

2017 ANNUAL REPORTS  
OUR 294<sup>TH</sup> YEAR



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

ANNUAL MEETING  
SUNDAY  
JANUARY 28, 2018  
11:00 AM

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**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF SHREWSBURY**  
**ANNUAL MEETING, JANUARY 29, 2017**

**Call to Order:** Moderator David Smith called the meeting to order @ 10:58 AM.

Opening Prayer - Rev. Lynne Dolan

**Approval of Minutes of 2016 Annual Meeting:** A motion to approve the minutes was made and seconded and the minutes were approved without modifications by a unanimous vote.

2016 Church Leadership Team (CLT) 2016 Highlights and 2017 Agenda

- Called Robert Hyde as Minister of Congregational Life
- Challenges
  - Decline in members
  - Difficulties in filling positions on specific ministries and committees
- Ministry in Action – Aligning Ministry & Governance
- Other staffing changes
- Fiscal & Facilities Management
- Looking forward to 2017
  - Stabilizing membership
  - Mission & Ministry in Action
  - Communicating/marketing
  - Staff Planning & Support
  - Building use
  - Long Range Planning

Questions:

- Plans for the Parsonage -Helen McLaughlin – Dave Smith gave recent history of parsonage evaluation/assessment? A group had been assembled but several members left the group which delayed the work. A group has been reconstituted and is actively reviewing options.

Ministry in Action & Governance – Presentation by Dave Russell, also on the Committee are Deb Del Dotto, Joanne Samant, and Linda Russell (in Absentia)

- Leadership & Governance Evolution: Dave Russell reviewed the activities over the past 12 months.
- Ministry in Action Phased Implementation
- Ministry in Action Review 2016 Successes & Challenges
- Successes & Challenges
  - Ministries: New ministries in Other Faith Traditions, Established the Mission & Outreach Ministry. Parkinson Choir Ministry started in the Music Ministry.
  - Leadership: CLT has increased the size and Council has decreased size
- Ministry in Action – 2017 Transition – See Diagram below.

## Ministry in Action – 2017 Transition



- What is a Ministry? It is a call to service.
  - Practices of a successful Ministry: Sharing & time of prayer at the beginning of meetings, commit to ministry for at least 1 year, no term limits (except for certain administrative functions), inclusive and open to new members and new ideas, continually tie work of ministry to the mission of the church as a whole and teachings of Christ, and encourage spiritual development.
  - Ministry Liaison: Liaison between the Ministry and the Council & Church Leadership Team (CLT). Liaisons may be a Ministry Chair or not, possess specific gifts and desire to contribute to church leadership and decision making as member of the CLT.

### 2017 Annual Meeting Actions

#### Motion 1 – Offered by David Russell

Amend FCC by-laws as proposed to incorporate changes to the church organization including:

- Implement the Faith Formation Ministry, encompassing the current Christian Education Committee, Youth Ministry and Bible study group(s).

## ANNUAL MEETING, JANUARY 29, 2017 (continued)

- Implement the Fellowship Ministry, encompassing the current Welcoming Committee, Social Circles and Women's Circles.

### Questions regarding Motion 1:

- Diane Smith recalled from prior discussion about the Ministry Model that the Bylaws would not need to be changed as much, however why are two changes to the Bylaws being offered? Paul Sainsbury and Dave Russell responded that the changes were being made at the macro level to allow for more flexibility at the micro level.
- Jane Trippi asked who would need to be asked if the church was being used for a function if the committees no longer exist? Dave Smith stated that it is a matter of scope for the event. The answer might vary with the size/scale of the event.
- Dot Perkins asked if the Ministries were just Committees with a different name? Joanne Samant and Deb DelDotto stated that the Ministry Model offers much more appeal to the passions that individuals have and they won't be limited by a rigid 3 year term structure. Dave Smith commented that the traditional committee structure has not been functioning well. It has been very difficult to fully staff committees with declining enrollment. FCCSM has done a lot of research and has looked at other churches who have gone to the Ministry Model and generally it has worked better for them.
- Louise Russell noted that there will be just 1 liaison to Church Council from the Fellowship Ministry to represent Welcoming Committee, Social Circles, and Women's Circle. Stephanie Ambra stated that the Liaison should stay in touch with the leaders from the Committees.
- Paul Labelle commented that the Ministry Structure will provide added support to ministries during periods when Committees were not fully staffed.

### Motion 2 – Offered by Dave Russell

Amend FCC by-laws as proposed to incorporate changes to church leadership including:

- Change the Council membership to 2 Members at Large (from 4) and add 2 Ministry Liaisons (Fellowship Ministry and Faith Formation Ministry) keeping the total council size at 20
- Change the CLT membership, removing 2 Members at Large and adding 2 additional Ministry Liaisons (Fellowship Ministry and Faith Formation Ministry)

Motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer Report: Lucinda Hepp

Presentation organized into

- What do we have?
- Overview of funds.
- Total assets \$3.3 million
  - Operating Fund \$87 k

**ANNUAL MEETING, JANUARY 29, 2017** (continued)

- Directed Funds \$131k
- Capital Fund \$76 k
- Endowment Fund + WCHR Bond = \$2,561 k
- Unrestricted Antenna Fund \$442 k
- 

<b>2016 Operating Fund</b>			<b>Income</b>			<b>Expenses</b>	
			Pledges, Offerings	\$379K		Salaries and Benefits	\$351K
			Endowment & Interest	114		B & G, Office	129
			Antenna Draw	40		Committees	25
			Building Rental	19	Less	Wider UCC, And Newton	33
			From Contingency Reserve	27		Outreach	27
			Missions UCC Contribution	2		Reserves	10
				-----			-----
			<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 581K</b>		<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$575K</b>
				<b>= Excess of income over expenses \$5364</b>			

**2016 Operating Fund**

- Service attendance was down 10% from 2015.
- Pledges and offerings received were down just 2% from budget but down 12% from 2015.
- We saved over \$30K in compensation costs due in part to the Minister of Congregation Life later start date than planned and a reduced work schedule for our office administrator.
- We spent less on utilities as compared to 2015 but had several unexpected maintenance expenses including boiler repair, repair to the room containing Sprint’s equipment and repairs to the Parsonage roof and chimney. These resulted in B&G expenses exceeding budget by \$10K.
- Committee and Outreach expenses were within budget.
- We had an excess of income over expense(surplus) of \$5364K

There were no questions on the Treasurer’s Report. Dave Smith thanked Lucinda for her amazing work as Treasurer.

## ANNUAL MEETING, JANUARY 29, 2017 (continued)

### Stewardship Report: Dennis Troy

- All Church Meeting – November 2016
  - Pledge gap \$126,129
  - Solution: 2 year bridge plan for the 2017 budget
    - Decrease pledge goal to \$360,000
    - “re-increased” draw from antenna fund
    - Did we hit the goal of \$360,000? No, \$23,959 short.
  - We have a problem!
    - Dependent on a limited savings account (antenna fund)
    - Instead of protecting its principal so it can generate passive income to provide us sustainable revenue, we are depleting it
    - <50% of active households in our congregation are making a pledge
- So What Can We Do About It?
  - Increase the amounts of current pledges
  - Increase the number of pledgers (currently <50%)
  - Grow our membership (and hope they pledge!)
  - Deplete our Antenna Savings Account
  - Cut spending
  - We can address our pledge shortfall now or later

Questions: Helen McLaughlin asked if we could have a special assessment/appeal to the church? Helen made the analogy to the NPR fundraising appeal. Dennis Troy said that could be considered.

Janet Trippi noted that we have been “too discreet”. Paul Labelle agreed with Janet. Rosemary Royer spoke about the Family Fun Game Night. Bruce Sadler noted that the Church has to pay the UCC a membership fee and he made the statement that the church should have a basic level of “dues”. Dave Smith mentioned that the FCC now calculates the “head tax” based on total income of the church and not based on the number of members. He also commented on the declining membership. Jason Molina noted we have to decide if we want to focus on our mission or on making sure people pay their “dues”.

Marjorie Hastings asked if we could reach out and contact members who are not pledging? Amanda Durkin felt we should appeal to individuals who feel blessed. Helen McLaughlin suggested we should appeal to asking people to just pledge something, no matter how small. John Ambra asked how many giving units: There are 193 giving units who have given thus far. Wendy Driscoll noted that Stewardship had 2 lists: one with the top 40 givers and another with the rest of the members. There have been significant efforts to contact donors.

### Budget and Finance (B&F) Report: Frank Jelinch

- Frank recognized others members of B&F including Joe Frank and David Rocheleau,
- 16 meetings in past year (12 regular meetings and 4 special meetings)
- Committee expenses level

**ANNUAL MEETING, JANUARY 29, 2017** (continued)

- Moving towards increased employee benefits contribution.
- Standard scrutiny of operating expenses/B&G
- Deferring full funding of reserves\*
- Revenue proposals to temporarily bridge the gap:
  - Increased draw from antenna fund (additional \$16,200 over prior year \$39,600) for 2-years (FY 2017 & 2018)
- Consuming accumulated surplus to balance budget and provide time to see increased vitality and membership realized.
- Long term path to close gap and achieve sustainability, options requires:
  - Increase pledges numbers **and/or**
  - Significant structural reduction in long-term operating cost levels

Motion to approve the 2017 Budget put forward by Budget and Finance was approved unanimously.

Building & Grounds Report: Chris Williams

- Major Projects:
  - Parsonage roof and structural repairs, full replacement of basement bulkhead entrance
  - Flood cleanups in Sprint room, bathrooms, and kitchens
  - Coordinating cell company's upgrades – Verizon, ATT, & T-Mobil
  - Gas conversion status: Working well: Cut heating cost to under 1/3 of oil for past 2 years, saving approx. \$16K/Year
  
- Smaller Projects:
  - LED lighting replacements, parking lot lighting improvements
  - Table replacement in Gifford Hall – have 11 new tables so far
  - Building security improvements – ongoing
  - Numerous maintenance issues, inspections, etc.
  - Pipe repairs in boiler room
  - Replacement of Sprinkler Air Pump
  
- Projects for the coming year:
- Fix ongoing plumbing issues – replace low flow toilets, old fixtures, identify leaks
  - Electrical and Lighting repairs and upgrades
  - Connection of Verizon Generator
- Explore and recommend options for repair or replacement of the church organ with Council committees
- Get more help!!!

