

2020

ANNUAL REPORT



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
CONCORD

Celebrating the Joy of Giving
IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC

MISSION & OUTREACH • CHRISTIAN FORMATION • CONGREGATIONAL CARE
WORSHIP & MUSIC • FIRST KIDS • SCOUTS



2020 Annual Report

Celebrating the Joy of Giving

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH | CONCORD

2020 will long be remembered as the year of the pandemic, the year of Covid to be more specific. Our year began with the usual burst of energy and enthusiasm which typically occurs in January. By late February we shared the anxiety of the rest of the world as the seriousness of this virus emerged and as it touched our community. In March we closed our campus but emphasized while we were closing a geographical space including our lovely sanctuary, we were not closing our church!

The articles in this Annual Report illustrate how our own set of heroes—staff and volunteers—creatively continued the work of the church while coping with the challenges produced by this virus. Their leadership ensured God’s love and concern for others was centered in our church activities, programs and through our mission outreach to the community.



As an example, in June the Session appointed a “Reopening Committee” chaired by Amy Woolwine which worked tirelessly to develop a plan to reopen the campus in the fall. With an emphasis on following the science, the plan included 20 specially trained volunteer ushers. It was to be implemented in the fall but a spike in Covid prevented this reopening. When appropriate, this plan will be launched in 2021.

Our annual gifts and pledges including those from the budget of the Presbyterian Women were a significant commitment to Christ’s teaching to love and serve our neighbors as ourselves. Gifts and grants were made possible for non-profits, schools, individuals and other worthy groups throughout the community. The significant impact of estate gifts to our First Presbyterian Church Foundation continued to positively affect our annual budget.

During 2020, it was evident that our church family, while separated from one another physically, remained connected spiritually through our love of God and knowledge that He is always with us!

Worship & Music Committee

R E S P O N D S T O C O V I D

Carol Hovey, Moderator of the Worship & Music Committee, shared how worship continued throughout 2020, though in a different format!

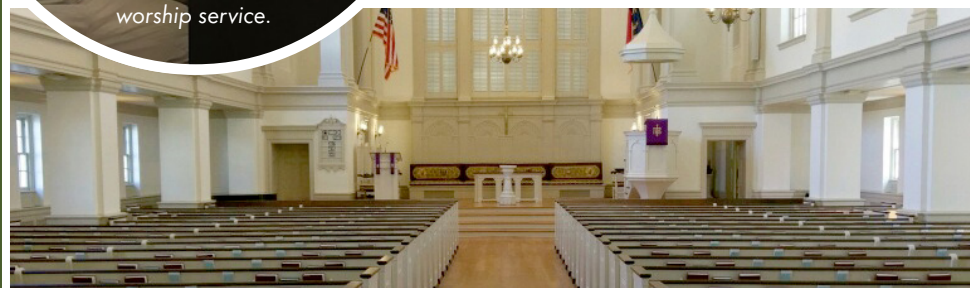
- When in-person gatherings were prohibited by the North Carolina pandemic guidelines in March 2020, we closed our Sanctuary for worship and also postponed alternate worship services such as a jazz vesper service being planned by Margaret Irvin. Many worship-related celebrations quickly became “drive-through” events including the Flowered Cross Service.
- Our immediate challenge was to quickly create a virtual on-line worship service that could be accessed through a YouTube page. We experimented with finding the best approach to deliver sermons from our ministers’ homes while, at the same time, inserting our much-loved music ministry throughout the service. (See Music Ministry, page 3.)
- Our solution was to order and install new audio and video equipment and train members to video tape worship services. We thank Hunter Morrison and his team of trained technology wizards for making this happen! Our updated technology resulted in the congregation being able to pledge and give online to include texting our offerings

to the church! Dave Sheridan, Worship Committee member said, “Our progress in the technology world has leaped well ahead of what we might have anticipated if we were not pushed into this by the confines of the virus.”

- A congregational survey was conducted to gather ideas on making our services more meaningful and how to increase connections during the pandemic while we were not “in person.” The 126 respondents indicated they desired to have a “mix” of worship services to include both formal and informal offerings and that most members were reading the Banner. Susan Smith, Worship Committee member said, “We have worked in harmony with staff and other committees to ensure that our members continue to have meaningful experiences through alternative services.”
- Lay Readers were invited to participate in the worship services via video—it was wonderful to “see” members of our church family again. Susan Otteni, Worship Committee member said, “We are so grateful to Director of Music and Organist Jacquie Yost for volunteering to tape these people. She really went above and beyond her traditional role to help our church feel connected.”
- Information normally included in our printed bulletins was included on the video at the end of the service. This addition which started in the fall was appreciated by so many. “Thanks” to Church Administrator Suzanne Russell for preparing this part of the service.



Hunter Morrison videos worship service.



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Music Ministry

Jacquie Yost, Director of Music Ministry & Organist, created a thought-provoking word picture of the effects of the pandemic on the Music Ministry during 2020 and beyond. The following excerpts are from Jacquie's reflections.

