

December Quarterly Informational Meeting Update

For those who were unable to attend the Quarterly Informational Meeting on Sunday, December 13, 2020 via Zoom, the following summary provides highlights of the meeting.

Opening Remarks—Pat Mendelsohn, Chair

Pat thanked the staff, who with Patrick's leadership have continued to provide meaningful worship via the livestream and also the in-person services held in the Memory Garden through October. She also recognized the efforts of the staff and our lay volunteers who devoted many hours to preparing for a safe return to the Meetinghouse. Unfortunately, due to the resurgence of Covid-19, the State of CT imposed restrictions that prevented our return to in-person worship.

The Church Council has been meeting regularly over the fall as we navigated through these unusual times. All members of the council have participated fully, and we look forward to updating you this morning on a few important matters that may have been considered as well as answer any questions you may have.

Senior Pastor—Rev. Patrick Collins

Viewership online continues to be excellent averaging around 300-350 unique views each Sunday on FB and YouTube

Christmas Eve Services will be offered at 3pm, 6pm and 9pm.

- 3pm service is child friendly- Cydney and I working on a very fun and meaningful message. Leaning into 2020
- 6pm traditional with brass from last year and the quartet
- Pageant at both with mix of new and old asking families to submit videos and photos in their own Nativity garb
- 9pm service will be a rebroadcast of 2019 Youth Candlelight Service.

A Nativity Walk is planned for families all day on Christmas Eve featuring the symbols of Christmas at 12 stations. Giveaways for children are planned.

Currently, a gathering on the front lawn at 5pm for a carol sing is planned. We are considering safety and the implications of such a gathering. We know this is something people want to do and I appreciate that, but I also think we have to consider that we consider ourselves to be a caring and compassionate community, and that means we do things with the best interest of our community at heart and if the carol sing means that the healthcare workers in our community will have an awful January and people, we have to think about that.

We have been living in this new reality for 9 or so months now and I have said over and over again that COVID has accelerated many trends for us. It forced us to embrace the online side of ministry and opened our eyes to the possibility of the digital environment. Given the success of the livestream and the potential in the digital world, I asked the Church Council to consider adding some human resources to help us meet those needs. Particularly, I asked for a full-time media, tech, and content coordinator to help with our marketing, advertising, communications and digital presence, as well as a part time live stream director.

Church Council—Pat Mendelsohn

Over the course of several meetings, the Council looked at the current staffing model with an eye to the future, looked at the skills required for optimal staffing and looked at the financial implications of any changes.

This led to the realization that we no longer needed as many staff hours devoted to Faith Formation and Membership, as the demands in those areas have declined over time. They remain vitally important to the church, but they do not require the same amount of resources as in past years.

The outcome of our discussions was that beginning January 1, 2021, the Director of Faith Formation will become a P/T position, and the hours of the Membership Director will be reduced. Our hope is that by the end of the fiscal year, June 2021, the responsibilities of the Membership Director will be covered by other staff and volunteers.

As the Council, with Patrick's leadership, considered the future needs of the church, they agreed that the livestream was vital to fulfilling the mission of the church and to facilitate ongoing worship both during the pandemic and into the future.

Similarly, the Council recognized the need for consistent communication to share the life of the church with our members and the greater the community—both in print and electronic media—and agreed that a Media, Technology & Content Coordinator was essential to meet this need.

The search for a Media, Technology & Content Coordinator and Livestream Director are well underway.

As to the financial impact, we expect that the result will be a modest decrease in overall staffing costs.

Caring Ministries—Sheila Bennett

We are comprised of several committees that focus on the spiritual and physical well-being of our members, families, friends and neighbors, including Prayer Chain, Prayer Shawl Ministry, Meal Trains, Hospital Visits and Wellness Program, Card Ministry and Stephen Ministers.

Founded in 1975 in St. Louis, Stephen Ministers are trained congregants who are capable of accompanying those who are facing some crisis in life, for instance, illness, death of a loved one, divorce, relocation, or financial setback.

