



First Presbyterian Church of Athens

2020 Annual Report

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In response to God's grace, the mission of First Presbyterian Church of Athens is to create a community where people seek the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rejoice in worship, and go forth sharing the love of Christ with Athens and the world!

Senior Pastor

Operation Overlord, the landing of Allied forces on the shores of Europe during the Second World War, was the most complex movement of people, equipment, and material ever attempted in human history. It took more than two years to create the plans that led up to D-Day, June 6, 1944.



The highest-ranking American officer to land with the first wave was 56-year-old Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., the son of the late President. As soon as he came ashore, he recognized that the original battle plan would have to be scrapped and a new one invented on the spot. The winds and tides had scattered the landing craft far from where they were supposed to be, and enemy resistance was far stronger than had been anticipated.

Legend holds that in the middle of all that chaos, General Roosevelt turned to an aide and said, “We’ll start right here,” and then he started giving new orders to move people and equipment forward.

Because of the emergence of a global pandemic in 2020, almost all the plans for mission and ministry at First Presbyterian Church had to be reworked on the fly. Nevertheless, in the middle of all the chaos, the leadership of this church said, “We’ll start right here.”

Because of God’s amazing grace and the resilience and imagination of our congregation’s leaders, during one of the most challenging years in our lifetimes, the work of the church has never stopped. We have discovered and developed many new ways of being the church, and to this very day, we continue to be a congregation that, in response to God’s grace, creates a community where people seek the truth of the gospel, rejoice in worship, and go forth sharing the love of Christ with Athens and the world.

Within the pages of this report, you will read about how, by God’s amazing grace, your generosity is making an impact for the kingdom of God here in Athens and beyond. None of it would happen without your faithful stewardship of the gifts that God has entrusted to you. Thank you for your continued generous support of this ministry, and even more, thank God for you.

You and I have not quite yet completed two years together as pastor and congregation. Even though this has been a most unusual year, I remain more convinced than ever that the best is yet to come for the First Presbyterian Church of Athens. Thank you for the countless ways in which you support me and my family. It is a joy and a privilege to be your pastor.

Very truly yours,

Dr. Ryan Baer, *Senior Pastor*

Associate Pastor

Beginning March 15, 2020, we prudently stopped gathering as a congregation in our sanctuary on Sundays for fear of spreading the Coronavirus.* The “loss” of this sacred space has understandably been cause for grief. The beautiful room with its native pine pews, light-filled windows, high ceiling, and marvelous organ holds great meaning. Countless holy events have happened here: babies baptized, wedding vows taken, loved ones memorialized, elders ordained, prayers prayed, hymns sung, and tears shed. We have felt the Spirit’s movement here. I am reminded of the Jerusalem temple, as it is portrayed in the Old Testament. It was the center of Israel’s religious life and symbolic of God’s presence.



But Israel has not always had a temple. Before the monarchy, there was the tabernacle, or tent of meeting. As God’s people wandered for forty years in the wilderness and settled in the Land of Promise, they worshiped in a portable sanctuary. The tabernacle, which moved from place to place, could be said to represent the freedom of God, which cannot be pinned down.

This tension between God’s presence and God’s sovereign freedom as represented by temple and tabernacle is one that endures. Being exiled from our “temple” during most of 2020 has forced us to remember that while we may refer to the building at 185 E. Hancock as “the Lord’s house,” God does not only dwell there. God is on the move. God is out and about, loose in the world.

Our congregation and staff have had to adapt. I had scarcely heard of Zoom before 2020. But I figured out enough to put together a Good Friday service on the audio/visual platform. Gathered not in our pews, but on our living-room couches, looking not at our lovely chancel, but into a computer screen, we listened to the Passion Narrative read by members and saw its heart-breaking scenes depicted in slides of paintings. We extinguished our candles one by one at home, worshiping as a body apart, yet together, thanks to technology. I have participated in many Zoom encounters since then and helped lead many Sunday services via Facebook and YouTube. Though the church has not been together in our “temple,” God has surely been present wherever we happened to pitch our tent.