Before the pandemic, worship in our church came in one form: in-person, in one location, and in one time. Yet, these now coveted traits of in-person worship had other less controlled attributes. Whom might you see in worship? What might an eager child say during the children's sermon? Indeed, these elements of "chance" and "spontaneity" would now ironically be welcomed guests in the virtual world into which we have acclimated. **But perhaps as we move into a post-pandemic world, we may consider the benefits of what virtual worship has offered us in mitigating the less-desirable effects of social distancing and isolation.**

First, virtual worship allows for its viewers to worship at any time. Others whose lives are bombarded by virtual education for their children and the stresses therein of working at home with their children have said how "binge-worthy" our services are once the children have gone to bed. **Our Joy Gift and Taylor Glen musical concerts provided an oasis for so many and can still be viewed on our YouTube website.**

Virtual worship also allowed for our members to see other venues like readers' homes and even the organ console. **One member commented how she had never been up to the organ loft and had never seen how an organ worked!**

The editing of not only different camera angles of our musicians and choir members but merging other images and art within our musical offerings truly add another dimension to worship like we have never experienced. Our musical presentations slowly began to insert "text" of our anthems on the screen in time with the music. **Not only did this allow for a quick understanding of the anthems and its relationship with the sermon, but for participation and community!**

But what has truly made all of this happen has been the **unwavering and devoted efforts of the Sanctuary Choir to make music for our congregation in witness to God's**

faithfulness and never-failing love. The lengthy recording sessions to maximize everyone's presence at that very time to achieve the greatest number of anthems for the following weeks were not easy. It was difficult not to hug each other during these sessions!

Our entire Christmas repertoire was recorded within eight days before Thanksgiving! Jeffrey Price and I were afraid that a spike in Covid numbers after Thanksgiving might eliminate another opportunity for recording music for Christmas. Although **the vocal and mental fatigue acquired from recording this amount of repertoire in one sitting can be draining, we did it, and with excellent results and reception!**

And last, but certainly not least, **the music at FPC through its recorded and instantly available means through our website has also provided a much-needed source of comfort for those in our congregation and community undergoing grief and loss during this time of isolation.**

Virtual worship and its peripheral benefits are still improving and may provide even more opportunities for mission and outreach as we venture into 2021.



Andrew Garrison joins Jacquie Yost in a duet.



Christian Formation in the midst of a pandemic

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

2020 marked the beginning of a new decade and our church year began with interesting areas of study and exciting church events scheduled.

Prayer Study Launched in January - Rev. Rachel Vagado launched a six-week prayer study January 16 for those curious about prayer. Reimagining Prayer was held during the lunch hour in the Commons Prayer Room, a very appropriate environment for the subject. An opportunity to join the group via Zoom was also offered. A set of images by artist Schott Erickson helped explore some of the frustrations surrounding personal prayer practices. The group used this information to reframe how to enter into a deeper conversation with the Divine.

Church Retreat Held on Campus Feb 21-23 - Diana Butler Bass, a renowned independent scholar of American religion and culture, was the featured guest speaker and leader of our three-day Annual Retreat held on our campus and opened to the community.



On Friday evening, guests had dinner in Davis Hall and then moved to the sanctuary to hear her keynote address where she introduced the theme of the weekend, "Faith & the Common Good: How Empathy & Compassion Transforms Our World!" Those gathered had an opportunity to participate in vibrant discussions as part of the question and answer segment following her remarks.

Participants gathered on Saturday morning for breakfast in Davis Hall for the beginning of a workshop. Her remarks sparked energetic conversation conducted within small groups at each table and then table leaders summarized remarks from their table to all participants.

One topic of particular interest was how churches throughout the United States are taking a closer look at the use of their buildings which, for many hours throughout the week, stand empty. How can a church best use these spaces to serve the community and perhaps create income from their use to be used to benefit the mission outreach programs of the church?

On Sunday, February 23 Butler Bass preached a sermon entitled "Transfiguration of the Lord." Again, the community was invited to attend.

More than 100 people participated in the Annual Retreat. Several church members volunteered during the three days to direct traffic and assist with this special happening in the life of our church.

GIFT Sundays Planned - To encourage intergenerational learning, the Christian Formation Committee created a program to be held the fourth Sunday of each month called "GIFT Sundays." GIFT—Generations in Faith Together—Sundays brought our congregation together at 9:45 am for a light breakfast and was the only Sunday school offering that morning with all classes meeting together in Davis Hall. Designed to help us learn and grow in faith, this event was well attended and planned to occur throughout the year.

COVID STRIKES CHRISTIAN FORMATION PROGRAMS

Sunday School for Children - At the beginning of the 2020 calendar year, all Sunday school classes continued in place with commitment from church volunteers to teach and assist with youth programs. As the pandemic emerged, a decision was made in early March to shut down the campus and all related programs being held on the campus.

With leadership by Rev. Rachel Vagado and assistance from the Christian Education Committee, Rachel announced on March 29th a weekly virtual Sunday school lesson would be offered during the regular Sunday school hour for all ages. She said, "Regardless of the pandemic, we will gather to connect, hear stories from and for our faith and learn together." These virtual lessons continued in the fall and in addition children were provided take-home kits each month and five-minute videos by Rachel each Sunday morning.



Adult Sunday School - For the four Sundays in May, the Journey Class began to meet by Zoom which would be followed by outdoor meetings during the summer and then in-person, safe meetings with masks and social distancing in the fall.

The S&D Class began Zoom meetings soon after the Journey Class which continued throughout 2020.



Journey Class meets in June.



A Creative Staycation Bible School held July 27-31

The Footsteps of Jesus was the theme of Vacation Bible School which earned the name "Staycation Bible School" due to those participating from the comfort and safety of their home. Another add-on was the advantage of participating while on vacation because of the kits prepared for the week. Kits included Bible stories, crafts, snacks and service ideas for the student and family to do together.