Comments: Sue Moore asked if we could organize groups to do small projects as part of mission work. John Ambra noted they would be organizing work days for people to volunteer.

**ANNUAL MEETING, JANUARY 29, 2017** (continued)

Call to Service - Nominating Report: Debbie DelDotto.

Deb Del Dotto presented the nominees.

Jean Feldkamp asked Deb and Paul Sainsbury to highlight the openings.

Dave Smith noticed that there is no true nominating committee. Deb and Paul have been doing this on their own.

Motion made to accept the slate of nominees: The slate of nominees was accepted unanimously.

Website Update – Paul Sainsbury: Paul demonstrated a beta version of the web site that should be live in the near future. Deb Del Dotto noted that the Gifford Trust gave \$5000 to the web site development efforts. Paul Labelle noted that the new web site is an important platform from which we can launch marketing efforts. It was suggested that clips of music be included. Other suggestions included text and video of sermons, church bulletins, etc. Dave suggested that suggestions for the web site be directed to Paul Sainsbury.

Old Business – David Smith - None

New Business – David Smith

Sherry Clark asked how can we make sure that groups which use the Church are getting the support they need for their activity e.g the dishwasher. Dave suggested that the group speak with the Office. Chris Williams noted that some groups need a caretaker and they might be charged for it.

Announcements – None

Prayer – Rev. Robert Hyde

Adjournment – at 1:20 pm

Sincerely,  
Stephen Erban  
Clerk

## **REPORT OF THE SENIOR PASTOR**

*For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Romans 8: 24-25*

It's been a topsy, turvy year. It is not possible to enter the New Year without feeling the unsettling effects of the previous year. We have weathered many storms and by the grace of God we are standing strong. Looking back on this past year there are many more reasons to be grateful than to despair. The church is strong and continues to answer God's call to be Christ's disciples in the world. We are open to the movement of the Spirit calling us to new forms of worship, prayer and discipleship. We are gathering to engage in sacred conversations that will transform our lives, our church and our world. We anticipate a future with strong leadership and innovative collaborations among our staff and ministry partners in this community and beyond. We wait for hope with patience because we are a faithful people. We have been faced with challenges some that have affected this particular church and others that have affected our nation and our world. We have maintained a positive, hope-filled spirit. God is good!

We are in the midst of change. When have we not been in the midst of change since I came here nearly 5 years ago? Some days change seems to be the only thing we can count on. God has given us the ability to respond to change. Individually and collectively we have deep spiritual wells from which to draw during these times of transition. I admit, there are moments when constant change can be exhausting. We are learning to find the blessing in each new challenge. I give thanks to God for each one of you; for your courage, your tenacity, your hope-filled optimism, your commitment to the work that is at times unpredictable and for your ability to trust in God's presence even when the seas get rough.

When an institution has been blessed with long and faithful leaders, their tenure is bound to come to an end. After spending time thoughtfully and prayerfully considering his future, our beloved Minister of Music, Malcolm Halliday announced his retirement after 27 years of service. We were blessed to share his leadership, gifts and grace as Malcolm developed the music ministry of the church, cultivating and encouraging church members to share their gifts to the glory of God. In June we lovingly expressed our appreciation and sent Malcolm off with our best wishes for a blessed future. Malcolm and his long-time partner Tom moved to Mexico and are establishing a much less hectic life from the one they knew here. God is good! We pray God's continued blessings upon them.

The search was on for a new Music Director. In the summer we welcomed Lois Toeppner, a gifted local musician as our temporary organist and music director. She worked closely with Christina White and members of the church to support the music ministry through the summer months as we began the search for a music director to serve the church during this transition. We thank Christina for the gifts she so freely shared through much of Malcolm's tenure that helped to shape our music ministry. In September, we hired Jeffrey Cutts as our interim director of music. He has brought a passion for sacred music and considerable experience directing and cultivating the gifts of church musicians. He jumped right in, recruiting members, working with our many choirs and providing considerable leadership for the celebration of Ministries event

## **REPORT OF THE SENIOR PASTOR (continued)**

that was held in October. God is good and we are exceedingly grateful to receive and welcome both Jeff and his wife Laine to First Congregational Church.

A search committee was formed to begin the considerable task of finding a new music director. The committee began its work in the summer and has worked tirelessly and thoughtfully to move this mission forward. They have solicited the input of the congregation and shared their progress regularly in preparation to receive candidates to fill the permanent position. In this time, many musicians in all facets of the ministry (bells and various vocal choirs) have shared leadership with Jeff. We are grateful for their commitment, flexibility and generous spirits. We anticipate welcoming a new music director before September 2018. The music ministry is one of First Congregational Church's strongest assets. We continue to pray for God to commission and call a gifted, spirit-filled person who will embrace this ministry. God is good. We are a hope-filled people.

This summer we also said goodbye to Stephanie Dozois, our Director of Christian Education. During her time as CE director, Stephanie lovingly shared her creativity and faith as she grew professionally and spiritually. She was faithful to the CE community of practice and completed the certificate in Christian Education program through the MA conference. She was called to serve another UCC church in Sudbury where she will work with children and families in an expanded capacity. We prayed God's blessings upon her and her family as they undertake this new adventure. We have been blessed to welcome Leo Biocchi to serve as the new Director of Christian Education. He brings with him a passion for working with children. Leo works with Autistic children and their families and brings a warmth, compassion and enthusiasm to his work with the church. We look forward to getting to know Leo and benefit from his many gifts.

We continue to foster strong relationships with our ecumenical partners in Shrewsbury and other social service organizations serving the community. This year we have collaborated with Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services to provide space to offer several Mental Health and Adolescents training sessions. Robert and I and several lay members have completed the 8 hour training that helps to inform and raise the awareness of mental health issues that face our adolescents. This collaboration and training will help to shape the important ministry we undertake with our youth and their families.

Our new governance structure continues to bear fruit. Several new ministries have formed around shared purpose and vision. A group continues to explore our interfaith connections. They held an interfaith dialogue in March to explore the intersections of our Abrahamic faiths. More events are on the horizon. A group has formed to collect stories and memories of our past in preparation for the impending 300 year celebration of the church in 2023. The Hands for Hope ministry has blossomed and children in Tanzania are the beneficiaries of the dresses and sweaters that this loving group creates. I believe the women who gather in the parlor faithfully each month also receive the gifts of the spirit as they knit and laugh and support each other. The prayer ministry began meeting monthly in the fall to pray together and receive the comfort and

## **REPORT OF THE SENIOR PASTOR (continued)**

support of the Holy Spirit in this important ministry. God is good and we are a hope-filled people.

When the world starts shaking we find a way to respond. The church has responded to many of the natural disasters that have impacted our country and the world in 2017. We have collected pennies to help our displaced neighbors in Puerto Rico and coats from our new friends that have come to our region in the aftermath of the hurricanes this fall. We continue to minister to our neighbors in need through our work with St. Mary's outreach ministries, WAMS in Worcester and CityReach in Boston to name just a few of our many partnerships. The Outreach ministry invited us to a dinner to explore the long collaboration we have had with the Mustard Seed ministry and to highlight the growing issue of food insecurity in Worcester. Our youth continue to delight in the mission work they undertake and blessed us with the stories of a transformative trip to Philadelphia in June.

God has shaken our spirits this year and moved us to look deeply and confessionally at our lives. We are asking pointed and challenging questions about how to be faithful Christians in these changing times. To this end we have undertaken a series of sacred conversations on race. These sessions began in the fall and will continue throughout the program year. We are wondering together what it means to be white, what privilege and responsibility this brings, what changes we can make to initiate a process of reconciliation and justice in our communities and how we may prayerfully work to dismantle the yoke of systemic racism. We are talking and prayer and reading and discussing trusting that God will lead us to action. We invite you to consider joining the conversation or praying for God to reveal to us a vision that will help us join this important work to dismantle this evil in our midst. We continue to seek ways to make God's love and justice real.

It has been a privilege to serve on the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ. I was selected this year to serve as the vice chairperson of the board. In that capacity I have worked on a collaborative board with members from MA, CT and RI seeking to present a vision for a unified conference to the annual meetings of our respective conferences in June, 2018. We meet monthly to discern a purpose and establish new bylaws and a governance structure that will empower us to move forward with the ministry of the Southern New England region for the United Church of Christ. Together as One we are open to God's call to ministry and believe that God continues to have a purpose for our local churches and its leaders. We seek to be innovative, nimble and responsive to the movement of the Spirit in these changing times. This work will continue in 2018 and beyond as we develop and deepen our collaboration with those doing God's work.

We have been doing a new thing in worship. In the fall we undertook two initiatives. The first Sunday of the month is Family Worship and communion. We are working to shape the liturgy to include the participation of our children, to welcome families to celebrate communion together and to shape the message so that is accessible to young and old alike. This is a work in progress and has so far shown great promise. We are also praying in a new way. We are weaving together

## **REPORT OF THE SENIOR PASTOR (continued)**

our prayers and song. This form of communal prayer feels more meditative, more inclusive and offers every member opportunities to share their prayerful joys and concerns. We encourage your feedback as we move forward and continue to respond to the spirit's leading us into new and deeper forms of worship. In the midst of change we strive to hold fast to that which has been and continues to be life giving. God is good. We are a gracious and grace-filled people.

We continue to seek new and innovative ways to share the church's story with the world and invite folks to be part of its life and mission. This fall we launched a new website that will provide both members and seekers a glimpse into who we are. If you know someone who is seeking a church home, invite them to join you! We continue to invite everyone who considers this to be their church, to share your gifts in whatever way feels empowering and life giving to you. Explore the possibility of being a deacon, say yes to the invitation to teach a Sunday School class, accompany our youth on a mission trip, offer your time and talents to the folks taking care of our building and grounds or take a leap of faith and agree to serve on the Stewardship committee. Whenever we step out in faith God always provides.