A particularly enjoyable gathering on Zoom was the small but responsive group who met weekly for “Prayer Exercises” in the fall. Together we explored a variety of different ways to pray, e.g. via Lectio Divina, writing collects, using body prayers, and practicing extemporaneous out-loud praying. Deepening our personal prayer life has been a key challenge during the pandemic-induced exile.

Another instance of responding to God “outside the box/temple” was the installation of a prayer station on the front porch of the church. In response to the great unrest in our community and nation sparked by the death of George Floyd, I felt called to provide a place for public lament, hope, and prayer. With the help of a few others, beneath our large wooden cross which I draped with a long swath of clear plastic painted to look like a splashing stream, I erected a sign quoting Amos 5:24: “Let justice roll down like waters.” At this temporary shrine, people read snippets from our confessions, prayed, and tied ribbons on the railing. It turned out to be a moving reminder that the sovereign God who commands us to “do justice and love kindness” (Micah 6:8) beckons the church and world to work for justice and exercise compassion.

I know we look forward to the time when we can unite again in our beloved sacred space. But if nothing else, 2020 has reminded us that God isn’t confined to a building. Thank you for the opportunity to serve with you as we continue to experience this insight anew.

Carol Strickland, *Associate Pastor*

*Later in the year a limited number of people were allowed to gather for in-person worship.

Parish Associate

The catchphrase of almost every summer Greek School student at Columbia Theological Seminary quoted Jesus in Matthew 6:34, saying “Let the worries of the day be sufficient thereunto.” Whenever students worried about obstacles to come and how to prevail, Professor Beth Johnson invoked Jesus’ words to remind us to be present in the moment, trusting that concerns of the future would be handled, with God’s great help. That motto has carried me through many “brutiful” moments in ministry over this pandemic year, moments both brutal in their difficulty and beautiful in their radiant holiness. This lesson is one our seniors know well. Many face significant obstacles each day – adjusting to major life transitions, like being distanced from family, accompanying their loved ones to the threshold of the life beyond this life and grieving their deaths, being unable to continue with former activities and finding new ones, downsizing their homes, adapting to deteriorating health and its limitations, accepting our own mortality and confronting loss of control over much of that process, and this year especially, coping with lonely isolation, prolonged boredom, and navigating the digital world, which is now required in all aspects of life from grocery shopping to worshipping to doctor visits and vaccine queues. Especially in a pandemic, we have a lot to learn from our seniors about how to live each day with attentive gratitude for the simplest blessings.



My ministry as Parish Associate is primarily to share the love of Christ with our members that are homebound, in senior care facilities, in the hospital, or just going through difficult times. Much of my work is confidential, but I want to give you a sense of the scope of the ministry that this congregation provides to its members and the larger community through my role:

- Caring for 20 members in senior care facilities, 43 members who are homebound locally, 5 members who live out of town, 71 members in temporary or deteriorating situations, 15 caregivers, over 50 bereaved families, and those who have been hospitalized or undergone recent medical procedures.
- Co-officiating worship through leading liturgy and preaching
- Co-officiating funerals for members of the church
- Serving on the Congregational Care commission
- Serving as a Confirmation Mentor with the Youth Ministry
- Teaching as a Godly Play Storyteller with the Children’s ministry
- Participating in the Living on a Prayer Sunday School class and leading rotationally
- Advocating for new ways to keep our seniors connected to the life of the church