A daily video was delivered to their inbox each day of the week with the Bible story, as well as links to music and movement videos and songs. This was designed so that the parent could choose the time each day their child would watch the video and when to do the crafts and other explorations. Children attending were ages 4 through 5th grade. Families of the First Kids program were also offered a chance to enroll and kits were delivered by First Kids teachers to their homes.





The Todd Hobbie Class suspended meeting until they were able to meet in person again.

Lenten Kits Prepared - Lenten kits for family worship at home were prepared. They included special cards for inspirational study and candles to be used during this time of reflection.

4th Graders Receive Bibles - As has long been the tradition of our church, 4th graders were presented a Bible from the church. This year, a photo of each child was shown as part of the YouTube church service. A member of the Christian Education Committee delivered the Bible to each 4th grader's home.

High School Seniors Remembered - Another tradition has been to have a reception for the graduating seniors. This year clever care packets were delivered to the homes of these graduates. During another YouTube worship service, a special video was shown honoring these students sharing where each student was

headed following graduation. Creative banners were posted on both Union St. and Church St. celebrating these graduates.

Rally Day Kicks Off New Church School Year in September - Rally Day was another virtual celebration. Via video, each Christian Education Committee member introduced what their respective areas had to offer and encouraged those interested to participate, despite Covid, another way to grow in faith and remain connected to the church family.

Several youths from our church explored the struggles of those who are living on the margins within and around Asheville during the Youth Mission Weekend in February 2020. Their host was the Asheville Youth Mission which works with a variety of agencies working with the homeless, in poverty, or food insecurity.

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First Kids Preschool Program by Maureen O'Bryan, Director

The year 2020 brought many dramatic changes to the world. Our goal at First Kids was to make sure our preschoolers and their families felt emotionally and academically supported as we learned to adapt to the Covid rollercoaster of changes.

On Friday, March 13, 2020 we, like the rest of the world, closed our school for in-person classes as mandated. We quickly rallied, and by the following Monday morning our staff was providing on-line virtual instruction for music, science, math, and literacy and more. Take-home kits, Zoom meetings, supportive calls and drive-by virtual hugs helped us all keep connected through the spring.



Our May graduation ceremony, which usually takes place in the sanctuary, was transformed into a Graduation Car Parade down Union Street, complete with fire trucks, police cars, banners, a string quartet and heart-warming cheers from our neighbors. Preschool parent Kelly McCarthy said, "That uplifting parade was a unifying event our whole neighborhood needed, something normal, something to cheer about during such a difficult time."

Over the past 64 years, over 2000 children have graduated from First Kids and crossed over the Graduation Bridge. In addition to the parade, the bridge was set up in the courtyard so the 2020 graduates were able to return, diplomas in hand, to have their photo made crossing the bridge.

We were able to re-open for in-person instruction in September, just in time to celebrate our 65th Birthday. The sheer joy and exuberance expressed by the children, parents and teachers, who were all so happy to be back, made all the cleaning, mask-wearing and temperature-taking worthwhile.

"My children are ecstatic to be at First Kids. Even when it's not a school day for us, we ride by the building and they get excited," parent Caroline Jarvis chuckled.

Director Maureen O'Bryan said, "The challenges of 2020 have only served to strengthen our purpose and focus to provide sensory-rich, highly-intentional, early learning experiences in a loving and creative environment for the young children who are called First Kids. We are blessed to be an important mission of the First Presbyterian church as we grow minds and share God's love with the children of our community."



First Kids offers:

- **Half-Day Classes** for children ages 6 months through Transitional Kindergarten
- **Highly-Trained staff** with low student-to-teacher ratios
- **Music and Movement Classes**
- **Monthly Chapel Experiences**
- **The Creative Curriculum Program** with emphasis on hands-on, developmentally appropriate experiences
- Partnership with **UNC Charlotte's Building Healthy Lifestyles Initiative**

2020 THROUGH THE LENS OF Presbyterian Women

A Report by René Prager,
Presbyterian Women Moderator 2020-2021

There is no pause button for Presbyterian Women; 2020 was a very busy year! Before the pandemic, our circles met for monthly Bible studies January through March. We hosted our Spring Spiritual Nurture event with the dynamic Jamie Valvano on March 8, 2020, as the last in-person gathering for the year.

During times of crisis, the work of Presbyterian Women increases, rather than takes a break. Thanks to Susan Brooks and our outstanding Backpack team, the families in need at Coltrane Webb did not miss a single week of food provisions. Betsy Morrison led our Night Shelter team through the Covid-prompted changes to our week-long dinner service in May. This included a drop-off dinner delivery instead of serving indoors and providing paper products to assist with safety protocols. These guidelines were followed in September and December.

Both the Funeral Meal and Meal Ministry teams made adjustments to how meals were delivered in 2020, but they were dedicated to providing meals to the sick or recovering, families of new babies, and those gathering for the loss of a loved one.

Our coordinating team worked throughout the summer to establish the annual budget, edit the directory, and attempt to plan the upcoming year. With the goal of returning in-person, we delayed the start of the year by one month, but it became evident that most of

our meetings and gatherings would need to transition to a virtual forum.

In 2020, over 100 women participated in Presbyterian Women: as a circle member, coordinating team member, in fellowship, mission, or congregational care. We were excited to welcome a number of young adult women as active members of our organization this year.

