



# First Presbyterian Church *of* New Canaan

*Creating a loving and just world by serving others.*



## 2019 Annual Report

**The First Presbyterian Church  
of New Canaan**

**Annual Report/Yearbook 2019**

The Rev. Carol Howard Merritt  
*Bridge Pastor*

The Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird  
*Associate Pastor*

Victoria Shields  
*Director of Music, Worship & Arts*

Sherry Tate  
*Cherub Choir Director*

Jim Riehl  
*Interim Church Administrator*

Tina St. Armand  
*Office Manager*

Erika Hagan  
*Administrative Assistant to  
Children's and Youth Ministries*

Kate Stringfellow  
*Operations Manager*

Edgar Torres  
*Day Sexton*

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*Photos provided by Staff and Church Members*

**Rev. Carol Howard Merritt**  
**Bridge Pastor/Head of Staff**



As I write this report, I have served First Presbyterian Church for six months. I love getting to know so many beautiful people who have put their hearts and souls into this congregation. You have a history of taking risks for justice, standing up for the powerless, and giving generously for a loving world. I saw a quote about FPCNC from a previous stewardship campaign: “We can change the world from here!” And it’s true! This congregation embodies an amazing amount of intelligence and love. You have many exciting possibilities on the horizon.

The ministry staff is the best group of people with whom I have worked. Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird’s energy and love for the families of this church are palpable. Victoria Shields’ talent and depth amaze me. Rev. Chris Tate’s creativity and imagination has been wonderful to watch at the Eventide service. And Rev. Mary Thies’ care for this congregation is steadfast and reliable. We each have different gifts that balance and work well together. It’s a joy to come to work each day, with these fantastic colleagues.

We accomplished a great deal in a short time, as we began to focus on our vision statement: “Creating a loving and just world by serving others.” Our congregation has grown, as we received 22 Active Members and 9 Baptized Members into the life of our church. We had the Mission and Vision statement approved by the Presbytery. We bought a beautiful manse, which was a requirement before we could form a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC). You nominated and formed the PNC which works hard each month. Rev. Kibbie Laird led a fantastic youth mission trip to West Virginia, where they helped to build a community center and host children’s programs. With Rev. Chris Tate’s leadership, we started a new creative and intergenerational worship service. With Victoria Shields, we began a new Lessons Program with different teachers offering piano, organ, voice and guitar. We hosted a book club, that met at the church, Saxe Middle School, and Elm Street books.

As your second interim pastor, my greatest hope was to restore a sense of calm to the congregation. When I arrived the chaos was palpable, and it seemed that we needed to have more solid ground to rebuild. So, listening to the congregation and staff became my priority. In times of healing, people need to tell their stories, and so I heard hopes and regrets. As a session and staff, we have been working on how to communicate in a healthier manner and how to forgive one another. As I oversee the ministry staff, we have been talking about our callings as a church and as individuals.

The greatest tension in the congregation when I arrived revolved around what to do about the projection screen in the sanctuary. The former interim, Rev. Michael Piazza, introduced the screen into worship. His assistant, David Plunkett, created the slides and ran them during the service. When David left, we didn’t have anyone to create and assemble the presentation, or run the projector on Sunday mornings. While I was happy to continue with the AV aspects of the service, we didn’t have the support staff to do it. So, Chris began an evening service as a permanent part of our schedule, and people who miss the slides and videos can enjoy them at Eventide. Of course, my goal is that we could be flexible with the visuals and use them when we can.

The biggest challenges we had were in Membership and Stewardship. When I arrived, there had been a substantial loss of people and giving. We continued the effort to reach out to those who had left the congregation, heard their concerns, and ensured them that they would always be welcomed back. With Stewardship, we asked members to increase their pledges by 17%. And wow! You certainly stepped up to the challenge! Our average pledge went up over 20%. Even with the loss of dear friends, our 2020 pledging came in very close to the 2019 covenants. Your generosity has given us a solid ground to rebuild.

One of the biggest wishes that people continue to have is that you want to grow as a congregation. I often hear about your history, when the membership filled the sanctuary. Growing is certainly a worthy goal! To that end, I encourage members to attend more regularly. When you participate, the energy in the sanctuary increases, and people become excited to see one another. The community bonds strengthen and that joy spreads. No amount of advertising can replace word of mouth. In this interim period, I hope you will lean in instead of checking out. I encourage you to not let the apathy of transition take over, and do not wait until the “real” pastor shows up. *You* are the church, and this church needs each one of you, especially during this time.

As we head into 2020 and continue to seek who God is calling us to be, I am thrilled about the possibilities ahead of you. Indeed, we can change the world from here!

Respectfully submitted, Carol Howard Merritt



**Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird, Associate Pastor**

“Children are a gift from God.” --Psalm 127:3  
 “God is at work in you.” Phil 2:13

2019 was another year of change and transition in our church. Rev. Michael Piazza our interim pastor, took a call in NYC, and Rev. Carol Howard Merritt arrived to be our Bridge Pastor and shepherd us until we find our newly installed pastor.

After nine and a half years of ministry together, I continue to feel God’s presence in this sacred place and with this congregation. Whether I am in worship preaching, celebrating the joys and milestones of everyday life, in the kitchen making meals for mission, or teaching confirmation with Scott Beyer, I always feel God’s presence with the people in this congregation. It is a very special place. I rejoice that we continue to do new and exciting things together to the glory of God. Our youth committee does great work to plan and support our ministries, which shows that our parents are committed to creating meaningful programs for our children and youth in all ages and stages of their faith development.

### **Confirmation**

Each year in May we confirm our confirmation class. We have very high standards for our confirmands, and that is intentional. We are teaching them to be loyal and good members of the church. They go through rigorous demands to become full members of FPC. They attend 1/2 of the worship services (18 over the school year), 10 youth groups, 23 confirmation classes, and attend the mission trip or complete the equivalent of 40 hours of community service over the summer. In 2019, we confirmed 13 youth.

### **Youth Ministry**

Under the guidance of Elder Laurel Carlson and a wonderful youth committee, we plan and implement a rich and rewarding program for our youth. We have two active youth groups which meet several times per month. Our MSYG (6th-8th grade) mainly comprised of our confirmation class and meets 2-3 times per month for fellowship and mission. They have become mission partners with Special Church, and it is one of the most magical and rewarding relationships through Christ that I have ever seen. And our HSYG (9th-12th grade) also meet 2-3 monthly for fellowship, spirituality, and mission activities. HSYG has finally gelled into a core group, and we have good attendance. We do, however, still struggle with excellent attendance in all of our youth programs as homework, sports and other extra curricular activities compete for the attention of our youth. While I have found New Canaan a difficult place to do youth ministry, I also find it very rewarding. ***I believe we are molding and shaping life-long Christians.*** We are molding them to be kind and compassion and loving people who follow Christ. They are young adults who see people they meet as children of God. They are people who choose to respond with love and who radiate God’s light in the world.

### **Summer Youth Mission Trip**

Our Summer Youth Mission Trip took us to Oakhill, West Virginia where we worked at the Center for Hope. In my nineteen years of ministry and over twenty-five youth mission trips, this was by far the most compelling and rewarding. We did extraordinary work thanks to the moms and dads who came along and chaperones. We were up at dawn, sawing and pounding nails shortly after breakfast. We put up the subfloor for 2500 feet in a warehouse that will be transformed into a gymnasium for kids to play, a safe space for kids after school so they don’t get caught up in the opioid crisis that is so prevalent in WV. At night we worshiped with a Pentecostal church, we did children’s ministry in a HUD housing development, and we talked about the meaning of God in our lives. It was a powerful week and the twenty-three youth and adults who went loved being part of #TeamJesus.