Until March, the primary means of delivering care was through physical visitation, visiting homes and hospital rooms, exchanging smiles and hugs, looking into each other’s eyes to share concerns and holding hands to take those concerns to God in prayer. Since March, we have been rightly prohibited from hospitals and senior care facilities and discouraged from home visits. However, the ministry and the members she serves have adapted with resilience, imagination, and love. This year, we began delivering a *These Days* daily PC-USA devotional to each of the members I visited. Since quarantine, I now drop those off personally or deliver via the postal service, expanding the list to use those copies that would normally be picked up at church and delivering them to other members on my list who might especially appreciate them. Once isolations began, I called each of my seniors to assess their needs and support and offer our assistance, record their emergency contacts, collect prayer requests, troubleshoot virtual worship access and offer mailed worship supports (audio cds or printed sermons & bulletins), and note their preferences for receiving correspondence from congregation members who were particularly concerned for the way the pandemic has affected our seniors. I continue to perform a rotation of visits via the phone as often as I can to check in with these members and to keep up with emergency situations requiring additional pastoral support.

When I look back on this year, there are so many moments of ministry that buoy my spirits. I remember the long, affectionate goodbye of one large, close-knit family as we prayed together through the final hours with their larger-than-life matriarch. I will laugh about having trouble tracking down a member or their next of kin during a wellness check, contemplating breaking into their house, calling the police for help and getting an update from their relative who was a police dispatcher, who helped me connect with the member, who had simply gone to visit family. I will remember the day I went from an intimidating, yet holy jail visitation to seeing Roger Burbage honored for his work with Family Promise at La Table. I will remember the last prayer I had at a hospital bed and the luncheon we shared when she recovered that ended up being her last. I will remember being recruited to do PR for Mask Making of Athens by two amazing church members, who rallied the community to make almost 20,000 masks to protect the most vulnerable among us and then getting to mail one to our senior members. I will remember the first time I had to pray at someone's bedside over the phone as they lay dying in a quarantined facility, how worried I was that it would be enough and how the Holy Spirit made sure that it absolutely was. I will remember the hospital chaplains and caregivers who took the time to update me on a frail member who was on a ventilator in a locked-down ICU. I will remember keeping vigil at a member's deathbed in her home, reading scripture, holding her hand, praying, and singing sacred songs through a mask, seeing her reassuring smile as she enjoyed some final small bites of strawberry ice cream, the constancy of her best friend and caregivers, and the tenderness with which her husband touched her. I will remember helping a frail caregiving member navigate an especially tricky situation to find affordable specialized care for their spouse whose health was deteriorating rapidly, tracking down estranged family members to assist with the situation, and humbly accepting the large donation they made to the church as a token of gratitude for the care provided. I will remember how the Spirit demanded a re-writing of the sermon I delivered virtually in an empty sanctuary after George Floyd was killed and how gracious the congregation was in hearing hard, holy words of grief, repentance, and a call for justice. I will remember the prayer station that was brainstormed in the staff meeting that week and refined in the Congregational Care meeting, going from a Pentecostal image I had seen on Facebook and being transformed by the ever-artistic Carol Strickland and her team into something that exceeded all expectations and brought deep tangible witness, reconciliation, and healing to our congregation and the larger community of Athens. I will remember the service for healing and wholeness that our pastoral staff conducted virtually and how good it felt to be together in that holy space for the first time in so many weeks. I will remember counseling families on pandemic funeral options and delayed grief. I will remember long walks with my beloved Confirmation Mentee through the confirmation journey in a pandemic. I will remember the grace that the church extended to my family as we shuffled our preschool plans and adjusted our work schedules over five times, as we sought a diagnosis and therapy for our son's sensory processing disorder which was so exacerbated by the pandemic's disruption. I will remember the care the church showed my family this Fall, when I was pregnant on modified bed rest with a large subchorionic hemorrhage that lasted for a total of 11 weeks before and after we lost our baby at the end of the first trimester. I will remember all the balls I dropped and all the people who gave me grace and helped me pick them up. I will remember with deep gratitude the flowers, the meals, the case of wine, the prayers, and the scripture and hymns that softened that difficult season for us. I will remember working with Congregational Care to adapt our Christmas Tea into a Cookie Delivery. I will remember the staff and members who helped me craft a Parish Associate Christmas Luminary Package to deliver to our members to help them shine their lights. Speaking of bright lights, I will remember Jill and the Crim family. I will remember how this church showed up in big and small ways for each other.