Four circles resumed meeting in October: two in person and two via Zoom. Circle service projects included Rose of Thanks, local schools, CVAN, CCM, Santa on Wheels, and DHS.

A new card ministry for our older congregation members was established.

Presbyterian Women operated on its own budget of under \$5,000. No line item is in the church's annual budget for Presbyterian Women. Instead, our annual income is derived from pledges made directly to PW by women of the church. Many lives are touched by these contributions from this dedicated team of women, both within our congregation and throughout our community!

We were grateful for the support of the congregation, as well as for Lynne and Rachel for their meaningful participation in our special events, to Christy Cannup for keeping our financial records, to Suzanne Ritchie for her amazing contributions to our communication, and to Heath for ensuring that we had everything we needed for our in-person offerings.

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. -1 Peter 4:10

Presbyterian Women

Honorary Life Membership Award

Marcia Brooks received the 2020 Honorary Life Membership Award for her dedication to the mission of Presbyterian Women and her outstanding commitment to the work of the church. This award is normally presented at the Birthday Luncheon event in May, which was cancelled in 2020. Instead, Susan Hannah, 2019-2020 PW Moderator, coordinated a surprise presentation in Marcia's front yard. Marcia and her family were greeted by women from Circle 3 and members of the Coordinating Team outside her home.



Marcia Brooks, left, with 2019-2020 PW Moderator Susan Hannah.



Circle 3 and Coordinating Team surprise Marcia!

Fall 2020-2021 Kick-Off Event

The kick-off to our 2020-2021 year looked a bit different. Instead of dinner and fellowship, we met, masked, on the driveway on the church grounds. Presbyterian Women were invited to a drive-up at the front of the sanctuary to pick up their Bible Study and Directory. Based on the response, it was evident that women of our church were ready to enthusiastically embrace the new year. Pictured are our volunteers holding up the new PW Directory and the 2020-2021 Bible Study: "Into the Light, Finding Hope through Prayers of Lament."



Women EVENTS

PW Fall Spiced Sunday Virtual Event



Motivational guest speaker Beth Troutman delivered a moving, inspirational presentation on her life's journey, calling us to "listen to our heart" and to watch for 'God winks.' Revs. Rachel Vogado and Lynne Keel provided beautiful opening and closing prayers for our program. This was a Zoom event followed by a drive by pickup of a Swag Bag filled with Judy Mongold's cookies and a fun fall mask. This event was coordinated by Dakeita Vanderburg, Carrie Myers, and Judy.



Swag bags were distributed including Judy's cookies!

René Prager, 2020-2021 PW Moderator Praised for Technical Support

Susan Hannah, outgoing 2019-2020 PW Moderator, offered praise for the technical assistance offered throughout 2020 by incoming 2020-2021 PW Moderator René Prager. Susan said, "René Prager was a lifesaver for all things technical, and an inspiration in going the extra mile. For the regular meeting of four circles, she was there with Zoom info and assistance for virtual meetings, or she was there in person for outside meetings. Her presence and support at our meetings were welcome and comforting, especially during this year of contact with one another.

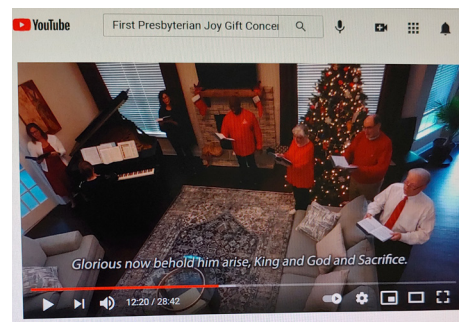


"René's leadership also shone through with our two virtual special events that were extremely well attended virtually making sure we were able to showcase two amazing speakers. Few women could have taken us through this difficult and challenging year with such efficiency and ease, and have PW come out stronger than before."

Joy Gift Offering and Concert

The Christmas Joy Offering has been a Presbyterian Women tradition since the 1930's. The Offering is distributed equally to two areas of need: the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions, providing critical support to church workers and their families, and Presbyterian-related schools and colleges, providing education and leadership development while nurturing racial and ethnic heritage. The congregation donated \$1,743 for the Joy Gift Offering in 2020.

Since the traditional Joy Gift dinner and concert was cancelled due to the pandemic, an amazing collection of talents came together to create what we enjoyed as the virtual Joy Gift Concert of 2020! Our traditional dinner concert was beautifully



re-envisioned by Shirley Brannan and Nancy Chikes, coordinators for the annual event. A special thank you to Hunter Morrison and the entire Worship and Music Committee for their assistance and support in

creating a video version of this concert for us to enjoy throughout the season! This event is posted on the First Presbyterian YouTube site.

Special thanks to Rev. Rush Otey for his inspiring closing prayer, and Jacquie Yost and Jeff Price for directing and compiling the breathtaking arrangement of anthems and solos by our extraordinary Sanctuary Choir. Jacquie noted, "This concert was boldly prepared for your enjoyment in affirmation of Christ's presence with and within us during this season of Advent."

Spiritual Nurture Luncheon | Sunday, March 8th

The Spiritual Nurture Luncheon has been an annual traditional luncheon hosted by the Presbyterian Women for women of the church. The 2020 event featured motivational speaker Jamie Valvano, middle daughter of legendary NC State basketball coach Jim Valvano who died from cancer at the age of 47. Because of Jamie's personal background and reputation as a speaker, the luncheon was opened to the men of the church.

