



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN NEW CANAAN

Where Faith, Families & Friends Connect



2020

Annual Report

**The First Presbyterian Church
of New Canaan**

Annual Report/Yearbook 2020

The Rev. Dr. R. Scott Herr
Senior Pastor/Head of Staff

The Rev. Mary Marple Thies
Parish Associate

Victoria Shields
Director of Music & Arts

Sherry Tate
Cherub Choir Director

Jim Riehl
Interim Church Administrator

Tina St. Armand
Office Manager

Kate Stringfellow
Operations Manager

Edgar Torres
Sexton

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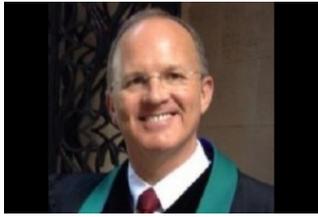
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Photos provided by Staff and Church Members

Rev. Dr. R. Scott Herr
Senior Pastor/Head of Staff



Dear Members and Friends of the FPCNC,

Charles Dickens starts off *A Tale of Two Cities* with the iconic opening line, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.”

And so, goes the best summary I can think of for the last year as *A Tale of Two Crises*, whether the pandemic or the political. Indeed, “unprecedented” was the word of the year, and it was a year full of tragic loss for so many millions of people, whether of life or livelihood. For all of us it was a year of halting transitions, and though it was challenging in many ways, I thank God for the privilege of being called through the voice of this congregation to serve in your midst and to be able to live in this lovely community. Thank you for the warm welcome that you extended to Kim and me, and for the small and large ways in which you helped us adjust to life in New Canaan and made us feel so quickly “at home.”

I wouldn’t be here except for the far reaching and persistent work of the Pastoral Nominating Committee and am so grateful for Bob Spangler, Cindy Graziano, Jen Gulden, Peg Bull, Kevin Thomson, Scott Beyer, and Sherry Tate (Howard Palmer was part of the initial team, too)! They were great ambassadors for First Presbyterian, and I thank God for their hard work, open hearts and prayerfulness which led me to consider, and convinced me to accept, God’s call to serve as your permanent pastor. I also want to thank the Revs. Carol Howard Merritt, Kathryn Kibbie Laird, and Chris Tate for their conversations in helping me to prepare to serve even before my arrival. A special thanks to the Rev. Mary Marple Thies, who also was key in helping orient me once I arrived and who continues as a key member of our staff team. Mary leads the Pastoral Care Team and provides wisdom and general counsel to me and all our staff.

After we finally arrived in Connecticut on August 24th and fulfilled the required two-week quarantine, we were able to begin worshipping together as of September 6th and our first “in-person” outdoor worship service for *Rally Day* on September 13th. Thanks to Randy and Linda Ferguson, Paul and Angela Johnson, and Doug, Serena, Alexandra, and Douglas Gillespie for helping to set up the Ferguson’s tent on the front lawn, and for Augie Kelliher, Alexandra Gillespie and Vivi Reeves for organizing Children’s worship for those wonderful Sundays outside on the lawn, and for continuing faithfully when we, wisely but regretfully, returned to on-line only services.

From day two, I began work with the Session and am grateful for the gifted leadership of our congregation: John Lanaway and Jen Van de Graaf have done a splendid job as co-clerks, and Jim Beall, George Benington, Linda and Randy Ferguson, Alexandra Gillespie, Jennifer Gulden, Jan Lucie, Vivi Reeves, Charlie Robinson, Kevin Thomson, and Barbara Wentzel have been a tremendous team in navigating these challenging times of the Pandemic.

I have also been thankful for the work of the Deacons and appreciated their helping Barbara Wentzel and Stephan Von Jena to distribute Welcome Bags. The Deacons have also written many cards and taken out Poinsettia flowers to some of our long-term members. Steve Van de Graaf has done a good job guiding the whole team. Janet Lanaway, Barbara Dahill, Augie Kelliher, Linda Martin, Carole Clarkson, Nell Smith, Elizabeth Stuart, Nancy LaBadie, Donna Hill, Peg Bull, and Nick Woods have all done wonderful work behind the scenes to maintain the compassionate and caring social fabric of our congregation.

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Before I came, Julie Hoffman created our new church logo, and with Angela Johnson and Sue Benko came up with new designs for “branding” on stationary and electronic platforms (website, Facebook, and other social media portals) and made connections with local media (*New Canaan Advertiser*, *Patch*, etc.) to communicate more effectively to the larger community what is happening in the life of our congregation. Special thanks for all of their work. Charlie Robinson is in the process of forming a team to make sure that the new logo makes its way to our signage at the entryway of the church for passersby on Oenoke Ridge Road to know who we are.

Jim and Dede Bartlett and Charlie and Sarah Robinson (and many others more informally – Jeannie Hart and George Post even took us to the beach!) provided hospitality events at their homes for us to meet and greet interested members of the congregation. Many of you dropped by with small and large expressions of kindness when we first arrived. Your generosity and thoughtfulness have made us feel so welcome here. *Thank you!* We hosted a group of youth and parents at our home for a BBQ meet and greet before the pandemic made such gathering unsafe.

We have tried to balance meeting together with observation of safety protocols to mitigate any risk of infection of our membership. We were outdoors until Reformation Sunday and then moved indoors for a month until the numbers started to rise again and have been all virtual since. A special thanks to Mark Magnuson for his taking on the leadership of our Virtual Coffee Fellowship meetings immediately after each Sunday service. It’s been a great way virtually to stay in touch and if you haven’t joined us you should come and join the fun!

We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to the second Search Committee of the year for proposing Courtney Steininger to the Session as our Director of Youth and Children’s ministries. Randy Ferguson headed up the team, and Megan Wunderlich was our unofficial but super helpful executive assistant and HR consultant, and the rest of the members, Alexandra Gillespie, Julie Reeves, Vivi Reeves, Mark Magnuson, Laurel Carlson, Lisa Gifford, and Christine Mangone worked hard reading applications and conducting Zoom interviews! We are already seeing the positive signs of Courtney’s leadership and energy!

I want to thank the Pastoral Care Committee, under the leadership of The Rev. Mary Marple Thies, for their great work in this very demanding pandemic year. Anne Palmer, Evelyn Bergstrom, Peg Bull, Sarah Robinson, and Ted Foster all are making calls and offering prayers for those most in need in our congregation.