I believe this ministry is so important to the life and to the overall health of this congregation, and I feel honored to be entrusted with its care. Thank you for welcoming me into your hearts, virtually and otherwise. May God bless you and keep you, be kind and gracious to you, and give you peace!

Rev. Margaret Davis, *Parish Associate*

Director of Music and Organist

Most of my annual reports have begun with a statement about yet another great year at First Presbyterian Church of Athens. There has not been a year more challenging for most, if not all of us than 2020, yet, amid challenges, First Presbyterian Church was a great place to be. We began the year officially celebrating our bicentennial and were looking forward to a full year of events. Things didn't quite go as planned.



January began with all choirs resuming their rehearsal schedule. In addition to church work, I was asked to accompany the 2020 Georgia Music Educators Association All-College Chorus in a concert at First Baptist Church. The big musical celebration of our bicentennial was a program in February that was part concert, part hymn festival called *Through the Church the Song Goes On*. The title came from a line in the opening hymn, *Holy God, We Praise Your Name*. The arrangement of the hymn began with handbells ringing and the choir chanting the *Te Deum*, which transitioned into the singing of the hymn, symbolizing our evolution as part of the Reformation. The Chancel Choir led hymns and sang anthems commissioned for our church, including *You Will I Love* by K. Lee Scott, and *Alleluia* by Daniel Elder. *Shall We Gather at the River*, an organ solo by Charles Callahan from a collection commissioned for our church, was performed. The choir was joined by guest tenor soloist Dallas Bono for *Ain't Got Time to Die* by Athens born composer Hall Johnson. A hymn text written by a trustee of First Presbyterian Church in 1828, *Father of All, This Shrine We Raise*, was sung to the hymn tune TRURO. The Bulldog Brass Society from the UGA Hugh Hodgson School of Music provided accompaniment for the hymns, all of which were arranged for organ and brass.

March began with a church staff planning retreat at the Presbyterian Student Center, making big plans for the year ahead. As part of my duties as Dean of our local chapter of the American Guild of Organists, I had planned an AGO members' recital in our church to celebrate Bach's birthday, March 21. As events unfolded in the second week in March, and on the day of a session meeting on the 12th, we were learning that COVID – 19 was quickly becoming a serious matter. The University of Georgia announced that in-person classes would not resume after spring break, and the rest of the semester would consist of online instruction only. Public schools decided the same. In-person worship was ceased beginning March 15 and we went to livestreaming services. Almost all in-person gatherings, including meetings, choir rehearsals, concerts, were canceled or went to an online format.

Determining how we could continue to worship in the most meaningful and authentic way was a challenge. Though there is no one "right" way to worship, under the strong, steady, and wise leadership of our Senior Pastor, Ryan Baer, we decided that worshipping "live" rather than in a pre-recorded format would be our approach, and that we would try to replicate a "normal" Sunday morning service as much as we possibly could. Congregational participation is at the heart of worship in the Reformed tradition, including congregational singing, so we decided hymns would be presented and led as closely as possible to the way they would be on a typical Sunday morning. Though the musical leadership present in the sanctuary for our services would usually consist of the organist, a soloist, and the pastors leading the service, those worshipping at home were encouraged to sing hymns at home with their families. As different as this has been, we have believed all along that we were doing the best we can with what we had, and as of the writing of this report, we continue to do the same.

Also in March, we received a collection of organ music commissioned by Kathryn and Carl Nichols. *Be Glad & Rejoice!* by Charles Callahan is a collection of ten festive postludes on hymn tunes, commissioned in celebration of both our bicentennial and the calling of Dr. Ryan Baer as our Senior Pastor.