There are currently 27 active congregants in our church who were trained between 1991 and 2010 and served our congregation well. Of those 27, 4 are on the Caring Ministries committee. In the past several years, the requests for Stephen Ministers waned – yet the desire to minister has not. Last fall we began discussing revisiting the program and engaging the many Stephen Ministers for dialogue.

Just before the pandemic, Karen Pacent led a brainstorming session with many of these congregants to explore ideas for supporting our congregation, leveraging the Stephen Ministry platform, but not limited to its structure.

As a result, we are exploring offering what we are calling Caring Friends which is a Stephen Ministry light program to provide objective, one-on-one confidential listening and talking companions during times of crisis.

Unlike Stephen Ministry which is a longer-term commitment, this supportive relationship could be limited to one phone conversation or last up to three months checking in once a week over the phone, FaceTime or Zoom. The Caring Friends team would include formally trained Stephen Ministers and other member of the congregation with professional coaching or counseling experience.

We are currently gauging the interest of the congregation in this offering. Our survey was featured in the Friday email on 12/4 and again in an email on 12/8. So far, we have 54 responses. Thank you to those who responded. If you haven't taken the time to complete the one-minute survey, we welcome your feedback.

The results of the survey will determine whether we formalize and put in place the tools and training necessary to make this offering a success, of value to and utilized by our congregation.

Buildings & Grounds—Tom White

I am pleased to report that the installation of the new boiler replacement and associated equipment is largely complete.

It was discovered almost a year ago that 1 of the 2 existing boilers that provide heat to the church was placed out of service requiring extensive repairs and the second boiler was also fragile and would require repair in the near term.

We were fortunate to endure the 2019-20 heating season with 1 operable boiler.

Over the summer, we solicited bids for the work, including working with a consulting engineer to establish bid parameters and guidelines for proposals for the heating System replacement.

After a thorough bid analysis, the project was awarded to Encon Heating and Air Conditioning based in Stratford. At a cost of \$147,802.00, significantly lower than the \$ 180,000.00 appropriation from the endowment voted on by the congregation to fund the project.

The Encon team began work October 19th and worked expertly to install the new equipment without disrupting the heating system. The first new boiler was brought on-line in early November and replacement of the second began directly after.

The project is now substantially finished with final building inspections expected in the coming week. There are no cost overruns.

Looking forward, the new system has a network system monitoring and trouble alerts. Encon will be performing annual inspection and service to maintain and extend the life of the new equipment.

Thanks to Steve Summerton who provided invaluable assistance with managing the project and to all the staff who endured a few chilly days in the church.

Stewardship—Kristen Jacks

Kristen thanked the folks who were on the call noting that those who take the time to join the Informational Meeting are typically the same folks who pledge as soon as they get the pledge packet.

To date, 177 pledges totaling \$490,397 have been received.

Kristen reported that the church had received a Challenge Grant. Every new pledge or any increase in last year's pledge will be matched dollar for dollar for up to \$100,000. A mailing with the details has been sent to the congregation.

Preschool—Donna Hascher

The following covers the points Donna made at the Informational Meeting, as well as an update as of January 6, 2021:

- COVID Update:
 - We ended December with no Covid-19 positive cases while the Preschool was open. There were instances when we switched to remote learning in individual classrooms while awaiting test results for possible exposures.
 - Families for the most part seemed to stay home and safe over Thanksgiving, as we did not experience an uptick in potential exposures following the break. We strongly encouraged families and teachers to remain vigilant over the Winter Break and reminded them that pursuant to CT's Travel Policy (and our own Preschool Covid-19 policies), those who traveled will need to quarantine before returning to school. We continue to plan to remain open regardless of what the Greenwich schools do, so long as we aren't directly impacted by Covid-19 within the school and we have the requisite staffing coverage.
- Enrollment:
 - Enrollment for the Spring semester remains at 69 as reported last month (up 11 from previously committed levels). Our 2's program is at capacity, but we still have a few openings in the 3's, 4's and PK.
 - Fall 2021 enrollment is up to 36 students (double last month's level) and we are seeing a lot of interest from new families (over a third of commitments at this point). Darla conducted five "virtual tours" for new families in the fall, which seem to be well embraced. As is typical at this stage, we still have a number of our existing families who have not yet committed, so we should see an uptick in January as we reached the deadline to release their "reserved slots" to the public.