*“Once you choose hope, anything's possible.”* – Christopher Reeve

We face considerable challenges ahead, but, as Christopher Reeve said in the midst of his life's struggles, “once you choose hope, anything's possible” We know this to be true. We continue to seek God's vision for the future and work to bring that vision to life. We invite your heartfelt and faithful participation. The better we know and the more we trust each other, the easier it is to respond when the world becomes topsy turvy. We continue to seek God's vision by praying and sharing our deepest thoughts and needs with each other. We continue to worship together offering ourselves as a living sacrifice, naming and claiming our failures and receiving God's amazing grace. We continue to share our gifts with this community and wherever there is need in the world. We continue to seek to discover who we are, who our neighbor may be and who and what God is calling us to be and do in the future. In this process we will succeed and we will fail. There will be times when we agree and others when we will not share each other's perspective or point of view. As children of God and disciples of Christ we covenant to treat one another with respect and grace. We agree to share openly our hopes and dreams and frustrations. In the end, we trust that God is in the midst of it and all will be well. God is good! We are a prayerful, faithful, grace-filled, hope-filled people. I look forward to the challenging and blessed work that is ahead of us.

Prayerfully submitted,  
Rev. Lynne M. Dolan

## **REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE**

### **Romans 12:9-13      Marks of a True Christian**

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*

In Paul's "Letter to the Romans," he provides valuable insights into how a Christian should live one's life. One of Paul's "marks" of a true Christian is serving the Lord. In this light, I'd like to reflect on a few acts of service to God and our community over the last year. It's hard to fathom how quickly time passes by, but in the blink of an eye, I've already been in your midst for over a year and a half. Truly, much has occurred since I wrote my last report! Nonetheless, in the spirit of a succinct report, I'll focus on three key acts of service:

- 1) Our first Confirmation worship service together.
- 2) A major renovation project for our youth room.
- 3) Yet another mission trip!

### **Confirmation**

In May, we had the privilege of confirming seven confirmands. Each confirmand had the freedom to choose whether or not he or she wanted to be confirmed. During our special Confirmation worship service, all of the confirmands decided to be confirmed and to become members of our church. It was a lovely occasion as each confirmand recited a piece of Scripture that was important to him or her, and then gave a personal testimony of why their Christian faith mattered to them. Special gifts were then presented to the confirmands by their mentors as well as prayer stoles made by members of our "Hands for Hope" ministry. I remain extremely thankful for this first group of confirmands who set a remarkable example of the vast potential of our youth members.

In September, a new group of confirmands began the program. Our class size grew to eleven members this year – nine of them being boys! I look forward to seeing what the remaining year brings for this new class as they journey together in their confirmation experience. It is such an honor to be involved in this critical moment in our youths' lives as they wrestle with their Christian identities, deciding if they want to confirm their baptisms made long ago, with a few even discerning to be both baptized and confirmed!

### **Youth Room Renovations**

As part of my capacity as the MCL, I've spent a lot of time in the youth room. On a few occasions, I've walked around the space when no one was present and observed its state of disarray. I took note of the growing "temporary" storage space that was forming in the adjacent room, the dusty pews that had not been used in some time, the old furniture that was falling apart, closet doors that were blocked off from being used, random youth supplies and resources

## **REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE (continued)**

scattered around the space without any noticeable organization, and so on. Out of these moments, I began to envision what an updated space would look like.

With these thoughts floating in the back of my mind, another curious event began to take foot at the church. Middle schoolers, many who were not connected with our church, began to enter our doors to hang out. While church leaders understandably did not want them hanging out without proper supervision, and therefore took the appropriate steps to remove them from the premises, I began to wonder if we had a golden opportunity lying before us. Many of our leadership conversations have centered around how to bring young people into the church. In this case, we had young people willingly entering the church without us having to do anything. Therefore, I wondered, “How can we make our young visitors feel welcomed and wanting to return? How can we create a safe space for them with proper supervision?” Furthermore, I wondered if building relationships with middle schoolers throughout our community would help with church growth? From these ponderings, I decided to discuss my ideas with church leadership, which resulted in me writing a letter in the COG pitching the possibility of a teen center where the youth of our community would have a place to gather. First, though, to create such a welcoming place, our youth room was in need of desperate renovations.

Jesus once said, “Ask, and it will be given you (Matt. 7:7).” Well, I asked and it was given! Not long after discussing the possibility with Church Council and the Board of Deacons, and then writing the COG article, members of our community began to show up in force in their support of updating our youth room. Such a project was a labor of love, involving a large time commitment of members both young and old, not to mention personal resources. Nonetheless, the congregation got behind the idea and made it a reality. The temporary storage space was cleaned out and new and appropriate homes were found for the random items previously stored there. This area turned into a study hall for the confirmation class, which consequently could also become a game room by throwing up a ping pong net on the recently donated ping pong table that now resides in this space. Additionally, the old drama room was transformed into a theater room, where the old pews were dusted off, modified, and turned into new seating for one’s movie viewing pleasure. Lastly, the furniture was tossed in the old youth room, newer furniture was donated, the floor was redone, plumbing and electrical outlets were updated, and the entire space was repainted and renewed into the wonderful space that it is today.

Once the finishing touches are made to the theater room, our project will be complete and the possibility of a teen center can then be further explored. Again, the updating of this space would not have been possible without the support of the community. Thankfully, the congregation responded to my vision with open arms, therefore making the renovations a resounding success!

### **Mission Trip**

This past summer, our youth group went on their annual mission trip, which was in Philadelphia, PA. We stayed at a UCC church in the downtown area. Each morning, we would head out into the city to a different service site to do some good work for impoverished members of the community. In addition to our service work, we had several opportunities to reflect on the

## **REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE (continued)**

growing disparities of rich and poor in the city, which was especially noticeable for people of color. I am proud to say that our youth group worked extremely hard and we accomplished so much during our weeklong trip.

Upon arriving at the various service sites, everyone rolled up their sleeves and got to work. After completing the good work at each site, I began to hear a reoccurring message from leaders at all of the various sites. I was told again and again that groups never accomplish as much as we accomplished. There was a large amount of gratitude and thankfulness given from each site leader, and so it spoke to the work ethic of our youth group. Additionally, even though some of our conversations around racial inequality and economic disparities were difficult to talk about, there was a lot of awareness building and eye-opening around these topics. Therefore, not only did the group work hard at serving others, they also learned a lot about themselves and the struggles of impoverished communities in our country.

### **Let Love Be Genuine**

It truly takes a village to accomplish any good work. In fact, the Body of Christ is strengthened when each member works together for the betterment of the community. Therefore, it is with great pleasure to thank everyone in our community who works tirelessly to make our church a wonderful place to worship. In keeping the acts of service listed above in mind, I'd especially like to express my genuine love to the following members:

Youth Ministry - Paul Mullins, Heidi Ebers, Vicky Batchelder, Kim Edstrom, Deb Pumphret, Steve Long, and Christine Evasius; not to mention Dale Martin who attends many of our events and to all of the parents of our youth who contribute in many ways to our youth programming.

Confirmation – Program Assistants: April Mullins and Miriam Montalvo; Mentors: Bev Fletcher, Pete and Marie Murphy, Tonya Hautala, Paul Mullins, Larry Iannetti, Elaine Shaw, Paul Dobner, Marc Montalvo, Lisa Gilliatt, and James Garvin.

Christian Education - Rosemary Royer, Jay Salsgiver, Alana Dros, Linda Phillips, Ken Ward, Kathy Holton, Cathy Phillips, Danielle McLaughlin, Heather Simpson, Laura Kenney, Linda Ryan, and our new Director of Christian Education, Leo Biocchi.

Youth Room Renovators - Don Alger, Carol Baker, Dile Holton, Ann Cairns, Pete Murphy, Marie Murphy, Bill Whitehead, Heidi Ebers, Dylan Ebers, April Mullins, Janey Mullins, Christine Evasius, Kat Evasius, Jared Evasius, Joseph Evasius, Abhi Renikunlia, Chloe Sainsbury, Maddie Kane, Paul Dobner, Dave Rocheleau, Brian Scott, Janet Pike, Kathy Buzzell, Lucinda Hepp, Phyllis Brockett, Carrie Bowler, and Sherry Robertson.

A special thank you to Skip Colby and Steve Flynn, both who donated their skilled talent at no charge to our church. Furthermore, many thanks to Bob Shepard and Rick Taylor for their professional work.

## **REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE (continued)**

Lastly, a sincere, heartfelt, and prodigious thank you to the many members of our church for their generous financial contributions toward the renovation project!

In conclusion, it's been another great year of service and commitment to our beloved church. While our church certainly has its challenges like any church community, it is the good people and the everyday acts of kindness that make my ministry here such a blessing. As Paul made clear, the marks of a true Christian include loving one another with mutual affection and outdoing one another in showing honor, marks that our community continue to live up to quite well. Thanks be to God!

In Christ's Love,

†The Reverend Robert Henry Hyde

## **REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF MUSIC**

The first four months of the official musical interim period have passed by successfully, and with several highlights to report. What remained of the year's budget by September was spent on items and services that have been very helpful to our program here, including instrument maintenance, purchases of new music, hiring of musicians, support of the vocal intern program, and a much-needed new set of music stands. Since September, we have had tunings on the sanctuary piano and box organ, as well as a touchup tuning on the main Casavant organ, which will have the first of its larger repairs in the new year 2018. These repairs will help ensure the longevity of the instrument, now over fifty years old. Our organ is still very much worth the effort to maintain, as it is a very fine instrument whose tone and pipework could not easily (or inexpensively) be replicated by a contemporary builder.

Our music ministry continues to thrive in the manner to which this congregation seems to be accustomed, and while our numbers in the Youth Singers and Training Choir are low, the quality and enthusiasm in these and other groups is extremely high. Additionally, our Senior Choir kept strong attendance even in busy times and popular vacation weeks, and we are blessed with many skilled singers who can sing confidently even when our numbers are lower. Our four handbell ensembles continue to thrive as well.

### **Senior Choir**

The Senior Choir has provided excellent music for worship each week. We have explored a diverse array of repertoire in a short amount of time together, and I am grateful for the enthusiasm and flexibility of the group as we have tackled music new and old, familiar and unfamiliar, accompanied and unaccompanied across many different sacred genres. On our full-attendance days we are thrilled to have robust and skilled Soprano, Alto, and Bass sections, but

## **REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF MUSIC (continued)**

as with many choirs, our tenor section is lacking in numbers (though not skill, strength, or enthusiasm). Our soprano section is reinforced by our talented Vocal Interns, and we thank Maggie Clark, Maggie Keene, and Caroline Martin for their gifts to the program.