*Continued on the next page*

## Mission

**Youth Mission (locally) Filling in the Blanks**—Closer to home, our ministries with the New Canaan Food Pantry, New Covenant House, Open Door Shelter, Domus, and Kids in Crisis have taken off. While I love our mission trips to other places, I think it is also very valuable to show our youth that kids and families in need exist right here close to where we live. Each month, we make **Dinners for Kids in Crisis** in our own kitchen for 15 youth who live in a residential facility in Cos Cob. We have cooked twice for the soup kitchen New Covenant house, and we have delivered over 120 bags of groceries to the New Canaan Food Pantry from food drives we have done this year. We also delivered 60 presents and stockings full of toiletries to Kids in Crisis.

## Highlights of the year:

- Filling in the Blanks, stuffing food bags
- Winter ski retreat weekend to the Berkshires to ski at Butternut
- Souperbowl Sunday—collecting \$368 through our Souperbowl café for the NC Food Pantry
- Youth Sunday—our youth do a spectacular job articulating what the church means to them
- Stations of the Cross—confirmands lead for children of the church
- Confirmation class and confirmation Sunday
- Welcome Home Sunday— old fashioned carnival games, ice cream sundae station
- Youth Kick Off the Year Dinner
- Ropes Course in the Trees
- Cooking and serving at New Covenant House soup kitchen in Stamford (two times)
- Cooking Monthly Meals for Kids in Crisis
- 30 Hour Famine—including shopping cart wars for NC Food Pantry, Sandwiches and emergency bags for the homeless for Open Door Shelter
- Advent Fair: Gingerbread houses, craft tables
- Christmas Eve pageant

## Blessing Tree for Center for Hope and Horizons

Who are we? What do we believe? While we differ greatly in backgrounds and our beliefs run the gamut, we are unified in our vision to be the body of Christ in this place. We embody a spirit of abundant welcome. We thrive in fellowship, mission, and spirituality. We have a strong sense that FPC is a safe and sacred place. We believe FPC is our spiritual home. We believe that God has called us to “be the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14) and we will do that by being “doers and not hearers only.” (James 1:22). Who are we? We are doers of good. And we are proud to be.



Youth Ski Trip, March 2019



Youth delivering items to the Food Pantry

**2019 Confirmation Class**

Andrew Almeida  
Danielle Asabea Asare  
Jake Bensen Bausman  
Thomas Otto Bausman  
Katharine Ann Byrne  
Logan William Carlson  
Andrew Christopher Dooley  
Ty Mathew Kelliher  
Avery Danforth Laird  
Phoebe Lightburn  
Ashley Kathryn Rodgers  
Gordon Mackenzie Stuart  
Toby Matthews Woods



## Music Ministry



Thank you to the staff; Carole Clarkson, Chair of Music, Worship, and the Arts; as well as the committee, choir, and congregation who supported the music ministry throughout this transitional year. In my last experience approaching an interim period, the outgoing pastor advised me to keep the music strong in order to keep the church steady during the transitional time. Here at FPC, I have been reminded of his wise words during our current transition. The choir and WMA committee have done a beautiful job keeping the program strong through their attendance and programming events to bring our community together. Thank you all for supporting this ministry. Check out what we've been up to this year and be sure to come to our upcoming events in 2020!

Soli Deo Gloria,  
Victoria Shields

### Valentine's Day Coffee Concert

Our third annual Valentine's Day Coffee Concert featured music from the American Songbook. We had a jazz trio accompany the FPC Choir, soloists from the choir, as well as kids presenting solos and an ensemble piece, L-O-V-E in this light program. In addition, we also sang Singing Valentines to audience members as well as over the phone to our home-bound members. A fun new tradition at FPC that we are continuing in 2020!

### Holy Week and Easter Services

The FPC Choir supported music on Maundy Thursday in our new chapel area, as well as for Easter service the following Sunday. Easter music was glorious as always, and supported by a brass quintet made up of members from the MET and West Point. We provided an extended prelude and postlude for both brass and organ, as well as provided exciting leadership on the hymns. The choir's dedication and talent always shines brightly on this festival day!



### Scottish Sunday



Scottish Sunday is always a highlight of our choir year! The service began with celtic harp music by Grammy-nominated harpist, Kristi Shade, followed by the procession by the Mount Kisco Pipe and Drums. "Highland Cathedral," "Amazing Grace," "Be Thou My Vision," and "Loch Lomond" were sung in this festival service, complete with clan tartans to show our pride of our Scottish heritage. Following the service was a luncheon and ceilidh in the common room, complete with fiddle music by Ty Kelliher and Pipe Major, Jonathan Henken piping in the procession of the haggis.

Thank you to the staff; Chairman Randy Ferguson; and the Worship, Music, and Arts committee for helping to continue this great FPC tradition!

### Haydn's Creation with Round Hill Community Church, Greenwich, CT

The First Presbyterian Church of New Canaan choir joined forces on Sunday, May 19, with Round Hill Community Church to perform Haydn's "The Creation" at their church in Greenwich. This second combined effort (FPCNC hosted Fauré's "Requiem" in 2018) featured the combined choir and orchestra sharing movements from the work and clergy from both churches reading poetry highlighting each of the seven days that God used to create the heavens and the earth. A festive reception was held after the concert to thank our choirs and clergy for their outstanding efforts in bringing it all together. Our next collaboration, Jazz Vespers, will be held at FPC on Sunday, May 31st!

### Father's Day Men's Choir

We had a great turnout for the Father's Day Men's Choir this year! The men presented the American folk tune, "Oh, Shenandoah" and The African-American Spiritual, "Jonah" in worship. They rehearsed the Thursday before and enjoyed a wine and cheese fellowship time following rehearsal. This is always a highlight of the year and nice for the men to have a little fun being together!



### Summer Music



We had some wonderful summer music offerings in 2019!

The Tate Family

Virginia Leeman and family

Ruth McKay—Harpsichord

Allison Gray

The Kelliher family

Ellen Taylor Sisson

Nick Depuy

Jackson Borges and Victoria Shields

Organ, piano, harpsichord duets

### Music and the Arts Lessons Continuing Education Program



We have expanded the music ministry this year to include a lessons program! Our new music education program, Music, and the Arts at First Presbyterian Church, is designed to engage and enrich the musical life of First Presbyterian Church and the surrounding community. It is a learning program for all ages, that supports music-making and overall well-being in a nurturing and safe environment. Lessons for all ages and skill levels are offered in piano, organ, voice, and guitar. We currently have students in all three instruments, including two from outside the FPC Community. It is never too early or too late to learn something new or to improve your musical skills!

### **Class on Church Music**

This four-week class explored the earliest origins of Christian music to present day, and the different traditions in which they were born. This non-performance class was perfect for those who appreciate music and wanted to know more about where our music on Sunday mornings originate, and how it is used in our weekly worship services. As always, there is a little nosh to add to the fellowship portion of our time together! Another class will be offered in March 2020 on favorite hymns, culminating with AlleBREWya - a Beer and Hymns night launching the new Glory to God hymnal.

### **Arts Ministry**



In September, we unveiled a painting called “Blessed” by Gigi Guthrie. The painting is a set of angel wings and meant to be interactive for all ages. The idea was to have color, energy, and spirituality wrapped into one! Our result was a 5’x5’ canvas to create a bright statement to be used throughout the year for people of all ages to become living art. The piece becomes living art when we stand in front of it and it becomes an extension of us. When we put ourselves before the wings, it is in that moment that the spirit of the painting begins to envelope us as spiritual beings.

### **Monster Bash**

A Halloween celebration for the whole family was held on Friday, October 11th. The evening began with a family-friendly interactive organ concert featuring Victoria Shields, Jody Davis from the Congregational Church, and Janet Yieh, Victoria’s former student currently serving at Trinity Wall Street. They presented a fun program (including music from Harry Potter!) to get our ghouls on FPC’s Æolian Skinner pipe organ. Following the concert was a potluck, games for kids and fellowship for adults. The costume contest was a blast with prizes going to Sherry Tate as Mother Superior, Armin Thies as John Calvin, Brooks Loner as Harry Potter, Hope Gilbert as Wonder Woman, Henry Tate as Skeleton Ghost, and Katie Ferguson as a character in “Orange is the New Black.” A great event all around!