It’s been a pleasure getting to know my staff colleagues and learning to work together mainly via Zoom. The all-knowing Tina St. Armand (our church’s institutional memory) has been most helpful in giving me historical perspective on everything and everyone! Victoria Shields is a first-class musician and I appreciate her musical skills and vision. She has done a tremendous job in bringing in gifted singers and musicians to add quality and depth to our in-person and virtual worship experiences, and I appreciate her efforts given the tremendous limitations of the pandemic and in a time when singing can be a “super-spreader.” The Rev. Mary Marple Thies, as I’ve mentioned above, has been extremely helpful in orienting me to the church and presbytery, and I value her wisdom and perspective as we prepare for the future. Jim Riehl, our interim church administrator, and Edgar Torres, our Day Sexton and under Jim’s direction, have been helpful in managing the contractors, and taking care of the day-to-day property issues both at the church and manse. Kate Stringfellow, our operations manager, has been dependable through the ever-changing schedule the pandemic has inflicted on our worship schedule. While I have enjoyed talking with Sherry Tate on the phone, because of the pandemic protocols, the children’s music ministry is on hold until safer times. Because of the pandemic precautions, I have only briefly met our bookkeeper, “Jo” Pirrone. It is strange to realize that because of the pandemic and physical distancing protocols, we have only had our weekly “staff meetings” on Zoom!

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Thank you to Jan Lucie, Peg Bull and Patty von Jena for their work as sanctuary decorators *par excellence* for the holidays and changing of the seasons.

Thank you to Jim Riehl and the COVID-19 Task Force, an ad hoc team to help us keep track of the pandemic numbers and assist the Session in making rational decisions about when and how to reopen the sanctuary for public worship: Jim Beall, Victoria Shields, Jan Lucie, Randy Ferguson, and Serena Gillespie have all been very helpful in guiding us as we move forward with “an abundance of caution” to ensure the safety of all of our members.

Thank you to Jim Beall and the Finance Team, notably John Lanaway for the stewardship committee work. We are cautiously hopeful that we have turned a corner and look forward to more sustainable financial support for the ministry and mission of our congregation as we embark on the path of growth.

Thank you also to Scott Byer, Steve Van de Graaf and Tina St. Armand for their help in setting up a small but vital confirmation class. I am also enjoying facilitating the *Enneagram Journey* course for adults on Wednesday evenings and the Men’s Fellowship on Wednesday mornings... I look forward to that time when we can meet together “in-person” for learning and community!

We are in a period of reorganization and reorientation as a congregation, and I continue to meet new people inside and outside of our congregation to learn more about our history and legacy in this town. I would love to meet *you* and hear your response to the question: Why are we here? Seems to be an innocent enough question. How would you answer it? I’m interested in hearing from you. We have a great history and legacy to build upon.... But what is our vision, mission, and values for this new season going forward in a post-COVID, post-2020 election period and a challenging time for many people socially, economically, professionally, and spiritually?

We are here to serve children, youth, young adults, families, singles, and our older and wiser ones. Part of this means continuing to provide the best welcome we can for new members to our community and for those members who have “been on sabbatical” in recent months/years. Please pray with me for our church family to grow but to always maintain that “family” spirit.

I love our four mission pillars: *live spiritually; love inclusively; learn continuously; and leave a legacy...* But to what end? And how will we rebuild to realize our mission? What are the metrics that will help us measure how we are making progress?

One of my goals is that we will continue to be a congregation that is “internally strong and externally focused,” and so I have joined the Rotary Club, Exchange Club, local Clergy group, and participated in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day remembrance service on January 18, thanks to an invitation by Paul Martin, our congregation’s liaison to the Interfaith Council.

So many of you have shown the strength of our congregation through your love and kindness. Forgive me if I have not given credit where credit is due. Amidst all of the transitions and challenges that we have faced, some alone and some together, I look forward to this coming year and growing into the pastor that you deserve, and from less of the worst of times to more of the best of times!

Grace and peace to you all.

In Christ,

Scott



Parish Associate
Rev. Mary Marple Thies



What a year this has been! It is difficult to imagine that at this time last year, we were in the sanctuary every Sunday, children were attending Sunday School, the choir loft was full and no one had heard much at all about a mysterious virus in China. How quickly things change. By the middle of March, we came to know all too clearly the danger that surrounded us as we lost Ed and Vivian Elbert to COVID-19.

In the early part of 2020, I served as part of the church staff, working with Carol Howard Merritt, Bridge Pastor; Kathryn Kibbie Laird, Associate Pastor; Victoria Shields, Director of Music and Arts; Chris Tate, Parish Associate; Tina St. Armand, Office Manager; and Erika Plank Hagan, Administrative Assistant. In early March, we realized that church as we knew it would have to change, so we began making plans to take advantage of Zoom, not only for worship, but Sunday School, youth group, and meetings of all sorts. At this same time, Spencer Reeves joined us to help with technology. His facility with the gadgetry and magic of the same, was invaluable, as was his calm assurance that everything would, indeed, work.

Thanks to all of you who have made the effort to transition with us into new ways of doing and being church.

Over the spring and summer, our staff gradually diminished with Erika, Chris, Kibbie and Carol all moving on to new calls from God for their lives. I had the great pleasure of providing worship leadership during August, when we switched from using Zoom for the transmission of worship to Local Live. It has been a learning experience for us all. Again, thanks for hanging in with us.

Scott took up his new call with us in September and after, what I hope was a suitable period of time, I stepped back from worship, so that he could place his own mark on this service, which is at the heart of what it means to be a community of faith.

Throughout this time, my primary responsibility has been to provide pastoral care to the congregation. Until Scott's arrival, I had a joy of serving as resource staff to the Board of Deacons, as they carried out their important ministry of compassion and service. In addition, I have been blessed to share the pastoral care ministry with the Pastoral Care Team, composed of Evelyn Bergstrom, Peg Bull, Ted Foster, Anne Palmer and Sarah Robinson. These five people are faithful in their work and generous with their time and energy. Together we have kept in touch with church members who are living alone or in care facilities, are ill, have experienced surgery or loss of a loved one. I can no longer say that we reach out to those who are shut in, for, this year, that is true of us all! This means that we have not been able to do in person visitations as in the past, but have had to rely on the phone, email and notes. We look forward to the day when we will be able to resume that more personal care.

In addition, until Scott arrived, I was responsible for caring for families who had lost a loved one to death, and planning and officiating at memorial services and committal services. However, given the restrictions associated with COVID-19, those have been limited.

One of the great gifts of this year of change and the ones that preceded it, has been Tina St. Armand, the one I call The Source of All Knowledge. Without her generous sharing of information and gracious support, I would have been lost.

I am grateful for your support and welcome of my ministry among you and look forward to a time when that will again be done in person. But, virtual or in person, please know that you, the members of this church and the community of faith collectively, are in my prayers. May God bless the life that we share and give life to our witness in the world.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Mary Marple Thies

Music Ministry



2020 has been quite a year for the Music Ministry! I have oft been reminded particularly this year of the saying, “If you want to make God laugh, tell him our plans.” While 2020 wasn’t a laughing matter, it did shed light on how intensely we plan and how we handle life when those plans don’t go as planned. It highlighted what was important to us, and it became especially clear that the arts were important to us at FPC, and to our friends and family. 2020 was a time for quickly shifting plans and being creative to maintain involvement and to provide spiritual nourishment to our members and community. In unexpected ways, there were many positives about a year that seemed to shift constantly. “Turning lemons into lemonade” best describes the path of the Music Ministry this past year!

