

2022 Annual Report



First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

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2022 Annual Report
First Church in Cambridge, Congregational

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Report of the Senior Minister

In Advent of 2022, our theme was *Behold: Opening to Wonder*. Together, we beheld those stunning James Webb images of distant stars and considered the wonders of the season. Though Advent began a new liturgical year for us, the invitation to behold resonates now as I look back and ponder all the divine creative energy that has coursed through our community over the past year, and see the figurative galaxy of stars that is all of you. Your gifts light up our First Church life together, week after week!

So first: Behold our leaders. First Church has constellations of them, too many to name; yet behold our moderator, Meredith Quinn, and her smart, steady, humble, generous, gentle, and grounded leadership. Her always-inclusive leading of Executive Council, Congregational meetings, and ad hoc task groups; the way she engages in weekly study groups and in the weekly Pentecostal Tabernacle biblical justice prayer calls; her clarity of mind and soulful presence... Meredith has been a beacon and a model of faithful discipleship and leadership throughout this past year-plus. And behold our Vice-Moderator Moana Bentin, with her ever-ready energy, her truth-telling spirit, her fun-loving and unflappable grace. I am grateful that Meredith and Moana will be switching roles in 2023, so that our church will continue to be guided by these two bright-shining lights.

While I'm at it, behold our fabulous Deacons, especially co-chairs Adam Weiss and outgoing co-chair Amy Matias. Adam and Amy have been a dream team, working together since Covid (and Amy before that) shepherding our highly-dedicated team of Deacons through hard decisions about worship, communion, and peace-passing protocols, always "thinking for the whole," praying for the whole, and being fully present most every Sunday to greet, serve, and keep our sanctuary a safe and welcoming space, even on those higher-Covid-risk Sundays when there were just a few of us in person, and many tuning in from home.

In June, these and other First Church stars planned and led a leadership retreat where we wondered together about what we were celebrating in 2022, two-plus years into Covid, and what questions we have moving forward. We identified and discussed five pressing themes to which I now turn in this effort to capture our year together. Please see the addendum to Meredith's report for a summary of the retreat itself.

Our Financial Life

Among many other things, we celebrated "the transparency, dedication, and truth-telling" of our finance team. Amen! Treasurer Rich Goode, Investments Committee Chair Laurie Burt, Stewardship Chair Joanne Paul, and Controller Rachel Carson, often joined by Bill Hsiao, Karen McArthur and others, brought keen eyes and sharp pencils to a variety of Covid-related and wider economic challenges, while moving us to address the continuing burden of our structural operating deficit. As with so many organizations that are "coming out of Covid," we had an especially difficult budget prep cycle this year. Through it all, this skillful team provided clear and necessary recommendations on both the income and expense sides of our ledger. Special thanks to Rich Goode for being so amazingly present to, and good-humored about, his ongoing work as our Treasurer, even on days when he had 17 (yes 17!) other zoom calls. And thanks too to Laurie Burt, who generously offered her remarkable organizational and business expertise not only to our Investments Committee but to at least four additional finance-related task groups this year.

Report of the Senior Minister (continued)

One of those groups was a new team we brought together to research the value of several of our key historic assets, including our parsonage, archival manuscripts, and our cockerel weathervane. The cockerel is a treasure, created in 1722 by Shem Drowne who made the grasshopper that tops Faneuil Hall. Questions have arisen about climate/weather-related preservation and whether it may be time to consider replication or replacement. This team's research is now well underway. Stay tuned for a report on what we are learning. And speaking of assets, at our last Annual Meeting the congregation launched a campaign to maintain and sustain that "wondrous machine" the Frobenius organ. In 2022, donors within and beyond First Church contributed over \$90,000 of our \$160,000 goal, allowing us to complete the first of a two-phase cleaning and maintenance project. Thank you to our "Pipe-Up: Frobenius at 50" team (Peter Sykes, Joanne Paul, Moana Bentin, Chris Reynolds, Lindsay Miller, Laurie Friedman, Faith Ross, Andy Clark, and Dave Kidder), and thanks to all who piped up with financial support. But the generosity of our church didn't end there. This year we were once again awed by your increases in overall giving to our church: up 10% last year, and 15% so far this year. Abundant thanks go out to our "Stew Crew" for yet another highly successful Stewardship Campaign, cheered on by our ever-encouraging Stewardship chair/coach extraordinaire, Joanne Paul. There is more to do, and more in the works, on our path toward financial sustainability, but the challenges ahead are now more deeply felt and understood by the wider congregation, and our momentum is strong. Again, I say, behold! Behold First Church's amazing generosity of time, talent, and treasure.

Our Staffing Model

At our June retreat, we celebrated "the energy, creativity, talent, adaptability and caring of our current staff, with new or recently increased hours and roles." We celebrated a full year of full-time Lexi, which was and is a Godsend! We celebrated the longevity and loyalty of key long-serving staff and the strong collaboration among them (us). And we celebrated our ongoing and still striving commitment to staff diversity.

Speaking of staff, if it felt as if ours was larger than usual this year on Sundays and beyond, it was. This is due not only to Covid-related increases in state and city-sponsored contacts for our homeless ministries but also to ongoing support from Covid-related payroll relief. The timing for our church staff could not have been better, since those funds allowed us to have staff on hand to cover Sarah Higginbotham's sabbatical this past spring (Thank you, Jaz!) and one month of Karen McArthur's sabbatical in August (Thank you, Lexi!). You also may have noticed that our bulletins included more prayer requests for staff members than usual. 2022 was a tough year for our team, with several close family losses and serious illnesses impacting dearest loved ones. Blessedly, our team is just that, a team, and I'm enormously grateful to them for being agile, caring, and collaborative enough to have each other's back, and mine, through many unforeseen life circumstances. Truly, it was a year of: "Sarah is covering for Kirsten," "Lexi is covering for me," "Kate is stepping in to preach" (on top of everything else she so masterfully does with the Friday Cafe), "George is taking Kimel's shifts this week." We are still working on who can cover for Jim Stewart, which I say with nothing but deep admiration for his seemingly 24-7 coverage of all things Shelter. Even there, though, we are seeing new staff hires and increased hours to help ease and distribute the load.

A loud shout-out to our 2022 game-changer staff person of the year, facilities manager Lee Prouty. Lee

Report of the Senior Minister (continued)

joined our team at the end of 2021 and brought his “jack-of-all-trades” skill set when we needed it most. Thanks to Lee, our sanctuary AV and livestream are now looking and sounding better than ever, and so is our entire building. In other 2022 staffing news, we were thrilled to welcome new HDS ministerial interns Ahmaad Edmund and Carla Carbajal, to continue—albeit very part-time—with Carlyle Stewart, and to receive and celebrate Ministerial Intern Ebony West’s gifts in the first part of our year. We also said a sad/glad farewell to our beloved Pastoral Associate Jaz Buchanan, who had her first child on New Year’s Day 2023 and plans to continue her ministry in Walpole later this spring.

With Covid relief funds running dry, our 2023 staff will be leaner. We won’t have Jaz, and we also need to prepare our hearts to say goodbye to Lexi as she finishes her two-year term as Transitional Minister. Thanks to Meredith, Moana, Laurie Burt, Claire Hunt, Laurie Williams, and Leslie Pelton-Cairns for meeting this summer to help us think through the next steps for our staffing model, in the near term and beyond. For this coming fall, we will continue to lean on each other, on our fabulous Community Ministers and lay leaders, and on our talented students, as we build our financial health to the point where we can again afford a second ordained minister, and continue our work to diversify our staff. I remain deeply hopeful and trusting that the Spirit will lead us where we need to be, though the timing may not be on our watches.

Our Becoming an Anti-Racist Church

We also celebrated “the Spirit’s ongoing movement in and through our deepening racial justice ministries.” 2022 highlights include the following: Our Annual meeting in January endorsed our First Church Land Acknowledgement and growing solidarity with Indigenous persons, including legislative advocacy, relationship-building, and learning opportunities like the truly mind-blowing Doctrine of Discovery sessions led by Hilary Hopkins this past fall. Our emerging Reparations Fund distributed \$83,000 to a Black-led collective of community leaders convened by Karlene Griffith Sekou. These funds were raised from members above and beyond their pledges and include a donation from the Missions and Social Justice discretionary line. After years of shared learning and discussion internal to First Church, 2022 marked a significant turning point toward more engagement outside our walls. We are building lasting relationships with Pentecostal Tabernacle, with the Cambridge NAACP (with whom we co-hosted a panel on reparations in September), and with other churches—both locally and in our wider denomination. And at a memorable service on Juneteenth, we welcomed the Lloyd family, descendants of some of the enslaved persons on our records, to share in the reading of names of enslaved members preserved in our church rolls. We are now working with Egypt Lloyd and others on a multigenerational fabric art project that will give us a lasting way of honoring and remembering those names.

Our collective racial justice efforts these past ten years are being recognized by many outside of First Church. At Harvard President Larry Bacow’s invitation, I was privileged to serve on Harvard and the Legacy of Slavery faculty committee, housed at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study since 2019. In April, that committee released a 137-page report with recommendations, including a \$100 million commitment from the university towards reparative efforts. As part of this ongoing work, I teamed up with several Harvard Chaplains to lead ten “Landscape of Slavery” tours this fall for Harvard faculty, staff and alums, and members of the wider Cambridge community. In December, I shared the honor of receiving the 2022 Community Service award with recently retired Cambridge City Manager Louise DePasquale at Pentecostal Tabernacle

Report of the Senior Minister (continued)

church, an award for our anti-racism efforts. I gratefully accepted the award but only did so on behalf of all us at First Church who have been part of this Spirit-led journey, and with special thanks to members of our Beloved Community team, especially co-leaders Peggy Stevens and Dave Kidder.

Hybrid Worship and Community...And Everything Else!

Combining two themes from our retreat, behold: our beloved First Church Community, on Sundays and beyond. We celebrated “feeling a deeper connection, because of small groups online, and the ease of joining online meetings, which has inspired wider involvement in the church.” We celebrated increased vulnerability and intimacy, and that we managed to thrive through the pandemic. On Regathering Sunday, we were back, and at the same time, we were a new community, even after almost 400 years! Our worship services this fall and through Advent were some of the more powerful sanctuary experiences I can recall—singing and praying, weeping and praising together, in person and with those at home, who regularly shared how they felt the Spirit of it, too. Over 60 gathered in person at a first-since-Covid Fall Retreat at Craigville, where we sang late into the night with Casey Marsh and Lisa McCarty beautifully accompanying with guitar and voice. Back at church, our choir sang all the more fully with new young adult members. In October, we honored our long-time members, over a dozen faithful who have been with us for 50, 60, and even 70-plus years, with a powerful testimony from Larry Smith, who began attending in 1945! Also, this fall, and with a deep bow to Sarah Higginbotham’s amazing ministry, we welcomed back more children than we had seen in almost three years. From generation to generation, the Spirit continues to enliven First Church and deepen our covenantal bonds with each other.

We celebrated our homeless ministries and the ways they adapted during the pandemic. We celebrated our Church school teachers and all of our hard-working committee members and chairs. We gave thanks for leaders of every Faith and Life group, which have helped many to experience an increased sense of intimacy with others in the congregation. Profound thanks especially to Brent Coffin for leading a weekly, deep-dive text study on Tuesday mornings, first through Luke and then through the Parables, and to Duncan Hollomon for leading our weekly Contemplative Practice Group, which grounds our entire community in holy pauses and spiritual depth. For the ongoing efforts of GBIO (thank you Will and Phil), for the ever grace-filled feeding of our bodies and spirits from our Friends of Fellowship (often known as Caitlin Anderson and family), for our Earth Stewardship ministry and a memorable Earth Sunday celebration (thank you Jim Brown), for nourishing summer book studies and a special guest appearance by author Bill McKibben, for our beautiful building and grounds, and the fact they are so well-cared for by Don Johnson and team (a special shout out to Don and others for our splendid new pew racks, and to Don and Lee for the countless hours of sleuthing to discover why our water bills were so high), for our communications ministry, and for all the behind-the-scenes work of Bruce, George, Kimell, Lee, Jason, Kirsten, Karen, our nursery workers, our Shelter staff, and our Community Ministers, we celebrate and give thanks.

