

Senior Minister's Report to the Board of Trustees

March 2022

The Overall State of the Congregation

I truly believe we are having a renaissance as a congregation. Our Pledge Dinner on March 4 was the most engaged I have ever seen in my years of ministry. We are attracting new families and they are pledging. Our Youth Group is especially engaged around environmental justice and their mission trip to Alaska.

There is new energy in worship and adult education resulting in a growing number of people joining us for worship and engaging one another in our classes and small groups. Our technology is improving unevenly. We are getting some much needed professional advice on streaming and we have made some upgrades to wiring and service. This will continue to be an area of improvement for us.

The Staff and our volunteers are working hard but the strain of coming out of Covid is taking a toll on all of them. Still morale is good.

Our biggest challenges lie in what is before us. The Organ vote will be contentious. That cannot be avoided but I do believe we are in a better place as a congregation to deal with that contention. While we have managed to stay on budget, two factors are looming before us. The first is the continued exodus of some of our biggest givers who are moving away to other climes. The second is the challenge of engaging new members in faithful giving. We are pouring a lot of energy into this pledge drive and hope to reach more people who have not pledged in the past.

Dealing with the Budget Gap

Since we are reducing one position by half, I have made a start in dealing with the Budget Gap. The best solution is to increase giving. We are putting a great deal of effort into our pledge drive with a hope that we will increase over last year. If we are unable to significantly close the gap by next year, I will be forced to make further cuts in staff.

Cutting staff means cutting programs. Obviously if we do that, we will face a dilemma: how are we to increase membership with less programming? We will not be able to continue the level of service we currently have.

Covid and Construction

We are returning to pre-pandemic attendance levels and program activity. Covid has added a virtual dimension which adds to our operating costs. One positive change has come in our ability to engage people in programming and volunteer meetings using the zoom platform.

Construction has been slowed by the pandemic. We are finished with the glass renovation and mid-way through the floor upgrades. What we do next depends on the congregation. Once we decide on a new organ, then the chancel rebuild, sanctuary floor and curtain glass walls will be our next phase. Beyond

that we will have to wait and see. We don't have enough money to take on the restroom remodel or air conditioning. We may need to use our remaining funds for the exterior porch repair.

I have directed Goody Clancy to begin preliminary design work on the chancel realizing that it may or may not include an organ. Because of the way they bill us, there is no extra cost to us to have them give us an early conceptual drawing of a restroom makeover. Since gender equity is a stated end priority, restrooms are an important step towards that end.

We do not know if construction on the chancel can begin this summer. Supply change issues, town permitting and contractors schedules will determine that. Obviously we want to do as much of the demolition over the summer as possible.

Completion of this Capital Campaign and Beyond

This June marks the end of our first Capital Campaign. We will continue to be improving our building well into 2023 with the money we have raised. I am recommending that we have another Capital Campaign starting in the fall of 2022. We will need a second phase to complete AC, restrooms and possibly repairs to the outer porch.

Respectfully Submitted, Rev. Dr. John Morehouse