We started the year off by continuing our newly formed music lessons program with two organ students, a piano student, guitar student, and two voice students. The FPC Choir sang their now annual Valentine’s Day Coffee Concert combined with a brunch hosted by Barbara Wentzel and the congregational life committee in the common room. Singing Valentines were sung to those present as well as over the phone to our elderly and sick on Valentine’s Day.

In worship, the newly formed arts ministry supported worship services in our first observance of Candlemas on February 2nd, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and later in our Advent Meditations. Thanks to the help of Carol Howard Merritt, Kathryn Kibbie Laird, Jan Lucie, and the flower committee, we were able to enliven our space with creativity, and to deepen our understanding of the liturgical year and the theme our clergy wanted to communicate to the congregation.

A music-related class was added to the music ministry in October 2019 and has continued since then. We started off with “A History of Church Music,” then in January 2020 the class explored “Favorite Hymn Stories,” and when COVID-19 started we immediately took our class on Zoom and it eventually turned into “Musical Musings” - a survey of Sunday’s music, which still meets today. It has been a class for those interested in music, history and church history, and a great way for us to stay connected with each other.

Worship during COVID-19 started with pastoral and music staff leading worship in the sanctuary over Zoom. As Covidtide progressed, it made more sense to pre-record music with a soloist and drop in videos in Zoom services, while clergy and parishioners were “live.” It definitely made for a strange experience going to church on Sunday in my dining room! In August, LocalLive was finally ready and worship was live streamed in the sanctuary with staff, and volunteer lay readers.

One particular highlight in Covidtide worship was an organ tour in July. As we anticipated the installation of LocalLive, and with the summer heat growing, soloist Harper Stevenson and I recorded at cooler venues that had interesting instruments to showcase. I was surprised at the gracious hospitality of our hosts in a pandemic situation! Many thanks to the musicians and staff at Mt. Kisco Presbyterian, Trinity Episcopal Church in Southport, St. John’s Lutheran in Stamford, and Saugatuck Congregational Church. It helped to add interest in worship, various organs, and connected us with other local faith communities.

COVID-19 obviously has brought many challenges for our church community and the Music Ministry. For the FPC Choir, virtual choir was not really a sensible option for us. Instead, the option of attending Musical Musings, choir happy hours, and the establishment of a weekly concert series in place of Thursday night rehearsals has become the popular FPC Facebook Thursday Concerts. While it is not a traditional model, it has become a model that meets our people where they are, while broadening our ministry throughout the church and beyond our walls.

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In the fall, once we had convened outdoor worship, it was time to start to gather music-makers in a socially distant way. Choir wasn't ready to sing outside with masks on, but people were ready to play bells! We rehearsed outside at individual music stations with minimal sharing of bells, and masks on. It was fantastic to be able to make music together and we added three new ringers! When it became too cold outside, we rehearsed the same way in the sanctuary with the doors open until the rising COVID-19 numbers halted in-person worship. I'm sure we'll all be ready to ring when the weather is warmer!

The weekly FPC Facebook Thursday Concerts draw hundreds of views on Facebook - Ty Kelliher's live concert reached over 1,000 people! The concerts have featured FPC members, our section leaders, and my supportive colleagues. In addition, many of these members made videos at home in the early days of COVID-19 and we were able to share them as part of this series, albeit pre-recorded. When possible, the concerts are streamed live, providing a space for us to gather in real time online as part of the event itself. We've had people from around the world tune in!

In June, we used the FPC Thursday Concerts to highlight Juneteenth in a concert for trombone and organ featuring trombonist, Burt Mason. The program highlighted African American musicians and composers from history to present day. Through this concert and another event I hosted, we raised \$2,000 for the Phil Ramone Orchestra for Children, which promotes music education in underserved neighborhoods in New York City.

In July, we took our concerts live outside on the new patio behind the church! Nick Depuy, Ty Kelliher, The Kelliher/Mangone family, Ellen Sisson, Jan and Jim Lucie, Laurie Galbreath, and Harper Stevenson all contributed to these concerts, even though one was rained out and we had to move it to the sanctuary with masks on and spread across the room! We had a small group of parishioners gather safely outside as a first attempt to visit with one another in-person. It was such a treat to see people in-person! The concerts took vacation in August and returned once again in September and have been going strong since.

In October, the Thursday Facebook Concerts hosted an outdoor concert by pianist Andrew Armstrong. This collaboration with Channel 79's Bob Doran, Andrew Armstrong, their supporters, and FPC was the largest event hosted by the church in all of 2020. Pre-registration was limited to 100 people and was full within a day and a half. The concert took place on the circle in front of the sanctuary with party lights hanging from the trees and portico, and lamps lit pathways for this concert under the stars. Attendees brought chairs and picnic baskets and enjoyed being outside safely with others, listening to fine music by Mr. Armstrong and friends. The concert was also aired on Channel 79 as well as on its YouTube page, and on our FPC Facebook page. It was an amazing night that highlighted the importance of gathering in each other's company to appreciate fine live music. We had a wonderful team of volunteers manage registration, health forms, and temperature monitoring. It was a proud moment for FPC!

For Advent, we presented three programs entitled "Advent Meditations." Each program featured a reading and spoken meditation by Rev. Scott Herr, and musical meditations by a solo cellist, Renaissance luteist, and harpist. The Advent Meditations were professionally recorded and aired as part of the FPC Facebook Thursday Concerts, Channel 79, and Channel 79's YouTube page. The previous collaboration with Bob Doran on the Andrew Armstrong concert helped to bring this special series to a wider viewership and recognition from our town. The Advent Meditations series was also a great way to help Rev. Scott Herr be more visible in the New Canaan community. Thanks to some special Friends of Music angels, we were able to make this program happen. Music as outreach is showing great potential future growth for FPC.

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In December, we were faced with another major holiday of the church year during COVID-19 with parishioners worshipping from home. Because the Advent Meditations were a great success, we wanted to keep that momentum moving into Christmas. Because we are not utilizing more than one singer per week, we were able to afford to do something more substantial, while being safe on Christmas Eve. Six professional singers gathered for one rehearsal and a dress rehearsal with string quartet to share Vivaldi’s *Gloria* at our 10 pm service. It was yet another situation where the restrictions of COVID-19 took us in a direction we wouldn’t normally go in. The result was a beautiful service in a difficult time of not being together as a congregation per usual. We recorded the audio for the service ourselves, combined it with the LocalLive video, and condensed the *Gloria* into concert form that was shared widely on Facebook as well as on Channel 79 by Bob Doran. It was a blessing for many beyond the FPC community.