And finally, for all the Saints, like Pauline Fennel, a beloved Saint whose life and gifts of exuberant hospitality we celebrated this year after she died in September. I can hear her saying it with us now: “Behold: First Church, you are a wonder!” From ages past, in 2022 and onwards!

Dan Smith

Report of Transitional Minister Alexandra (Lexi) Boudreaux

This congregation's enthusiasm for and commitment to our collective ministry together even as we emerge from these recent pandemic years that have brought new challenges continues to inspire me beyond words can capture. In 2022 alone lay leaders and staff led over 15 faith and life groups engaging topics ranging from support groups to racial justice groups to astronomy nights and nature walks! We leaned into our relationships with one another and with God all the more with our Lenten theme of examining the ways in which Jesus is at the center of our faith, centering how Jesus leads us to learn about the emotions in our human experience. In our conversations after worship we did not shy away from tender conversations about our relationships with difficult feelings like anger or loss, which made way for deeper connections with one another. In line with our increased sense of connection and small group programming, this past year the Women's Community has sustained a monthly book group run faithfully by Alex Steinert-Evoy and Susan Reynolds, a Lenten retreat on zoom, and a community Advent dinner for 17 women in person for the first time since the pandemic. Thank you to Alex, Susan, and Joanne Paul for being dedicated and consistent leaders in creating spaces for women to explore their faith in the midst of a compassionate and joyful community for many years now.

Our sense of being the church with and for one another deepened all the more into the Spring and Summer. Our leadership retreat in June provided the leaders of First Church a moment to look up from the work of the last two years, to look around and remember all that we have been through and accomplished together. We took time to collectively remember the status of our financial life, our racial justice ministry, our staffing model, and our practices of being a hybrid community. The song "Celebration" by Kool and the Gang (thank you Moana Bentin for the idea to bring joy into this retreat!) echoed in MJH as we wrote down all the good things that have come out of this season of life together. At the same time, we made sure to engage deeply with the very real challenges and questions we still have as we make our way through an ongoing pandemic and transitional period of ministry.

Born out of a faith and life group, the Reparations fund continues to grow and our learnings about this area of racial justice ministry have been expanding as well. A group from the congregation met with some members of the Collective and their liaison Karlene Griffith Sekou on zoom later on in the month of June. Some of the members of the Collective hosted the meeting, asking the congregation questions about our relationship to the work of reparations, inviting us to think deeply with them about our motivations for this kind of work and how we are engaging with the spiritual and emotional labor of our anti-racism journey. Through our engagement with this group and others outside our walls we have had experiences of having mirrors held up to our racial justice ministry, helping us see both the deep work we have already done and also where there might be opportunities for our perspectives to be informed by a diversity of how this work is done in other communities, cultures, and spaces. This aspect of our spiritual journey has required both a deep engagement with the spiritual, emotional, and very real financial aspects of relinquishment and reparation and also a grounded commitment to humility, decentering our own voices in the process. Special thanks to the members of the Beloved Community team, especially Dan, Peggy Stevens, Dave and Alice Kidder. The fund is just one of many ways we are seeing glimpses of what it looks like to be on the path of building the beloved community that God envisions for us all.

As Sarah was on Sabbatical and Jaz was providing coverage for her work with the youngest among us, our communications team covered her tasks related to all the ways we communicate to the congregation and

Report of Transitional Minister Alexandra (Lexi) Boudreaux (continued)

community about the goings-on at First Church. In August, I was able to cover another Sabbatical on our schedule for Karen McArthur. Learning more and more about what it takes to manage the accounts payable and receivables of the church as well as being a resource to our amazing buildings and grounds team for reimbursements and projects has been a gift to me. Early on in 2022 Karen McArthur and I along with our Moderator Meredith Quinn provided an orientation to the church's financial and communication systems to the new Executive Council. Providing an orientation to lay leaders equipped us all to have access to the tools and information that we need to do ministry together in a more transparent and efficient way. From our new check request form, to our online parish directory, to how we collect and store committee meeting minutes for all to see, there is an organizational resource for our needs. The willingness of lay leadership to learn new systems and ways of being and doing church continues to impress me. Thank you all for taking the journey with us.

As we have experienced more and more of having an in person intergenerational presence on Sunday mornings we have had the gift of both returning to beloved and cherished traditions from pre-pandemic days and also have experienced some new innovations that have come into our midst. It was a particular joy to offer glitter blessings on Pride Sunday in mid June with some of our deacons on the street outside of our sanctuary doors, greeting both members of our congregation and our neighbors walking down the street. We offered a gentle touch of glitter on folks' foreheads, blessing them and reminding them that they are made of stardust and are God's beloved child. Continuing the joy in our worship life, for Pentecost Sunday we waved rainbow streamers as we read the Pentecost story at the mention of the Holy Spirit while the youngest among us were led up into the balcony to pop confetti on the congregation below. A moment of silliness and celebration filled the room, guiding us to experience play and joy in our worship on Sunday mornings.

Speaking of intergenerational joy, our youth programming started back in full swing this past Fall with a Confirmation Class of 9th and 10th graders taught by Sarah Higginbotham and myself, Our Whole Lives for 7th and 8th graders (thank you Laurie Williams and Jaz Buchanan!!) and a youth group for high school aged folks. Every year it is a pleasure to collaborate closely with Sarah in teaching our youth and this year was no exception. It has been the first Confirmation class back up and running since the pandemic put us on zoom back in 2020 and it has felt good to be back in the Harter room again. We have a wide range of topics from the history and authorship of the Bible to making meaning of grief and death, to forgiveness and reconciliation, to making sense of being a person of faith and of science, to First Church's history of racial justice ministry- AND we aren't done yet!

During our first all-church retreat back after lockdown at Craigville Becky Moyer (thank you Becky for being the best youth group co-leader a gal could ask for!) Sarah, and I chaperoned the youth group house, bonding by playing card and board games, making popcorn and homemade cookies and watching a movie together on that rainy weekend. That Sunday morning as some folks headed back into town for worship at First Church the remaining folks on retreat worshiped in the tabernacle once more with communion. We invited the youngest among us to sit right up close to the communion table and as we were figuring out how to serve the elements, the kids sitting up front without hesitation reached for the plates and cups to help serve. This unplanned moment of having kids jump up to help serve those of us gathered is one of the gifts

Report of Transitional Minister Alexandra (Lexi) Boudreaux (continued)

of what this year has brought. Moments when we have encountered new challenges and each one of us, stirred by the Holy Spirit, in our own way has stepped in to help meet the needs of our community. We have not only made it through the early days of the pandemic, but we have grown and blossomed into the hybrid and engaged church we are today- and we could not have done it alone...those kinds of blessings only come from God's help and from the help of one another.

After being in community and in ministry with each and every one of you for the past 4 and a half years it has been a privilege to serve alongside you and see God working in and through your open and compassionate hearts. As we prepare for more transitions in 2023 together, I have every confidence that the people of First Church in Cambridge will faithfully listen to God's call for your ministry, thriving and acting in the ways of Jesus' justice and love as you make your way into a new season of discovery, wonder, and joy.

Yours in Christ,
Lexi Boudreaux

Report of the Minister of Stewardship & Finance

Last year, describing 2021, I wrote that “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.” That new day has now dawned, and although I’d say that we’re metaphorically still in its morning hours, I’m happy to report that the system of shared responsibilities and communication is working quite smoothly. There are still things that we could do more completely if we allotted more staff time to them, but in general, we are able to provide a healthy balance between adequate attention to detail and efficient stewardship of the church’s resources.

Financial Reporting

Once each detail is properly entered and tagged, then the resulting reports show a thriving and engaged congregation that is paying careful attention to financial sustainability as we leverage the gifts entrusted to us for ministry in our time. During 2022, we managed overall expenditures of \$1.987 million; a little over \$1 million of this is our operating budget, just under \$700k was Homeless Ministries, and the balance was various restricted fund activity such as the Frobenius organ work and the Reparations Fund. Detailed monthly financial reports are available online for lay leaders and staff, and full annual financial reports are available on the Church Finances page of our website.

Although much this year was similar to last year, one change came in the way we account for the costs of administering our contracts and grants. Instead of allocating each ¼-hour, each postage stamp, each bank fee, or a portion of each shared expense, we now bill a percentage of each contract for “agency administration.” This covers not only the financial staffing to administer the contracts, but also a portion of the software, supplies, and equipment, as well as our insurance and finance office space. This change reduces administrative time and more fully covers our costs for these important and long-standing missions of our church.

As happens most every year, updates of IRS requirements and employer regulations continue to keep me on my toes, as we seek to be responsible to our employees and to our generous donors and volunteers. Among our goals for 2023 is to offer an orientation to financial vocabulary and reporting for those who would like to know more about what to look for in our congregation’s financial reports as we make decisions together for our future.

Financial Staffing

Our finance staff of three continues to maintain our financial operations: Bruce Dillenbeck in the office receiving mail, recording income, and overseeing check printing; Lexi Boudreaux recording expenses and reconciling Pex card transactions; and myself working on payroll, personnel, planning, policies and procedures. Between the three of us, we average 38 hours per week. Together, we maintain a digital system of recordkeeping and communication that keeps pace with the church’s active ministry, and also provides backup for each of the financial responsibilities for times that one of us is away for a planned vacation or unplanned illness.

Report of the Minister of Stewardship & Finance (continued)

In addition to overseeing financial operations, I staff the Finance, Stewardship, Investment, and Staff Policy committees as well as the financial aspects of the Shelter Oversight Committee. As always, it is a special privilege to work with and get to know such wonderful and dedicated lay leaders. My sincere appreciation to Treasurers Rich Goode, Larry Evans, Connie Pyle, and Art Anger, Controller Rachel Carlson, Moderators Meredith Quinn and Moana Bentin, Committee Chairs Laurie Burt, Joanne Paul, Jan Jeffers Lo, and our creative and hardworking staff. As I have said before, it is collaboration at its best, and a joy to work together in a church that is so deeply committed and so willing to risk looking critically at our past and hopefully toward our future and yet another new year in the long life of our congregation.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karu".

Report of the Director of Music

2022 was the year of the Frobenius organ. This year marked the fiftieth anniversary of its installation in the summer of 1972. Since that time, it has served our congregation nobly and taught generations of students (including me) who have practiced and taken lessons on it. This milestone also became an opportunity for some much-needed maintenance and cleaning. A project was created, spread over two years, in which the pipes are removed, cleaned, regulated and tuned, and the mechanical and electrical parts of the organ are refurbished . updated or replaced. The generosity of the congregation and community has made this possible, and the results are both visible (the façade pipes are shiny and dent-free again) and audible (the sound is cleaner, more focused and blending, and the tuning is greatly improved). Next summer the project will be completed, and fundraising is ongoing in order to make that possible. I am very, very grateful to everyone who has contributed to this project, and to William Cataneuse, whose organ maintenance firm has done marvelous work.

The First Church Choir is back in action for a second season after the Covid shutdown. We sang for practically every service, including special music for Easter. Our special music for Advent had to be unfortunately postponed due to my own bout with Covid – worse timing would be hard to imagine – but we will persevere, and sing that piece (a Magnificat by the Baroque composer Isabella Leonarda) for next year’s Music Sunday. For Regathering Sunday we sang the premiere of a new work written for the Choir by our Staff Composer, Patricia Van Ness. This ebullient setting of Psalm 84 was scored for SATB choir, guitar, violin, flute, and percussion. Our own David Torrey contributed spirited rhythm as the percussion section!