We got our dancin’ shoes on when we turned our mid-century modern Philip Ives sanctuary into a 1970’s disco complete with special lighting and fog! DJ Ralphie helped us get our groove on with the best tunes of the era. Even though this event was for all ages, surprisingly our 80 and up crowd made up the majority of our attendees. We had lots of fun in this step back in time!

### **Charis Chamber Voices**

This Westchester-based choir has become a staple at FPC since 2016. Artistic Director Arthur Sjögren, presented an all-Baroque program accompanied by Baroque orchestra. This concert was especially poignant as it was Maestro Sjögren’s last concert. As at all Charis concerts, there was a fantastic reception and audience for this special concert!

### **FPC Christmas Concert**

An annual FPC Choirs Christmas tradition, this concert by candlelight featured Cecilia MacDowell’s “A Winter’s Night” and other festive works by living composers of the season combined with poetry and readings from scripture. Accompanied by brass, harp, and organ, the concert ended with congregational carols sung by candlelight. It was a great way to get in the Christmas spirit and finish off a great year of music-making in 2019!

### **Cherub Choir**

Sherry Tate, Director

The Cherub Choir at FPC is for children ages 4 through 7 (pre-K through grade 2) and offers these children a first opportunity to experience service as worship leaders. One weekly rehearsal is held on Sundays after morning worship, approximately 11:15am - 11:45am. The choir aims to sing in worship several times a year between September and June; Cherubs participate in the Christmas Eve Nativity Pageant and in past years have joined with older children to participate in a biblical-themed musical. In 2019, Cherubs joined a group of older children to present an anthem in the Easter Sunday morning worship service.

The anthems and songs learned in Cherub Choir are mostly unison melodies which teach Bible stories, reinforce faith concepts, or mark events in the liturgical calendar. Musical goals for the children include learning to match pitch, keeping a steady beat, and exploring various rhythm patterns. The rehearsals include movement to music as well as the use of rhythm sticks, melody bells, chime bars, tambourines, drums and other percussion instruments.

It has been a continuing struggle to maintain consistent attendance in this choir, as children and their parents face many competing activities among which to choose. But I believe it is an important offering at FPC, as singing in Cherub Choir helps children learn how to serve God and church using their natural talents. They learn to cooperate with peers to create a beautiful sound, express joy, and “make music for the Lord.”

Sherry Tate  
Director



Children and Youth participating in the 2019 Christmas Pageant.  
Cherub and Carol Choirs singing at the 2019 Easter Service.

**Summary of Monthly Attendance for 2019**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Sunday Worship</b>	<b>Special Services</b>	<b>Total</b>
January			414
February		Youth Sunday 182	524
		Ash Wednesday 30	
March			658
April		Tenebrae 45	842
		Good Friday 20	
		Easter Services 7 AM 11	
		10:00 AM 353	
May			636
		Scottish Sunday 260	
June			496
July			358
August			293
September			518
October			562
November			444
December		Christmas Eve 5:00 PM 235	789
		Christmas Eve 10:00 PM 103	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>6534</b>

**Necrology and 2019 Memorial Services**

**Deaths:**

January 20	Barbara S. McDonald
January 24	Joan deGarmo Caird
February 5	Elizabeth Bastine Kay
July 1	Virginia VB Lamborn
September 20	Robert Dean Thomas
October 9	Andrietta M. Weber
December 5	Priscilla R. Lawrence
December 30	Audrey M. Knobloch



**Columbarium Interments:**

May 18	Ruth MacIver Sisson
August 17	Virginia V.B. Lamborn

**Columbarium Interments and Services:**

January 12	Robin Kaye Lewis
March 30	Joan deGarmo Caird

**Memorial Garden Services:**

January 11	Kathryn S. Cunningham
April 22	Barbara S. McDonald
May 22	Patricia Stillman
October 14	John Lynch

**Memorial Garden Interments and Services:**

June 7	Elizabeth Bastine Kay
June 8	Marilyn J. Hutchins
April 22	Barbara S. McDonald
November 9	Andrietta M. Weber

**Memorial Services:**

September 21	Arthur Sultan
October 13	Robert Dean Thomas

### Clerk of Session

John Lanaway



A huge amount of progress was made in 2019. In particular, we concluded our work on a renewed Vision for our church under the leadership of a committed group of church volunteers led by the indefatigable Julie Hoffman. We subsequently held a Session/Deacon retreat around the Vision and how we bring it to life. That work continues today with the support of our wonderful bridge pastor, Rev. Carol Howard Howard Merritt. As an example, the January visit to our sanctuary of Sandy Hook Promise, a terrific organization well known to all for their work in helping to keep children safe, was an opportunity to engage the broader New Canaan community and model our new ministry aspirations outside our walls.

2019 was also another exciting year of transition for our church! Regrettable timing but, after helping us to finalize the new vision, Rev. Piazza found his perfect permanent role in New York City (or, to be more accurate, they found him). Mike left us mid-year to take up that new challenge. Fortunately for us, the Presbytery was able to help us quickly identify the Reverend Carol to guide us through the remaining interim period - that has already led to the formation early this year of the permanent Pastor Nominating Committee.

As we know, interim transitions are difficult for any church family. Uncertainty and doubt can discourage engagement and foster a “wait and see” mentality in those who are not already well ensconced in the church. That is a shame because, as in all things in life - the more you put into it, the more you get out of it. I have certainly found that to be the case in my own church life. In fact, at the moment I am in danger of getting too much out of it!

Although attendance in the pews, including the number of children, is down, only 5 memberships were transferred this year while 4 new member families were welcomed and 10 baptisms and 1 marriage were celebrated - evidence that momentum is turning and attendance will come back to us when permanent leadership is clear.

The Session has, despite significant drops in stewardship maintained the levels of programming we offer, and the staffing that our operations mandate. It goes without saying, however, that reserves are finite and adjustments may be required as we move forward.

It is my fondest hope for our church that 2020 will bring the uncertainty to a close and mark the beginning of a new period of stability, confidence and growth. The choir will sing, the bells will ring out and peace will reign over the land.....from our lips to God’s ears! Towards that end, I express our sincere gratitude to the wonderful group of members who have volunteered their time to serve on the critically important **Pastor Nominating Committee: Scott Beyer, Peg Bull, Cindy Graziano, Jen Gulden, Howard Palmer, Bob Spangler, Sherry Tate and Kevin Thomson – thank you all!!**

Peace and happiness to all of you,

John Lanaway

### Adult Education

Elder Lisa Gifford has been working tirelessly this year, calling speakers and designing an educational program that serves the needs of our congregation. When asked what they most wanted in adult education, the members of the congregation talked about wanting a book club. Rev. Merritt began meeting with a group of people on Monday mornings at 10:00, where they read and discussed *Healing Spiritual Wounds: Reconnecting with a Loving God After Experiencing a Hurtful Church*. Then, Lisa helped to coordinate a group of people who met at Gates Restaurant before heading over to Saxe Middle School to see Bill McKibben, the environmentalist, who talked about his book, *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?*

Lisa planned other events, like an all-congregation read of *The Dearly Beloved* by Cara Wall at Elm Street Books.

In addition to the book groups, our Adult Education was enhanced by Victoria’s contributions, especially her four-week class on Church Music.

## Buildings and Grounds

Charles Robinson

Members: Jim Beall, Jim Riehl, Edgar Torres, Patty von Jena, Stephan von Jena

2019 saw the FPCNC Building and Grounds Committee continue the momentum established in 2017 and 2018. Several large-scale projects and numerous smaller projects were successfully completed.