One of the highlights of the past few months was the concert in October celebrating the missions and ministries of the church. The Senior Choir provided special music for this event, which involved other groups and soloists from the church. We were also blessed to have Music Minister emeritus Malcolm Halliday with us for the event, lending his talents on piano. We are also grateful to Isabelle Zhao, who joined Malcolm on the four-hand piano accompaniment of Aaron Copland's *The Promise of Living*.

Another highlight from this season was the choir's exploration of choruses from Handel's Messiah Part 1 during the Advent season. Using my new original chamber organ editions, the choir sang selections during the first three weeks of Advent. Additionally, the church's box organ enabled us to perform the choruses at their original pitch level (A=415, one semitone lower than modern pitch).

I thank all of the wonderful singers for four fantastic months in Senior Choir, and I invite any and all singers to come join us now in the new year! Additionally, I would like to include a special thanks to Linda Divris, who faithfully maintains the post of choral librarian.

### **Youth Singers**

While they are small in numbers, it has been an enormous pleasure to work with the talented and enthusiastic young musicians of the Youth Singers this year. We began our year with a memorable new anthem, *Where You Lead Me I Will Go*, and we rang in Christmas with Michael Head's *The Little Road to Bethlehem*. Most of all, the Youth Singers contribute every single week to the worship music of the Senior and Training Choirs, and they constantly help to strengthen both programs. We seriously hope that more youth will come make music with us in 2018!

### **Training Choir**

I have had the great pleasure of playing piano for the Training Choir in this interim year. This group also falls under the "small yet mighty" category, as membership is small, but the choir is made up of eager young singers who have fun singing and love learning lots of new music! They have sung special music in worship at least once a month since the beginning of the year, and in addition to their annual participation at the Southgate Christmas concert, they were joined by the Occasional Choir (made up of younger musicians) and Youth Singers in leading the 5 pm Christmas Eve service.

### **Handbell Choirs**

I have been astounded by the quality and dedication of our handbell choirs at FCCSM. The Shrewsbury Ringers and Parish Pealers have provided much leadership in this regard, as each group frequently plays in Sunday worship. We were also blessed to have our handbell groups for

## **REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF MUSIC (continued)**

the annual Christmas concert at Southgate and our October concert celebrating mission and ministry. In addition to these ensembles, we are also extremely lucky to have two novice bell ensembles, Primary Bells and Chimers, where musicians of all ages are able to hone their skills and participate in bell ringing. A special thanks to Susie Amos, Jeanine Vitale, Tom Porter, Elaine Shaw for their remarkable leadership of our large and thriving handbell program.

### **Arts on the Green**

It has been a pleasure to see our Arts on the Green series continue as a means of musical outreach to the wider community. The last few months, we have seen a bluegrass ensemble, the New England Ringers handbell choir, and our annual Caroling on the Common (which unfortunately had to be held indoors due to weather). I look forward to hosting a few more concerts in 2018, including professional choir Diamonds from the Dust and another appearance from Malcolm.

I thank all of the wonderful musicians participating in our many programs, and I encourage anyone interested in any of our musical offerings to come and join us in 2018. Many thanks to all of you for welcoming me into your church family, and a special thanks to Lynne, Marianne, Robert, Lauren, and Leo for being terrific colleagues and wonderfully easy folks to work with. I wish everyone happy music-making and a very happy 2018!

Faithfully yours,  
Jeffrey Cutts, Interim Minister of Music

## **REPORT OF THE OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR**

This year we welcomed a new Sexton (Brian Scott), Interim Music Director (Jeffrey Cutts) and CE Director (Leo Bioccho). Welcome to all!

Thank you to Sandy Regnier for her help in getting the bulletins ready for Sunday. The Church on the Green would go nowhere if not for our incredible volunteers. Thank you to Sandy Regnier, Mary Pelletier, Ray Harlow, Sue Phyfe, Louise Russell, Elaine Shaw, Linda Holden, Stanley Holden, Janet Pike and Doris Woodfin. Please come and join us if you have a free hour or two on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month. It is a great time of fellowship and a wonderful history lesson!

Along with the church calendar scheduling, Scouts scheduling, funerals, weddings, booking rooms for both outside room renters and member activities, the office also does the record keeping for all new members, baptisms, marriages, and deaths. We take care of bulk mailing, bulletins, newsletters, building use, flower calendar, Arts on the Green programs, door security

## **REPORT OF THE OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR (continued)**

MACUCC forms, maintaining office equipment, building equipment, Board of Health permits, annual building inspections from the Shrewsbury Building Inspector, fire department, State of Massachusetts for the elevator and elevette, setting both heat and air-conditioning weekly for room usage, staying in touch with vendors for security, equipment maintenance ... and anything else that comes along.

Thank you to Rev. Dolan for her help, support and understanding; our Minister of Congregational Life, Rev. Robert Hyde; and our Finance Administrator, Lauren Morse, for keeping me company in the office. It has been a wonderful year.

Marianne Brodrick  
Office Administrator

## **REPORT OF THE DEACONS**

First Congregational Church of Shrewsbury Board of Deacons is dedicated and we are proud to assist our Pastors as we continue to grow in our faith and reach out to each member of our church community.

The annual Deacon's Retreat was held on March 26th. The Deacons spent the afternoon "Listening to the Movement of the Spirit for an evolving Ministry", which was the overarching topic of discussion. What is the role of a Deacon; past, present, and future? As a church community we have moved to a partial ministry model. How will Deacons evolve as we continue to move forward? The Visitation Ministry was also discussed at the Retreat and the group shared a recommendation to support and participate in the music listening sessions.

The role of Deacons and their current responsibilities include: assisting our ministers with Communion, Baptism, Confirmation, New Members, and at Special Services. Deacons organize and work with our youth in our Jr. Deacons program and organize our weekly lay readers. We maintain a Friends at Home list and Deacons visit, deliver flowers, call, and write notes to keep our Friends at Home in contact with our church and in our thoughts and prayers. The Confirmation Class shares their Statement of Beliefs with the Deacons in small group settings. Our prayer ministry continues to thrive with our Blue Prayer Cards in addition to the book of Joys and Concerns. This fall our Prayer Ministry expanded. We are currently holding a regular prayer gathering after worship service one Sunday a month.

Our Senior Pastor, Reverend Lynne Dolan, facilitated a five week Lenten Devotional Study. Our Minister of Congregational Life, Reverend Robert Henry Hyde, facilitates a weekly Bible Study. Super Saturday, held in the spring in Wilbraham and the fall in Framingham, was attended by Deacons, both Pastors, and other members of our congregation. A six evening and full-day

## **REPORT OF THE DEACONS (continued)**

training on Racial Justice began late this fall and will continue into the spring of 2018. One goal of the Deacons is to provide and encourage the growth of the Church as a learning community. After the retirement of Our Minister of Music, Malcolm Halliday, the Deacons along with the entire congregation, have welcomed Jeffrey Cutts as interim Minister of Music. Jeffery works to provide our church community with music which complements our spiritual growth. The music program offers participation opportunities for all, from the occasional choir for beginners to our Senior Choir. Bell Groups also span age groups and ability levels. Music is an integral part of our worship service and we thank Jeffrey for his devotion to this important part of our worship service.

This spring Reverend Hyde and the Christian Education Director jointly brought forth their well thought out plan to dedicate one Sunday a month, the first Sunday, as a Family Service. After a discussion, the Deacons agreed to begin in October. All children are welcomed to actively participate in the service. It has been a delight to see our youth serve as lay readers, ushers, assist in communion and the many duties Deacons perform on Communion Sunday, the first Sunday of the month.

Both of our Pastors have fully functioning Pastoral Relations Committees with five members serving on each Committee. Both Pastors have had their annual review and the Deacons want to personally thank all who participated.

First Congregational Church Deacons are here to support fellow church members in their faith, and affirm the belief that God is still speaking. Our church is blessed to have a group of committed Deacons who work to promote opportunities for spiritual development, and provide a presence in our community. Our work together and with the church community allows us to flourish and grow in our faith.

Thank you to the entire church community for your work in supporting our historic church. Honoring old traditions and new creativity allows us to focus forward. Our church community encourages each of us to grow spiritually, provide assistance to those in need, and continue on our journey of faith enrichment. As always, your feedback is welcomed as we continue to be faithful servants of God.

Respectfully Submitted  
Deb Del Dotto, Chair of Deacons

## **REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

Moving into 2018, members of the Christian Education Committee are Jay Salsgiver, Ken Ward, Cathy Phillips, Kathy Holton, Linda Ryan, Alana Dros, Danielle McLaughlin, Laura Kenney, Heather Simpson and Rosemary Royer. We thank outgoing members Heather Knight and Darcy Deldotto for their invaluable help these past few years, and we are very grateful to additional parents who have contributed their gifts and talents when time has permitted. In August as we said our goodbyes to our former DCE Stephanie Dozois, and applauded her dedication and the creative and innovative programs she brought to the Sunday School.

The current CE Committee members also teach in the Sunday School and work well as a team alongside the Sunday School Guardian Group in the absence in recent months of a Director of Christian Education. Formed in the summer of 2016, the Sunday School Guardians, consisting of Linda Phillips, Jay Salsgiver, Ken Ward, and Alana Dros have run the Sunday School with great efficiency. We have a lot to be grateful for. They have taken turns being Supt. of the Day, distributing the Spark Curriculum lesson plans and materials, and ensuring the safety of the children. This year, Jay Salsgiver created a successful Signup Genius for Pre-School teachers and Workshop Rotation leaders. Middle School parents responded well to email requests for Middle School assistants. We have found that while some young parents are reluctant to commit to a few weeks of a unit ahead of time, they will assist on an ad hoc basis if asked and will step up at the last minute if available.

We fully understand that young households seem busier than ever these days, but we hope that they can relax at church, feel involved in the Sunday School, and forge close bonds with each other. This is one reason why we strive for a well-functioning Sunday School coupled with some joyful CE events.