This has been a year of transition for me professionally. Over the summer, I stepped down from my professorship at Boston University after twenty years and accepted an invitation to join the organ department faculty at the University of Michigan, a historic and thriving program. This means I am commuting weekly to Ann Arbor to teach there as well as to New York City, where I am continuing to teach at the Juilliard School. Two super-early mornings each week is a small price to pay for the rich experience of working with and guiding some of tomorrow’s best organists and harpsichordists.

I give thanks for First Church – its spirit, its love, its heart, its energy, its amazing staff. I can’t imagine being anywhere else, and I am profoundly grateful.

Peter Sykes

Report of the Director of Creative Worship & Arts

As 2022 rolled over into 2023,, we experienced an alarming spread of yet another Covid variant, witnessed concerning political disarray in Washington D.C., and watched images of extraordinary weather incidents around the country. Sound familiar? It's easy to lose track of time (what year is it, now?) as we continue to navigate more "unprecedented" events than any of us thought possible. And yet, here is the First Church community, continuing to gather in person and online to "be the church." I am thankful for this community's consistent and steadfast attention to its ministries, even in the face of uncertainty and challenge.

Looking back, 2022 began with an Omicron surge that sent us back to an all-virtual Sunday morning schedule for the entire month of January. We returned to hybrid worship in February, and our Church School reopened with in-person classes for the first time since the onset of the pandemic. Though attendance was lower than our pre-pandemic average, a number of children participated in a condensed year of Godly Play, Middler, Bible 101, and OWL classes.

Just after Easter, I began a two-month sabbatical. I am so grateful that First Church extends the benefit of sabbatical time not just to clergy, but to program staff as well. My time away included a bit of travel, reconnection with old friends, and restorative, unscheduled time—what a gift! Thank you.

Throughout the year, I worked alongside the other members of our First Church Communications Team (Kirsten, Lexi, and Dan) to maintain the structure of our improved communications production. It might not be apparent from the outside, but communication procedures put in place over a year ago have led to a more efficient and streamlined system that benefits us all, staff and members alike.

Our Regathering season this past fall was a joyful reunion. It was amazing to see many folks rejoin us in person on Sundays for the first time since the pandemic began, including families with children who have become reacquainted with the rhythm of Church School and afternoon youth programs. I am extremely grateful to our Godly Play teachers Lindsay Ludwig, Lisa McCarty, Lauren Yockel, and Devin Hansen, who are inviting our children to reorient themselves to the stories and traditions of our faith. A huge shout-out is in order for our OWL teachers Phil Jones, Laurie Williams, and Jaz Buchanan, who rallied our 7th and 8th graders to travel across the river to Old South Church so many Sunday afternoons this fall! An outlier to this attendance bump has been the Nursery, where we have not welcomed as many infants and toddlers as before. Grateful thanks to our unflappable Nursery staff Lily Worth, Tammi Steele, and Amber Moy, who offer a warm invitation to the under-4 set to "come play!" in our Sage Hall indoor playground.

It was thrilling to return to Craigville for our All-Church Retreat after four years - wow! The connections made and strengthened in soulful conversations, silly games, community dances, and singalongs are such a blessing. The return of other in-person multigenerational gatherings such as All Saints Sunday, the Advent Workshop, and the UnPageant also made my heart sing.

Even as we don't know all that 2023 holds, I know that First Church will "keep on keeping on," providing warm hospitality, love for neighbors and the world, and a justice-seeking spirit through it all.

Faithfully,

Sarah Higginbotham

Report of the Director of Operations

2022 was a whirlwind of a year! As the year progressed, daily living (and working) felt more and more like it used to before the pandemic. But it can't be denied that the pandemic changed many things, and we here at First Church are still working through those changes and finessing them so that what we do in makes sense in this new hybrid world.

After the Omicron surge in the beginning of 2022, things at the church began to pick up in earnest. There were more and more concerts, dances, events, activities, and meetings, such that by the fall months the church building was just as busy as it was pre-pandemic. Because not all area buildings returned to hosting outside groups the way the church has, we had a number of "new to us" building renters, including Attica music school, Handel and Haydn Society, the Harvard Bookstore and others. Hopefully this trend will last and building use fees will continue to provide a substantial amount of income to the church.

Because we are living in a new hybrid world, we also continued our partnership with Musae, the company that provides livestreaming service and ticket sales for the performing groups that rent the sanctuary. This is still going well – we are able to make a bit of extra income from the groups who want to livestream while Musae takes on the task of making the livestream happen technically, and selling the virtual tickets to audience members.

Administratively, things also moved along at a fast pace. The Communications Team continues to work hard to make sure the church's happenings appear in all the right places (bulletin, social media, website, kiosks, etc.) so that people are made aware of them. There are also the daily and weekly tasks of just keeping the ship running – labels for nametags, printing bulletins, answering emails, updating the database, etc. Office Assistant Bruce Dillenbeck plays a big part in making sure all these tasks are completed, and I am grateful to him for his consistency, reliability, and willingness to do the work.

The building did need some maintenance work this year. The Building & Grounds Committee report includes more details, but we had some plumbing work, corrected a wrongly installed water meter, had some boiler repairs done, and worked to discover some malfunctioning toilets that were running, and cause our water bill to skyrocket.

Facilities Manager Lee Prouty was hired in mid-December 2021, so this was his first full year in the position. He has brought to the job much initiative, many facilities related skills, and a wealth of facilities knowledge. From bringing us a tool that makes it much easier to move the communion table, to working on the heating system so that it bypasses broken valves, he has been invaluable when it comes to the day to day upkeep and maintenance of the building. He also has A/V experience and is now running the technical portion of Sunday worship. I am so thankful we have added him to our team.

Our sexton Atul Singh left the position mid-year, and over the summer sexton Kimel Williams had to take some medical leave due to a back injury. Former sexton Douglas Casey came back to help us out, and First Church Shelter employee Steve Brown was also a regular substitute for the sexton position. Sexton George Williams and Lee worked many extra shifts to make sure we had all the coverage we needed. Kimel returned to full-time work in the fall, and just this past December we added Jason Taggart to the team – he

Report of the Director of Operations (continued)

is a part-time sexton currently working Saturday and Sunday mornings. The sextons are and have always been an important part of maintaining the building and its busyness. From janitorial tasks to security issues to larger maintenance projects to liaisoning with building users, the sextons have a pulse on the life of the building in a way no one else does. I express my gratitude to them as often as I can.

As I look ahead to 2023, I am excited and hopeful about what the coming year will bring. I expect the building will be full of music and art, children's laughter, thoughtful discussion, food and fellowship, and much more. I am privileged to be a part of it all.

Respectfully submitted,
Kirsten Manville

Report of the Shelter Director

Once again I have the privilege of reporting on the efforts undertaken, in the name of the people of First Church Cambridge Congregational, UCC, by the First Church Shelter.

Last fall, the First Church Shelter celebrated thirty five years of providing a concrete act of mercy for the men who seek assistance from us. Seven nights a week, 14 men are provided with a place to call home and a base from which to carry out their journey out of homelessness and into a more stable living situation.

For the past 14 months, through a partnership with the City of Cambridge, we have also been able to make available the services of a Housing “Navigator,” not only to the guests of the First Church Shelter but to those who present themselves at the Friday Cafe. Our Navigator has been instrumental in helping over a dozen individuals make their way through the formidable and often discouraging process of applying for, and gaining access to, the subsidized housing opportunities that they need in order to reconnect themselves to the communities they have become estranged from.

Our partnership with the City (and with the cooperation of the University Lutheran Church) of Cambridge also makes it possible for Cambridge’s poor and unhoused to have access to hygiene facilities and an opportunity to start connecting with other services.

The partnership has also made it possible for the only, a free hot meal available in the City of Cambridge on Wednesdays, to be served out of the Tower Room.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the people of First Church have continued to step forward and seek out opportunities to serve and bring hope to those who are unable to access, or participate in basic life saving and affirming services. I often get to be the public face of our First Church efforts but, of course, none of the service and advocacy that takes place would be possible without the support and encouragement of the Christian community that happens to meet at the corner of Garden and Mason Street.

On behalf of all of us who work out the shelter, the showers and the Tower Room, thank you for providing us with the opportunity to do this work which continues to be needed and we all find deeply rewarding.

Jim Stewart
Shelter Director

Report of the Moderator

Reorientation has been a major theme for Executive Council (EC) this year. In the spring, it felt like we had come through something big together. Now that the high waters of the pandemic had receded (at least for a time), we were stepping out into the mud and looking around with fresh eyes. Some landmarks were familiar; others seemed new. Collectively, we felt the need to take stock of where we are now, in 2022. We decided to hold a retreat for First Church leaders to identify what we are celebrating right now, and what questions we have. Please see below for a summary from those conversations. First Church, there is a lot to celebrate!

In our meetings this year, we dedicated many hours to reorienting ourselves to First Church **finances**. With pandemic relief funds coming to an end, we need to face our structural deficit head-on. Rich Goode, Laurie Burt, and Karen McArthur offered EC and the congregation many opportunities to learn about our financial situation. The budget conversation during our November Congregational meeting showed just how deeply we are all engaging with our financial choices. This is a good thing! And we have seen robust pledges that respond to our goal of a balanced budget.

We have also turned our focus to First Church's **staffing model**. Two years ago, the Staff Model Working Group (SMWG) shared their findings on how First Church's staffing model might change in the years ahead. Drawing upon a congregational survey, conversations with consultants, and staff conversations, they identified our congregational priorities and offered a three-phase framework for our staffing model. The working group's report was shared in January and February of 2020 – not the most propitious time, as we were soon overtaken by Covid-19.

Allow me to offer a refresher. The SMWG identified the following congregational priorities, based on our input:

- Sunday worship
- Racial and social justice
- Outreach and service
- Desire for the intimacy of small group gatherings
- Family ministries

In addition, the SMWG noted our congregation's desire to live within our means and increase the racial/ethnic diversity of ministerial leadership. First Church, even with all the growth we have experienced, these priorities and desires still feel accurate today, two years later!

The SMWG recommended that we think of staffing models in three "phases." At the time, we were in Phase One, consisting of a full-time Minister supported by pastoral associates and ministerial interns. The pandemic relief funds allowed us to move into Phase Two, calling Lexi Boudreaux as a Transitional Minister and increasing other staff hours. Covid both facilitated and necessitated this change, and we have been blessed! However, Lexi's contract is due to end at the end of summer. Our 2023 budget projects a return to Phase One staffing in early fall in order to balance our expenses with our projected income. For the moment, Phase Three (hiring a full-time senior minister of color to serve alongside our senior minister) is financially out of reach. A small group met in late summer to consider our staffing situation and

Report of the Moderator (continued)

recommended to EC that, when it is possible to return to Phase Two staffing, that the search committee seek out a called minister of color.

As we move forward, many First Church leaders are engaged with addressing our staffing and financial situation. Some are looking closely at the value of key assets, to determine whether we are stewarding them appropriately, and whether there are options the congregation might consider. Others are exploring the idea of a fundraising campaign to retire our debt. As I leave the Moderator role, I will remain engaged on staffing issues. I am particularly keen to ensure that we do not overburden Dan in the year ahead, and I look forward to collaborating with many of you as we discern our next steps together.

Another theme for EC this year has been **how we manifest the antiracist commitments we made as leaders of the church**. In 2021, EC agreed to the following benchmark in order to support First Church's Vision to be an Anti-racist Church: *Anyone serving in a leadership position at FCC has participated in anti-racist training, made a commitment to anti-racist learning and action, and has begun the process in concrete ways*. This year, we agreed to incorporate antiracist goals or processes into our committee work, and to commit to personal learning that we would reflect on together. As moderator, I tried to incorporate inclusive meeting practices into our conversations (e.g., giving people time to reflect before discussion began, deliberately making space for those who haven't spoken to enter the conversation, following up privately with individuals when it seemed appropriate). As we reorient to our goal of being an anti-racist church, it is clear that we have made great strides. Let's acknowledge this together and take that progress as encouragement for the road ahead.