**FPCNC South Campus Landscape Design & Execution – New Bliss House Terrace, Walkways & Vehicle Accessway** – In close consultation with the B&G Committee, FPCNC’s landscape architect developed a cost-effective plan to materially improve the church campus south of and between our Sanctuary and Bliss House, and immediately adjacent to the Common Room. These improvements incorporated necessary upgrades to current and future handicapped accessibility, and repaired and significantly upgraded the aesthetics and future maintenance and repair-ability of this area’s paved ways and hardscape.



**Columbarium** - We carefully removed the beautiful, but diseased and dangerous specimen tree, its stump and extensive root system in the center of the Columbarium. At the same time, we removed old, unused conduit nearby and repaired and re-pointed certain needy segments of the Columbarium walls. A new walkway was added to connect Columbarium to the Memorial Garden and the Church.

**Memorial Garden** – Important improvements to the walkways around and through the Memorial Garden were installed in 2019, together with weeding and dead plant material removal and replacement, in conjunction with the greater South Campus Landscape Design.

**First Presbyterian Nursery School West Campus Landscaping** – We made significant improvements including selective tree, branch, and root system removal; careful re-grading; and walkway to playground repairs, to the sloped areas between Bliss House and the FPNS playground, all of these provide a safer, sunnier rest and play area.

**Basement Projects** - In the basement under the Choir Room, we replaced a corroded fuel oil filler pipe which included removing stored items from the area. We patched and waterproofed foundation walls. We also made important improvements to the sump pump to stop infrequent flooding and to lower the high humidity levels.

**Wood Repair and Repointing** - In preparation for select exterior painting, Wisner Remodeling made key repairs to several areas on the Bliss House, Kitchen, and Sanctuary. Additional isolated locations of damage to wood by birds and insects were repaired at various locations around Bliss House. Isolated areas of the foundation at Bliss House were repointed. The boiler chimney above the choir room was repointed and a new crown and refurbished cap installed.

**Bliss House Roof** - The roof over the main church office, hall, and restrooms was replaced during spring break.

**Tate Barn** – Removal of a large, dangerous evergreen tree at the west elevation of the Tate Youth Barn was completed safely in 2019. In addition, the Tate Barn main entrance door was replaced, and the building exterior was repainted.

**Doors and Door Hardware** - We refurbished and re-installed closing mechanisms on the Sanctuary lobby’s main entrance doors, on the office entrance doors and other entry doors. Window inserts were installed in the large custom Sanctuary lobby doors. A major improvement was the installation of a power assisted handicapped opening and closing mechanisms on the main Sanctuary door.

**Campus Wide Tree Assessment** - As there have been a number of losses of special trees on our campus, especially during the last few years, we have begun a preliminary analysis to identify, map and assess our trees in order to better maintain our landscape. Our landscape architect has identified and mapped all significant plantings in our landscape so that we can engage an arborist to assess the status of our remaining important landscape elements, many of which exhibit distress.

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**Interior Painting** - As part of our commitment to the First Presbyterian Nursery School, two rooms were painted by our low cost/high value painting contractor, Peter Koch & Company. In addition, the Senior Pastor's office was completely repainted. New carpet was installed, and the side chairs were replaced.

**Common Room Floor** – The Common Room floor had become badly worn and damaged. During the Fourth of July week, broken boards were replaced, and the floor was sanded and refinished.

**Leaks at Sanctuary Window Walls & Repairs to Chipped Column Edges** – Carpenter, Jeff Davis, made repairs to the window wall in Victoria Shields' office, which had suffered damage due to water infiltration over many years, especially after a particularly strong late summer storm. The entire window wall assembly in this office will most likely need to be replaced in the coming years. Conditions at other window walls are being monitored to determine needed repairs. Mr. Davis also repaired and painted the chipped column edges in the sanctuary.

**Main Parking Lot** - The main parking lot had many broken areas and cracks. All these issues were repaired and the main lot and Sanctuary circle were re-sealed.

**Entrance Drive to Tate Barn, Nursery School and Church Offices** - The old crumbling asphalt drive was removed and replaced. New walkways to the Bliss House offices, the rear garden and the Tate Barn were installed.

**Manse Report** - In December of 2017, the church sold the old manse on 51 Toquam Road. The proceeds of \$915,000 was invested in a separate account aimed at both preserving and growing those funds. In the summer of 2019, the Session determined that the church would be well served by purchasing an appropriate manse for the prospective new Senior Pastor. The search committee to find a home was formed and was headed by Jen Gulden. After looking at many houses, it was determined that we would need to spend about \$1,100,000 for the right house.

An excellent opportunity arose to purchase a good property at 171 Jonathan Road but the purchase price was way above the amount our target price. After negotiation, the seller agreed to accept \$1,100,000 which was a considerable reduction from the asking price. While the negotiations were under way, church members actively contributed to a special Manse Fund. In the end, using the saved manse money which had grown to \$954,000 and with \$150,000 of additional manse money donated by church members, the church was able to purchase the new manse for \$1,100,000.

We took possession of the manse during the first week of September 2019 and our Bridge Pastor, Carol Howard Merritt, is now residing in the new manse. The home required some maintenance during fall and has turned out to be an excellent residence for Carol. There are some additional items which will be undertaken this spring. Overall, the new manse is an excellent addition to the church property and will greatly help in attracting a new Senior Pastor.

Respectfully submitted,  
Charles Robinson



Senior Pastor's Office



Church Manse at 171 Jonathan Road

## Christian Education

In the Springtime, Rev. Chris Tate led children's education, Sunday's Cool, which ran simultaneously during worship. Each Sunday, the kids explored how God calls us, as they heard the stories of guests talk about their vocations. The children went to the Wolf Conservancy in South Salem to talk about creation and the importance of learning about and respecting it, to Joe's Pizza for pizza-making and discussion about Christian hospitality, and to the New Canaan volunteer ambulance Corp, to talk about caring for others in a tangible way. During the summer, we welcomed the children in worship. We provided worship bags and a "prayground" so the kids could have an interactive worship experience.

We kicked off the fall season with Rally Day. Rev. Kibbie Laird and Diane Palmento began a Children's Chapel, using the Spark House curriculum. As a previous schoolteacher, Diane has been an invaluable resource for our children and is in charge when Kibbie is away.

In addition to Sunday's Cool, families often attend the Eventide service, which is interactive and intergenerational. It is a delight to see children and their parents celebrating communion and praying with one another.

## Congregational Life Committee

Barbara Wentzel, Chair

Members: Barbara Beall, Sue Benko, Erica Bergmans, Daska Campbell, Margaret Cooper, Jennifer Frazer, Jeannie Hart, Linda and Paul Martin, Sandy Mills, Jo Ann Nerenburg, Anne Palmer, Sue Sherwood, Bev Thomas, Barbara Wentzel, Carolyn Wind

Presbyterians do like parties....

Our October 5th Icebreaker was held at the historic home of Sarah and Charlie Robinson! It's really a step back in time to see this house....from the floors to the ceilings to the decor it is a treat for everyone. Thank you Sarah and Charlie for your hospitality!

On November 20th we gathered for "Tea with Carol." Members of the Congregational Life Committee served tea sandwiches, cookies and tea in the Common Room. The Rev. Merritt talked about her journey from childhood to the First Presbyterian Church of New Canaan in 2019. It was a really good time for everyone to get to know Carol better.

November 23rd welcomed members of the congregation to our new Manse. The Rev. Carol Howard Merritt and her husband The Rev. Brian Merritt (who is a minister in NJ) showed us wonderful paintings and furniture that they have collected over many years. Members read a Blessing of the House!

Jennifer Gulden welcomed us to her home on December 20th for a Christmas Icebreaker. We got into a festive mood with all her holiday decorations! Thank you, Jen!

All members of the congregation are invited to attend our various events. If you would like to join our committee please email me at [barbarawentzel@mac.com](mailto:barbarawentzel@mac.com).