April brought Holy Week and Easter, which were very different, but the holy season and days were observed. Erring on the side of caution, the decision was made not to have a brass quintet on Easter Sunday. Also, several recitals and concerts on our schedule were canceled, including an organ recital by Geneva Stonecipher, a former church music intern. Geneva graduated from Indiana University with an MM in organ performance. A performance by The Bulldog Brass Society and a doctoral recital by trumpeter Tyler Jones were canceled. In May, our traditional Scottish Reformation Sunday was not held with bagpipes and the invitation of local civic leaders, but it was still observed with a few flag bearers in procession.

In June, The Montreat Worship and Music Conference was changed to a virtual conference, which I, along with Charlotte Chromiak, and some other church members took advantage of. Many of the conference offerings were adapted to address dealing with our pandemic situation in churches. Suggestions of handbell music that could be played while socially distanced were particularly helpful. All other summer conferences were canceled or replaced with online offerings.

Over the summer, construction began to prepare for the installation of an Antiphonal Organ which will be in two chambers in the back of our sanctuary. This new addition is given by Dr. William E. Barry in celebration of the bicentennial and in honor of The United States Military Academy. The Antiphonal Organ is being built by the Schantz Organ Company (who built our present organ) and will include seven ranks, including a Trumpet Harmonique. Installation will take place sometime in 2021.

In an effort to offer things in a new way, I began writing two regular columns: *What Was I Thinking?* which gives detailed background information about music selected for Sunday services, and *Hymns at Home*, which gives information about how to sing and otherwise use hymns and hymnals at home. More has been written in the first series, but both will continue. The articles were e-mailed and posted on the church website. I also taught an Inquirer's class about hymns, and I was honored to be a guest leading one of Carol Strickland's Wednesday prayer classes, again emphasizing the use of hymns at home.

In November we began limited in-person worship services but continued to live-stream. In December, we had our annual Lessons and Carols service, led by two singers. Members of our Handbell Choir played for both the Live Nativity and the final bicentennial celebration, both held outside in front of the church as drive-by events. Also, for the Live Nativity, I performed Christmas music on the organ which was broadcast outside through speakers, and we broadcast all of the music through an FM channel so people driving by could listen in their cars.

We are grateful for the two main singers who offered their leadership and sung solos and duets: Kendall Kookogey and John Tsao. We also had one of our youth sing in worship, Ann Harper Covington. While we all look forward to having our choirs back, for the time being we will continue with one or two singers until the situation improves. We've also had instrumentalists play in worship, including Meghan Bawcum, cello, Jean Martin Williams, horn, and Tyler Jones as a guest trumpeter.

On a personal note, in the midst of the already difficult year, my mother passed away in April. She was a proud member of this church for the five years she was in Athens, and I am grateful beyond words for the support and love she and I received from our members, and for the sympathy and support my family and I have received since her death. Thank you. First Presbyterian Church is truly a church family.

Soli Deo Gloria (to God alone be the glory).

Dr. John T. Coble, *Director of Music and Organist*

Director of Youth Ministries

In many ways this last year feels like the movie Groundhog Day. Every day is the same as the last. Youth have been home from school since March and continue in virtual school today. Church moved to online worship on March 15th, and we've been meeting as a youth group over Zoom ever since, rarely missing a Sunday night. It wasn't until I looked back through the calendar that I realized what an amazing year we did in fact have, filled with so many new opportunities to learn and grow as individuals and as a church family. Today, I give thanks to 2020...



...for giving me a weekend away at Montreat College Conference with our interns to start the year. The theme, Remembering Sabbath, seems prophetic as we learned about the importance of rest, unplugging and spending intentional time with God to restore our souls. I am so very grateful for Leighton Parker, Jordan Osborne (2019-2020) and Caroline Hurst (2020-2021) for their commitment to our youth, and to the continued relationship with the Presbyterian Student Center.

...for providing young people the opportunity to lead us in worship. This year's Youth Sunday held on February 9th was our largest yet with 49 middle and high school youth participating, representing 10 different schools. Five brave seniors shared meditations with us on the theme *Thank you for being a friend* and the Confirmation Class helped us get to know the disciples better with personal introductions. We also debuted new FPC t-shirts celebrating the upcoming 200th birthday of the church!