In all, there were things we missed in 2020 like a rousing Easter service, Scottish Sunday, our first beer and hymns night, “*AlleBREWya*” (which David Hill brewed fabulous beer for!), and the jazz mass combined with Round Hill Community Church that was scheduled for May. The music ministry was able to turn lemons into lemonade repeatedly. The result is that our ministry is reaching people not normally involved in the music ministry and reaching those outside our walls and beyond New Canaan. Parishioners who have moved away have checked in at our concerts and have even showed up at our choir happy hours! It is my hope that we may continue to explore ways to reach beyond our walls for the growth of FPC. Thank you to our pastors and staff, former chair of Worship, Music and Arts, Carole Clarkson, and Jan Lucie, our current chair of Worship, Music and Arts, as well as our parishioners who have supported all of us in this crazy time. Thank you for giving us room to expand this ministry and to reach people in ways I wouldn’t have thought possible. THANK YOU!!!



Soli Deo Gloria,
Victoria Shields,
Director of Music and Arts



The Chancel Guild is responsible for the maintenance, design and placement of textiles in the Sanctuary including banners and antependia in accordance with the church calendar and at the request of the Pastors. The Guild falls under the aegis of the Worship, Music and Arts Committee.

Cherub Choir

Sherry Tate, Director

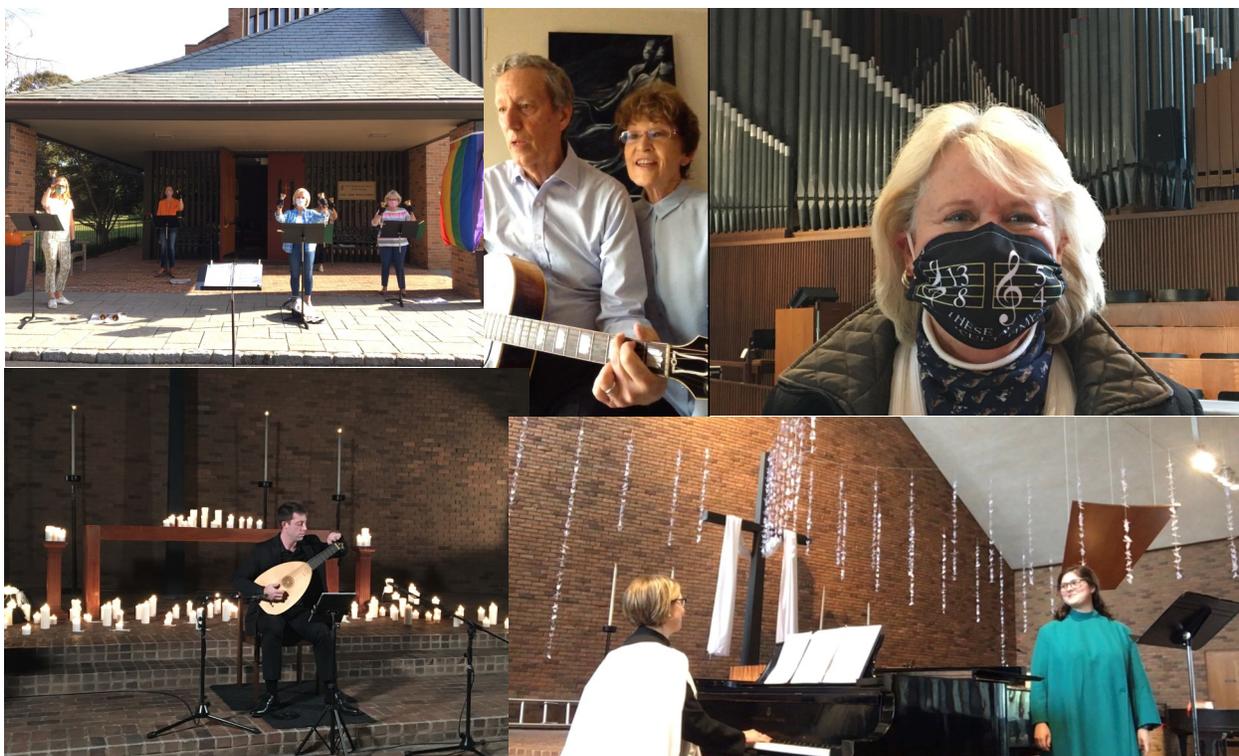
It is most difficult to write this report for the year 2020, as we all were confronted with a worldwide pandemic and the need to worship virtually, especially as the act of singing was itself shown to be a dangerous and open avenue for transmission of the coronavirus. As a result, in the year 2020, there was no gathering for choir rehearsals at any level from March through the end of the year. Consequently, the FPC Cherub Choir was sadly “on hold” for the entire year. What I present below is the plan for what the Cherub Choir has been in the past, in the hope that in time and with God’s help and blessing, our younger children may once again come together to “make music for the Lord.”

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 11:15 - 11:45. 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 some years have joined with older children to participate in a biblical-themed musical. Cherubs have sometimes joined with a group of older children to present an anthem in the Easter Sunday worship service.

The anthems and songs learned in Cherub Choir tend to be 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. Rehearsals frequently include movement to music as well as the use of rhythm sticks, melody bells, chime bars, tambourines, drums and other percussion instruments.

I believe the Cherub Choir is an important opportunity offered at FPC, as singing in Cherub Choir helps children experience how to serve God and church using their natural talents. They learn to cooperate with their peers to create a beautiful sound in expressing their joy and enthusiasm for the worship of the God who guides their lives.

Sherry Tate
Director



Summary of Monthly Attendance for 2020

Month	Sunday Worship	Special Services	Total
January			353
February		Youth Sunday 118 Ash Wednesday 50	447
March			508
April		Tenebrae 27 Easter Service 10AM 241	679
May			632
June			521
July			319
August			321
September			598
October			363
November			441
December		Christmas Eve 5:00 PM 67 Christmas Eve 10:00 PM 78	519
			Total 5701

Necrology and 2020 Memorial Services

Deaths:

January 21 Katharine Mountcastle
 January 26 Joseph Tracey Mackle
 March 18 Edward Joseph Elbert
 March 21 Vivian Tarbox Elbert
 September 12 Howard Greene
 September 25 Charles Daniel Bergfeld
 October 1 Robert Jay Schneider
 December 18 George Henry Megrue

Memorial Garden Interments and Services:

February 1 Joseph Tracey Mackle

Columbarium Interments:

July 12 Katharine Mountcastle
 October 26 Miriam Harlow Murphy

Memorial Garden Services:

October 10 Robert Jay Schneider

Lakeview Cemetery, New Canaan, CT

November 10 Roger Williams Rothballer



Co-Clerks of Session

John Lanaway and Jen Van de Graaf

2020 was a very difficult year in so many ways for our country, for our town and for our families. In such circumstances, we should be very grateful for how much progress we made here at the First Presbyterian Church of New Canaan. We began the year under the able stewardship of Bridge Pastor Rev. Carol Howard Merritt. Carol's steadying influence and excellent care assisted in our transition when we had to say a sad goodbye to Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird. Carol and Rev. Mary Marple Thies helmed worship and pastoral care until the arrival of our new, permanent Pastor and at that point we said another goodbye, with our heartfelt thanks, to Carol.