Respectfully submitted,  
Barbara Wentzel

## Communion Committee

Denise Riehl, Chair

Members: Barbara Beall, Erica Bergstrom, Lis Ely, Kip Farrell, Mary Lee Lesko, Linda Martin, Sue Sherwood

Matthew 26:26-28 *"Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' And He took a cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins.'"*

The communion committee is in charge of preparing the communion table, bread and wine on the first Sunday of each month, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Easter, and Christmas Eve. Each member serves approximately two times per year, once purchasing the bread, and once as a helper.

**Finance Committee**

Jim Beall, Chair

Members: Jim Ely, Mike Farrell, Janet Lanaway, John Lanaway, Jim Riehl

The church had an operating deficit of \$175,141 in 2019 which was a \$94,691 increase from our 2018 loss of \$80,450. This additional loss was due to the combination of a revenue decrease of \$32,747 expense increases of \$61,944. The expense increase was largely associated with personnel expenses, relocation expenses, and building repairs. The revenue decline was a combination of lower pledge revenue of \$136,487 and increased gifts of \$111,211 compared to 2018. There was one very positive note on the revenue side. The stock market performance provided a gain for our reserve funds of slightly more the \$225,000 for the year.

As was reported in the 2018 Annual Report, thanks to a very generous gift, a new Sanctuary roof was installed during the winter and spring of 2018. In order to continue rehabilitating the Church buildings and property, the Church obtained a loan \$300,000 from the Presbyterian Church USA. During 2019, this money was used to install the new rear patio, sitting wall, Sanctuary walkway, driveway and Memorial Garden and Columbarium walkways. Also included were repair and sealing of the main parking lot, a new roof over the main office and replacement of the drive and walks to the Bliss House and Tate Barn. With this work completed, there are no major project planned for 2020.

During this time of financial concern, the Church staff and volunteers are continuing to manage the church's financial position with care and prudence.

<b>Operating Financials 2013 - 2019</b>							
	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
	<u>Actual</u>						
Pledges	826,098	924,261	844,372	861,499	931,613	756,681	620,194
Plate	27,411	29,357	30,305	31,723	21,692	17,970	13,879
Gifts	153,848	122,666	58,637	98,847	59,014	80,505	191,716
Facility Rental	52,698	53,937	54,325	67,760	62,075	101,686	98,591
Other	<u>3,868</u>	<u>3,375</u>	<u>24,998</u>	<u>3,506</u>	<u>478</u>	<u>285</u>	<u>0</u>
<b>Total revenues</b>	<b>1,063,923</b>	<b>1,133,596</b>	<b>1,012,637</b>	<b>1,063,335</b>	<b>1,074,872</b>	<b>957,127</b>	<b>924,380</b>
Buildings & Grounds	190,331	214,017	189,568	162,591	267,987	273,630	227,398
Children's Ministries	7,188	8,143	7,344	16,513	32,514	12,356	9,862
Outreach	46,882	46,143	32,021	4,812	43,866	30,528	34,893
Administration	167,001	163,294	166,486	163,192	89,281	100,035	129,731
Congregational Life	6,501	3,855	1,689	2,559	1,127	2,063	4,353
Membership	532	534	539	1,120	1,596	3,232	2,032
Personnel	662,892	618,674	612,252	595,408	549,078	537,145	611,998
Youth	9,706	13,501	9,159	11,990	20,101	13,725	15,699
Worship, Music and Arts	<u>54,464</u>	<u>59,468</u>	<u>66,710</u>	<u>53,004</u>	<u>63,591</u>	<u>64,863</u>	<u>63,555</u>
<b>Operating expenses</b>	<b>1,145,497</b>	<b>1,127,629</b>	<b>1,085,768</b>	<b>1,011,189</b>	<b>1,069,141</b>	<b>1,037,577</b>	<b>1,099,521</b>
<b>Operating Surplus (Deficit) Unaudited</b>	<b>(81,574)</b>	<b>5,967</b>	<b>(73,131)</b>	<b>52,146</b>	<b>5,731</b>	<b>(80,450)</b>	<b>(175,141)</b>
Transfer from Reserves	75,000	0	73,000	0	60,000	0	250,000

**Investment Committee**

Jim Ely Chair

Members: Jim Beall, Mike Farrell, John Lanaway

The FPCNC investment portfolios enjoyed strong returns for 2019, with substantially all equity and fixed income markets performed well after a difficult 2018. Our Reserve account was invested in a conservative portfolio of investment grade fixed income and equity index funds during 2019, and returned 18.4% for the year ended 12/31/19. Our Manse Account, which was used to hold the proceeds of the sale of the old Manse in 2017, was invested in a conservative mix of short maturity fixed income funds prior to the purchase of our new Manse in August 2019, and returned 5.9% for the year. Our Operating account is used to hold excess cash and to receive/sale donated stock received over the course of the year.

The Investment Committee continues to believe the Church is best served by maintain a conservative investment strategy, with the primary goal of capital preservation, while generating positive returns on our funds.

Respectively,  
Jim Ely

**First Presbyterian Church of New Canaan**

**Reserve Account**

**For The Year Ended December 31, 2019**

	<u>12/31/2019</u>	<u>Percent</u>
<b>Holdings as of 12/31/19:</b>		
Cash	\$3,014.43	
Money Market	<u>78,851.95</u>	
Total Cash and Equivalents	81,866.38	6.4%
PIMCO Enhanced Short Term ETF	130,035.20	
Doubleline Low Duration Bond Fund	164,993.99	
Doubleline Total Return Bond Fund	<u>166,378.21</u>	
Total Fixed Income	461,407.40	36.3%
Schwab S&P 500 Index Fund	363,251.10	
Schwab Total Stock Market Index Fund	<u>363,218.62</u>	
Total Equities	<u>726,469.72</u>	<u>57.2%</u>
Total Investments	\$1,269,743.50	100.0%
<b>Investment Performance:</b>		
Balance December 31, 2018:	\$1,292,293.70	
Balance December 30, 2019 (1):	\$1,269,743.50	
YTD Return:	18.4%	

(1) Reflects withdrawals of \$250,000 during 2019.



If you have remembered FPCNC in your estate plans, and would like to be included on the list of members of the Bell Tower Society, please let the church office know.

Thank you for making plans to leave a legacy.

### Membership Involvement Committee

Linda Ferguson, Chair

Members: Tindley Gilbert, Serena Gillespie, Lynn Quinn, Julie Reeves, Anne Wagner

The Membership Involvement Committee of First Presbyterian Church of New Canaan welcomes and reaches out to visitors on Sunday mornings, arranges semi-annual New Member Information classes with the clergy, and helps integrate new members into the life of the church.

This year, our church welcomed eight new members, thirteen confirmands (see page 6 for list of names) and baptized ten members, including three newborns. Five families transferred their membership to other churches. Sadly, eight of our members died during the year. Our 2019 final membership number stands at 512.

#### Births:

March 3 Vivienne Rose Trapp, daughter of Cameron Villarreal and Kevin Trapp  
 March 7 Madison Eva Mae Ruszkowski, daughter of Diana Pawel and Joseph Ruszkowski  
 April 27 Evelyn Annunziata Colella, daughter of Lorenzo and Alissa Villarreal Colella

#### Baptisms:

February 24 Forrest Adrien Joseph, son of Ashley Kniffin and Cyril Lance Joseph,  
 with Rev. Dr. Michael S. Piazza officiating.  
 May 19 Danielle Asabea Asare, daughter of Solomon and Mavis Asare,  
 with Rev. Dr. Michael S. Piazza and Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird officiating.  
 Toby Matthew Woods, son of Peter and Kristina Woods,  
 with Rev. Dr. Michael S. Piazza and Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird officiating.  
 June 9 Vivienne Rose Trapp, daughter of Kevin Michael Trapp and Ashley Cameron Villarreal  
 Trapp, with Rev. Dr. Michael S. Piazza and Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird officiating.  
 August 11 Evelyn Annunziata Colella, daughter of Lorenzo Benito and Alissa Villarreal Coletta,  
 with Rev. Carol Howard Merritt and Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird officiating.  
 September 22 Madison Eva Mae Ruszkowski, daughter of Joseph and Diana Pawul Ruszkowski,  
 with Rev. Carol Howard Merritt and Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird officiating.  
 October 27 Charlotte Allen, Sam Alnouri, Margaux Reagan Allen-Alnouri and Yates Asher  
 Allen-Alnouri, with Rev. Carol Howard Merritt and Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird  
 officiating.