In closing, I give thanks to God for the vitality and depth of the First Church community. I give thanks for our extraordinary ministers and staff who prepare transformative worship services and programs, guide our lay leaders, and hold our community with love and grace. I am also thankful for the dedicated leaders with whom I have served this year. And I am grateful for Moana Bentin, our incoming Moderator, who is exactly the moderator we need at this time.

– Meredith Quinn, Moderator

Report the Moderator (continued)

First Church in Cambridge

Summary of notes from Leadership Retreat held on June 5, 2022

In early June, leaders at First Church met to pause, to celebrate our ministry over the past couple of years and to ask questions that we have in this season for our church. Below is a summary of our celebrations and questions around key themes. The congregation was invited to contribute celebrations and questions online and through in-person small conversations.

OUR FINANCIAL LIFE

In our financial life, we celebrate:

The **transparency, dedication, and truth-telling of our finance team.** We appreciate their careful planning and stewardship, and their resourcefulness in seeking out funds like the PPP loans and grants from the city;

Improvements in our financial systems: in the “back office,” in how we take in donations, and in the establishment of a Finance Committee to enable coordination;

An **investment strategy that aligns with our values;**

Increased giving to First Church;

The **upcoming campaign for planned giving** – a key step to achieving financial sustainability.

Our questions center on these themes:

What is our current financial health? How are we doing relative to our goals? Are there any concerns about the financial stability of First Church? How much of a safety net do we have? What are major upcoming expenses?

How does money relate to our faith? Do we pray about money? How willing are we to sacrifice? How important are material things (physical property, investments) to the goal of bringing God’s kingdom on earth? Do we anticipate abundance?

Assuming that our priorities (e.g., staffing changes) will require more financial resources, **how can we increase membership and giving?**

Do we have the right level of communication about finances? What are our financial priorities? How are financial decisions made? Is the budget accessible to those who aren’t financially savvy? How much does the congregation want to know?

Given the inequities in our society, **what is our financial responsibility to the community outside of First Church?**

Report of the Moderator (continued)

OUR BECOMING AN ANTIRACIST CHURCH

In our work towards becoming an antiracist church, we celebrate:

Our recent **Land Acknowledgment**, and growing solidarity with Indigenous persons, including legislative advocacy, relationship-building and learning opportunities.

Our **Reparations Fund**, and the emerging collective that is distributing that fund, as well as additional opportunities for sharing resources through an antiracist lens.

Broad participation in after church offerings, small groups, etc (more than 150 people engaged) and a **deeper leadership role by Executive Council** that is incorporating antiracist work in so much of the church life (small groups, committee meetings, retreats, worship, sermons, etc)

Deepening relationships in Cambridge and beyond:

with **Pentecostal Tabernacle** church through weekly prayer calls and more

the **Cambridge NAACP** who reached out to us having heard about our work

with the **Slave Legacy Coaliton** (convened by the Lloyd Family who are descendants of enslaved persons on our records.)

Dan's work with **Harvard and the Legacy of Slavery Initiative**

with **other churches in the UCC** and other denominations

Acknowledging that **the work is a forever journey** and efforts to **meet people where they are** on their own journeys. We appreciate opportunities for self-learning and also that we are attracting new members *because* of our antiracist vision.

Bringing a more humble and vulnerable spirit to the work with more willingness to listen and learn

Our questions center on these themes:

How do we keep building relationships with communities and persons of color? How do we do this without putting emotional labor on them? How are we growing in deeper and authentic relationships with each other and our neighbors? God's question for us: "Are you not your family's keepers?"

How might we humbly share our work with Cambridge? with Greater Boston?
with our denomination? with the country?

How do we continue to change our church culture? What does being antiracist look like in our day to day church culture? How are we cultivating a community of care and nourishment for the work ahead? What are the short term goals toward becoming anti-racist? What are long term practices the church maintains permanently? What can we do that uses our strengths?

Beyond reparations, what repentance ought we to pursue and why? How do we have awareness of both class and white privilege? How can we not force or be artificial and thus meaningless? How can we overcome our egos so as not to be paternalistic?

STAFFING MODEL

What we are celebrating about our our staffing model?

The energy, creativity, talent, adaptability and caring of our **current staff, with new or recently increased roles/hours** (i.e. "our clergy and staff - no whining here," wonderful Transitional Minister and

Report of the Moderator (continued)

Pastoral Associate,' "awesome sextons and building manager," "cheers for Carlyle and Ebony,"
Our ongoing commitment to **staff diversity**

Lexi's ordination!

The **longevity and loyalty** of key long-serving staff, and **strong collaboration** among them.

Our interns, and the way we identify and promote young and new leaders, with a shout to HDS

Gratitude for the work and foresight and report of our Staff Model Working Group and that we we are already in **Phase 2 of our 3 phase model**.

Patience and fortitude of current staff w shift to Zoom and online everything.

Questions that arise:

Around what's next?: How much change/transition can FCC hold at once with pandemic & pending staff changes? What is the plan for staffing when Lexi is gone? How satisfied or dissatisfied do the staff feel? What is interim ministry plan? When do we start a national search? How can a period of interim ministry lead us through upcoming transitions? What is timeline of staffing changes? A question around the staff model plan: What are our benchmarks and how can they be more transparent to whole congregation?

Around current staff: how can we tend to underlying pandemic related depletion of staff and laity? Are the staff being overworked? What does the staff think needs to change or adapt at FCC? Are there too many things to do? Do we need to streamline and find better balance? How long is our current staff staying (many have been with us for many years!)?

Around increasing staff diversity: How can we continue to diversify our staff and leadership? How do we find leadership of color for a predominantly white congregation? To what extent is our church culture ready to support a senior-level minister of color? Where are we in becoming a truly multicultural and welcoming congregation? Discern, what will lead us to this goal? How will we know when we are ready to call a clergy of color? Questions FCC may have for us: Are we trying to do too much? 'What is this about a senior-level minister of color? We have a stable and super-competent staff of mostly white people. What are we called to do next?'

Around finances: How do we juggle increased staff (and an additional senior minister of color) in light of diminishing endowment? We want to add a senior level minister of color: where are we financially in terms of that?

More general and spiritual questions: How can we offer balance of contemplation and generative change to a more welcoming place? Question God may have for us - are you listening to me? How do we say "yes" and how we say "no" to what we undertake? (We can't do everything). Are we pointing to God in all our activity?

Hybrid Worship and Community

What are we celebrating about our hybrid worship and community?

Feeling a **deeper connection** to many people because of the small groups online and the ease of joining small groups that are online, which has inspired wider involvement in the church. There is a sense of **increased vulnerability and intimacy**.

Beautiful new website, **online presence** on Youtube, instagram and facebook, audio-visual

Report of the Moderator (continued)

improvements and innovations to how we do worship (First Worship on the lawn, hybrid liturgists etc)

A **creative staff** who helped keep us all **connected** during the height of the pandemic and our **collective willingness** as a church (**lay members**) to **offer our gifts** to share

We have **managed to thrive** during the pandemic

Questions that arise:

Around integrating our in person and online community: How to connect the two parts of our community? How to acknowledge people-create one community? Question for Congregation-How can you keep connection with me when I probably won't ever be able to come back to church? How to bring the online worshippers closer to other members? Is there a way to acknowledge the presence of those online in worship?

Around planning for what the future looks like: How do we draw on the practice of trust that we have exercised so far in our journey? How are we going to navigate the attrition that will occur in our membership (because of covid)? Question from God-Are you doing your best? How can you do better? What do you need? What is our church going to look like in the long run? How do we know when the long run or homeostasis arrives? What is sustainable?

Around improving the experience of Hybrid church: Question from God-how would you enable a deep connection with what is sacred in remote settings? How to strengthen our hybrid church, use technology to deepen our faith and expand membership? How do we encourage deep connection in community remotely? How can we support those who offer their gifts? From God-Are you doing your best? How can you do better? What do you need? Question for Leaders-how do we lead in person vs remotely?

EVERYTHING ELSE!

In addition to all listed above, we celebrate:

Our homeless ministries and the ways they adapted during the pandemic

Church school teachers

Music

Leaders of faith and life groups – which have helped many to experience an increased sense of intimacy with others in the congregation

Our beautiful building and grounds, and the fact they are so well-cared for. We appreciate the staff and volunteers who steward our facilities.

The website: functional *and* gorgeous!

Questions that arise:

How are we called to serve?

As we continue to grow, how can we keep strong bonds?

What are we doing about the climate crisis?

A few years back, we set an intention to not be too busy. How are we doing?

What are we growing into? How can we trust that God is already doing a new thing?

Report of the Board of Deacons

In the year 2022, the deacons found great joy in the blessings of being a hybrid church, both increasing in-person attendance and sustaining First Church's online presence. This shift has allowed the deacons to feel more connected with one another and our fellow congregants, as we seek to be guided by a spirit of service. We thank last year's outgoing deacons and chairs, Beth Spaulding, Gandhi Solanski, and Amy Matias. We are joyously welcoming Casey Marsh, Laurie Williams and Audrey Bellinger to join our 2023 team.

In early 2022, the deacons advised staff in making challenging decisions related to dealing with Covid spikes, leading to the difficult choice to make January fully remote, returning to a full hybrid return in February. As the year progressed, deacons continued to advise on Covid safety protocols related to Communion, masking, and other ways to allow for in-person services to be both safe and meaningful times of connection, while maintaining an online presence. These have included reinstating the offering, the passing of the peace, holding outdoor services when weather permits, hosting Zoom coffee hour, among many other liturgical and non-liturgical items.

In February 2022, deacons advised staff on the current staffing model, addressing questions related to staffing needs/readiness, our goal of being an anti-racist church, and how Covid has affected our staffing model, among other significant matters. In March, deacons implemented ways to increase broader congregational participation, such as recruiting volunteer greeters and reaching out to past deacons to help create a "deeper bench."

As in-person attendance has increased, deacons have had more in-depth discussions how to best care for and nourish the First Church community in this "new normal." Some results of these discussions have been deacon led prayer walks, lifting up and appreciating decades-long members of First Church, and developing a spiritual care tips sheet. As throughout 2020 and 2021, deacons hosted Zoom coffee hour and, given the fluctuating attendance, deacons and staff agreed to shift Zoom coffee hour to the 2nd Sunday of each month in 2023. The deacons split into subcommittees to look at the narthex, sanctuary, and other gathering spaces and made changes to make our church a more welcoming physical space when we reopened to in-person worship.

Deacons have engaged in our continued work toward being a more radically inclusive and diverse faith community. One example of this is 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 committee's function at First Church. Deacons have also been involved in decisions to make our spaces more representative of our mission of inclusivity by choosing diverse art for Margaret Jewett Hall. In these actions, we have been graciously following the lead of Transitional Minister Lexi Boudreaux, who has been strongly enacting values of inclusivity in all of her work and continues to make First Church more inclusive. She has taken the initiative on many welcoming projects, such as connecting new members to First Church, including a draft of a pamphlet for new members that will be coming out in 2023! Lexi has been a passionate leader in our work to become a more anti-racist church and moved our welcoming practices forward in significant and long-lasting ways. Her ongoing support to and with minister Dan Smith has been invaluable in another year of great challenge and transition.

Report of the Board of Deacons (continued)

The congregation also was blessed with continued funds to support Jaz Buchanan as a part-time ministerial associate. The deacons and the congregation have benefited from her wisdom and considerable gifts as we give thanks for her leadership. We celebrated Jaz and her contributions to First Church on December 18, 2022 and wished her many blessing in her next ministerial position in Walpole, MA.

Our congregation has continued to have the privilege of Carlyle Stewart's leadership in its anti-racism work. Through his teachings in "A Call to Return" he has helped us focus on Spiritual Ecology and how it can help support and expand our long-term anti-racism work at First Church in Cambridge. This was made possible through a grant from Boston University. Carlyle has also continued to enrich our anti-racist journey together as guest minister and preacher.