During the early stages of the COVID-19 lockdown, after we had suffered the very difficult loss of Ed and Vivian Elbert, members of Session, Deacons, and the Pastoral Care Team touched base with all members of our congregation, near and far, to ensure they were safe, to identify areas of need and to secure volunteers to help meet those needs.

In August, thanks to the efforts of our wonderful Pastor Nominating Committee (led by Bob Spangler) we welcomed our new Pastor Rev. Scott Herr and his family to New Canaan. They settled into our manse after returning to the US from 12 years in Paris. Rev. Herr's great energy and infectious optimism have infused our congregation with an excitement that we have been thirsting for.

Thanks to another great group of volunteers to keep us safe we worshiped in-person outdoors for the months of September and October. Scott dove right into the community; joining the Rotary Club and the Exchange Club and meeting with town leaders in order to find out how best to serve the community at large.

December and the season of Advent brought our watchful waiting for a Youth Director to a happy conclusion. We welcomed Courtney Steininger to our staff as Director for Youth and Families. Courtney's position is fully funded for 3 years due to the generosity of donors to the Pastor's Endowment Fund. Courtney will soon graduate from Princeton Theological Seminary and she will then be installed this summer as a minister in PCUSA and our Associate Pastor.

We ended the year with high hopes for the new era that we know has begun. The year 2020 will forever be known as a dark, sad year but in it we found sparks of life and great reasons for hope.

There are so many people we could thank for their service to our church this year, that we prefer not to take the chance of missing someone.

Onwards and upwards!

Jennifer Van de Graaf and John Lanaway,
Co-Clerks of Session



Courtney Steininger,
Director for Youth and Children's Ministries



PNC members: first row: Scott Beyer, Peg Bull, Cindy Graziano, Jennifer Gulden
Second row: Howard Palmer, Bob Spangler, Sherry Tate, Kevin Thomson

Buildings and Grounds

Charles Robinson

Members: Charlie Robinson, Jim Beall, Jim Riehl, Denise Riehl

The 2020 Buildings and Grounds work was focused on maintaining the Church buildings and grounds and on maintaining and improving the Manse.

Sanctuary – The LocalLive TV camera system was installed in the Sanctuary. This involved installing new wiring, additional IT equipment and two cameras. The system has proved a vital part of delivering Sunday Services to the Congregation during the pandemic. The plan is to continue these LocalLive TV broadcasts even when we resume in-person services so that those not able to attend in-person will still be able to participate from home.

In anticipation of in-person services, the Sanctuary air handling system was upgraded with the installation of an Ultraviolet (UV) lighting system to improve Sanctuary air purity and quality. In addition, one of the two Sanctuary boilers began to leak, showing its age. It was replaced with a new boiler in November.

Bliss House – Maintenance this year included replacement of the basement oil tanks. To assist members and staff with entry and exit to the Kitchen, a new handrail was installed on the outside step. Several interior areas were repainted.

Tate Barn – The Barn exterior was re-painted as well as the first-floor interior. Exterior windowsills on the west side of the building were also replaced.

Grounds – The Columbarium was power washed, and the mortar was refurbished. The stump from the large tree that fell near the wall on the front lawn was removed.

Manse – The Manse was originally built in 1964 and, as with all houses, requires ongoing maintenance and occasional refurbishment. The main project accomplished in 2020 was refurbishment of the master bath. In addition, the kitchen exhaust fan and hood lights were replaced. The stove was serviced and partially refurbished. The main entrance walkway stones were re-set, and a railing was installed. The driveway apron at the garage entrance was replaced and new garage doors are being installed.

Overall, the Church properties are being well maintained. No major projects are planned for 2021.



Manse bathroom refurbishment



The Pastor's Study

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 and Carolyn Wind

The Rev. Carol Howard Merritt was our Interim Minister at First Presbyterian Church of New Canaan until July 2020. Carol moved into the new church manse at 171 Jonathan Road in 2019 and members of the church were invited to a “Blessing of the Manse” on November 23, 2019.

In January, Jen and Steve Van de Graaf hosted an Icebreaker at their home. Everyone was happy to have the opportunity to get together. Thank you, Jen and Steve.

The Rev. Dr. Scott and Kim Herr arrived the end of August and Rally Day was September 13th. The worship service was held outside on the lawn.

There were two parties to introduce Scott and Kim Herr to members of the congregation. The first one was held at Sarah and Charlie Robinson’s home and the second at Dede and Jim Bartlett’s. Both parties were held outside because of COVID-19. A big thank you to the Robinsons and Bartletts.

In September of 2020, Stephan von Jena and Angela Johnson suggested that because there were so many people moving into New Canaan, we should have a way to introduce them to FPCNC. With the names and addresses of many new residents, teams of people began stuffing and delivering Welcome Bags. The bags included a letter from Scott with a brochure about the church, paper white bulbs from Copia Garden Center and a gift certificate to Gates Restaurant. One hundred Welcome Bags were delivered to new neighbors in New Canaan with 20 members of the church helping with this project.



In October, a few women of the church met on the patio to think about having a Women’s Ministry program. It was decided that this program would be called “Do you want a Faith Lift?” and we would meet the first Wednesday of each month from 4:00 - 5:30 pm. The Mission Statement began with “The First Presbyterian New Canaan Women’s Ministry seeks to be a progressive Christ-Centered gathering of women, encouraging one another in our faith journey through activities that offer spiritual formation and education, companionship and community service.” All women in the New Canaan Community and beyond are invited to join. Our first meeting was held on November 20th with Kim Herr as our speaker. She entertained us with stories and photos about her faith journey. Evelyn Bergstrom was our second speaker in December when she talked about the book she had written several years ago. She emphasized the word “Moment.” All meetings were held virtually on zoom.

Although we were unable to have several events and had to cancel some it was still a busy year.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Wentzel



Donna, Jeannie and Barbara assembling Newcomer’s Welcome Bags.