Another goal has been to de-centralize the week-to-week operations to put less reliance on the Director of Christian Education. This has been achieved in two ways: firstly, teachers are put in contact with one another within a grade level in order to bond, share teaching ideas, and to find their own last minute replacements if needed. Secondly, teachers have been offered a link to the Spark curriculum so that they can print out their own lesson plans and materials for the week. Our nursery infants continue to be cared for by our own nurturing Kristine Couture to whom we are very indebted. It's comforting for the infants and their parents to enjoy the consistency each week of a familiar caring adult.

Our CE events have included a Spring Fling and a Christmas Party for the young ones run by the talented Kathy Holton. The 15 or so children and their parents played some wonderful games to music and song. They were also treated to an exciting egg hunt, a piñata and made some crafts. The Sunday School Community Brunch was enjoyed by all, and Children's Sunday continued this year with the addition of a tour of a fire truck. Thanks to Heather Simpson for coordinating this. On the first Sunday of Advent, the children were treated to Advent Calendars and refreshments at the new Sunday School Corner in Gifford Hall. The much-anticipated Tableau was a hit again and we all marvel at how wonderful the children look in the costumes, at how it all somehow comes together at the last minute.

## **REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COMMITTEE (continued)**

The CE Committee is delighted with the addition of the monthly Family Service and is happy to encourage our youth to participate in the various tasks. The committee members will continue to make suggestions and work with the Deacons and Ministers to ensure that this service becomes 'family friendly', enjoyable and meaningful to our younger members of the congregation. We are absolutely thrilled to welcome Leo Biocchi as our new Director of Christian Education. The Congregation experienced a real 'moment' during the first Sunday of the Advent Family Service as Leo was introduced to the congregation with the children sitting nearby. With numerous gifts and musical talents to share with our church community, we think that Leo will quickly impress and endear himself to the Sunday School families and beyond. While arguably, the days of a volunteer Sunday School Superintendent may be over, as a group we fully intend to support and nurture Leo's growth in his new position, and with Robert Hyde as his mentor we are confident that he will flourish as our DCE.

Respectfully,  
Rosemary Royer, CE Chair

## **REPORT OF THE CHURCH CLERK**

Our church bylaws charge the Church Clerk to keep records of business meetings, maintain membership records and census data, give notice of regular and special meetings, serve as secretary to Council and annual and special meetings, and make an annual statistical report to the congregation and the UCC.

The church office administrator maintains the membership records of births, marriages, deaths and membership changes and submits the statistical reports annually.

**BAPTISMS** 02/19 Tinsley Faith Dozois, daughter of Stephanie and Steve Dozois  
04/23 Molly Elizabeth Smith, daughter of Jessica and Jeffrey Smith  
05/07 Sean Everett Degliaberti, son of Jessica and Keith Degliaberti  
05/14 James Duncan Phye, son of Kimberly and David Phye  
05/21 Zoe Emmeline Spyropoulos, daughter of Gina and Paul Spyropoulos  
06/25 Andrew Nathan Barrett, son of Lisa Barrett  
09/03 Emerson Kathleen Peters, daughter of Jessica and Daniel Peters  
09/17 Clara Elaine Pochily, daughter of Christine and Michael Pochily  
11/12 Kerrie Jean Fournier, daughter of Erin and Jason Fournier

Total Baptisms: 9

### **MARRIAGES**

Total Marriages: 0

## REPORT OF THE CHURCH CLERK (continued)

### ADDITIONS

#### **MEMBERSHIP**

April 30 Lisa Barrett, Mary Barrett, Diane Brown, Beth Anne Doan, Andy Doan,  
Cathy Albanese-Gabbett, Kevin Gabbett

November 19 Claudia Plasse and Larry Iannetti

Total Affirmation of Faith: 9

Activation of Membership: 0

Membership Re-instatement: 0

Confirmation: (Confession of Faith) May 7

Michael Bonollo Jared Evasius

Tony Li Seth Mullins

Catherine Pellini Katrina Roy

Kyra Ward

Total Confession of Faith: 7

### LOSSES

**DEATHS** 01/23 Helen Caswell 05/09 Albert Haynes 05/30 Jean Whitney

Total of deaths: 3

Non-Members Funeral Services Performed:

02/28 Alberta Somers 04/01 Christine Koester

06/03 Elizabeth Rossley 07/30 Evan Hancox-Rizicki

08/18 Leonard Needels 08/06 Clifford Prentice

09/21 Vincent DiPilato

Total of non-member deaths: 7

Removed by Request:

02/27 Jim LaPrad 02/27 Linda LaPrad

01/29 Lindsey Merchant 01/29 Desley Boardman

08/29 Jean Rekemeyer 08/29 Arthur Brownlow

11/08 Mary Ramachandra

Total removed by request: 7

Removed from Membership by Board of Deacons:

Total removed by vote: 0

Membership as of December 31, 2015: 657

Additions: 16

Losses: 10

Net Change (loss): 6

Membership as of December 31, 2016: 663

## **REPORT OF MODERATOR**

Change today is a constant and it certainly is an accurate characterization of 2017 at First Congregational Church here in Shrewsbury. Throughout the year we experienced a period of transition as we celebrated the ministries and bid farewell, to those who have faithfully served our congregation. Early in the year our Minister of Music Malcolm Halliday announced his retirement, following nearly three decades of dedicated service. Early in the summer Stephanie Dozois, Director of Christian Education, shared the news that she would be departing to respond to the call of a new position at another church.

Each of these announcements, resulted in the need to redirect significant amounts of time and attention, to lift up and celebrate their respective ministries, to undertake the necessary steps to prepare for interim periods of support and to launch searches to permanently fill these essential roles in our church. Through the Spring, we focused on the dual activities of early transition planning and celebrating Malcom's music ministry. A search committee was assembled and launched to assess immediate needs and call the resources necessary to sustain our music program during the interim period, pending a comprehensive search for a permanent music director. Sunday June 11<sup>th</sup> marked the date for Malcolm's last service and was followed by a memorable celebration of his ministry here at First Congregational Church. Beginning in the spring and working through the entire summer, our interim search committee worked diligently to first assess interim requirements for supporting our music program and then identify, screen and interview candidates. Their work culminated at the end of the summer as we welcomed Jeffrey Cutts as interim music director.

Even as the interim search committee was completing its work, a second search committee charged with conducting the search for a permanent music director position was assembled and began their work during the hot summer months. The committee conducted an extraordinarily rigorous assessment, surveying some 70 open music director positions and also speaking with music schools and accomplished music directors to secure their perspective. The committee documented and ranked personal and professional attributes for a prospective candidate. Based on that research, the committee drafted a job description for First Congregational Church, together with proposed updates to the Church profile. Following reviews in congregational talk-back sessions, with CLT and Church Council, the committee is on track to post the position and begin screening responses in January 2018.

Special thanks are in order to members of both the interim and permanent search committees. We are blessed to have such dedicated volunteers who have and continue to work so diligently. Many of us do not have visibility to the long hours these folks spend on our behalf. We are grateful for their work throughout the summer and many long evenings throughout the year. Their work will enable us to arrive at the best decision that will serve to sustain and further build on the outstanding music ministry here at First Congregational Church.

As I noted, search activity was not confined to our music ministry. Our search to permanently fill the position of Director of Christian Education (DCE), proved to be an extended effort over many months. This situation proved to be quite the challenge as our volunteers – particularly

## **REPORT OF MODERATOR (continued)**

Personnel representatives were stretched across multiple search efforts. While the DCE search was in progress, additional volunteers from our Faith Formation Ministry stepped up to fill the void and keep our Sunday School running following Stephanie's departure. This group who referred to themselves as the "Sunday School Guardians" poured enormous time and energy, much of it behind the scenes, to ensure that Sunday school class schedules were in place and teachers recruited. Because of their efforts, we were ready to welcome children and youth back to Sunday School at the end of the summer and in November we welcomed Leo Biocchi as our new DCE. We owe this group a very, special thanks for their dedication and support.

In February, the Church Leadership Team (CLT), met in retreat to evaluate progress and consider mission and administrative priorities for 2017. The retreat provided a welcome opportunity and the time to thoughtfully reflect on a variety of important topics that included:

- Considering planned actions to address the aforementioned staff transitions
- Reviewing the progress of ministry & governance transition
- Discuss mission priorities around our youth and outreach. In particular, time was spent considering potential ideas centered on outreach to the wider community as a counter the declining role of the church in many people's lives, impacts church attendance/participation.

Membership, service attendance and overall engagement in the life of the church continues to be an area of significant concern for us, mirroring the experience of other mainline churches. Particular measures vary as does the interpretation of the implications for any specific measure. It is apparent that engagement within the church can encompass many other activities beyond attendance at Sunday worship services. However, the long-term trend is clear as evidenced by declines in service attendance, correlated with a narrowing base of pledging and in overall financial support. Service attendance during specific seasons have experienced significant declines over the last decade. Over the past 5 years, we have seen average attendance for the overall year fall by 33%. Measures of stewardship and Sunday school participation have also seen comparable declines.

There are no single or easy responses to such trends. Council, CLT and our pastors have and continue to expend significant effort to assess the implications of these factors on our mission, ministries and programs and consider approaches for sustaining them. We encourage and welcome ideas from everyone in our community in this regard.

Challenges notwithstanding, we at First Congregational Church continue to support vibrant ministries both within and beyond the four walls of our historic meeting house. Within the local community our outreach to IHN, Mustard Seed, sponsorship of scouting are examples of our commitment to service. Within our congregation there is constant activity ranging from our prayer ministry, bible study, care teams, Parkinson Choir and Dine with Nine to name a just a few. Our music ministry remains a centerpiece in the life of our congregation. Looking beyond the immediate community, our outreach to wider ministries is extensive. Both of our pastors serve in leadership roles – Rev. Hyde on the board of the Worcester Area Mission Society

## **REPORT OF MODERATOR (continued)**

(WAMS) and Rev Dolan, currently serving as Vice Chair of the MAUCC Board of Directors. Other members of our congregation serve on the board of Andover Newton Seminary at Yale and as delegates to the MAUCC. Our youth are significantly invested in mission work as evidenced by their work with City Reach and the annual mission trip, while other members volunteer for other mission work. We provide in-care support for seminary students called to ministry. Other churches look to ours for inspiration and also to benefit from our experience in areas ranging from our music program to our success with utilizing cell towers to generate income supplemental income.