One of the benefits of serving in the role of deacon is the additional perspective on the thoughtfulness and generous way Dan Smith leads the deacons and the congregation as a whole. The deacons have deep gratitude for Dan's steady leadership in this challenging time of transition. It cannot be understated how Dan, along with Lexi, Jaz, Sarah, Peter and the entire staff, have thoughtfully and lovingly led careful discernment as we found our way through the many changing needs of our community as the Covid-19 pandemic shifts and changes. Dan's leadership in the integration of remote video technology and use of the new sound system evolved to a "well oiled machine" and has enhanced the ability of our congregation to connect to one another when connection in person might not be possible for all.

We said goodbye to Kevin Newell, who was our key support with the video and sound system and we are grateful for the talent of Lee Prouty, who has seamlessly taken over the charge.

Deacons also advised staff on how to provide thoughtful support and response grounded in our faith traditions to the overturning of Roe v. Wade. We are deeply grateful for the careful thought and care Dan and the rest of the staff have shown the congregation on this and other deeply felt social and political issues.

We again wish to thank outgoing deacons and greatly look forward to welcoming Laurie, Audrey, and Casey.

Peace and blessing for a wonderful 2023!

Amy Matias and Adam Weiss (Deacons Co-Chairs)

Report of the Christian Formation Committee

Members: Ariel Ackermann (partial year), Audrey Bellinger, Nancy Cyr (partial year), Ingeborg Haug (partial year), Faith Ross, Carol Wilson-Braun, Hilary Hopkins (chair)

Clergy/Staff: Lexi Boudreaux, Jaz Buchanan, Sarah Higginbotham, Carla Arevalo Carbajal, Dan Smith

Finding it both convenient and safe, the Committee met via Zoom once again. We met each month except for July and August.

Committee meetings were often devoted to either brainstorming ideas for formation activities in upcoming Liturgical seasons, or fleshing out offerings already proposed by clergy/staff. These lively sessions are difficult to capture in a few words, but they always left us excited and, at times, satisfied with our work.

Below are some highlights of Committee members' more formal contributions to Christian Formation at First Church.

This listing does not include formation activities led solely by clergy/staff, of which there were many!

1. Ariel and Hilary hosted seven sessions during Epiphany which made use of the Vanderbilt University Divinity Library Daily Lectionary collection of art images which illuminate the scriptures for the season.
2. Hilary convened a five-session summer book group which read and discussed *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake*.
3. Carol led a well-attended 9:30 hour on gender issues and the history of how FCC became an open and affirming church in 1991.
4. Hilary convened two sessions on the Doctrine of Discovery, using materials prepared by the UCC. Many attendees commented that much of the information was new to them.
5. Audrey hosted three 9:30 sessions at which she presented her artwork of collages illustrating the Psalms. There was lively discussion about the intersection of art and words.

At each of our meetings, Sarah summarized the many offerings for children and youth. This is our upcoming generation, and they are so fortunate to have illumination, involvement, and support at every age level, from preschool through high school. [Ed. Note: All I ever learned in Sunday School was the names of the first five books of the Bible. Not what they were about, just their names.]

All kinds of other formation activities were on offer, too: numerous small Faith and Life groups; book groups; early morning and afternoon zoom meetings on Bible studies and parables; a zoom group for people facing aging and death issues; walking pilgrimages; Jesus our Center post-worship discussions; several lectures on contemporary topics; films on issues of slavery and indigenous peoples.

We have two customs in our Christian Formation committee meetings. First, we begin each meeting by hearing our Land Acknowledgement and reflecting in sacred silence about what it actually means, inasmuch as we are sitting on the land to which it refers. Second, we end each meeting by considering the list of Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture: we choose one of the 14 at random, read its characteristics and their antidotes, and reflect upon them in sacred silence. Each time we are startled, concerned, and humbled by how accurate these seem. Each time our consciousness and conscience are stimulated. We can hope that our meetings reflect this.

Report of the Christian Formation Committee (continued)

Thank you to our diligent, imaginative, and committed members, Ariel, Audrey, Nancy, Faith, Carol, Ingeborg, Sarah, Lexi, Jaz, Carla and Dan. Thank you also to the congregation of First Church in Cambridge, always ready to try something new. Together we will see it through.

Respectfully submitted--Hilary Hopkins, Chair - 1/9/2023

Report of the Building & Grounds Committee

We are so pleased and grateful that the church building is busy again with church and community activities. In-person worship, church events, community meetings and rental events are a welcoming sight. We thank Kirsten our Director of Operations for organizing/renting the church spaces for many 2022 events. We thank Lee our Facilities Manager for his extra effort in supporting the increased building usage and for many successful tasks he performed that are cited below. We are gratified that the buildings and grounds are well maintained and needed improvements were made in 2022.

2022 seemed to be a year dominated by plumbing related issues. Fortunately, Lee's problem-solving skills resolved many of them. The issues included replacing several sections of leaky pipes, repairing toilets, completely replacing a toilet, repairing one of the main boiler pumps, re-piping of the irrigation meter, and resolving inoperable thermostat control valves on heating lines. The domestic heating system became inoperable due to calcium/dissolved minerals build up. The plumber replaced effected piping components and Lee jury rigged a flushing system to clean out the tankless heater. Also, the church building was experiencing high water usage. Initially, a thorough building walkthrough did not reveal any ongoing water leaks. To pinpoint the high usage, Lee installed a remote camera over the uncovered water meter. Daily and hourly recordings along with building events were documented and tracked on spreadsheets. Eventually, two toilets were identified that would continuously run at various times due to deficient fill valves. As of this writing, the water usage has been back to normal for the past month.

Many improvements and repairs were made to the church building and to the parsonage. Repaired the ADA automatic bathroom door closure by installing a robust supporting door header, installed a new debris screen for the Parish House flat roof drain that allows water to flow into it even with leaves/debris covering it, restored the Living Wall with new ivy plants and soil bags because an infestation of mealworms, refinished the Parsonage kitchen floor, replaced deteriorating Parsonage back deck floor planks, and installed more robust pew hymnal racks. Lee handmade a leverage type tool that greatly assist the movement of the heavy sanctuary communion table and he also repaired the sanctuary lighting control panel by finding a hard-to-find replacement on eBay.

The second phase of the church building exterior preservation was completed. This phase included replacing the north sanctuary roof tiles and repairing end walls, replacing the cloister roof and damaged roof tiles above it and making roof cap repairs. The Cambridge Historical Commission gave us the matching \$100K matching grant for this phase. The next planned phase is the restoration of the tower. Last year we submitted a Letter of Intent (LOI) for a matching grant from the National Fund for Sacred Spaces (NFSP) to partially fund restoring the tower. We were not invited to continue with the next step of submitting our application form. 10 LOIs out over 130 submitted were only invited to submit their applications. We plan to resubmit again in 2023. B&G is supporting the Assets Team in accessing the condition and researching the value of the cockerel weathervane. The cockerel is showing signs of deterioration occurring to the gold leaf on several surface areas. We had included a closeup inspection and any needed restoration to the cockerel as part of the tower restoration project.

A considerable amount of landscaping work was performed this year. The lawn area in front of the playground was aerated and dethatched to help lawn growth during the drought conditions. A missing front fence rail was reinstalled. Our tree care service trimmed the trees in front of the church and treated the elm tree. Kimel trimmed the front bushes and Joanne organized the mulching. Also, Joanne created and installed

Report of the Building & Grounds Committee (continued)

beautiful new planters on each side of the 11 Garden entrance. Kirsten is handling the insurance claim for the car accident damage to the front fence at the corner of Garden and Mason Streets. The claim check is expected before the end of January.

The 2022 B&G operating budget had an overrun of about \$20K or 12.6% which mainly due to higher energy prices and insurance premiums, numerous plumbing repairs and the higher water bills. The Capital Reserve account at the end of 2022 has a balance of \$12K. The major expenditures this year from this account were the boiler loan (\$24K) and the Exterior Preservation contractor balance (\$63K).

B&G's proposed work towards our vision for being an antiracist church will involve building relationships with the B&G staff who are persons of color and/or are LGBTQ&T. We plan to hold open, honest, and confidential conversations on a regular basis to check-in on how things are going for them in work, their personal lives and are they experiencing any troubling type experiences and/or have concerns. We will ask if they have any ideas about how the church can further its anti-racist agenda and invite them to participate in Church activities such as the Men's Breakfast, etc.

I am grateful for the contributions of Buildings and Grounds Committee members Peter Byerly, Cathy Garnett, Robb Morgan, David Torrey and Johanna Wendelin.

Respectfully submitted, Don Johnson, Chair

Report of the Earth Stewardship Group

This past year Earth Stewardship continued its efforts to increase awareness of the climate crisis and its importance as a part of First Church's Christian mission and message. Part of this effort included increased attention in service program intercessions to populations that suffered environmental setbacks due to extreme weather events such as major storms, sea level rise, heat and drought. As well the Church continued its awareness of the role environmental justice plays in local communities. The Eco-faith book group read Bill McKibben's "The Flag, the Cross, and the Station Wagon" as well as the thoughtful resource-minded "Water Always Wins".

An especially meaningful event was the Earth Day celebration which spoke to the challenges of the climate crisis but also reviewed the history and achievements of environmental activity and witness at First Church. With contributions by Susan Redlich, Laurie Burt, Jim Brown, Claire Hunt, Jaz Buchanan and others, a slide presentation showed the changes to the physical plant and infrastructure of the church inside and out, including installation of solar collectors. As well it highlighted the importance of the church's speaking to the declining conditions of the natural world and its resources.

Finally, Jaz continued her imaginative and meaningful supervision of the Earth Stewardship website. Also, Heather Stanford brought her ministry to First Church and increased the awareness of local events that speak to climate issues.

Report of the Shelter Oversight Committee

The First Church Shelter continues to serve unhoused men in the church basement every night of the year, as it has done for the last 35 years. After two plus years of responding to the covid pandemic, the shelter transitioned from a 24/7 opening to more traditional hours.

In July, the opening times were adjusted to 4 pm to 8 am on most weekdays. During weekends, school holidays and inclement weather, the shelter remains open 24 hours a day. Since there are no longer Isolation and Recovery Facilities, shelter guests who test positive for COVID 19 are allowed to isolate (with staff supervision) at the shelter.

Shelter guests continue to be divided between the traditional bunk room and office space in the basement. This is to comply with ongoing public health recommendations that allow for ample space between guests to reduce communicable diseases.

With the assistance of the Cambridge Housing Authority, and other providers, 4 guests were able to move into their own apartments this year. The progress to secure housing is very slow, and current economic pressures prevent faster placements. Later this month, money should become available to incentivize landlords to accept more payment vouchers, and thus open up more housing for this population.

The other programs funded by the City of Cambridge continue: the Meals Program has continued food distribution from the Tower Room on Wednesday nights. First Parish UU has begun to host - indoors - the distribution of these meals, while the shelter continues to arrange for the catering. The Shower Program continues to be hosted by University Lutheran Church, and staffed by First Church shelter workers. The showers are still a much needed and utilized resource in the community.

The Navigator, Cherry Russell, continues to effectively help identify obstacles to gaining housing and ways to overcome them. Many thanks to the City of Cambridge for supporting these vital programs which positively impact the vulnerable population in our community.

The work of the Shelter Oversight Committee has continued to be supporting all the various projects of the Shelter, facilitating communication with the church, reviewing financial decisions and hosting the annual Doris Beauvais Luncheon in October. Our process to hire an Assistant Shelter Director has been supplanted by assigning new responsibilities to existing employees that will allow more time off for Shelter Director Jim Stewart. Attracting employees for regular shelter work continues to be difficult as is the case in many industries. Cambridge community members continue to donate meals with extraordinary dedication, for which all are grateful. First Church members continue to support the shelter during the holidays by providing special meals, pies and gift cards to the guests. Many thanks to these generous folks.

