now with five (5) years of performance, has achieved returns generally and consistently equal to or better than the traditional non-ESG portfolio. For the calendar year 2021, the ESG equity portfolio slightly outperformed the non-ESG portfolio returning 18.12% versus 17.20% (gross of fees).

Asset allocation for ESG equities at the start of 2021 was close to the then-targeted level of 40% (actual 41.9%). This represented an authorized gradual increase from the initial target level of 10% to 40% be-

Report of the Investment Committee (continued)

tween 2016 through 2020. Over several quarters in 2020 through early 2021, the Committee undertook a comprehensive examination of our ESG performance and asset allocation since inception of the Investment Committee's Sustainability Investment Guidelines in 2016, including trends in ESG investment principles, commitments, and performance outcomes globally and nationally. In April 2021, the Committee authorized an increase of 10-15% of the ESG equity allocation above 40%, with timing at the discretion of OWP through 2021. At the close of 2021, the allocation of ESG to non-ESG equity assets was roughly equal, with ESG increased to 49.9% and non-ESG at 50.1%.

The Committee will continue regular quarterly and annual evaluation of the overall performance and asset allocation of the Church's portfolio in ESG equity investments, as well as consideration of ESG investment in other asset classes. The Committee is also committed to continue a course of disciplined learning and improvement in these sustainability investment practices not only in ESG trends, but also emerging trends and leadership in the use of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles in portfolio investment and asset screening criteria as part of FCC's commitment to embrace racial equity and become an anti-racist church. The Committee will report any revised asset allocation and updates to the Sustainability Investment Policy guidelines to Executive Council in 2022.

Respectfully submitted,
Laurie Burt, Chair, FCC Investment Committee

Report of the Treasurer

Thanks to the efforts of our previous Treasurers, our Minister of Stewardship & Finance, the members of the Finance, Stewardship and Investments Committees and many others whose generosity, insights, time and expertise have contributed to the financial sustainability of our congregation, we are in good position going into 2022.

In 2021 our committee focused on the benefits available to us through government stimulus. Programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program and the Employee Retention Credit enabled us to continue to pay our employees with their full wages throughout our pandemic building closures. Expenses rose year-over-year but that was due to there being such a large drop in 2020 expenses due to long periods of the church being closed to all visitors and lower utility bills.

We were also blessed with a \$100,000 matching grant from the City of Cambridge that went towards the ongoing repair and maintenance of the roof. We spent over \$210,000 on the roof in 2020 but the matching grant, which may continue to be available again in 2022, greatly helped pay for these needed repairs. Going forward it is not unrealistic to consider that the roof will need significant ongoing repairs every year. So long as the matching grant continues to be available to us, we can consider accelerating certain repairs (think lintels, windows, insulation, etc.) that will serve as investments in our physical space long into the future.

One significant element of our financial position was a booming stock market. A rising tide lifts all boats, and our investments were no exception. The Investment Committee report will talk about our performance and ongoing investments into ESG funds, but from the Treasurer's office we offer a note of caution: Past performance is not an indicator of future results. Environmental, inflationary, political and epidemiological uncertainty threaten not only our congregation but the world at large. Everything from a modest correction to a stock market crash are all possible and things to prepare for. However, we are the ultimate in long-term investors and have weathered storms before and will again. As our previous Treasurers have said, the key to our long-term sustainability is to maintain an income stream that is greater than our expenses by at least 2 percentage points. With inflation likely to impact our church in the form of higher labor and energy costs, we need to be mindful of our long-term sustainability when considering new investments.

In 2022 we will spend more time looking at long term financial plans and different options to help pay for the vision of our church for things like hiring a full-time minister of Color, other missions and social justice investments, continuing to pay living wages to our staff and helping our great old building be a comfortable home for our and future generations.

First Church is in a good position heading into 2022, and that is due to the generosity of our members, and the excellent work of Executive Council, the Finance, Stewardship Investments and other Committee members in keeping focused on our long-term vision. Thank you for your generous support in building our beloved community.

Rich Goode

Congregational Roll 2021

Active Roll Reported for 31 December 2020: 397

Additions to resident membership: 5

New Members (by affirmation of faith): 5

Hanna Bliska

Xiaomeng Han

The Rev. Susie Hayward

Kathy Williams

The Rev. James D. Ross II

Removals, by death: 1

Cynthia Shoemaker

Removals, by letter of transfer: 0

Baptisms in the Church Universal: 1

Sylvester Ackermann

Marriages: 0

Active Roll on 31 December 2021: 401

Communion of Saints

During 2021 the following persons completed their lives among us

David Angney
Jack Bailey
Katie Bentin-Aimaasu
Carroll "Sue" Butler
Nancy Clark
Rev. Leonard Clough
Edwin Cranston
Janet Demery
Daniel Dyer
Jesse Eason
Ted Felton
James Freeman
Barbara Geer
Helen Grogan
Sally Howes Hansen
Jay Hopkins
Mary Hyde

Jean Roger
Joachim Byung Nam Kim
Elizabeth Charlotte Kreiger
Cliff Moller
Pamela Perkins
William Redlich
Cynthia Shoemaker*
Jeri Eisenberg
Shuman Stanley M. Slawsby
Elsie Pitre Smith
Jean Stauffer
Dianne Totten
Charles Van Ness
Marjorie Van Ness
Michael Wall
Hans Gert Wengert
Jacoby Williams

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

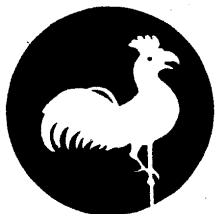
One thing I ask of you, Lord, this I seek:
to live in your house all the days of my life...

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.

-Psalm 27, par.

*First Church member



FIRST CHURCH IN CAMBRIDGE, CONGREGATIONAL

United Church of Christ

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