In my report last year, I made reference to the importance of service within our community. As the examples noted above evidence, we are blessed as church with many who are committed to serve. That commitment manifest itself in many ways across our congregation. Nowhere was it more evident than in the “roll-up-your-sleeves” work performed by Carol Baker who took it upon herself to retrofit our meeting room downstairs, by the many volunteers who gave of their time and resources to renovate our youth room and those who assisted with kitchen renovations this year. Special thanks to all who contributed to these efforts!

We are also blessed with gifts in the form of buildings and financial resources that other churches are not so fortunate to have. With those gifts comes responsibility to be good stewards of the gifts entrusted to us. Our committees, Council and CLT expend a great deal of effort on activities aimed at maintaining and making sure these are put to optimal use. Activity during 2017 encompassed work on multiple fronts including:

- Extensive evaluation of antenna contracts and potential for extending and further monetizing these assets
- Transition to new investment advisors with the aim of improving performance and lowering cost of managing our long-term investment and endowment assets
- Evaluating alternative options for the parsonage and meeting pastoral housing commitments
- Building improvement projects and planning for future capital projects
- Investment in a new, updated web site that enables more effective communication and outreach to both our congregation and the wider community

As we move into 2018, we mark 295 years of rich history and tradition here at First Congregational Church of Shrewsbury. Looking forward to 2018, plans call for the completion of the search and selection for a permanent music director. We look forward to redirecting renewed energy to sustaining and expanding our ministries, further developing our ministry and governance model and making progress toward that elusive goal of achieving long-term sustainability. We are now within five years of the tricentennial anniversary of First Congregational Church’s organization. It is not too early to begin planning for where we would like to be in 2023 and how we will prepare to celebrate that auspicious milestone.

Even as we seek to discern the future path of our ministries it can be helpful to reflect on the long history and tradition that provide a strong foundation to build on as we look forward. A recent

**REPORT OF MODERATOR (continued)**

experience of mine underscored the resiliency and the strength of our Christian faith, offering a level of reassurance with respect to our ability to sustain our mission in changing times. While attending a board meeting of the Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School, we had the opportunity to view a priceless collection of document artifacts dating to antiquity. Here we had before us several dozen artifacts, spanning nearly two millennia of Christian history. Beginning with a parchment dated to only a few hundred years or so following the birth of Christ, we also viewed a Guttenberg Bible, Martin Luther's Bible, Sir Thomas Moore's prayer book, along with books that were the foundation for the English translation that produced the first King James bible. It was as if we were witness to Christianity's history, laid out as a family tree before us on two long tables. It was an inspiring and insightful experience, underscoring the deep roots and staying power of our Christian faith together with its resiliency and ability to always remain relevant to the times throughout the centuries. It is a history not to be underestimated and a lesson to keep in mind as we consider the possibilities for our ministries here at First Congregational Church.

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Before concluding, I would like to recognize the members of our Church Leadership Team: Paul Sainsbury, Senior Pastor Lynne Dolan, Deborah Del Dotto, Frank Jelinch, Jean Feldkamp, Stephanie Ambra, Dile Holton, and Jay Salsgiver.

Thank you also to the members of Church Council, to our committees, ministry groups, ministers, staff and to each and every member of our congregation who give of themselves for the work of our church.

Blessings,  
Dave Smith  
Moderator

## REPORT OF MISSION AND OUTREACH

Thank you to everyone that contributed time, talent and treasure to the Church's outreach efforts this year. Your efforts made all the Mission and Outreach Ministry's efforts possible. Your financial donations to the church this year made the following donations possible.

Wider UCC	\$21,000
Andover Newton	\$2,000
Youth & Family Services	\$5,000
Sage Place	\$ 400
St Anne's Human Services	\$3,400
St Anne's Medical Clinic	\$1,500
The Barton Center	\$ 500
Cottage Hill Academy	\$1,200
Mustard Seed	\$2,310
Interfaith Hospitality Network	\$3,500
Worcester Area Mission Society	\$6,000
Heifer Project	\$ 850
LaRomana Mission	<u>\$2,000</u>
Total	\$44,660

**Special Collections:** We collected money from the congregation for the following:

Christmas Fund (Veterans of the Cross) \$ 696

One Great Hour of Sharing \$ 721

Neighbors in Need \$ 401

Food Cards for St Anne's

    Thanksgiving \$ 1000

    Easter \$ 800

Hope for Housing food cards: Purchases of food cards by members of the congregation resulted in \$1258 going to Hope for Housing, a program from the Greater Worcester Housing Alliance that works to prevent family homelessness.

Sale of Gift Cards: Purchases of gift cards by members of the congregation resulted in about \$150 in proceeds to the Mission and Outreach Ministry.

Mustard Seed Dinner: Your attendance at the March dinner netted \$437 which will be used to purchase food for Mustard Seed dinners.

SERRV: Your purchase of handcrafted items from artisans and farmers around the world helped those artisans and farmers. Proceeds from the 2016 sales were donated to Dismas House to help with their heating expenses.

## **REPORT OF MISSION AND OUTREACH (continued)**

Gift Tags for St Anne's: 100 tags

At Christmas time, congregants provided 100 gifts to children in need.

St Anne's donations: Almost every week, donations of food and used clothing were made to St Anne's to benefit their food pantry and thrift store.

### **Your donations of time and talent made the following possible:**

Mustard Seed Meals: Volunteers prepared, delivered and served a monthly meal for the Mustard Seed program in Worcester.

Interfaith Hospitality Network: Volunteers provided evening and overnight hosting for three weeks. This program provides housing and food for six homeless families at a time.

Mitten Tree: Mittens and scarves were made or purchased and donated for distribution by St Anne's.

March Toiletries & Food Collection for St Anne's Food Pantry: Toiletries and food were donated by the congregation and the Boy Scouts delivered them to St Anne's.

#### IHN Fundraisers:

Used shoes were donated by the congregation to support this fundraiser for IHN  
Five members of our congregation raised donations and walked in the May Walk for Homelessness. Proceeds from the walk benefit organizations working on homelessness in Worcester, including IHN.

A special thanks to the entire membership of the Mission and Outreach Ministry for making the IHN Dinner such a success.

A special thanks to Mariah Pike for making our attractive sign-up sheets this year. A special thanks to Kathi Buzzell and Sue Russell for making the SERRV sales happen during Advent.

A special thanks to Janet Pike whose organization makes the Mustard Seed meals happen.

A special thanks to Dave and Sue Russell who do the shopping for the food used to make the Mustard Seed meals.

A special thanks to Lyn Tozeski for hosting and recruiting evening hosts at IHN.

A special thanks to Lisa Gilliat for making the gift card sales happen.

A special thanks to Norma Garcia for making birthdays joyous at Sage Place.

The biggest thank you goes to the members of this congregation! Your support of the Mission and Outreach budget allows gifts to be made to community organizations that make our immediate area a better place. You literally provide food for the hungry and shelter for the homeless. Your contributions to special collections support the mission of the United Church of

## **REPORT OF MISSION AND OUTREACH (continued)**

Christ nationally and internationally. You make the Outreach efforts of this congregation possible.

**Mission and Outreach Members:** Kathi Buzzell, Jean Feldkamp, Norma Garcia, Lisa Gilliat, Sue Russell, Lynn Tozeski

**If you've read this far, you are interested in the Mission and Outreach Ministry. If you would like to join this ministry, you don't need to be nominated. All you have to do is contact Jean Feldkamp at [jeanfildkamp@hotmail.com](mailto:jeanfildkamp@hotmail.com) or 508-869-6025.**

**If there was one thing you could do in 2018 to further our church's outreach efforts, what would it be?**

## **REPORT OF CHURCH LIBRARIAN**

During the past year we have added a great number of books in all sections of the library, thanks to many donations from members of our congregation who were moving or down-sizing, plus a few new purchases with specific themes. Donations have definitely kept our expenses to a minimum. We continue to be "Under Construction" as we try to purge, organize, and re-locate various books.

We have a large number of picture books and DVDs in the children's section which tell many of the bible stories found in the Sunday School curriculum. One special addition has been "The Brick Bible" which shows the books of the Bible with Lego characters. The holiday collection has been very popular with the younger children.

Thanks to the Martha Circle and their guest speaker Norman Minor, we received a collection of books related to Islam.

In anticipation of our upcoming 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary we have started a section called "1723 and Me". It has a few historic articles, photos, and a DVD with Alden Stone and others sharing stories of the early years of our church. Please check it out to learn more or contact the "Our Story" ministry.

Many of our research related materials have been moved to the newly renovated CE library on the lower level. Many thanks to Carol Baker and Doris Woodfin for painting and organizing this special room which is useful to our Pastors and others doing biblical research.

Our new lending policy that was started last year seems to be working well. We no longer require sign-out cards, but we ask that borrowers try to return their books within 3 weeks. Most books are returned in a timely fashion, but if you find you have a book that is "overdue" please return it as soon as you can.

## **REPORT OF CHURCH LIBRARIAN (continued)**

We hope members of the congregation will continue to take advantage of our library by reading some of our newest books as well as many of our previous acquisitions. We also appreciate receiving any books from book club members and those who are downsizing their collections.

We will once again be “purging” our book shelves in January, donating some of our older books to area collecting services. As always, we will continue to keep valuable historic/reference books.

Elaine Shaw, Librarian

## **REPORT OF THE STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE**

The past year was a challenging one for the Stewardship Committee with the transition of several members on and off the committee and a change in chairmanship. For most of the year, we have had a three-person committee, and I wish to thank Dennis Troy and Chris Knight for their work on this year’s campaign.

Additionally, Stewardship owes a great debt of gratitude to our Senior Pastor, Rev. Dolan, our Financial Administrator Lauren Morse and our Office Manager Marianne Brodrick for their diligent work on this year’s campaign. Most of all, we thank all of the 145 members who have pledged their financial support for 2018.

As of this writing on January 8, the current Stewardship Campaign has garnered \$300,982. With a Campaign goal of \$325,000, this achievement brings us to about 93 percent of goal. The number of pledges as of this writing is 43 less than what was achieved by that point in 2016. As an addendum to the campaign strategy, Stewardship is reaching out to those who pledged in 2016 but have not done so in 2017 in an attempt to reach our goal to fully fund budgets of FCCS for 2018.