- Staffing:
 - Staffing is becoming even more of a challenge as CT's Covid-19 situation continues to deteriorate. The part-time substitute that we had arranged to help cover maternity leave through January pulled out in early December (after the first one pulled out in November), and we're still down a teacher in one classroom due to an unexpected surgery. Additionally, two of our teachers informed Darla over the break that they have made last minute decisions to travel to address family issues. As a result, some classes may begin remotely in January while those teachers complete their requisite quarantine period.
- Director Search:
 - Back in the fall, Darla resigned to relocate to her vacation home in the Poconos. We are very sorry to see her leave after 8 years at the helm of the Preschool.
 - We immediately formed a search committee. The search went very well, and we were lucky to have many qualified candidates apply for the Director's job.
 - In late December, we hired Jennifer DiCarlo, see below for her bio. She will overlap with Darla for a few weeks and will officially begin February 1.
 - Darla has graciously agreed to extend her departure to the end of January to help with the transition.
- Monday, January 4th all staff (teachers and substitutes who will be teaching this week) were tested for Covid-19 and everyone came back negative. We opted for the saliva PCR test and by driving the vials to Branford yesterday morning we were able to get the results by about 6:30pm. This is the lab that the First Presbyterian Church Director shared with the Greenwich Director's group after they successfully utilized them following Thanksgiving and this seems to be a viable option, however it does cost \$100 per test.
- Finally, our return after the break seems to be going well so far - a number of families have opted to stay home this week so we're running at a lower capacity, which is somewhat helpful. We have three young adults who are home from college helping out as a few of our teachers are still out - Melanie's two daughters (Ellie and Lydia) and Cara and Paul Olmsted's oldest daughter, Emma. Thank you, ladies!
- We are beginning to include Jennifer in "introductory calls" with Darla, Melanie and the teachers this week. She's also going to participate in an Orientation session with our incoming spring semester families next week. It looks like Jenn will be able to wrap things up at OGS by January 15, so we should be able to achieve a pretty thorough transition with Darla before she departs at the end of the month.

Jenn's bio follows:

It is with great pleasure that we welcome Jennifer DeCarlo as our next Preschool Director! Jennifer is an accomplished, respected educator who is well known within our community. She has been a kindergarten teacher at Old Greenwich School for the past six years and taught at Cos Cob School, North Street School and Eagle Hill School prior to OGS.

In addition to being an experienced teacher, Jennifer has also held many leadership roles at OGS and at the Greenwich Public Schools District level. Jennifer's background, teach philosophy,

collaborative leadership style, community focus and sheer enthusiasm for education are just what we were looking for to build upon Darla's great leadership tenure.

Moving into a Director role has been a long-term career goal of Jennifer's, and she is very excited to be joining First Church Preschool on February 1! Please join us in welcoming Jennifer to the First Church family!

Budget—Rick Derr

We knew this Fiscal Year 2021, which started on July 1st, would be financially challenging and unpredictable, because of the impact of the ongoing pandemic. The Budget for this Fiscal Year 2021 as presented and approved at the Annual Meeting was quite lean, but still was only balanced due to the Paycheck Protection Program loan. When we last talked at the Quarterly Information Meeting in September, we already knew we would have a major hole to fill in that FY2021 Budget due to the worsening impact of the pandemic, particularly on the Preschool.