#### Marriage:

May 11 Allison Dahle Riehl and Greg Arnold Konrad, in Madison, CT,  
 with Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird officiating.  
 Allison is the daughter of Denise and Jim Riehl.

#### New Members:

October 13 Charlotte Allen and Sam Alnouri, by Affirmation of Faith  
 Angela, Emily and Paul Johnson, by Transfer from First Presbyterian Church of  
 Deerfield, Illinois  
 Jim and Jan Lucie, by Transfer from First Presbyterian Church of Macomb, Illinois  
 Diane Palmento, by Re-Affirmation of Faith

#### Transfers:

Homer and Katrina Parkhill, Congregational Church of New Canaan  
 Andrew and Meredith Petitjean, Congregational Church of New Canaan  
 Rudy and Joanne Prechter, Christ Church of Greenwich, CT  
 Bill and Lindsay Tucker, Congregational Church of New Canaan  
 Dean Van Nest, First Presbyterian Church of New Haven, CT

## Mission and Outreach Committee

Chris Dooley, Chair

**Members:** Alex Carlson, Barbara Dahill, Ben Dooley, Paul Johnson, Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird

The Mission and Outreach Committee is dedicated to creating opportunities for inter-generational mission at FPCNC by identifying and supporting programs directed to hungry, under-sheltered, or otherwise disadvantaged people in our region.

Objectives for 2019: Emphasize volunteer hours levered across various programs and projects, rather than straight financial support.

Outreach Partner Criteria: There are several thousand excellent service organizations that our committee could consider for support. We apply the following selection criteria:

- Congregation involvement and financial support must be impactful
- Partner should offer service opportunities to the congregation
- Any new partner must have a member/sponsor who sits on the Outreach Committee

Selected Outreach Partnership Updates:

### Filling in the Blanks (Rev Katherine Kibbie Laird)

This New Canaan based charity combats hunger by sending 750 local children home with bags of basic foods for each weekend. Shockingly, many students on the subsidized school lunch plan go hungry over the weekend in challenged homes. Our youth group packed Christmas backpacks as gifts for the holidays.

### New Covenant House (Chris Dooley)

We assist this program by shopping for food, preparing and serving meals once a month at the New Covenant House in Stamford. Typically, we serve 100+ meals the first Saturday of each month. Many adult members, full families and our youth groups have participated.

### Cents-ability (Rev Kathryn Kibbie Laird)

The total for our 2019 "noisy" Sunday Cents-ability collections totaled \$1879.07. Our Cents-ability objective is to provide hunger relief locally, regionally, nationally and globally. Our "coins" are disbursed to the Food Bank of Lower Fairfield County, the Presbyterian Church (USA) Hunger Relief Programs, and to the New Canaan Food Pantry. Your generosity raised hunger awareness and provided nourishment for our neighbors. It's amazing what we can do collectively with our coins when we act intentionally.

### Dove Program (Karen Hanson)

Dove boxes provide holiday food to families in need. Direct financial donations are also collected with our "Green Doves." Led by Karen Hanson, "the Dove Lady," this Outreach program has had long-standing support from the congregation.

Respectfully submitted,  
Chris Dooley



Mission/Outreach Helpers  
Left: Cents-ability Collection  
Right: Delivering Dove Boxes



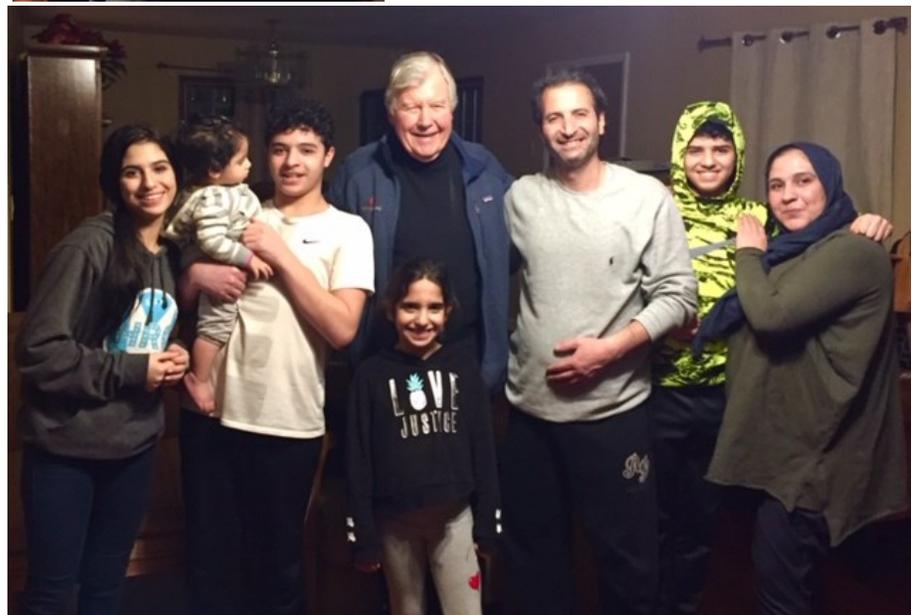
**Abo Noktah Update 2019**

The Abo Noktah Family had big news in a small package in 2019...baby daughter Hayat (meaning “life” in Arabic) was born in April. She a delightful little girl, and much loved by her parents Khaldoun and Khwala, and older siblings Hanin, Yaman, Ahmed, and Zain who constantly play with her.

This family continues to enjoy living in the “garden apartment” style condo they rent in The Cove waterfront neighborhood of Stamford. This school year elder son Yaman joined eldest daughter Hanin at West Hills High School, which is surprisingly far away, near Long Ridge Road and the Merritt. Younger son Ahmed is still at Turn of River Middle School, which also requires a bus ride, and now-middle-sister Zain continues at K T Murphy Elementary, which is conveniently just two blocks from home. All four of the older children continue to participate in the Horizons at New Canaan Country School student enrichment program. FPCNC is able to cover the modest per family fee the program requests each year. Horizons’ anchor summer program providing academics, arts, sports and more runs through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, which younger siblings Ahmed and Zain are still a part of. Hanin and Yaman have now both ‘graduated’ to Horizons’ high school program which provides academic coaches and related activities and social opportunities for older students.

Dad Khaldoun continues to work with a local family, which includes Arabic speakers, who have a confectionary factory in Northern New Jersey. Mom Khwala stays very busy with baby Hayat and cooking her delicious meals for the family. All the Abo Noktahs extend their continued gratitude to both the First Presbyterian Church of Stamford and of New Canaan, who have co-sponsored their successful resettlement from Syria to Fairfield County over the past three and half years.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lynn Quinn





**Nominating Committee**

Jan Sulkowski,  
Chair and Session Representative

**Members:**

Huw Gilbert  
Jen Gulden  
Mark Magnusen  
Carol Howard Merritt (ex-officio)  
Julie Reeves  
Vivi Reeves (youth)  
Nell Smith (Deacon Representative)

The Nominating Committee is elected by the congregation and meets formally several times per year. The committee is charged with finding suitable and willing candidates from the congregation to assume lay leadership positions of the church. The committee presents to the congregation a slate of candidates for open Elder, Deacon, Youth Elder, Youth Deacon and Nominating Committee positions for election at the annual congregational meeting. In addition, the committee identifies people who would like to take a more active role in specific areas of the church and refers them to the relevant committee chairperson.