The Committee is ever grateful to the long serving and dedicated shelter staff: Alex Ball, Aran Benavides, Kevin Benitez, Jack Bioni, Steve Brown, Joe Freitas, James Gullberg, Eun Taek Jung, Dennis Keveney, Nathan Knudson, Shosh Lovett-Graff, Gabe Mulcaire, Cherry Russell, Nathan Wilson-Braun and Jim Stewart. We also thank Karen McArthur for expert bookkeeping and Dan Smith for support and communications.

In Service to all of God's People,
Hanna Bliska, Claire Cocroft, Brian Funk, Marianne Jensen, Jan Jeffers Lo

Report of the Friday Cafe

The Friday Café has had a full and busy year that included a transition back to indoor dining for the first time since March 2020—thanks be to God!

Updates

After 30 months of lawn dining only, we returned to (limited) indoor seating in September 2022. We feel like ourselves again! We are currently offering seating for 54 guests at a time. Powerful intake and exhaust fans keep the room ventilated; a CO₂ detector lets us know if we need to open a couple more windows when things get busy.

Guests

We are currently serving about 90 people each Friday—fewer than pre-pandemic levels, but enough to keep us on our toes. Some guests choose to take their meal to-go, while a majority dine in. As always, we see a mix of regulars and newcomers each week. Guests love the home-cooked food in our buffet, and our clothing and toiletry tables fill a critical need, especially in the winter months. Thanks to all who have donated new and used items to keep those tables stocked.

Volunteers & Staff

Each week, about 75 volunteers participate in our program, including at-home cooks and in-person volunteers. We are grateful to local organization Community Cooks for helping organize this part of our program, and especially grateful to the 45 individuals who contribute to our meals each week.

In-person volunteer slots are in demand, and it's not always easy to find a spot in the schedule! Many of our old volunteers have returned, and many new ones have become regulars. We are incredibly blessed by a strong core team of Friday Café leaders who help keep everything running smoothly: Dave Demme (operations manager), Pat Demme and John MacGibbon (kitchen), Manuela Hanshaw, James Burns, and Theresa Norris (clothing), Carmon Davis, Devin Hansen, Alex Steinert-Evoy, and Neil Petersen. I wish I had space to thank every one of our regulars by name, but please know that we appreciate you!

We have also been greatly blessed by the participation of First Church Ministerial Interns Carla Carbajal and Ahmaad Edmond, and by the addition (thank you, First Church Shelter!) of a weekly Housing Navigator, hired in partnership with the City of Cambridge to work with guests and clients served by First Church programs.

Other Partners

We continue to partner with our friends at the Cambridge Health Department to offer annual flu and COVID vaccine clinics in the Library. They do an amazing job. Other local partners include: Harvard Epworth United Methodist Church; Club 4 at Cambridge Rindge and Latin (students can fulfill community service hours by cooking and baking for our weekly meal), and service groups from Harvard and Boston College.

Funding

While we are holding off on holding an indoor fundraising event until the return of warm weather, we have already been greatly blessed by the generosity of several new and previous donors this year. Word of our ministry is out in the world, inspiring support even before we ask for it. And please join me in thanking Brian

Report of the Friday Cafe

and Lindsay O'Donovan; the owners of the Burren in Somerville; and a cast of local musicians, who collaborated on a wonderful benefit concert for the Friday Café in November. The evening raised our spirits as well as a substantial portion of our annual budget! All of this extraordinary generosity enables us to purchase additional program supplies and to provide more direct aid in the form of clothing and other essential resources.

New Schedule

Starting this fall, we updated our hours to 12:00–3:00. Our regular program year now runs from September–May, and then we switch to summer mode, with bag lunches instead of cooked food, and fewer volunteer openings.

We are deeply grateful for all of those who participate in countless ways to make our program a place of welcome and a vital resource to neighbors in need. A special thanks to our First Church staff for administrative and building support—we couldn't do it without you. Thank you, First Church, and thank you to all our friends and neighbors for getting us through the pandemic and keeping us thriving.

Kate Layzer

Report of Beloved Community

Supporting the Congregation in Becoming an Anti-Racist Church

Since 2008, First Church has been on a Racial Justice journey marked by 4 interwoven streams of work, learning, and action. This report discusses efforts, progress, and lessons learned in 2022.

Deepening vision and commitment

In 2022, the Beloved Community group has continued to move from being a small group of committed leaders to a group supporting the congregation-wide Vision for Being an Anti-Racist Church as we strive to make the vision a reality and to become “Repairers of the Breach” (Isaiah 58:6).

All First Church Committees have committed to including racial justice approaches and goals as part of their work. In their 2022 annual reports, they were asked to include descriptions of their efforts towards enacting the vision for being an anti-racist church. For example,

Committees like Fellowship and Buildings and Grounds committees consider BIPOC (Black, indigenous, and other People of Color) businesses when hiring vendors and contractors.

Christian Formation Committee led several pre-church education sessions on Settler Colonialism and the Doctrine of Discovery.

The Gifts Discernment Committee examined ways to expand their vision beyond their usual assumptions of who might contribute to a committee’s work (i.e. that a teacher should be on the Christian Formation Committee). They looked for new and diverse perspectives from the congregation.

Executive Council agreed to the following Benchmark to be reached by anyone serving in a leadership position at FCC including Deacons and committee chairs: Church leaders have participated in anti-racist training, made a commitment to anti-racist learning and action, and begun the process in concrete ways.

Ongoing learning and study

In 2022, new learning opportunities were added to the many Faith and Life groups, presentations, pilgrimages, and discussions on African American history, systemic racism, and white supremacy held in previous years. These included

In 2019, Dan Smith was invited to serve on the faculty committee guiding Harvard’s Presidential Initiative on Harvard and the Legacy of Slavery. Since the report’s release in April, Dan has worked with Harvard Chaplains to create a Landscape of Slavery tour that has been offered to First Church and other Harvard Square Churches, as well as 10 tours for Harvard students, faculty, alums and community groups.

Four Faith and Life small groups have been held this year on Racial Justice topics including a book group on *The 1619 Project, Created by Nikole Hannah-Jones* and the *New York Times Magazine*.

Report of Beloved Community (continued)

Members of the Beloved Community have compiled a list of the lessons learned and the wisdom gained from our work to make our Vision for Being an Anti-Racist Church a reality. We will reflect on this learning with the congregation in 2023 along with the humility engendered by the long road ahead in this endeavor.

Remembrance and Reparation

In 2021, we created a First Church Reparations Fund to share with a small collective of community leaders of color, with no strings attached. We've so far collected and distributed \$83,000 via the Collective's designated fiscal agent Building Audacity, Inc. This has been a learning for us in how not only to relinquish our resources but our control of what will happen with those resources. Most of the funds were donated by individuals, and in 2022 First Church's Missions and Social Justice Committee made the first Church-funded contribution to the Reparation Fund. The person who has formed The Collective and serves as a liaison between the group and First Church is FCC member Rev. Karlene Griffiths Sekou.

Since 2017, the church has read aloud and honored names from our archives of those who were enslaved by First Church members. We have shared litanies of repentance, usually on Juneteenth. This past year, we were joined in worship on Juneteenth by a descendant family of an enslaved person connected to First Church. In 2022 we began working with First Church member Paula Paris (Black History Cambridge), a descendant family member, and a local Black artist to co-create a lasting fabric art project that includes names of enslaved persons connected with our history.

At our Annual Meeting on January 31, 2022, and after two years of research and learning from members of local indigenous communities, First Church approved a Land Acknowledgement which we now share regularly at First Church worship, meetings, and events.

In September, First Church co-hosted a panel with Cambridge NAACP entitled "Cambridge: Envisioning Reparations" with Ken Reeves, Richard Harding, Irene Monroe, and Kris Manjapra. Mayor Siddiqui and some city councilors attended.

A group of Beloved Community members has begun meeting with James Ross, SNECUCC's minister of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on convening a small group of UCC congregations to share each congregation's efforts and lessons learned in our work towards reparations. Since First Church is beginning to hear from congregations seeking advice about our Racial Justice journey, we have worked on developing a narrative of our Racial Justice work that emphasizes the lessons learned and our humility at the long journey still ahead of us.

Report of Beloved Community (continued)

Spiritual transformation

We continue to ground this work in our faith, prayer and in how the Holy Spirit can transform us individually and collectively.

First Church was awarded the third round of a “Creative Calling” grant from Boston University which enabled us to continue to have programming by our Community Minister of Racial Justice, Carlyle Stewart. Carlyle preached several sermons during 2022 and held an evening series on “Racial Justice and Eco Spirituality.”

To better ground our work in spiritual transformation, Beloved Community and Deacons have been reading, *Reparations. A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair* by Kwon and Thompson. The book will be shared with the Executive Council and the congregation in 2023.

We are grateful for the ways we are being transformed by building exciting and generative multi-racial relationships with the larger community, particularly with Pentecostal Tabernacle in Cambridge who awarded Dan Smith its 2022 Community Service Award for his leadership on anti-racism efforts. Various members of the congregation and staff have also built relationships with the Reparations Fund and collective, Cambridge NAACP, various legacy of slavery efforts in Cambridge and Harvard, the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, and our Homeless Ministries.

Report of the Archives Committee

The First Church Archives took a giant step in 2022 toward its goal of making our collection of First Church records and documents accessible to anyone interested in this congregation's distant or not so distant past. At the beginning of the year, many First Church records from the 19th through 21st centuries were housed in flimsy or inadequate containers. Now they are in brand-new archival-quality folders and boxes.

Three factors brought about this transformation. First was the Massachusetts State Historical Records Advisory Board, which awarded First Church a grant of \$1089 to buy archival storage material. Funds for the state grant came from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, part of the National Archives.

The other key factors were Kate Judd, co-chair of the Archives team, and Jacqui Gates, longtime archives volunteer. They worked a total of 190 hours removing records from their old boxes and arranging them in chronological order by category. As they worked, they culled duplicates and unrelated material and banished paper clips, staples, rubber bands and tape, all destructive to documents. The records they rehoused included Sunday bulletins from 1958 to present; Jazz service bulletins; membership lists; records of transfers, admissions, dismissals, and pledge cards; financial records; minutes of Executive Council, the Board of Deacons and other committees; Annual Reports.

The newly organized records provided information for three anniversaries: the 50th of the installation of the Frobenius organ (1972), the 35th of the First Church Shelter (1987), and the 30th of the declaration that First Church is an "open and affirming" congregation (1992). The Archives also provided information for an All Saints Sunday service, celebrating people who have been part of the First Church community for 40, 50, 60 or, in the case of Larry Smith, more than 70 years.

The Archives trace the life cycle of the church newsletter EVENT, from its first edition in June 1978 to the final in December 2021, when most church communications moved from print to the First Church website. A major challenge in coming years is how to collect and preserve "digital-born" data. The Archives team looks forward to working with church staff and leaders to develop a digital records management system.

In addition to church records, the Archives collects material related to First Church's history. In 2022, Sally Calkins Oxnard, a great-niece of Raymond Calkins, minister of First Church from 1912 to 1940, brought from her home in Exeter NH a donation of Dr. Calkins' sermons and books.

Other contributions in 2022 were a flat file, donated by Henry and Jacqui Gates; records of the 350th anniversary of the Cambridge Platform of 1648, donated by Carol Wilson-Braun; and a copy of "Sliding Into Home," the autobiography of Perry King Neubauer, which includes many references to his and his wife Susie's 60-year involvement with the ministries, music and life of First Church. In a year that the general public became aware, perhaps for the first time, of the National Archives, we are happy to say the work of the First Church Archives continues. We welcome others to join us in this important, fascinating service.

Kate Judd, Lindsay Miller, Christine Reynolds, co-chairs

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 this past year, as were all of us at First Church, by the continuing pandemic and its impacts on church life.