For the First Quarter of FY 2021 (July – September, 2020), the total Church (including the Preschool) fell -\$62K below Budget. We were budgeted to lose (171K) and the actual results were a Loss of (233K). It is normal for the First Quarter to be a Loss due to lower receipts during the Summer months, but this year was expected to be worse than usual due to the lack of a Summer Program in the Preschool due to the pandemic. However, the results for the Quarter ended up worse than budgeted, due to a couple of factors:

1. Stewardship Pledges came in -\$44K less than Budget. We trust that this is just a timing issue, and that Pledges will be higher than budgeted in the Second Quarter (October – December). Pledge statements went out in November to encourage everyone to get caught up. As of this week, we still have \$119K of CY 2020 Pledges outstanding, which is \$30K more than at this time last year. This still may just be a timing issue, but it may also be a sign of the tough economic times.
2. Plate & Church School Revenues, which are the Sunday morning collections, were -\$4K below Budget because donations through the livestream services were below the normal receipts from in-person services.
3. Preschool Tuition was -\$24K below Budget as enrollment in September was down about 30% below Budget as a significant number of parents decided to keep their children home because of the uncertainty of returning to school during the pandemic.
4. Otherwise, all other areas were a net gain of +\$10K to Budget largely due to vacancies during these months.

Looking forward, we still are working to offset a major shortfall to the FY 2021 Budget due to the reduced enrollment in the Preschool. With tuition and enrollment down 30%-40% it is extremely challenging for the Preschool to cover its fixed costs. This makes it unlikely that the Preschool can contribute the budgeted contribution to the church this year of \$153K. In September, we reported that this shortfall that needs to be offset will be at least \$150,000. It is reasonable to find roughly \$50K-\$70K of this amount in reductions in expenditures (through staffing adjustments, vacancies, savings on programs and events that cannot take place, etc.). The balance of the shortfall will need to be covered by improvements in Revenues, primarily from Pledges and other Gifts.

Therefore, Stewardship for CY 2021 is a big key to solving our financial challenge this year and into the next Fiscal Year starting July 1st. (Remember that your CY 2021 pledges impact the second half of the current Fiscal Year and the first half of the next Fiscal Year.) Thankfully, the very generous Challenge Grant gives us the opportunity to fill the hole in our current Fiscal Year, and to help better position us for Fiscal Year 2022 - IF the congregation can respond to the challenge to increase pledges.

Please understand that simply filling our FY 2021 hole is not our only objective in Stewardship for CY 2021. We don't know how much the pandemic will impact the next Fiscal Year. But even if we can get largely back to normal in the Church and the Preschool next year, we will need more pledges than we had in 2020. (Remember that this year we had the Paycheck Protection Program funds to help us.)

So, I hope that you will prayerfully consider if you can increase your pledge or pledge for the first time for 2021.

Outreach—Lauren Ghaffari

The Outreach Committee sponsored three events during November and December.

On Harvest Sunday, November 22, we hosted a drive by food drive for Neighbor to Neighbor. Members of the community were invited to participate as well as the congregation. We delivered 180 bags of shelf stable food to Neighbor.

In addition, a fresh food drive was held on the platform #GiveHealthy. 39 donors donated 2117 pounds of fresh food also to Neighbor to Neighbor.

Finally, a special Harvest Sunday Offering was set up to benefit H.O.M.E. as they were unable to travel for the craft fair and food collection this year. The offering total amount was \$5860.00.

The annual Giving Tree event was accomplished via an online sign up and drive by gift drop off on Harvest Sunday. 156 holiday wishes were filled for clients of H.O.M.E. in Maine and residents of Pilgrim Towers in Stamford.

The 54th Annual Christmas Tree and Wreath Sale was held on November 28 and 29 and December 5. 25 members of the GHS Freshman Football Team unloaded 478 trees. 80 volunteers worked the sale – some doing up to 5 shifts. Sales were brisk on the first weekend due to good weather and few families traveling for the holiday. We sold out on Saturday, December 5. Total proceeds are pending.

Lunch for the first Monday of the month for the New Covenant Center Café continue. Bagged lunches are arranged through ShopRite. The First Church Fund for NCC will be one of the charitable recipients of the tree sale proceeds to cover part of the expenses for 2021.

Respectfully submitted,
Pat Mendelsohn, Chair, Church Council