**Offertory Committee**

Ed Elbert, Chair

**Monthly Counters:**

Jim Beall	Peggy Hooker
Margaret Cooper	Marlene Powers
Jim Ely	Tom Quinn
Mike Farrell	Bob Spangler

**Personnel Committee**

Randy Ferguson, Chair

Members: Peter Bayer, Howard Greene, Jennifer Gulden, Julie Hoffman, Barbara Wentzel

*The session . . . has the responsibility . . . to provide for the administration of the program of the church, including employment of nonordained staff, with concern for equal employment opportunity, fair employment practices, personnel policies, and the annual review of the adequacy of compensation for all staff, including all employees. – Book of Order G-10.0102.*

Working with the Head of Staff and as an advisory to the Session, the Personnel Committee is charged with helping to develop, implement, and administer policies and procedures in all matters pertaining to staff personnel, with the exception of recruitment and selection of ordained pastors for pastoral positions. The committee's primary responsibilities include:

**Staffing**

Work with the Interim Pastor as Head of Staff to review and approve staff position descriptions, oversee performance reviews, and administer 360 degree feedback from congregation annually, help monitor staff performance and manage performance issues as necessary. Take a role in the recruitment of new staff members. Develop employment packages for prospective staff, and conduct exit interviews.

**Compensation**

Establish salary rates based on both similar positions elsewhere and Presbyterian guidelines. Work with the Finance Committee to establish annual salary increase percentages based on an assessment of job performance, cost of living changes, and the ability of the church to provide. Monitor total compensation levels. Help oversee vacation and leave time, with the assistance of Head of Staff.

**Policies and Procedures**

Review the church's Personnel Manual to revise as appropriate. Ensure that personnel practices comply with laws and established guidelines.

Maintain compliance with the Book of Order and FPCNC by-laws.

**In Summary**

The FPCNC Personnel Committee operates in an advisory capacity to the Interim and Associate Pastors and to the Session, and as a support team to the church staff. We help design, define, recommend, and monitor personnel policies and practices with the objective of rewarding performance, addressing grievances, and ensuring that the church's staff and personnel organization operates with equity and at a high level to meet the needs of our church.

Respectfully submitted,  
Randy Ferguson

## Stewardship Committee

Tindley Gilbert, chair

Members: John Lanaway, Jim Riehl, Jim Beall

Elder Tindley Gilbert kicked off stewardship season by asking the congregation, “What does stewardship mean to you?” The congregation texted results, and we created a wordcloud with people’s responses. The top answers? **Love. Community. Impact.** We used these words to guide our stewardship campaign.

In our gratitude, stewardship became a time when we could reflect on why First Presbyterian is so important. We asked people to finish the sentence, “Because of FPCNC…” and we received powerful testimonies:

- We have found a church that has made us welcome in our new community and I have had the privilege of working with the wonderful youth of the church on the mission trip.
- I found a church family who supports and loves my family.
- I love this church because of its inclusivity—we welcome people of all faiths and even no faith! God bless us all.
- Our church family has been an important source of love and support in our lives.
- I feel like I belong.

On Stewardship Sunday, we toasted all of you, the amazing people whose time, energy and resources have kept this congregation thriving throughout every transition. We knew that we had a particular challenge this year, because we lost members in the interim period. So, we asked people to increase their pledges by 17%. And you responded with great generosity! Even with losses in pledging units, we came close to matching our 2019 promises.

We want to thank Tindley Gilbert, Jim Beall, Jim Riehl, and John Lanaway for their tireless work. They have been reconnecting with members and listening to so many joys and concerns. But most of all, we want to thank you, the congregation. Your outpouring of generosity has given us the ability to minister from generation to generation.

As of February 8, 2020, the Church has received pledges from 134 givers for total of \$628,000 for the 2020 budget year. This is 82% of the goal of \$767,000 and 93% of last year’s pledge total \$675,000. The 134 givers for 2020 is 78% of last year’s 172 givers. This is a reduction of 38 giving units from 2019 to 2020.

As was noted in last year’s report, the pledges for 2019 were down significantly from 2018 when there were 190 giving units with a pledge total of \$766,000. It is obvious that the Church needs to reverse this downward trend in the number of giving units. Also noted in last year’s report, there are several large donors who provided significant help to the Stewardship campaign for which the Church is very thankful.

The Stewardship Committee wishes to thank all of you that contributed so generously to both the 2019 and 2020 Stewardship campaigns.

## **Worship, Music and Arts Committee**

Carole Clarkson, Chair

Members: Linda Ferguson (Greeters), Peggy Hooker (Ushers), Ruth Laird (Lay Readers and Cross Bearers), Sarah Robinson (Communion Servers), Roger Smith (Treasurer), Nell Smith (Hospitality), Armin Thies (Secretary), Kathy Edwards, Jeannie Hart, George Post, Ellen Sisson, and Victoria Shields (Director of Music, Music & Arts).

The Music, Worship and Arts committee is charged by Session to administer programs and events which aid in worship and to oversee all aspects of the regular worship each Sunday as planned by our ministers. The MW&A committee advises Session and supports the ministerial staff in providing meaningful worship for the congregation and throughout the church year - through regular and special services, musical performances and related arts programs. The MW&A committee is not in charge of youth programs but is available to help whenever possible. Our committee often hears that music is one of the most cherished attributes of our church, and we in turn strive to fortify our choirs and musical programming to enhance this aspect of worship for our congregation and community. One change that occurred under the leadership of Interim Pastor, Michael Piazza is the role the MW&A committee plays for Scottish Sunday. Whereas the Chairman of the Scottish Committee, Randy Ferguson, will organize most aspects of Scottish Sunday, the MW&A Committee will be in charge of the worship portion of the event in coordination with our Pastor. This year and into 2020 our committee will be asking the congregation for 300 new hymnals to replace our old, rather worse for the wear, hymnals. The old hymnals will be donated to other churches who could use them.

The Director of Music & Arts, Victoria Shields, in her fourth year with us as Music Director, has, once again, brought real energy and imagination to our musical programs (see report from Victoria which lists the many imaginative and successful musical events she has orchestrated). She has been a pleasure to work with! Our section leaders in the choir, Harper Stevenson (soprano), John Howell (tenor), Lauri Galbreath (alto), and Jonathan Guss (bass), are with us this year and have been indispensable, particularly during those months when attendance in the church choir is low (usually during winter when many of the "snowbirds" in our choir head South).

Our committee has changed our monthly meeting times to Thursday evenings at six and is scheduled to take place several days after Session meetings. The meetings are scheduled this way because many of the members are in the choir and choir practice is held on Thursday evenings. I like to have our meetings shortly after the Session meetings in order to be able to relay any issues Session wishes to bring to the MW&A committee.

I would like to thank my wonderful, tireless committee for their unflinching willingness to perform not only their own tasks but their willingness to help others with their tasks when needed. I could not do this job without them!

Respectfully Submitted,  
Carole Clarkson

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## **Eventide Service**

This fall, we began to gather at 5pm for an interactive, intergenerational service, led by Rev. Chris Tate. We started it during Lent, and the service became an important part of the congregation. So, we continued it when fall began. It is a beautiful time of contemplation. Nick Depuy and Chris Tate lead the singing, and we typically learn two or three new songs each week. Chris often preaches through poetry, video, and word. We participate in interactive prayer, and we celebrate communion each week. In the fall, Chris tackled a different subject each week. We talked about immigration, domestic violence, and the environment. The time allows families to worship together, even when they have complicated sports and dance schedules.



Breaking bread at Eventide Service

## Youth Ministries Committee

Laurel Carlson, Chair

**Members:** Chris Dooley, Nancy LaBadie, Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird, Julie Reeves, Kristen Rodgers, Kristina Woods

The Youth Ministries Committee is dedicated to creating opportunities for our 6<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> grade youth to live spiritually, love inclusively, learn continuously and leave a legacy. The committee assists Rev. Kibbie Laird in planning fellowship activities, mission trips, retreats and pilgrimages. FPC provides a safe and sacred space for our youth to participate in fellowship and mission activities. We encourage them to bring friends and have fun while learning about how to live and grow in their faith.