Jamie shared private and personal insights to inspire those attending about

how to live an extraordinary life having experienced amazing victory and heart-breaking tragedy herself.

More than 100 people attended this motivational luncheon. A \$300 scholarship from the Dunford Fund was awarded by the Presbyterian Women who manage this fund to cover partial costs of the event. Additional funds to cover expenses came from the cost of the lunch and the sale of table arrangements at the end of the luncheon.



From left, Kimberly, Jamie, and Nicki

Kimberly Leatherman and Nicki Bryant luncheon coordinators noted, "Jamie is such an exceptional speaker we wanted to share her inspirational messages with as many as possible. We were delighted with the large attendance. She was a treat to hear and the feedback was outstanding!"

COLTRANE WEBB BACKPACK PROGRAM



Susan Brooks, Coordinator of the Presbyterian Women Backpack Program, discusses the creative 2020 approach to providing food to these students.

We share the Backpack Program with Central United Methodist Church, and together serve 30 students each week during the school year. During Covid, we could not continue to provide rolling bags of food due to factors such as bare shelves in the grocery stores, quantity limits on some items on our shopping lists, and the high degree of health risks our shoppers would face.

The school district asked us not to provide food in the rolling bags without going through some stringent disinfecting requirements every week. Then, the schools switched to providing virtual lessons for

students which added an extra layer of complexity to providing actual food. Because we had been providing enough food to feed four people over the weekend, we had to shift quickly to continue supporting these needy families.

But first we had a pantry full of food that had already been purchased, so we decided to take that food to Cooperative Christian Ministry – all 1,600 pounds of it!

As we had already been providing Food Lion gift cards for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, it made sense to switch to that method of support. The food we were providing averaged out to a little over \$23 per family per weekend. Providing a \$25 no

tobacco/no alcohol gift card meant each family could replicate our weekly purchases if they chose, or they could combine the card with other available resources and purchase food we aren't able to provide, such as dairy, fresh fruits and vegetables.

This has been a year that has required a good deal of flexibility from everyone. And even though we had to change how we provided assistance, we are immensely proud that we moved from providing food to providing gift cards without missing a single week. We will continue to meet whatever challenges arise. For the Presbyterian Women, the children must be fed.



First Pres International Mission Outreach in Haiti



BACKGROUND

In 2017 and 2018, several members of our congregation with Rev. Lynne Keel as the team leader participated in mission trips to support Operation Force for Christ Bayonnais (OFCB) in Haiti. The focus was to support Actionelle Fleurisma, founder of OFCB Ministries, who in 1993 started a school in the mountain region of Bayonnais, Haiti. This school now has a main campus and two satellite schools and, at one point served 2,500 students. A trip was planned for 2019, but was cancelled due to political unrest in Haiti.

HAITI 2020—AN UPDATE BY BETSY LILES

Life in Bayonnais continued in 2020 despite the civil unrest and Covid. Bayonnais was terribly affected by the political turmoil and the Covid virus. The country experienced starvation, burning tires, barricades with fire, gun

fire and kidnappings. Food in Bayonnais was scarce, but fortunately rice was distributed to the students in each of the schools.

Faith, hard work and hope brought many good things to Bayonnais in 2020 as well.

Actionelle reported school attendance was very high with 1,700 students on the main campus and an additional 500 at the satellite campuses. The 9th graders took the National Exams and sixteen 13th graders graduated in the fall. 550 students were sponsored in 2020 through World of God with over 30 students being sponsored by members of First Presbyterian Church. There are still 1,650 students that are unsponsored. (See below to sponsor a child.)

Agronomy in Bayonnais remained strong and their chicken operation produced 90-100 eggs per day. The medical clinic saw more patients in 2020 than in previous years and continues to do all they can to meet the health care needs of their community.

NAME CHANGE AND NEW AMBULANCE

OFCB officially changed its name to Friends Empowering Haiti with the tagline, "A Mission of Love and Hope for Bayonnais." Friends has a strong board of directors that meets monthly and is supported financially by numerous churches in North and South Carolina. First Pres members Brian Moore and Betsy Liles serve on this board. Friends sponsored a Facebook

Fundraiser in the fall which raised \$22,000 for our friends in Haiti!

An ambulance was donated to Friends. Ambulances are very scarce in the Bayonnais area and in much need, thus the new ambulance will be a tremendous source of help. Board members drove the ambulance to Florida and it was then shipped to Haiti.

Although travel to Haiti was halted in 2020, our church's relationship with Bayonnais remains strong. Hope abounds and our church stands ready to travel to Haiti as soon as it is safe to do so!



HOW CAN WE HELP?

Donations designated for this mission project can be made through the church and designated for *Friends Empowering Haiti*. Those wishing to sponsor a child should contact World of God online at www.worldofgod.org.

First Pres Becomes a Matthew 25 Congregation

The Matthew 25 Invitation - Matthew 25:31-46 calls all of us to actively engage in the world around us, so our faith comes alive, and we awaken to new possibilities within the Kingdom of God. Convicted by this passage, both the 222nd and 223rd General Assemblies (2016 and 2018) exhorted our denomination's churches to act boldly and compassionately to serve those who are marginalized or in need – people who are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned, strangers, poor or oppressed in other ways and in need of welcoming and healing.

Our Session Responds - Responding to the rising rates of poverty as well as the increasing racial tensions in our community, First Concord's Session voted to become a Matthew 25 congregation in June of 2020. This denominational initiative seeks to focus on three areas: 1) Building congregational vitality, 2) Dismantling structural racism, and 3) Eradicating systemic poverty.