Aside from recruiting candidates and completing a draft slate of positions for 2023, we engaged in a discussion of how the Gifts Discernment Committee process does or does not foster progress toward First Church's goal of becoming an anti-racist church.

Our discussion yielded comments on our overall process, and several suggestions for fostering relationships with communities of color in Cambridge.

We concluded that better access for everyone at First Church to the Gifts Discernment database of position descriptions could help individuals make decisions about how to participate in church governance. We will follow through on this observation. We also discussed reaching out to the whole congregation once a year to ask about individuals' interests, concerns, and gifts and conferring with Phil Jones to identify young adults in the church who might take on leadership roles.

We recognized that we might go about our business with internalized biases toward particular "types" of candidates for positions. An example might be any positions involving finances. We have usually looked for candidates with experience in financial matters, and the result of this approach has been largely recruitment of white males. Mindful of this bias, we could cast a broader net in the future. We should add "potential to bring diversity" to experience and technical skills as criteria for selecting potential candidates.

We noted the diversity of our ministerial interns over the past several years. Perhaps one intern might participate in Gifts Discernment meetings, both to learn about how the committee operates and to provide unique perspectives on our process and decision-making.

We recognized the challenges of bridging cultures in fostering relationships and the importance of seeking invitations from community groups rather than trying to force relationships. For over a year, FCC members have joined the Pentecostal Tabernacle (PT) weekly Social Justice Prayer Call. Dan Smith's relationship-building with PT has opened a door to intriguing possibilities: small prayer groups that meet monthly, more visiting from one congregation to the other, joint working groups to explore the potential for joint activities like book groups, social action initiatives.

The 2023 slate that follows is the slate that was approved by Executive Council. Some committees need more members, in particular Stewardship, Shelter, Gifts Discernment and Buildings and Grounds. 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

Report of the Gifts Discernment/Nominating Committee (continued)

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.

Finally, we want to thank Rev. Dan Smith, who has joined our meetings over the past year. His knowledge of the interest and gifts of First Church folks has been invaluable. His willingness to engage potential candidates, if asked, has moved the process forward in several instances. He always brings energy and optimism to our work, often when energy and optimism may be in short supply. Thanks, Dan, for all you do!

Dave Kidder

Report of the Gifts Discernment & Nominating Committee (continued)

2023 Slate of Officers, Boards and Standing Committees Bold font means new to position

OFFICERS

Moana Bentin - Moderator

Meredith Quinn - Vice Moderator

Chris Reynolds - Clerk

Treasurer – Rich Goode

James Cairns - Associate Treasurer

Art Anger - Asst Treasurer

Connie Pyle - Asst Treasurer

Rachel Carlson - Controller

Claire Morgan - Member at Large

BOARD OF DEACONS

Adam Weiss - Co-Chair

Dean Eaton

Nora Willcutts

Leslie Pelton-Cairns—Co-Chair

Jean Dany Joachim

Peggy Bendroth

Casey Marsh

Laurie Williams

Audrey Bellinger

FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

Caitlin Anderson – Co-Chair

Phil Jones

Fellowship Coordinators: Martha Dyer, Sara Hendren, Brian Funck

Cookie Solicitors: Sara Hendren, Brian Funck, **Lisa Dinardo**

MISSIONS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Molly Baker – Chair

Deb Cunningham

Sally O'Brien

Alice Kidder

Holly Marple

Kathy Williams

Susan Hayward

Report of the Gifts Discernment & Nominating Committee (continued)

CHRISTIAN FORMATION COMMITTEE

Hilary Hopkins - Chair

Carol Wilson-Braun

Ingeborg Haug

Susan Reynolds

Beth Spaulding

Heather Stanford

SHELTER OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Jan Lo - Chair

Brian Funck

Claire Cocroft

Marianne Jensen

Hanna Bliska

Lisa DiNardo

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS COMMITTEE

Peter Byerly - Chair

Cathy Garnett

Robb Morgan

Dave Torrey

Johanna Wendelin

STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

Joanne Paul – Chair

Winnie Yip

Susan Ohman

Caroline Newton

Anne McClintock

GIFTS DISCERNMENT/NOMINATING

Beth Loomis - Co-Chair

Mary Robinson - Co-Chair

Gail Breeze

Jenny Stuart

Dave Kidder

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Rich Goode, Treasurer - Chair, *ex officio*

Rachel Carlson, Controller, *ex officio*

James Cairns, 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

William Hsiao

FINANCIAL OPERATIONS (SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE)

James Cairns, Associate Treasurer - Chair, *ex officio*

Rich Goode, Treasurer, *ex officio*

Rachel Carlson, Controller, *ex officio*

Report of the Missions Committee

*“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.”*

Psalm 89:14

This year, Missions and Social Justice focused our discretionary giving on easing the burdens of racial injustice and environmental damage, as well as responding to political events that threaten social justice and voting rights. The largest portion of our budget continues to support the Southern New England Conference of the UCC in its social justice priorities.

Racial Justice

Racial justice causes were a priority area for giving this year, and many of our discretionary donations benefited communities of color in some way. Our single largest contribution to First Church’s anti-racist vision was allotting \$5000 in funds for The Collective, allowing its members to make decisions with these funds for racial reparations. We also put a down payment on, and helped to shape, a coming exhibit for First Church: “Americans Who Tell the Truth,” featuring portraits of many activists of color, which will be on display on church walls in the winter of 2023. One new portrait will be created and introduced at our church’s request – that of Harriet Jacobs, who lived for many years in Cambridge. This is one step in making First Church a more inclusive and inviting space for people of all racial identities.

Homelessness and Low-Income Support

Missions and Social Justice continued to support people who are currently houseless as well as low-income individuals and families. With many of the groups working on services to the unhoused, we supported both specific projects and general programming. Organizations to which we donated were:

- Friday Cafe, which serves meals and provides donated clothing to the needy
- First Church Shelter, which provides meals and shelter for men
- City Mission Society, which runs a new clothing drive before Christmas and meets other needs of people in poverty
- 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
- Solutions at Work, which supports a meals program in Cambridge and on an ongoing basis runs a center where people can get clothing and accessories appropriate for job interviews
- Harvard Square Meals Program, which feeds those in need.

Greater Boston Interfaith Organization

Missions and Social Justice supports and advocates for the causes sponsored by GBIO each year. This year brought a focus on advocacy via several initiatives regarding Affordable Housing, which GBIO voted to make its sole organizational focus in December.

Report of the Missions Committee (continued)

International/Global

First Church's most significant initiatives this year involved supporting the Latin American ministry of Monica Maher (chiefly in Ecuador), sending relief funds to the UCC's Ukraine Relief Fund, and supporting Father Frank Mukiliza Kivumbi's orphanages for Ugandan children. Late in the 2022, Missions and Social Justice committee members made a connection with representatives from the village Oasis of Peace, which unites Israelis and Palestinians in peaceful and collaborative coexistence, in hopes of offering financial support in coming months.

A growth area in locally and globally connected causes is our funding of environmental organizations. This year, those included the organizations Biodiversity for a Liveable Climate, 350 Massachusetts, Mothers Out Front, and Mass Interfaith Power and Light.

Health and Well-Being

Several of our donations advanced the work of organizations devoted to health and well-being in different spheres of action.

- Anti-Gun-Violence: We funded the Mother's Day Walk for Peace, the United Way of Buffalo and Erie Counties (after the tragic shooting in Buffalo), and Cambridge's Gun buy-back program, Gift Cards for Guns.
- Reproductive Rights: After the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, we donated to the Eastern MA Abortion Fund and the Brigid Alliance.
- Transgender Rights: We made a donation to Transgender Emergency Funds of MA to fund their retreat.
- Cancer Research: We gave to the Pan-Mass Challenge for cancer research and prevention.

The Committee welcomes any member of the congregation to suggest needs for social justice activities to contact the 2023 Chair, Molly Baker. This report is submitted by Deborah Cunningham and Sally O'Brien, Co-Chairs in 2022.

Report of the Fellowship Committee

First Church Fellowship values. When our church built the new kitchen as part of the renovation several years ago, an informal kitchen committee came up with the following values. I've found it useful to return to these values as a framework for reviewing how we're doing in terms of feeding one another as a congregation and using meals to support building our congregational community and relationships (which is what I take Fellowship to be all about!)

- **Inclusive.** We strive to eliminate barriers to all being fed at our church meals and from our kitchen
- **Participatory.** The joys and responsibilities of feeding one another are shared
- **Sustainable.** We strive to be good stewards of our resources, both congregational resources - the time and money shared by First Church members - and the limited resources of our planet

Inclusive. COVID-19 made it hard to lean into this value for much of 2022! The beginning of the year saw a return to hybrid worship and a pause on in-person events thanks to the surge in the omicron COVID variant. Even after that, many of our church family still attend worship online, and the numbers at meals are still well below numbers at in-person worship, which suggests that some are still hesitant to eat inside.

Spring and fall of 2022 saw First Church programming - and needs for Fellowship support - begin to edge back to the familiar cadence of events that we remember from before COVID-19: Regathering, Stewardship Luncheon, Christmas Party (cookie swap this year instead of a sit-down meal), Epiphany Potluck, Annual Meeting Luncheon, Mardi Gras Pancake Supper, Lenten events (still TBD this year), Palm Sunday Potluck Breakfast, and Multi-Generational Picnic.

In terms of ensuring that everyone in our church family has something to eat when we sit down together, we are still working hard to meet all the dietary needs and preferences described in the 2019 Annual Report.

Participatory. My goals for Fellowship in 2023 fall mainly in this area. Most of the individuals and families who had previously had been able and willing to take some leadership in Fellowship are no longer able to participate as they had been. Specifically, the feedback is that they find the quarterly "Fellowship Coordinator" structure - in which a given individual or family is responsible for all events during a three-month period - too stressful, and they'd prefer their responsibilities to be more dispersed.

In 2023 I'm going to try a different structure in which the "Coordinators" are a pool of individuals who can take one of the following three leadership roles for each event (and one of each being the point person for ministry and for coordinating between them - e.g., so the Cleanup Captain knows in advance whether we're using compostable or reusable dishware, so they know how many individuals needed!):

- **Setup captain** - set out tablecloths, cutlery, dishes, glasses, water pitchers, serving utensils, bins for compostables, trash, recycling, reusable dishware, etc.
- **Cleanup captain** - give announcement during the meal for clearing tables, etc., wash reusable dishware or ensure compostables are bagged and set out, figure out what to do with leftovers
- **Purchase and prepare/reheat (or set out, if catered) food.**

Report of the Fellowship Committee (continued)

Finally, Lisa DiNardo is stepping in as Cookie Coordinator, which is wonderful.

Sustainable. I also hope to build up enough volunteers to enable the return of our reusable dishware in 2023, perhaps in collaboration with the Earth Stewardship group, though that is a lesser priority. We have had some success with a hybrid approach to compostable/reusables, successfully using the reusable melamine dishes for soup which limited the volume of dishes to wash while also avoiding the compostable bowls, which can get floppy and hard to hold when full of soup.

Spending was considerably under budget in 2022 given the return to hybrid worship that canceled in-person events in the winter and early spring, and the fact that numbers at meals continue to be 60-75% of the pre-COVID numbers 2018 and 2019.

Fellowship is taking a 25% budget reduction for 2023, which - combined with the recent inflation of food and especially catering prices - will mean that we should aim to continue cooking as much as possible rather than catering.

Racial justice. There are two ways in which I am hoping that Fellowship can impact racial justice.

1. Purchasing catering from black-owned or minority-owned businesses. We did successfully purchase pizzas for an event from Oggi Pizza, but several minority-owned businesses we approached were unable to help due to short-term staff shortages or a decision to move. We will continue on this track in 2023, to the extent that budget allows.