Communion Committee

Denise Riehl, Chair

Members: Barbara Beall, Lis Ely, Kip Farrell, Janet Lanaway, 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.”*

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, our committee has felt like lost sheep this past year. We cannot wait to resume preparing 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.

Our team gets a yearly schedule; and should there be a conflict we make changes and advise the office.

The schedule assigns two members, one to purchase bread and the other to assist. It is a great opportunity to get to know one another as well as appreciate the workings of preparing communion. Working in tandem allows a new member support and confidence as they come onboard.

We look forward to preparing communion again and invite anyone to join this committee.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise Riehl



Flower Committee

Peg Bull, Jan Lucie, Patty von Jena



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. Because of COVID-19 and only being on Zoom our committee also had to adapt. We had to consider camera angles and how our flowers should look. Our mission is to decorate the sanctuary, adding beauty, color, and nature.



We added purple during advent, shifting to red and green for Christmas. We are trying to have flowers weekly in the sanctuary, but only Peg & Patty have offered to help arrange flowers. Jan has been a life saver watering, keeping everything looking fresh and pretty. She arranged an incredible fall arrangement of pumpkins and gourds; she also arranges all the candles and sets up. We’d love your help! We’re happy to help or teach you on simple decorating. We need a bigger committee for when we can once again be together in the sanctuary - please join us!

Finance Committee

Jim Beall, Chair

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

The church had an operating deficit of \$96,157 in 2020 which was a \$78,084 decrease from our 2019 loss of \$175,141. Although revenue was down \$175,727, we were able to reduce expenses by \$251,711. The expense decrease was largely associated with lower personnel expenses, administrative expenses and building repairs. The revenue decline was largely due to a decrease in gifts of \$158,519 compared to 2019.

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 \$86,000 for the year. This will offset the annual depreciation charge of approximately \$72,000. In addition, the Church anticipates receiving a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) grant of \$90,130. In total, this will come very close to balancing the 2020 budget. During 2020, Building and Grounds work was focused on maintaining Church properties including improvement to the Manse. During this time of the pandemic and financial concern, the Church staff and volunteers are continuing to manage the church's financial position with care and prudence.

Operating Financials 2014 – 2020*

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Pledges	924,261	844,372	861,499	931,613	756,681	620,194	641,712
Plate	29,357	30,305	31,723	21,692	17,970	13,879	5,415
Gifts	122,666	58,637	98,847	59,014	80,505	191,716	33,197
Facility Rental	53,937	54,325	67,760	62,075	101,686	98,591	71,329
Other	<u>3,375</u>	<u>24,998</u>	<u>3,506</u>	<u>478</u>	<u>285</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Total revenues	1,133,596	1,012,637	1,063,335	1,074,872	957,127	924,380	751,653
Buildings & Grounds	214,017	189,568	162,591	267,987	273,630	227,398	165,038
Children's Ministries	8,143	7,344	16,513	32,514	12,356	9,862	2,634
Outreach	46,143	32,021	4,812	43,866	30,528	34,893	31,797
Administration	163,294	166,486	163,192	89,281	100,035	129,731	98,345
Congregational Life	3,855	1,689	2,559	1,127	2,063	4,353	4,369
Membership	534	539	1,120	1,596	3,232	2,032	450
Personnel	618,674	612,252	595,408	549,078	537,145	611,998	492,523
Youth	13,501	9,159	11,990	20,101	13,725	15,699	9,119
Worship, Music and Arts	<u>59,468</u>	<u>66,710</u>	<u>53,004</u>	<u>63,591</u>	<u>64,863</u>	<u>63,555</u>	<u>43,535</u>
Operating expenses	1,127,629	1,085,768	1,011,189	1,069,141	1,037,577	1,099,521	847,810
Operating Surplus	5,967	-73,131	52,146	5,731	-80,450	-175,141	-96,157
(Deficit) Unaudited						PPP Grant	90,130
						Net Deficit	-6,027

*exclusive of investment gains and depreciation

Investment Committee

Jim Ely, Chair

Members: Jim Beall, John and Janet Lanaway

Despite one of the most volatile periods in economic history, the FPCNC investment portfolios generated positive returns for 2020. As has been the case for a number of years, our Reserves account was invested in a conservative portfolio of investment grade fixed income and equity index funds during the year, and returned 6.8% for the year ended 12/31/20, versus 18.4% for the year ended 12/31/19. Additionally, on 11/10/20, we created a Youth and Family Fund, which will be used to hold the proceeds from donations received in support of our new Director of Youth and Children’s Ministries, Courtney Steininger, and our upcoming youth and family programs. The Fund’s year-end balance of \$238,230 is currently in cash, and will be invested in high-quality cash equivalent investments given the Fund’s expected 3-4 year lifespan. Finally, our Operating account is used to hold excess cash and to receive/sale donated stock received over the course of the year. The Operating Account had a balance of \$4,857 on 12/31/20.

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

Respectfully, Jim Ely

First Presbyterian Church of New Canaan

Reserves Account

For The Quarter and Year To Date Ended December 31, 2020

		<u>12/31/2020</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Holdings as of 12/31/2020:	Cash	\$766.39	
	Bank Sweep	\$10,510.34	
	Money Market	<u>212,159.96</u>	
	Total Cash	223,436.69	16.5%
	PIMCO Enhanced Short Term ETF	130,611.20	
	Doubleline Low Duration Bond Fund	164,335.33	
	Doubleline Total Return Bond Fund	<u>167,473.83</u>	
	Total Fixed Income	462,420.36	34.1%
	Schwab S&P 500 Index Fund	332,890.84	
	Schwab Total Stock Market Index Fund	<u>337,713.57</u>	
Total Equities	<u>670,604.41</u>	<u>49.4%</u>	
Total Investments	\$1,356,461.46	100.0%	
Investment Performance:	Balance September 30, 2020:	\$1,274,477.39	
	Balance December 31, 2020:	\$1,356,461.46	
	4Q Return:	6.4%	
	Balance December 31, 2019:	\$1,269,743.50	
	Balance December 31, 2020:	\$1,356,461.46	
	YTD Return:	6.8%	

Membership Involvement Committee

Linda Ferguson, Chair

Members: Jennifer Gulden, Barbara Wentzel

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 seven confirmands and baptized one infant and one adult. Two families transferred their membership to other churches. Sadly, eight of our members died during the year. Our 2020 final membership number stands at 385.

Our committee looks forward to continuing to help make First Presbyterian Church a warm and welcoming spiritual home for both visitors and members.

Baptisms:

May 10 Suzanne Lynch, via Zoom, with Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird and Rev. Carol Howard Merritt officiating.

September 26 Rorie Olivia Joseph, daughter of Ashley Kniffin and Cyril Lance Joseph, with Rev. Dr. R. Scott Herr officiating.