Rev. Lynne Keel

Rev. Lynne Keel said, "By making this commitment, we have united with Presbyterians across the country who are studying and addressing these areas of focus. Our congregation began this process in 2020 by creating a Racial Equity Reads group to educate ourselves about the role of structural racism in our country, community, and American Christianity.

Anti-Racism Liaison Created - "Additionally, our Diaconate has added an Anti-Racism liaison, currently represented by Scott Verner, to explore how our congregation may work to dismantle structural racism. We look

forward to expanding these efforts churchwide as well as introducing additional programming related to poverty eradication."

Scott Verner noted, "What I have learned over the past year is that systemic racism is not the open bigotry expressed by someone shouting a racial slur. Instead, it is the assumptions behind racism that have been woven into American systems over the past 400 years – education, justice, economics, health care and more.

"It harms minorities deeply every single day. It holds power over us all, and it works in ways that many of us dismiss or aren't aware of. That's because we don't understand how it arose, we haven't been taught our 'whole' history, and we don't see how our systems harm minorities. I believe we all must open ourselves to truly see systemic racism for what it is – an abomination that continues to blind us to racial inequity."



2020 Staff Changes

Rev. Dr. Scott Kenefake, Interim Senior Minister Leaves



Scott Kenefake

While eagerly awaiting word from our Pastor Nominating Committee about the selection of our new senior pastor, our congregation was served by Interim Senior Minister Rev. Dr. Scott Kenefake who had joined us June 1, 2019.

At the end of his contract and following his last sermon October 18, 2020, Scott noted, "It has been a busy and eventful 18 months of Interim ministry for me at FPCC. In reviewing my planning calendars over the past year and half, the thing that stuck out is how busy the church staff and countless volunteers have been in helping to plan and lead the myriad of activities that take place in the life of this church in a typical week. Certainly, the pandemic of the last seven months has altered much of this, but this review affirmed for me the inherent "resilience" of congregations when faced with difficulty and uncertainty. Scott accepted a position as Interim Head of Staff of First Presbyterian Church, Bloomington, Indiana.

Rev. Dr. Rush Otey, Temporary Supply Minister, Arrives



Rev. Rush Otey

The Rev. Dr. Rush Otey joined the staff November 4, 2020 to serve as the Temporary Supply Minister and Head of Staff until our new Senior Pastor is called. His first sermon from our sanctuary was Sunday, November 8th. Jeff Monroe, Moderator of the Personnel Committee, noted, "Rush had retired in early 2020 from Selwyn Avenue Presbyterian Church where he served 18 years as the Senior Minister (2002-2020). We are so fortunate that Rush agreed to leave his retirement to serve our church!"

Jayne Mauer, Church Hostess, Retires

Jayne Mauer, Church Hostess, retired in May after 5 years of outstanding service to the church. In explaining her decision to retire, Jayne noted she was leaving us to move on to greener pastures, literally, as she was retiring from cooking goodies to spend more time caring for her beloved horses on her family's property. Her husband also retired which created more opportunities for them to travel.



Jayne Mauer

As part of Jayne's legacy, she leaves us with *Jayne's Recipes*, a cookbook of her favorite and most-often-asked-for recipes which she wrote to create additional funds for the Backpack Program in 2020. A Wednesday Night Covered Dish Dinner will be held in Jayne's honor when the Covid guidelines permit.

Rachel Vagado, Associate Pastor of Christian Formation, Resigns



Rachel Vagado

In December of 2020, Rachel Vagado, notified the Session she had accepted a position as the Associate Pastor of Christian Formation at First Presbyterian Church, Gastonia and ended her ministry with our church December 31. She said, "I will miss the relationships I have developed over the last five years with you all. These five years in ministry with you have taught me many things and enriched my call as a minister. Getting to share in your faith formation, to ask questions, study and reflect, to play and create with children, and to vision and hope with youth has been a privilege and a joy. What a gift it has been to work with Lynne and the church staff, as well as with all of you, as we are all called to share in the work of Christ."

Girl Scouts 2020

With great enthusiasm, Daisy Troop 3631, Brownie Troop 323, Junior Troop 3142, and Girl Scout Troop 334 launched into 2020 earning a number of badges, patches, and participating in several community service projects.

On March 8, the Girl Scouts hosted a Girl Scout cookies and lemonade reception in the courtyard following worship on Girl Scout Sunday.

Because of social distancing restrictions from the pandemic, in late March, the Brownie, Junior, and older Girl Scout troops switched to daily programming via e-mail with the goal of providing a simple, optional activity for troop members by age group. In the early weeks, with school on pause, several Girl Scouts earned almost 20 badges and patches and also shared photographs of their community service work from or near home.

The 2nd-12th grade Girl Scouts returned to in-person meetings in August. After a summer of social unrest across the country, one parent suggested learning about different cultures and we adopted that as our guiding theme for this year. Each month, we built our meeting plans around holiday celebrations across the globe, including: International Day of Peace, Rosh Hashannah, Dia De Los Muertos, Diwali, Hanukah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa.



The Girl Scouts enjoyed a walking tour of downtown Concord, including special guest speakers Norman McCullough (as Warren C. Coleman) and Peg Morrison who shared some of the history of the Cannon Family with the troop.