Under the theme of “Journey to Generosity,” Stewardship’s strategy for the past year has been to explain how giving to our Church assists our members and thousands of needy persons in the greater-Shrewsbury area through our many missions and ministries, appealing to members’ senses of gratitude to God in helping to alleviate our neighbors’ suffering in this manner.

Despite facing headwinds of overall declining Church attendance and membership, which is a universal reality for churches these days, it’s extremely encouraging to have achieved as much of our goal as we have by year-end. Two of our FCCS members recently took the additional and unexpected step of pledging a second time as an example to all of us of what we can achieve through our collective generosity.

## **REPORT OF THE STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE (continued)**

Stewardship encourages all members who have already pledged to follow those individuals' leads by searching their hearts for how further generous they may be to help us meet and exceed our minimum goal for this year.

Paul LaBelle, Chairman  
Stewardship Committee

## **REPORT OF THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**

2017 was a very busy year for the FCCSM Personnel Committee. Since February, we have collaborated with the appropriate committees to hire a new Sexton, Brian Scott; an Interim Music Director, Jeffrey Cutts; and a new Director of Christian Education, Leo Biocchi. All three searches came with unique challenges and a few unanticipated delays. Ultimately we feel confident that the new staff members are a good fit for the positions and for our community, and we are grateful to have them here.

There is also a representative from the Personnel Committee on the search committee for the permanent Music Minister. The search committee began their process back in August and anticipates having a settled Music Minister/Director in place by the summer or early fall of 2018.

In addition, Personnel is in the process of reviewing and amending the Personnel Policies first adopted in 2008. This review is not intended to be a shift in any of the existing policies, but rather a process to clarify the policies and an effort to use explicit, consistent language throughout the document for all positions. Personnel will be bringing these updated Policies to Church Council for their review in early 2018.

Respectfully submitted,  
Christina M. Manos  
Chair, Personnel Committee

## **REPORT OF THE AVIS KEMP/OLSON SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE**

As of June 2017, we have awarded 40 Olson Scholarships totaling \$20,000 and 124 Avis Kemp scholarships, totaling over \$61,000. 2017 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Olson Scholarships and this coming year will be the 30<sup>th</sup> year of Avis Kemp Scholarships.

Our Olson Scholarship recipients for 2017 were Hannah Besaw and Emily Lapomardo. Avis Kemp Scholarships were awarded to Natalie Martin and Kevin Durkin

The Endowment Fund continues to receive memorial donations, which are added to our scholarship resources. We are very grateful to the many church members and friends who generously support our fundraisers and/or who have made memorial donations to the scholarship fund.

In the spring we sold summer bulbs through "Flower Power" and we sold additional spring bulbs in the fall, earning \$549.50 to add to our scholarship funds. Everyone reported that their gardens were lovely! Look for us again in the spring as well as the fall.

The Church Fair will be coming in the fall 2018, with our annual "Silent Auction" table. While you are doing your spring cleaning or downsizing, be sure to set aside your special treasures to help us earn scholarship money.

In March 2018, applications for scholarships will be available on line or in the church office for any church members interested in furthering their education.

Elaine Shaw for the Committee: Stephanie Ambra, Phyllis Brockett, Carol Haller, Helen Porter, Margaret Szulga.

## **TROOP 114 SCOUTING REPORT**

### **Boy Scout Troop 114**

Boy Scout Troop 114 began the second 100 years of sponsorship by our Congregation on Scout Sunday, February 12, 2017.

Troop activities this year included success with new sleds at the Treasure Valley Klondike Derby, marching in the Memorial Day Parade, food preparation and sale on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in Dean Park, two weeks of summer camp at Treasure Valley and Camp Yawgoog, attendance at the National Jamboree, and a week of sailing and snorkeling at Seabase in the Florida Keys. At summer camp, the Jamboree, and Seabase, scouts learn skills, earn merit badges, and achieve rank advancement. All of the boys are learning life skills that will make them good citizens and members of their community

Troop 114 is very active under the leadership of Scout Master Rick Spurr and Committee Chair Jenn Owen. There were 69 active scouts and 32 registered adult leaders in the troop this fall.

## **TROOP 114 SCOUTING REPORT (continued)**

The troop meets in Cushing Hall on Tuesdays, and the troop has a weekend activity every month, usually camping. This is a large, well-run troop that consistently receives a Quality troop award from Boy Scouts, including the Gold Level Journey to Excellence this year.

Troop 114 raises money for their camping and high adventure trips through quarterly bottle drives at town hall, the bottle bin in the parking lot, and at their annual Pasta Supper at the church, this year on Saturday, March 17, St. Patrick's Day. The troop also volunteers for service activities including working with the Outreach committee by leading the March food collection for St. Anne's food bank. The troop also cleaned the church parsonage grounds this fall, raking and disposing of the leaves and trash. Scouts working for the Eagle award conduct service projects in the community which this year included completion of a field house at the Glavin youth soccer fields, carpentry projects at a two local churches, collecting old flags for proper disposal, and a nature trail at Floral School.

### **Cub Scout Pack 114**

Pack 114 is very active and continues to flourish under the leadership of new Cub Master Virgil Gray and Committee Chair Susan Gregory. The success of the pack is supported by a very large and active group of adult volunteers and assistant Cubmasters.

There are 58 active cub scouts in 8 dens in the Pack. 25 new boys joined the Pack this year. 29 adults are registered as leaders. This year the Pack added a Lions Den for 5 year old boys. The Pack meets in Cushing Hall once a month on Mondays and the Dens meet regularly in the church. The Pack usually has a weekend activity every month for the boys and their families, such as local hikes, overnights, fishing, skating, and the Pinewood Derby competition in March. Overnights at the Ecotarium and Treasure Valley were special events this year. This is a large, well-run Pack that consistently receives a Quality award from Boy Scouts.

The Pack is involved in community service opportunities, including hosting a coffee hour at the church, the Memorial Day parade, recycling uniforms for new/younger scout families, food collection for the food bank, a toys-for-tots collection, and participation in the annual town clean-up. The Cub Scouts raise money through can and bottle drives and candy sales.

Cub Scouts earn belt loops and pins for skills and rank advancements culminating as Webelos and the Arrow of Light transition to Boy Scouts. Awards are received each year at the annual Blue and Gold dinner, including the cross over to Boy Scouts.

Our Congregation has an exceptional Boy Scout Troop and Cub Pack and we should all be proud of 101 years of sponsorship. Scout Sunday is February 12. Please come to the Pasta Supper fundraiser for Troop 114 on Saturday, March 17, in Gifford Hall.

Pete Murphy  
Charter Representative

## **REPORT OF THE CARE TEAM MINISTRY**

The Care Team Ministry, which began back in 2011, is basically an invisible, silent ministry going on strong behind the scenes of First Congregational Church of Shrewsbury. It is a ministry which brings kindness and caring to countless members of the congregation throughout the year by performing simple and ordinary acts of thoughtfulness. The Care Team members take very seriously their role of providing a constant connection of support and love for those who are temporarily or perhaps permanently separated from the life of the Church. It is a ministry of many people performing many different functions. The Care Team members always choose what they feel most comfortable doing. It may consist of sending cards to those who are homebound to assure them that the Church is thinking of them, calling or visiting someone to see if there are any needs that the care team can assist them with, helping to stock the shelves of the care team freezer so that soups, casseroles, muffins, breads and cookies are always available if someone needs a meal, or providing transportation to a Church service or Church related function through a subcommittee of the Care team called "Car Pool Heroes".

All communication is done by email and there are no meetings. A luncheon is planned for Sunday, March 4th, right after the Sunday morning service to celebrate and thank our care team members, as well as to discuss how we might improve or change what we do. It will also be an invitation to anyone in the congregation who would like to know more about this wonderful ministry and perhaps join it. Please come to the luncheon. We would love to share with you everything that this ministry does. I am constantly getting very positive feedback from members of the congregation who are on the receiving end of the kindness of the care team about how much it means to them to be remembered and thought of perhaps during very difficult times in their lives.

I would like to thank Janet Trippi for mentoring me as I took over this position. After her many years of leadership, I greatly appreciated her guidance and support.

Thank you to all of you who serve on the care teams. I hope that you realize, that even though it is a ministry that is done entirely behind the scenes, its impact and how it touches so many lives, is wonderful. I know that the members of the congregation hold you in very high esteem, not only for what you are constantly doing, but for doing it so very well.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sue Russell, Care Team Coordinator

## **REPORT OF THE EARTH STEWARDSHIP MINISTRY**

### ***Members***

Don Alger, Andreas Bergmann, Deb Del Dotto, Darren Del Dotto, Paul Dobner, Jason Molina, Suzanne Moriondo, Andrea Pereira, and Paul Sainsbury

### ***Mission statement***

As we are all caretakers of God's earth, the mission of the Earth Stewardship Ministry (ESM) is to promote awareness of environmental issues. We participate in efforts to address these issues and provide educational opportunities that advance understanding of sound environmental practices.

### ***Church Solar***

The ESM continues to be excited about the prospect of using solar power to provide a renewable source of energy for the church. The solar landscape will be changing this year due to the implementation of the new SMART State solar incentive plan, and the retirement of the *more beneficial* SRECII program at the end of March, 2018. Importantly for Shrewsbury, the SMART plan is not available to customers served by municipal utilities like SELCO (unlike SRECII). A plan for the installation of a 14.7 kW system on the South facing roof of the Adkins addition was approved by the Shrewsbury Historic District Commission a few years ago and would provide ~35% of the church's electricity with a projected payback period of only 8 years under the SRECII incentive program.

### ***Earth Sunday***

Earth Sunday this year was Sustainable Sunday with exhibits highlighting Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), home gardening, recycling, and a special exhibit on composting by Missy Hollenback. The service on Sunday, April 23rd featured hymns and music celebrating God's creation.

### ***"Scientists In the Field" Books Purchased for the Church Library***

The ESM purchased two *Scientists In the Field* books detailing how scientists study environmental problems and think of solutions for those problems after identifying the underlying cause. *The Hive Detectives* by Loree Griffin Burns traces how scientists are investigating the recent spate of hive collapse that has been occurring in the United States and elsewhere aiming to identify the underlying cause. *Tracking Trash*, also by Burns, describes how scientists learn about ocean currents and how floating trash accumulates in giant whorls in the Pacific Ocean. These books are perfect for young readers to explore environmental problems and to learn about the scientific process. They can now be found in the ESM section of the church library.