FPCNC has two aged-based youth groups that form the foundation of our program. Our MSYG program serves our middle school children in grades 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The children are invited and encouraged to attend the fellowship and mission activities that we have planned for each month. This part of our program also includes our Confirmation class. The class of 2019 had 14 confirmands. This year's class of 2020 has 7 confirmands in it from 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They meet every week from September through May for dinner and class. They are required to attend various fellowship and mission activities throughout the year as well. They are always highly encouraged to participate in our annual mission trip. In the summer of 2019, we went to the Center of Hope in Oakhill, WV. This year we will be going back to Oakhill, WV in June of this year to finish some additional work at the Center of Hope. MSYG help to run the games during Rally Day, cook dinner for children in Kids in Crisis, mission work with Special Church, Advent Fair, and enjoy the White Elephant Gift Swap during their Christmas dinner among many other activities.

HSYG serves our 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students. While it is always hard to find the ideal time to gather this group of very busy teens, HSYG is scheduled to meet at least twice a month on Sunday evenings. While some activities, like cooking for Kids in Crisis, shopping for Filling in the Blanks, or Souperbowl Sunday are joint activities with MSYG, most activities are planned solely for the high school students. The culminating event for HSYG this year is a mission trip to Appalachia, WV from June 27<sup>th</sup> - July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020.

Some of the wonderful activities planned for the rest of the year include Souperbowl of Caring Café, Youth Sunday, Butternut Ski Trip, Usher and serve ice cream for MLK day, and March Madness.

Thanks to the Youth Ministries Committee members who give their time, energy and ideas to help promote FPC youth programs. The committee is grateful to all who participate in our activities. We thank parents and other members of the congregation who give of their time, talents and treasures to support FPC youth.

Respectfully submitted,  
Laurel Carlson



Souper Bowl of Caring Sunday, February 2019



Confirmation Sunday, May 2019

**Board of Deacons**

Elizabeth Stuart and Steve Van de Graaf  
Co-Moderators

<b>Members</b>	<b>Ministries</b>
Peg Bull	Pastoral Care Team and Visitation
Alex Carlson	Co-Youth
Barbara Dahill	New Members and Outreach
Ben Dooley	Co-Youth
Karen Hanson	Member-At-Large
Donna Hill	Baptisms
Michelle LaBadie	Co-Youth
Nancy LaBadie	Flowers, Youth Liaison
Janet Lanaway	Cards and Letters
Nell Smith	Nominating
Elizabeth Stuart	Treasurer
Steve Van de Graaf	Driving, Memorial Services

The Board of Deacons is comprised of 12 active church members who have been called by the congregation to dedicate three years of service assisting fellow parishioners as well as the community -at-large. As set forth in the Book of Order, a Deacon’s duty is “to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, the friendless, and to any who may be in distress.”

The Board of Deacons offers care and support to our church community through many activities:

- Representing the church during Memorial services and receptions providing support and assistance to bereaved families.
- Sending cards and letters of encouragement or sympathy to church members during difficult times or times of celebration.
- Visiting sick or elderly church members.
- Preparing and serving dinners at INSPIRICA, a women’s shelter in Stamford.
- Providing confidential financial emergency assistance to church members in need through the Deacon Fund.
- Assisting families in preparation for the baptism of their children during Sunday Services.
- Participating on the Pastoral Care Team, working with our pastors to support those in difficult circumstances.
- Transporting those who cannot drive to and from church events.
- Delivering Christmas and Easter flowers to the homebound or families who are sick or have recently lost loved ones.

Serving breakfast to the congregation for our Summer Sunday Services.

Participating in the Prayer Chain, adding our prayers to those of the church community for members and friends with special needs.

Providing/coordinating meals to members who are in temporary need of assistance.

The Deacons are grateful to all who support our efforts. The Scottish Committee and everyone from the congregation who contributed to the Deacon Fund enable us to assist those who come to us in need.

Additionally, we are most appreciative for “past” Deacons who prove that “once a Deacon, always a Deacon” when they help at Memorial receptions and other activities. Their continued service enables us to carry out our ministry of compassion.

As we look forward to the exciting challenges of 2020, we continue to seek ways to increase our ability to care for our church family and the greater community. We welcome individuals from our congregation who wish to share the treasure of their time and talents by serving as a Deacon.



Allen-Alnouri family baptism with Rev. Carol Howard Merritt officiating

### **Dorcas Group**

Members: Marion Blose, Gloria Bridgman, Connie Musa, Carolyn Scott, and Ruth Witt.

The Dorcas Group is a group of women who use their hands, yarn, and knitting needles to bring comfort to others. The church members began more than fifteen years ago by knitting caps for "Hats with Hugs" and then provided the caps to cancer patients. Today, Dorcas Group makes blankets for babies with AIDS, prayer shawls for church members and friends of the community, and hats for cancer patients. Some of the organizations that have received the items are Greenwich Hospital, Whittingham Cancer Center of Norwalk and Inspirica of Stamford. The items are also utilized by the clergy, deacons, and pastoral care team. These organizations and people then gift them to people in need of comfort due to life situations such as illness or loss.

Dorcas meets on the third Wednesday of each month from April through November from 10 AM to noon. Membership is open to anyone interested in knitting projects and sharing some fellowship. The ladies of Dorcas Group purchase their own yarn, so financial contributions are welcome. The ladies of the Dorcas Group don't meet the recipients of the items they make, but take joy in knowing they are providing comfort to those in need.

### **Flower Committee**

Peg Bull and Patty von Jena, co-chairs



Members of the Flower Committee are responsible for decorating the Sanctuary with flowers for Christmas, Palm Sunday, Easter, and other church events. The committee also maintains the sanctuary planter, the "Brave Little Garden" located by the office entrance, and the outdoor planters at the church entrance. Anyone wishing to share their time and talent is most welcome.



**Special Church**  
Nancy Reichart

Special Church, a program for adults and teenagers with Special Needs, is a part of FPCNC's Outreach. The group gathers for fellowship and spiritual growth on Thursdays from 3:30 - 5:00 PM in the Common Room at FPCNC.

Romans 12:6 "We all have gifts. They vary with the grace that God has given us."

When Special Church gathers in the Common Room every Thursday these words from Romans come to life. What is grace? Grace is gentleness, gratitude, delight, laughter, radiance, unconditional love, peace.

FPC has been home to Special Church for more than thirty years. Our program was founded by parents to provide a religious experience that was meaningful to their special needs children. Many of our members are charter members. Our gathering always begins with hearing God's word and learning of His love in our Words of the Week segment. We follow with a variety of activities which might include creating art, performing acts of kindness or celebrating a holiday or other special event. New in 2019 was our Secret Pals friendship with the Confirmation Class. It is so much fun to arrive at church to find notes or surprises from our pals! We enjoy writing back to them and hope that one day we will have the opportunity to meet in person.

Every soul responds to music. The final half our of our gathering is spent with Matt Hennessy of Rhythmhearts. We certainly make a joyful noise as we fill the air with spirited exuberant singing!

My heartfelt thanks to everyone who supports our ministry in any way. We appreciate the staff, congregational leaders and members of FPC for welcoming us each week and for contributing to our funding. Special thanks to Tina St. Armand who is always gracious and supportive, to Edgar for preparing our space and, of course, to Rev. Kibbie and the Confirmation Class for being the best Secret Pals ever! Our volunteers Kate Sullivan, Marlene Powers, Deb Evensen, John Mastracchio, and Bob Reichart always arrive with helping hands and loving hearts.

Our members are our greatest blessing. They arrive at church full of God's grace and they are what makes Special Church shine brightly!

We are all looking forward to this new decade of Special Church!

Nancy Reichart



Santa came to visit our Special Church friends.



Santa's helpers!