The Girl Scouts also incorporated civic celebrations into the curriculum by celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the passing of the 19th Amendment in August. Brownie Emma Bailey wrote to Concord Mayor Bill Dusch and asked that he declare August 26, 2020 Women's Equality Day. Mayor Dusch issued the proclamation! They later marked Election Day by earning the new Girl Scout Democracy badge with the help of guest speaker Concord city councilwoman Jennifer Parsley.

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Brownie Abby Rodriguez delivers books to a local Little Free library as part of our Thoughtful Thursday spring activities.



Our Girl Scouts completed hiking badge while hiking among the wild ponies at Grayson Highland State Park.

Community service is a vital component of Girl Scouts. In appreciation for the support from First Presbyterian Church, the Girl Scouts participate in many of the missions of the church, including: the Salvation Army Center of Hope ("The Night Shelter") dinner services three times each year, Operation Sandwich for Opportunity House, and the Backpack Program. In addition, the girls filled stockings for the Salvation Army and participated in the Rotary club sponsored school supply drive at the church in August.

For more information, contact René Prager (thepragers@yahoo.com) who serves as the contact for all levels of Girl Scouts at the church, kindergarten through 12th grade. Due to Covid, the Daisy troop paused programming in March for the remainder of 2020. René Prager and Megan Rodriguez co-lead the Brownie, Junior, Cadette, Senior, and Ambassador level Girl Scouts.

Below: Brownie Troop 323, Junior Troop 3142, and Girl Scout Troop 334 welcomed four new members to the Girl Scout organization in 2020. In October, they celebrated the start of the new Girl Scout year with a traditional Investiture/Rededication Ceremony.



First Presbyterian Boy Scout Troop 3

Harris Morrison, leader of Boy Scout Troop 3, reported Troop 3 has remained active and engaged throughout 2020 in spite of the challenges posed by Covid. "Scouting is an organization focused on leadership and character development of youth, with a heavy emphasis on outdoor activities. Through the travails of Covid, all the boys have managed to advance at least one rank, and earn merit badges, such as Forestry, Citizenship in the Community, Cycling, Rifle Shooting, Kayaking and many more.

"Troop 3 enjoyed an advancement weekend at Camp Barnhardt, and took numerous outings including snow skiing in the NC mountains, biking the Virginia Creeper Trail in Damascus, VA, and canoeing in Congaree National Park in South Carolina. Through it all, the boys (and leaders!) have built strong friendships, learned self-discipline, and had a ton of fun!"



For more information about Troop 3, please contact Scoutmaster Harris Morrison at harris@harrismorrison.com.



GIRL SCOUT GRADUATES HONORED & GOLD AWARDS GIVEN

Girl Scout Troop 334 graduated three scouts in 2020: Molly Bynum, Ella Fink, and Meredith Sheridan. Since normal recognition ceremonies were not possible, Cabarrus County troops “adopted” each of the local 2020 graduating Girl Scouts and celebrated their commitment to Girl Scouts with special gift deliveries to each scout.

MEREDITH SHERIDAN

Meredith Sheridan was recognized in May for achieving her Gold Award during the previous scout year. The county organized a caravan of younger Girl Scouts to conduct a drive-up parade to the homes of each Gold Award Girl Scout and presented her with a yard sign and gift. Meredith was also awarded the 2020 Marie McClucas Girl Scout Endowed Scholarship.



Meredith, left, with mom Kirby Sheridan.

MOLLY BYNUM

Molly Bynum, who has remained active in Girl Scout Troop 334 even after her move to South Carolina, was recognized in July 2020 for earning her Gold Award. Molly addressed the issue of childhood obesity through the promotion of balanced nutrition and physical activity in a fun activity and coloring book designed specifically for Cabarrus County’s young children. Molly designed the bilingual book, written with both Spanish and English translations. The book was distributed through Cabarrus Health Alliance.



Worship & Music Committee continued from pg. 2

- Pam McDonald continued to offer her support for Communion and was creative in obtaining individual communion packets which included individually wrapped wafers used in filming.
- Our own Princeton Theological Seminary Student Casey Aldridge was invited to preach in July before being ordained as a youth minister in a church in New Jersey.
- The Music Ministry staff continued to be consistent, creative and committed to bringing us joyful and uplifting music. Jacquie Yost on the organ and piano and other guest musicians were truly inspiring as was Choirmaster Jeff Price who showcased the array of talent in our choir.
- Kudos to Revs. Lynne Keel and Rachel Vagado for their sermons delivered from their homes. Lynne also delivered a sermon from a community location while Rachel actually painted a picture during her sermon from her home’s deck to illustrate the sermon!
- Peter Chikes, Worship Committee Member noted, “Our committee prayerfully sought God’s guidance as we worked around all of the challenges in providing online worship services during this pandemic.”



Jonathan Ewart, lay reader



Christian Formation continued from pages 4 and 5

Technology Upgrade Helpful - As we adjusted to a church living in the midst of a pandemic, our Christian Formation programs became dependent on technology to deliver these programs to our church family. This ranged from the church service, the Sunday school classes, Session and Diaconate meetings, Music Ministry presentations, and to church committee meetings. **The Christian Education Committee recommended to the Session that we purchase new equipment and greater internet speed** so we could establish a strong delivery system of information to our congregation which the Session approved.