...for the chance to take 13 youth on a Winter Mystery Trip. While our time in Pensacola Beach, FL was definitely fun, it was the day spent in Montgomery, AL that we all cherished. Our youth toured Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and the Civil Rights Memorial Center, then spent time in reflection and prayer at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. It was a powerful, emotion-filled day that grounded us for later in the summer when our world turned upside down with racial unrest. This trip was also the last time most of us left our homes for months as weeks later Covid hit the US.

...for introducing me to new technology and the online community of youth directors around the world. I had never heard of Zoom. I was not proficient with Google. I didn't use Instagram. And suddenly, we were moving all church programming online. How do we stay connected in this new format? Apparently with youth, it's quite easy. Youth engagement has grown during this time at home. We have been able to incorporate videos, games and music into our lessons. We even were joined one night over Zoom by the YAV site coordinator from New Mexico to talk to us about Indigenous Peoples Day and PUCSA border ministries. We have revamped the youth Instagram account and used Google Classroom for confirmation. Visit our youth website, www.fpcathenspit.com to see more of the ways we've been able to stay connected this virtual year.

...for opportunities to be creative and connect in new ways during Lent and Advent. We had little time to pivot and plan, yet Holy Week this year was incredibly meaningful. We were able to put together a beautiful Holy Week@Home packet and I did my first (of many) home deliveries with Lenten care packages for all youth families, including palms! This year my own family wore matching Easter pajamas as we gathered on the couch to celebrate Easter. It was different, and it was wonderful! By the time Advent arrived, we were ready. The Advent@Home bags were a joy to create and I know brought meaning to all of our families. Included was a devotional, suggested family activity and gift for each week of Advent. We were even able to host our annual Elf Movie Watching party on Zoom complete with syrup laden spaghetti and snowman mugs filled with hot chocolate.

...for the reminder that youth are awesome, especially our seniors! It has been a hard year to say the least, but watching it through the eyes of youth has been a constant source of encouragement. From shifting to online learning to reimagined proms, cancelled sports seasons and delayed graduation ceremonies, our youth have

shown courage and resilience. As I created the high school senior videos for online Graduation Sunday, my heart was filled with an overwhelming sense of hope for our future.

...for pushing all of us, including the church, to acknowledge and address issues of racial injustice. This summer was one of the most painful times in my life. I wrestled with how to help the youth and more importantly my own black child understand what was happening in our country; and, how I was being called to respond as a Christian. My faith was tested over and over again. With the guidance and support of colleagues who have been doing this work for years, I launched the 21 Day Challenge, an online resource of articles, videos and podcasts on race, power and privilege. Initially created for youth and their families, we opened it up to the larger church and later added two book studies and created a prayer station on the front steps of the Sanctuary. There is much work to be done, and I am grateful that we are part of the PCUSA who is at the forefront of fighting for social justice in our world. Our youth are passionate about issues of justice and often connect most strongly to God through mission work. This summer we were even able to host two virtual mission weeks, learning about race, hunger, homelessness and education while finding ways to serve others from home. In the darkness, we are called to be the light and our youth continue to respond with brightness.

...for time to be together as a family. Youth families are incredibly busy. Multiple after school activities and homework mean families rarely have time to gather around the dinner table, nonetheless, host game night. As 2020 cleared calendars, we were able to add a virtual family game night to youth ministry. Over Zoom our families have met monthly for trivia, Disney Night and even a Chopped cooking contest. What dessert would you create with boxed stuffing mix, canned pumpkin, canned cranberry and canned green beans?!