Confirmands:

Brian Doster Crowell

Pryor Anne Gilbert

Carter Charles Lightburn

Isabella Ama Madrid

Susan Nelson Peter

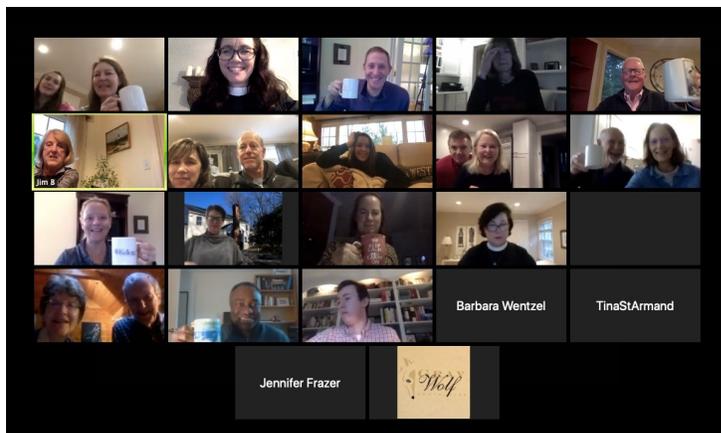
Emily Grace Rodgers

Brooks David Wunderlich

Transfers:

Willing and Catherine Biddle, Bronxville of Reformed Church, Bronxville, NY

James, Anne, Maeson, Tema and Chandler Wagner, Congregational Church of New Canaan



Virtual Coffee Hour photo



We are going to miss you beautiful people!! But, in order to stay healthy and safe, we will be moving our services on to livestream. Watch your email for more information. (March 13, 2020)

Mission Ministry
Abo Noktah Family Update 2020

It has been a tough year for all of us, and actually “getting together” with the Abo Noktahs has been, as you would expect, impossible. The family continues to do well and are pretty self sufficient at this point. Those who were able to view the on-line Stewardship Sunday service will have been able to see that for themselves, and to hear how grateful the family remains for everything that has been done for them and for the strong support and encouragement they continue to receive from Stamford Fish Church and from our own First Pres.

The three eldest children are all now at Stamford's West Hills High School. Hanin, the eldest daughter, is a junior and already starting to plan for college - she has a lot of potential and ambitious plans for her future. The two sons, Yaman (sophomore) and Ahmed (freshman) are also enrolled at West Hills. Zain, the middle daughter (Grade 4) continues at K T Murphy Elementary School, a convenient 2 block walk from their very nice garden apartment. Baby Hayat's main responsibility remains to be spoiled and played with by her four siblings.

Currently Hanin and Zain are fully remote learning, and the boys are in a hybrid mode, attending school in person every other day. The four school-aged children each have an individual chrome book provided by Stamford Public Schools, which will need to be returned at the end of the academic year. Hanin also has an Apple desktop set up in her room, but the family computer the boys use has recently broken.

Hanin remains active with Horizons at New Canaan Country School, as part of their "Academic Coaching" program for High Schoolers. It has converted from a 1:1 in-person advisor/advisee model, in which she had weekly phone calls with her assigned advisor and periodic in-person sessions, to a virtual "teams" model. Each team includes a staff member with an academic focus, another with a social-emotional focus and one with a skill-building focus. Hanin's cohort of 11th graders meets with their assigned advisor "team" by Zoom on Tuesday evenings, to discuss high school challenges and college prep. What an awesome assist....

Hanin plans to register for a business program in college. Kay Pfaff, a wonderful Fish Church volunteer (pictured below), is also working very closely with Hanin, who has already taken a practice SAT and is registered for the official test on March 13th. Hanin is also looking to do volunteer work to round out her resume, so we will try to help with that if we can.

Zain was the only sibling eligible to participate in the 2020 "anchor" K - 8th Summer Program, which was also converted to fully remote. Participating students received books, materials, the annual T Shirt, and extras such as a Shop Rite gift card.

We will continue to keep this family in our thoughts and prayers and help in any way possible as the children mature and the parents worry about family members, particularly aging parents, still in Syria.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn Quinn
 John Lanaway



Nominating Committee

Linda Ferguson

Chair and Session Representative

Members:

Rev, Scott Herr, John Lanaway

Jen Van de Graaf

Pastor Nominating Committee

Scott Beyer, Peg Bull, Cindy Graziano,

Jen Gulden, Bob Spangler, Sherry Tate,

Kevin Thomson

Director of Youth and Children

Laurel Carlson, Randy Ferguson,

Lisa Gifford, Alexandra Gillespie,

Mark Magnusen, Christine Mangone,

Rev. Scott Herr, Julie Reeves, Vivi

Reeves, Megan Wunderlich

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

Jim Ely, Chair

Monthly Counters:

Jim Beall

Margaret Cooper

Jim Ely

Mike Farrell

Peggy Hooker

Marlene Powers

Tom Quinn

Bob Spangler

Personnel Committee

Randy Ferguson, Chair

The session . . . has the responsibility . . . to provide for the administration of the program of the church, including employment of non-ordained 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 Senior Pastor - 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 Senior 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 Senior Pastor 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
John Lanaway, Chair

THE TIDE HAS TURNED!

I would like, first, to recognize a wonderful group of pledge captains who were so diligent and hard working for this year’s effort. A smaller Delta Force continues to harass the recalcitrant few!

Jim Beall	Team Ferguson	Paul Martin
Team Bull	Andrew Gifford	Lynn Quinn
Bob Caird	Doug Gillespie	Jim Riehl
Jim Ely	Team Lucie	Team Van de Graaf

As of February 2, pledges for 2021 have been received from 135 pledging units for \$722K (2020 final – 142 for \$652K). Eight families were lost from last year’s list due to deaths or moves and three new families have arrived or returned to the fold. As mentioned above, we are still chasing a few for 2021 so when we are all done the 2021 campaign will definitely be better than laid out above.

The most important message we can all take from this result is that First Pres is back - alive, well and ready for its next prolonged period of growth and service. Your generosity, with your time and with your treasure, will make all of that possible.

But Stewardship is not just about the money. The enthusiasm that we heard in the course of calls, for our new permanent pastor and for the path we are now on, was energizing to see and hear.

Stewardship Sunday was, like everything else, a little different this year. We were able, during the virtual service, to hear from the Abo Noktah family as an important reminder of what Stewardship is really all about – the good work we do in the broader community. We then enjoyed a “holiday sweater” drive through at the church where we took in a good number of pledge cards and had a lot of fun - despite the fact that the fix was clearly in on the ugliest sweater contest....

Thanks to all of you for helping to maintain this place of peace and reflection for those who will come after us!



Left: Ugly Sweater Contest participants; Middle: George and Jeannie; Right: John and Rev. Scott Herr



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.