Virtual Christmas Pageant - Rev. Rachel Vagado with assistance from her husband Chris, minister of New Hope Presbyterian Church, Gastonia, and Jason Graffis, Director of Contemporary Worship and Arts at Covenant Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, produced a virtual Christmas pageant. The video was a salute to actual pageants from years gone by that included video footage and photos collected from church families. Youth read the Christmas story and familiar Christmas carols

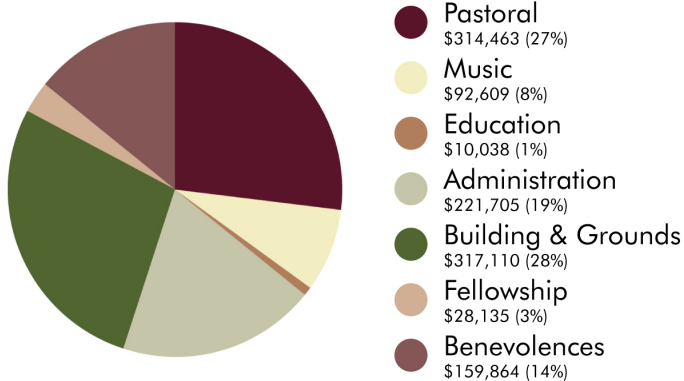
were sung by a soloist creating a nostalgic look at the church’s traditional pageants. **Warm memories were kindled as the Christmas story was enacted by children from many decades. The pageant ended with the traditional lighting of candles and congregation singing Silent Night outside the sanctuary.** This pageant is posted on the First Presbyterian Church YouTube page.

Prayer Wall Created for Advent November 29 - Promoting a “new way to pray during Advent”, the Christian Education Committee created an outdoor prayer wall in front of the sanctuary. Those walking or driving by were encouraged to stop and add a prayer via a sticky note to the wall. Prompts were posted to suggest lifting up a prayer for hope, joy, peace and love. This project was supported by a large number of those stopping to offer prayers. **Following the death of a police officer killed in action, the prayer wall was moved closer to Union Street and even more people stopped to offer prayers.**

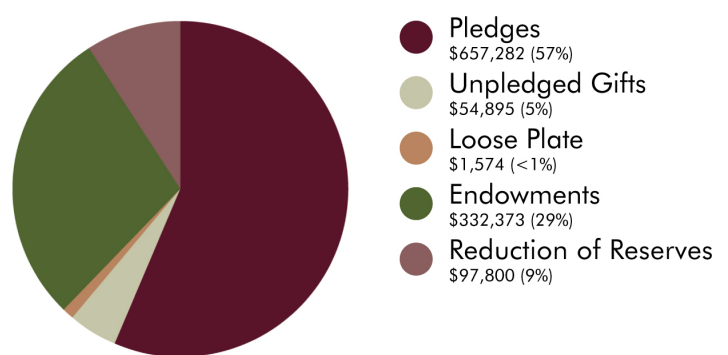
So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7)

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BUDGET EXPENDITURES AND RECEIPTS 2020

EXPENDITURES
\$1,143,924



RECEIPTS
\$1,143,924



OUR FUTURE

Gifts, Pledges, & Estate Gifts

If you've had an opportunity to read the 2020 *Joy of Giving* Annual Report, you've seen how **our church rose to meet the challenges resulting from the seriousness of the Covid pandemic. The creative implementation of programs and the continued mission outreach of our church was beyond what many of us expected** as we, ourselves, determined how to best continue our relationship and participation with our church family during this difficult time.

Through the use of our annual stewardship gifts and pledges plus the distributions from the First Presbyterian Foundation, made possible by those faithful followers who previously provided estate gifts to our church, we were able to accomplish so many of our goals during this extraordinarily challenging year. And, we faced these challenges with enthusiasm, generosity and our trust and faith in God.

The graphs indicate, once again, the increasing importance on funds received from our Foundation as we balanced our operating budget. **In 2020, 29% of our budget was supported by funds returned from our investments and endowments.**

And, because of the continuing generosity from our church family and Foundation, **benevolences totaling \$159,864 or 14% of our budget were distributed in support of mission outreach projects serving those less fortunate, gifts much needed during this year of crisis.** The insert in this Annual Report illustrates **how our church family was inspired to provide additional gifts beyond their annual contributions to serve those in need.**



OUR CHURCH NEEDS YOUR HELP!

We look forward in 2021 to welcoming our new senior pastor Dr. Rev. Ellen Crawford True. **With her leadership and that of the staff and our own church heroes—leaders from the Session, Diaconate, and church volunteers—unique ways to worship and serve God during another year of the pandemic will emerge.**

At this point in the history of our church, annual stewardship pledges and gifts become more important to make certain we can maintain the financial health necessary to support programs and follow Christ's mandate to love and serve others. **Where possible, increasing stewardship gifts and pledges, providing additional gifts during the year, and creating a gift for the church in our estate plans will ensure First Presbyterian Church of Concord continues to flourish in the future!**

Please contact those listed below for more information about the many ways you might wish to financially support our church. We encourage you to go to the **GIVE** section of our website at firstpresconcord.org/give to learn more about resources which will assist you in planning your gifts.

First Presbyterian Church Foundation

Britt Leatherman <i>President</i>	John Bishop
Susan Schneider <i>Vice President</i>	Francey Brown
William Niblock <i>Treasurer</i>	Jason Cagle
Betsy Liles <i>Secretary</i>	Jim Monroe
	Holt Morrison

2020-2021 Stewardship Committee

Dale Carpenter
Harris Morrison
Chrissy Rotan