

Senior Minister's Report to the Board of Trustees

November 2020

As promised I want to expand on my plans to meet our two new priorities for this year and how we might sustain them in the post Covid world.

Our first priority is **Policy 1.2.4**: *We become a sustainable, engaged, growing Congregation comprised of all generations.* Last month I provided an executive interpretation of what I saw as engaged, growing and sustainable.

Growing is perhaps our greatest challenge during the pandemic. Our current membership is 371 adult members and 41 children and youth. These are active and contributing members of our congregation as defined by our by-laws; that is, the adults have signed the membership book, they are active and they are making a financial contribution of record. Children and youth are defined by participation over a 60-day period. In addition to these number we may have another 10 or so adults who are active friends, that is, they are active and contributing but have not signed the membership book. We have lost about 40 members since the pandemic began. Despite this our giving remains strong and on budget.

The general rule of thumb is that a congregation needs about 5% new members every year to offset those who move away or leave for any number of reasons. This means that we will need to attract at least 12 new adults to stay even. That replacement number may be different in a pandemic. My target for new members is 52 by this time next year (for a net of 400-410). That seems to be a rate that will show significant growth and return us to pre-pandemic levels. As it stand now we will not be able to budget staff at current levels next church year without significant growth in members and giving this spring. This will prove to be a challenge as we move ahead.

Engagement is far harder to measure effectively. Generally, I look to see how often someone attends worship (once or more a month, I consider engaged) and if they are involved in some other aspect of congregational life (Social Justice, Music, Faith Formation, etc.). This is fairly easy to measure in the time of zoom because we have rosters of who attends worship and I can easily survey committees and groups to see who is showing up. Our children and youth are measured by engagement now in any case so not much will change there.

Sustainability is the largest unknown as we adapt to a new world. As we begin to meet more in person in late 2021 we will have two metrics to follow, in person and virtual participation. To sustain these metrics will require us to use existing tracking technology more efficiently. It will also require a re-alignment of our staff in order to more efficiently meet the needs of a hybrid congregation. We have already begun this shift with the "Connect Campaign" which is on target to raise \$10,000 to improve our streaming experience. Equipment has been purchased and I have appointed Nate Pawlek our Director of Faith Formation and Desmond Hughes our Sexton as our new Tech Managers. They have been ably guided by a team of people in communication on what we needed and how to get to a more improved streaming experience which will include future use of video and sound improvements in line with our capital campaign plan.

In order for this transition to remain sustainable, I will need to reorder staff functions and likely hire social media and development coordinators. This will likely be done in 2021-2022. I would also like to revise our membership definition and do away with signing a membership book. I have long considered

anyone who comes to any function and who gives of their time and their money to be an “active member.” Now, with a virtual congregation with attendees from across the country, signing a membership book seems outdated. Why not throw open the door and welcome into membership all who would work with us towards our mission? Obviously, we need to be more careful about who we nominate to leadership but we could count many more than we do.

Our other priority is **Policy 1.3.3**: *We live out our commitment to promoting social justice causes, especially racial justice and gender equity, we will need to increase our outreach to transgender communities and become active allies to people of color.* Fortunately, we have ministries in place that are committed to this work. Measuring the success of this priority will be more challenging. One measure might be how many of our members are involved in this commitment. Another measure might be how many of us have completed the Intercultural Developmental Inventory (IDI). The IDI is a centerpiece to our racial justice work in that it will help each of us understand our implicit bias. Congregational resolutions and the subsequent reporting on them is another measure, much as we have done with #MeToo and Safer Congregations.

Metrics

I always remember the sage advice that it matters what we count and it matters that what we count matters. Numbers alone don't tell the whole story. When this congregation had 550 members on its books, it still operated as pastoral size congregation of 200. Growth comes in many forms; numerical, organizational, maturational and spiritual to name a few. We are healthy and robust right now considering the pandemic and how it has affected so many other congregations. Our membership, while reduced, is stable. Our giving is strong and our engagement has been growing even with a pandemic that has severely limited our in-person gatherings.

In the future I will regularly report on where we are in terms of members, kids, financial giving and our numbers engaged in our ministry. I will also report on the effectiveness of our ministry which may be a better metric overall. I welcome your thoughts on this.

Respectfully Submitted, Rev. John Morehouse