Worship, Music and Arts Committee

Jan Lucie, Chair

In March we settled into a beautiful display of origami doves of peace hung by your ministerial staff. Small individual doves were shared with the congregation, and we ventured into an unknown territory of how to worship in ways we never could have imagined. Your ministerial staff led by Bridge Pastor, the Rev. Carol Howard Merritt, the Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird, the Rev. Mary Marple Thies, the Rev. Chris Tate, and Victoria Shields, Director of Music and Arts, responded to this challenge with energy and creativity. With little time lost, we began to worship by Zoom and later transitioned to the more music adaptable LocalLive, continuing this worship experience with only one Sunday lost to internet outage due to a late July storm. By September 13th we were worshipping at 10:00 AM outside under the Ferguson tent on the east side of the building, sharing Rally Day with an 8:00 AM service from the sanctuary on LocalLive for those whom an in-person choice was not advisable or impossible due to distance. Thanks to LocalLive we discovered that members and former members who live a distance away could now avail themselves of our services and have become more involved in the life of this congregation. Our appreciation to Spencer Reeves for his dedication and insight operating the sound system. Many thanks to those who diligently worked to make these transitions possible: Leaders Jim Riehl, Jim Beall, Serena Gillespie, Randy Ferguson, and Jim Ely. So many others responded to requests to help out including Mark, Audrey, and Layla Magnusen, Bob Spangler, and Peggy Hooker. How vital has been the insight of Session's Co-Clerks, Jen Van de Graaf and John Lanaway.

To facilitate a successful transition from the services of our Bridge Pastor Carol Howard Merritt and those of the Rev. Kathryn Kibbie Laird and the Rev. Chris Tate, we were blessed with the leadership of the Rev. Mary Marple Thies for the month of August.

On Rally Day, September 13th, we welcomed the Rev. Dr. Scott Herr and his wife Kim to our enthusiastic congregation. Our great gain is Paris, France's great loss to Presbyterian worship! Scott has spent countless hours learning our traditions, choices and challenges and is constantly inviting us to go beyond anything we could have imagined.

Late in October we tried socially distanced by reservation worship in the sanctuary, but in November numbers of increased COVID-19 infection caused us to solely depend upon LocalLive. An extremely creative Christmas Eve family worship service at 5:00 PM was devised by Rev. Herr and transmitted by Zoom. Communion has continued to be celebrated, as it was on Christmas Eve at a 10:00 PM service, on the first Sundays of each month. Per health considerations the elements have been served in small, individual packets containing both bread and juice.

A recent webinar given by the American Guild of Organists explored how congregations have adjusted to worship during the pandemic restrictions. Our very talented Director of Music and Arts, Victoria Shields, has aced this! Each item mentioned by the panelists representing much larger congregations than our own has been met by Victoria with zeal and musicianship abounding, keeping our music ministry on its traditionally inspiring high level. Adjusting from a full choir led by four talented section leaders to quartets and then to soloists, she has continued to lead us musically in our spiritual quests. Please refer to her report for the many new music experiences she has instituted to keep our congregation in touch with our music traditions and with each other.

Our support of Victoria and the ministerial staff continues into the new year. With the tremendous support of Peggy Hooker, who secured ushers for all services from Rally Day into November, and the flower committee of Peg Bull and Patty von Jena, we have been able to explore new ways of worship and sharing of the arts. Please consider volunteering to be readers and ushers by utilizing the Sign-Up Genius created by Serena Gillespie: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/30e0b4aaaad2aa31-sunday> 2021 welcomes us with new challenges and our committee seeks members to fulfill these tasks. Please let me know of your interest.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan Lucie

Right: All Saints Day
Candle Table.
Far Right: The
Ferguson Family
participating in
Sunday's Service



Board of Deacons

Elizabeth Stuart and Steve Van de Graaf
Co-Moderators

Members

Peg Bull
Carole Clarkson
Barbara Dahill
Donna Hill
Augie Kelliher
Nancy LaBadie
Janet Lanaway
Linda Martin
Nell Smith
Elizabeth Stuart
Steve Van de Graaf
Nick Woods

Ministries

Pastoral Care Team
Flowers and Gifts
New Member Liaison
Baptisms, Inspirica/Outreach
Co-Youth
Member At-Large
Cards and Letters
Secretary/Communications
Nominating
Treasurer
Driving, Memorial Services
Co-Youth

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.

Reaching out to 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 2021, 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.



Left: Rorie Olivia Joseph baptism, with Rev. Scott Herr officiating. Right: Anne Kniffin, grandmother of Ashley Kniffin Joseph, and great-grandmother of Rorie, Forrest, and Chloe Joseph.

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.

A New Year Blessing
With the first light of the sun God bless you
When the day is done God bless you
Through each day of your years God bless you

On January 2, 2020 we began our first gathering of the new year with our Words of the Week segment. Our Words for the new year are always a blessing. We were excited to be back at church and looked forward to being together, hearing God’s word, sharing faith and fellowship and our caring for each other, creating art, doing acts of kindness, singing together, celebrating everything, and sharing in God’s Grace. Before we knew it, March and COVID-19 arrived, changing life as we knew it. While this pandemic has been difficult for everyone it has been especially trying for our special needs community. The structure of a daily routine, socialization, work, and all activities ceased abruptly.

So, what do you do when you can’t go to Special Church? We felt that it was imperative that we keep our members engaged within the boundaries set by pandemic guidelines. There was only one right decision. We would take Special Church on the road and into the world of Zoom. Matt Hennessy, our music therapist and favorite “music guy,” arranged a weekly music session for us on Zoom. How great that we get to see and greet each other and sing our favorite songs with Matt every Thursday afternoon!

Special Church on the Road has had several outings as well. We wear our masks, jump in our cars, and make socially distant stops at our members’ homes to drop off crafts that can be done at home, Halloween treat drop-offs (in costume of course), or maybe just a socially distant visit in the yard or through a window. Even Santa couldn’t come to Special Church in 2020 but he did send stockings stuffed with gifts for his helpers to drop off! One of the best road trips was Music on the Road. Our volunteers and Matt formed a caravan and took music to everyone at their home. Masked and spread out across yards we read our Words of the Week and sang accompanied by Matt on his guitar. At one stop the neighbors also came out on their porches and sang along with us! What a gift that afternoon was!

Yes, 2020 has been different for sure, but what hasn’t changed is God’s love for us and our love for each other. We have been blessed in ways we never imagined. Our lights still shine. We send thanks to all of our angels here on earth who support our efforts to keep our Special Church family together. Don’t worry FPC, we’ll be back ASAP filling the Common Room with love and joy!

I conclude my report with our Special Church prayer. Father, we are thankful. May we ever be mindful of our blessings. We are