2. Fostering a culture of pitching in. It is incumbent on all of us to ensure that the work involved in First Church's Fellowship events does not fall disproportionately on our sextons. Our congregational members are many, and our sextons are few, and just 10-15 minutes here or there collecting cups, or stacking chairs, or pushing trays through the dishwasher can make a huge difference. This is the right thing to do regardless of who our sextons are, but it does have a racial dimension given that our sextons are more likely to be people of color than our congregation as a whole.

Thank you to everyone who has pitched in in 2023!

Caitlin Anderson

Report of the Stewardship Committee

From Philippians 2:1-4, the words of Paul to the church in Philippi:

*“If you’ve gotten anything at all out of following Christ,
if his love has made any difference in your life,
if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you,
if you have a heart, if you care—then do me a favor.
Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.”*

This message from Paul, as he writes from prison, is pretty blunt – the best way for the Philippians to help him is to follow the same basic approach to life that Jesus took. Serving others, lending a helping hand is completely in their long term self-interest!

The 2022-23 Stewardship Committee adopted this text because of its clarity and Paul’s challenge. The Philippians took specific interest in Paul’s ministry and provided financial support for him throughout his ministry. So we seek, in partnership with the Treasurer, Finance and Investments Committees, to be a resource for members of First Church in Cambridge, that we all may be good stewards of our household finances in the ways of Jesus our brother.

We begin by thanking our staff liaison, Rev. Karen McArthur for her comprehensive knowledge of finances, our church’s history of giving and her spiritual and biblical perspectives on money. We thank Rev. Lexi Boudreaux and Jaz Buchanan for the depth of their understanding of technology and creative skills in helping us create the “Hands of Ministry” slideshow and the “Lending Hands” video. We thank Issa Bibbins for his piano arrangement and playing of “Precious Lord” for our slide show. We thank Sarah Higginbotham, Christine Reynolds and the entire Communications Team, for their gifts of vision, graphics, formatting and setting clear deadlines for the electronic messaging of our 2023 pledge season.

We thank Caitlin Anderson and her family for their enduring dedication in making delicious soups for the November 6 Stewards & Saints luncheon and kickoff. We thank our Covenant Dinner hosts, who graciously opened their homes, decks and backyards for small group dinners and fellowship – the McCanns, John and Hilary Hopkins and Bill Hsiao.

We thank 14-year-old Freddie Funck for her colorful artwork that graced our bulletin covers on every Sunday of the 2023 season. She indeed is a talented artist and her potential is exciting! We thank Office Assistant Bruce Dillenbeck for carefully entering all financial contributions as they come our way, and the production and mailing of our print materials.

We are grateful for

- shared testimony of faith and giving practices from various members of our congregation in worship and small group conversations
- the very good news that 15 pledges for 2023 are from people that are either new to the church or did not pledge in recent years
- those that have submitted their pledges, and for their average pledge increase of 15% over last year that we appear to be within reach of our ambitious 2023 goal of \$705,000

The pandemic was in full force in 2020 and with that, a re-invention of how we communicated with each

Report of the Stewardship Committee (continued)

other. Since then, our stewardship communications have shifted to mid-week emails, a medium that allowed us to insert graphics, videos and written testimony. We sent postcards and hosted 9:30 am gatherings on Zoom and livestream Sunday worship to reach the most people possible in carrying out our theme of “Lending a Helping Hand.” Our plate offerings steadily increased as our in-person worship numbers grew, and our online giving continues through our website and mobile texting.

Wherever we could, our committee was devoted to integrating intergenerational testimony and images throughout the campaign. We, however, have yet to identify a goal toward advancing Anti-Racism at our church. We pledge to get an earlier start in our committee work in 2023 and our agenda(s) will include conversation and ideas of ways we can operate in an Anti-Racist way.

We are always asking, how can we, as a Stewardship Committee, do better in providing what people may need to know for their specific financial situation. As we look forward to 2023, this Committee, along with the Planned Giving Task Force, will be undertaking the educational and logistical steps of a formal First Church planned giving program.

Finally, a BIG question for this and other committees and ministries will be: *As we become more geographically dispersed, both locally and nationally and even globally, and continue to worship and program through the internet and livestream, how will we stay closely connected?*

People of First Church in Cambridge, your generosity continues to be inspiring and a blessing!

Respectfully submitted,

Joanne Paul (Chair), Caroline Newton, Susan Ohman and Winnie Yip

Report of the Investment Committee

First Church began the year 2022 with \$3,758,635 in its investment accounts at Charles Schwab with investment management provided by O'Brien Wealth Partners (OWP). At the end of 2022, the value at Schwab was \$2,722,484, a decrease of \$1,036,151. The change in the investment account balance reflects the downturn in markets this past year due to several economic and external factors, and a combination of additions and outflows in the account, including \$78,692 in gifts, \$55,362 in income from investments net of fees, offset by net losses of in investments \$730,151, and by distributions of \$420,000 to the Church treasury. Distributions to the treasury included scheduled monthly contributions, transfer of cash for stock gifts made to FCC, scheduled and unscheduled capital improvements and other miscellaneous operating expenses. Please see the Treasurer's 2022 report for specific expenditures.

This was a challenging year for US and global markets and economies, with resulting significant declines across all asset classes. First Church investment returns generally followed these volatile and downward trends, in line with benchmarks established for each asset class. Many external factors affected market performance this year, including significantly Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, economic sanctions imposed by US and NATO allies on Russia for this aggression, and resulting increases in global oil prices and other commodities. At home, the US economy continued to rebound as the Covid-19 pandemic eased its grip, while still struggling with demand outpacing supply, labor shortages and wages increases and increasing inflation. While the Church's investment portfolio performed competitively in this difficult economic landscape, overall, the portfolio at year-end was at a record low for the decade, even as the last quarter began to show positive signs of recovery. Based on investment activities alone, investments decreased by (-19.27%) on a time-weighted basis.

The asset allocation at year end was 67.30% in a globally diversified portfolio of stock funds, 19.0% in fixed-income or bond funds, 9.7% in alternative assets and 4.0% in cash, within the ranges established in our Investment Policy guidelines. Returns on indices for comparable categories of stocks were losses of (-18.6%) for the MSCI AC World Index. The fixed income portfolio decreased in value by (-14.11%) compared to a decrease of (-13.01%) in the Bloomberg Barclays US Agg Bond index. In Alternatives, OWP's strategy has been to reduce overall portfolio volatility while provide long-term equity-like return. Alternatives in the portfolio decreased by (-8.07%) compared to a loss of (-0.96%) in the Credit Suisse Hedge Fund Index, a benchmark that combines various different strategies, including Hedge Funds to other non-traditional holdings in which we do not currently seek exposure.

During the year, the Investment Committee continued to take 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 the ESG equity portfolio and non-ESG equity portfolio (traditional). The Committee continues to require screening of all holdings for any carbon-related assets; consistent with its Sustainability Investment Policy Guidelines and FCC's commitment to Climate Change, as measured by Carbon Tracker, the percent of the portfolio invested in companies on this list remains less than 0.2 % (1.6%) The Committee notes that due largely to the war in Ukraine and consequent upward pressure on global oil prices, the fossil fuel market experienced gains in 2022 against otherwise long-term downward trends as the market for clean energy technologies increase. In calendar year 2022, both portfolios experienced loss-

Report of the Investment Committee (continued)

es, with ESG equity assets returning a decrease of (-22.54%) versus (-22.22%) in non-ESG equity (gross of fees).

Asset allocation for ESG equities at the start of 2022 was 49.9% and 52.9% at year's end. This is consistent with the Committee's authorized gradual increase to 40% by 2020, and an additional increase of 10-15% authorized in 2021, with timing at the discretion of our asset managers. The Committee continues regular quarterly and annual evaluations of the overall performance and asset allocation of the Church's portfolio in ESG equity investment, including consideration of ESG investment in other asset classes. The Committee engages in disciplined learning and improvement in these sustainability practices as they become both more "main stream" and respond to demands for accountability to climate change risk, consumers and nonpartisan goals. As part of FCC's commitment to embrace racial equity and become an anti-racist church, the Committee continues to investigate emerging trends and leadership in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) indices and principles to guide portfolio investment and screening criteria for asset managers. The Committee will report updates on this DEI research and any revisions to asset allocation or the Sustainability Investment Policy to Executive Council in 2023.

Given the challenges of the current economy, inflation and recessionary trends and their impacts on markets and the FCC portfolio, the Committee is committed to work closely with the Finance Committee and Church leadership in 2023 to maintain fiscal discipline as we pursue strategies to rebuild the portfolio and prudently steward this financial resource to help support the vibrant life of First Church.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Burt, Chair, FCC Investment Committee

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

Report of the Treasurer

In thinking about my letter to you this year, I pulled up last year's letter and this passage stuck out to me:

“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.”

Well folks, looks like some of these things have come to pass. The stock market performance, coupled with inflation and rising energy costs, raised the red flag for us to contemplate a different approach to our budgeting. The main issue we identified is our spending – we simply spend more than we take in from all sources. Pandemic relief money and the rising stock market helped smooth out those gaps for the past several years, but that is coming to an end. Upon the first pass of the budget this year, we were facing a nearly \$200,000 shortfall – that is nearly 20% of our annual budget!

We asked each committee chair to contemplate a budget that is 10% less than the prior year, and to detail the impact of a reduced budget on our people. We wanted to be sure we did not reduce hours that our hourly staff have come to rely on and wanted to give them a substantial cost of living adjustment to account for higher consumer prices. We also looked at our future staffing plans, like delaying the hiring of a full-time minister of color and how we backfill Lexi after her 2-year contract ends. We also increased rents for our tenants and rates to book our beautiful space. Finally, we commissioned a small group to investigate how we can leverage our assets to work harder for us – things like the cockerel, our archives or even the Parsonage.

While some of our work is still ongoing, we presented a balanced budget for 2023, with a few key assumptions around pledge income and how much of our endowment balance we use (we are trying to not withdraw more than 4% of our rolling 5-year average balance in any given year). There are many wildcards that can derail this plan such as not meeting our pledge income targets, higher than usual energy costs over the winter or damage to our buildings.

This is also my last year as Treasurer and I will be transitioning the role to Jim Cairns from today onwards but have agreed to stay on as the Associate Treasurer for 2023. During my time here I have been amazed by your generosity. Whenever we ask, you deliver. We are grateful for the generosity of our congregation and blessed with continued grant opportunities to boost our funding. For many, myself included, this is our home away from home. I pray that the foundations that we and prior generations have laid will continue to bear fruit for future generations.

Yours in spirit,
Rich Goode

Congregational Roll 2022

Active Roll Reported for 31 December 2021: 401

Additions to resident membership: 3

New Members (by affirmation of faith): 3

Jean Dany Joachim

Brian McNamara

Heather Stanford

Removals, by death: 1

Pauline Fennel

Removals, by letter of transfer: 1

Davis Dyer

Baptisms in the Church Universal: 1

Charlie Hare

Marriages: 3

Claire Hunt and Robb Morgan

Emi Fujiwara Larsen and Eli White

Michelle McGraw and Ted Sectish

Active Roll on 31 December 2022: 402

Communion of Saints

During 2022 the following persons completed their lives among us

Tim Butler
Edwin Cranston
Pauline Fennel*
Stephen Friedlaender
Doris Goode
Bill Hays
Rev. Jane Heckles
Llewellyn Langel
T.M.
George McKenna
William Redlich
Jim Roche
Prof. Judith Ames

Whitenack Tatarelli
Hannah Tauber
Jamal Thompson
Fiona Tolhurst
Charles Van Ness
Marjorie Van Ness
Jeanette Beth Wall
Jacobey Williams
James Williams
Mattie Ruth Williams
Wallace Williams
Todd Clay Willmert

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

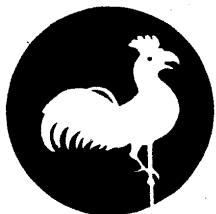
One thing I ask of you, Lord, this I seek:
to live in your house all the days of my life...

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



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