### ***Earth-Centered Lenten Observance***

The ESM sponsored another Earth-Centered Lenten Observance this past year encouraging members to instead of giving up favorite foods or desserts to instead focus on practices that can help reduce their environmental impact. This simple meditative task was centered on choosing one of ten simple ways to reduce pollution and/or energy consumption bolstered by more

## **REPORT OF THE EARTH STEWARDSHIP MINISTRY (continued)**

expansive explanations in COG articles. For the ambitious, the Massachusetts Council of the UCC sponsors a yearly Lenten Carbon Fast where you can receive daily environmental tips via email by signing up at [www.macucc.org/carbonfast](http://www.macucc.org/carbonfast).

### ***Town-wide clean-up***

ESM once again organized a group of volunteers to participate in the Shrewsbury town-wide clean-up on April 8th. The weather was somewhat chilly but spirits were warm and the group pulled an impressive (but at the same time disappointing) amount of trash from Dean Park. Many thanks to everyone that participated in this great event! And, if you have not participated in the past, please consider joining us this coming April, since many hands make light work.

### ***Church and Parsonage Energy Use***

The ESM continued to work with Marianne Brodrick, Lauren Morse, and Chris Williams (Buildings and Grounds) to track the cost and consumption of electricity, heating fuel, and water at our church and parsonage. The installation of insulation in many areas of the church, improved weather stripping, hot water pipe insulation, the use of window coverings, and the installation of higher efficiency gas burners over the past few years have all contributed to minimizing heat and cooling energy consumption and costs this past year. In fact, the ~\$35K cost of installing dual fuel burners and relining the chimney has been more than offset in the ensuing first two years of operation, due to higher efficiency and the lower cost of natural gas as compared to oil.

As compared to 2016, church fuel consumption did not increase during the first 11 months of 2017, despite a small increase in heating degree days (a measure of the energy demand needed to heat a building). Comparison of energy consumption per degree day revealed that consumption in 2017 was 10% lower than in 2011 (the year before the insulation was installed). That's progress!

Church electrical consumption decreased by 12% compared to last year, probably due to a decrease in air conditioning due to a 19% decrease in cooling degree days (similar to heating degree days). There was also a small 2% decrease in electrical consumption and small 1% increase in oil consumption in the parsonage.

Overall energy costs decreased for the church (\$872), but increased for the parsonage (\$570), due to either reduced consumption or increased costs. Overall water costs increased (\$223) due to increased consumption in both the church (39%) and parsonage (13%).

### ***Recycling***

ESM continues to maintain a vigorous volunteer recycling effort at the church, since there is no town pick-up. Members of the church take turns collecting the church recycling each week and bringing it to their homes for curbside pick-up by the town contractor. There are multiple blue recycling containers located throughout the church making it easy to recycle. Please use the bins, but avoid throwing non-recyclable and food-stained items into the recycling bins. Food items like beverage and yogurt containers should be emptied and rinsed (or wiped off) prior to

## **REPORT OF THE EARTH STEWARDSHIP MINISTRY (continued)**

placing them in a recycling bin, otherwise the person collecting the recycling has to do it (for the whole church). Following these simple steps makes the job of picking up the recycling more manageable. If you would like to help with this important conservation effort, please contact one of the members of the ESM.

*~Earth Stewardship Ministry appreciates the encouragement and support they receive from the congregation. If you would like to join us, please contact an ESM member.~*

## **REPORT OF FAITH FORMATION MINISTRY**

As part of our Ministry in Action transition, Faith Formation ministries moved to the Ministry team model in 2017. I have the honor of serving as the first Faith Formation Ministry liaison. As part of my role, I represent the Christian Education and Youth Ministry programs on the Church Leadership team (CLT). The second part of the role involves nurturing new ministries aligned with the faith formation mission. For the year 2017, no new faith formation ministries were launched. For the first part of the year, I listened and learned about the work of the CLT and how my role works between the various committees. My focus for the second half of the year switched to the Sunday school program.

With the departure of Stephanie Dozios in August and no line of sight for our next Director of Christian Education (DCE), we resurrected the Sunday School Guardians group to manage the delivery of the Sunday school program. We put together a Sunday school calendar, selected workshop themes and recruited workshop leaders, shepherds, teachers and helpers. I wish to thank my fellow guardians, Alana Dros, Linda Phillips and Ken Ward for stepping up and keeping this valued program alive during the interim time between DCE's. In late November, we were blessed with hiring of Leo Biocchi as our new DCE. For 2018, my focus will be mentoring Leo as he comes up to speed on the Sunday school program.

I'd be remiss if I didn't send out thank yous to the following for supporting our Faith Formation Ministries: Rosemary Royer for leading the Christian Education Committee. Rosemary's support and commitment has been invaluable over the past year; to our Sunday school volunteers, workshop leaders, teachers and helpers, without you, there would be no Sunday school program. On the Youth Ministry front, to Paul Mullins and Vicky Batchelder for their commitment to the High school and Middle school youth groups, respectively. Finally, to Reverend Robert Hyde for resurrecting a weekly bible study program and inspiring us all to reach higher in support of our Faith Formation ministries.

## **REPORT OF FAITH FORMATION MINISTRY (continued)**

Please feel free to reach out to me for any questions you might have around our Faith Formation Ministries.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jay Salsgiver, Faith Formation Liaison

## **REPORT OF FIRST STEP FUND**

The First Step Fund provides financial assistance for special programs for this congregation that are usually not covered by any other church budget.

This fund was the result of prolonged and thoughtful discussions related to the termination of the Women's Fellowship. In May of 1999, the members of the Women's Fellowship voted to create the First Step Fund with their remaining treasury, \$21,236.52, for the purpose of funding programs that would enrich the life and mission of our congregation as the members of the Women's Fellowship had done for many years.

All monies for this fund are held by the General Fund of the church. It was also decided that these funds are available to borrow or use outright for a one time gift or event and that no program can receive more than \$400.00. Several programs including speakers, musical events, the start of the Knitting Ministry have been sponsored. In recent years the First Step Fund Committee was asked to consider two requests that exceeded \$400.00. These requests were important opportunities to improve our church building and enhance ministerial development. These were voted on and approved by the committee members.

The first request in 2013 was for \$5,000.00 to contribute to the Deacon's sound/video project. The second request was in June 2017 from our minister of Congregational Life, Rev. Robert Hyde. Rev. Hyde requested the amount of \$2,300.00 to assist him with the expenses of a certification opportunity at Boston College: a Post-Master's Certificate in Spiritual Formation, a unique program held for two weeks for three consecutive years.

The balance of the First Step Fund as of January 2018 is \$7,700.08.

Any person not connected with a funded group, who would like to sponsor a program that is held within the church and open to the congregation may apply for support from the First Step Fund.

Donations are the key to maintaining and increasing the First Step Fund. Please consider donating to the Fund to support new programs and opportunities for our church.

Janet Trippi, Chair; Amanda Durkin; Rosemary Royer; Jay Salsgiver

## **REPORT OF THE HANDS FOR HOPE MINISTRY**

The Hands for Hope Ministry is a diverse group who meet on the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of each month in the Parlor between 10 am and 11:30 am. The group is open to all, and the conversations are lively, the laughter frequent, and the comradery strong.

Our shawls, robes and baby blankets are distributed to members and friends of this congregation. The dresses, shorts and sweaters are shipped to Tanzania to support the orphans in Kagera, one of the poorest areas in that country. The clothing that we make, along with personal hygiene kits, enable these children to go to school. Without clothing the children stay inside their huts all day, which promotes the spread of disease. The pictures that we have received from the Tumaini Fund show big, bright smiles on all the faces, as they model for us their new clothing. “Tumaini” is the Swahili word for “hope” and the Tumaini Fund is bringing hope to over 200,000 aids orphans. Their “Sewing for Hope” project is the organization that our ministry supports.

In April, we held the “blessing” ceremony for our prayer shawls, lap robes, baby blankets, dresses, shorts and sweaters. We hung our works from the balcony in the sanctuary that morning for all to see the results of our efforts. A writer from the Community Advocate came and interviewed some members of our group. He then published a great article about our event. Due to that article we received two enormous fabric contributions from people who had seen the article, as well as one new member! Several members of our congregation have made large donations of fabric and yarn. We have enough to keep us sewing and knitting for some time. Additionally in April, Rev. Hyde made a request of our group, for some stoles for the confirmands. He provided us with the pattern and several in our group assembled and embellished the stoles so that each one was different.

During the winter and spring, two Sew-a-thons were held to produce dresses. Four members of our group gathered, bringing with them sewing machines and partially started projects. In one 3 hour period, we produced 14 dresses and finished 10 pairs of shorts.

In November, we held our first Cut-a-thon, when we gathered in Gifford Hall to cut out items from the vast supply of donated fabric. During that session, we cut out 13 dresses, 12 kerchiefs, 12 slips and 7 shorts. This reduced the storage space required to keep our fabric, and provided us with precut out items that people can take home and assemble.

We are working to keep our baby blankets and prayer shawls inventory strong. Our preemie hats are made with love and taken to the Memorial Hospital by a devoted volunteer member. To date, our group has created 132 dresses, 112 sweaters, 30 shorts, 8 kerchiefs, 6 T-Shirts.

Our group continues to grow and thrive, our donations of fabric and yarn have been pouring in, and we are blessed to have the opportunity to do this valuable work!

Respectfully submitted,  
Carol Baker, Hands For Hope Ministry

## **REPORT OF OUR STORY MINISTRY**

The “Our Story” Ministry is a group which is interested in the history of First Congregational Church of Shrewsbury. One of our goals is to find and research information, genealogy, pictures and stories relevant to Shrewsbury, New England and Congregational history. In 2017 we began using one of the new bulletin boards near the kitchen to post articles and pictures which we hope will pique your interest. We also display items of historical significance in one of the display cases outside of the chapel. Our group is evolving and we will not name the members here because that list is constantly changing. Our informal meeting times vary and our group is loosely structured with each person bringing their own interests and abilities. In 2023 FCC will be celebrating its 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary and anticipation of that event has spurred us on to look for information that has not been included in the recent publications. We welcome your pictures, memories and stories that you may want to share.