...for showing us that God is always with us. When church moved online, it gave us an opportunity to develop and own our faith formation at home. Nowhere was this more important than with our Confirmation Class who began their journey back in September 2019 in person and were confirmed in October 2020 on Zoom. Thirteen 8th/9th graders met for 10 weeks in the Pit before everything went on hold. After months of hoping we'd back in person, we finally shifted to an online classroom and relied heavily on parents and mentors to provide the needed 1:1 conversations. As with most things, it was hard and wonderful, culminating with my most favorite Session meeting yet, where youth and Session members talked about their faith in breakout rooms. Thank you 2020 for giving youth a space to ask incredibly hard questions and for holding their doubts, and leading them back to you.

Thank you 2020 for reminding us that WE are the church. May we continue to shine in this new year!

- Kim Ness, *Director of Youth Ministries*

Director of Children's Ministries

Children's Ministry

This year in Children's Ministry has been one filled with LOTS OF EXTRA WONDER! We started off 2020 like any new year wondering about the many ways we could continue to share God's love and light with others. However, after only two short months into the new year this wondering was joined by a whole slew of extra wonderings. I wonder how long this virus will keep us home and apart from our church family. I wonder how we "do" church and Children's Ministry without being able to physically gather altogether. I wonder...



2020 has drawn to a close and we now know how this year turned out – it has been a hard year. However, thanks to the virtual world we have been able to gather together for worship and continue being the church. We have also learned many new and meaningful ways to stay connected as a Children's Ministry family as well as grow spiritually stronger together with our families at home. This year children AND parents have been able to experience Godly Play together at home via our new Children's Ministry YouTube Channel. We have also enjoyed "zooming" together and listening to many wonderful children's books focused on sharing love and kindness with others during our Storytime Circle Zoom. And I personally LOVED being able to actually see our children and families at the many "drive by the church" events as families came by the church to pick up fun goodies for the children and worship resources for the entire family.

Even though this has been a difficult year, it has been a good year in Children's Ministry, and it has got me thinking and wondering about how I and our church can better support our children and families as we move into a new year. What has really stuck out to me in 2020 is that even with a pandemic or not a pandemic, life will continue to be busy and stressful for our families. Like it or not, weekends, Sunday mornings, and Wednesday evenings are filled with many more activities that can keep us away from church. I cannot change this reality and what I have learned this year is that that is ok. We are the church no matter if we can physically gather together or not. However, I do hope everyone comes running back to church when it is completely safe to do so. We need to see each other and be with each other, but I know that life will return to normal and will fill up quickly with lots of extras.

Over this past year and especially during Advent, I have come to realize a very simple way that we can better support our First Pres Families and that is to continue to put more meaningful and purposeful resources right in the hands of our parents and children so that they can grow spiritually stronger together throughout the week at home in addition to Sunday mornings at church. In December, each family received an Advent Goodie Bag that was filled with gifts of hope, peace, love, and joy for each week of Advent. The gift of hope was the Godly Play Advent Story. This special story is told over the four weeks of Advent and reminds us that we too are on our way to Bethlehem along with the prophets, Holy Family, shepherds, and Magi. I heard from many parents that being able to share this Godly Play experience (reading the words of the story out loud with their children, lighting their very own Advent candles that go along with the story and having additional hands-on materials representing all who were there on that Holy Night) with their children made this 2020 season of Advent and Christmas even more meaningful and intentional than in years past.

I am very thankful and grateful for our church's support of this sweet ministry and for the love and appreciation that continues to be shown to our First Pres Children and their families. I am also personally thankful for my church trusting me to lead this Children's Ministry through a very difficult year and now into a new year that is filled with hope and new opportunities.

Natalie Bishop, *Director of Children's Ministries*

Director of Weekday School

The Weekday School began January 2020 with a full house of 132 children, 9 classes, and 26 lovely teachers! Little did we know that we would leave for Spring Break and not return for “In House” for the remainder of the school year. Parents were very pleased with our ability to provide prerecorded story time and academic lessons, music lessons, packets for older academic needs, and Class Zooms weekly so that the children could see each other and have some live circle time activities! With all the world closed into their own homes, parents and children all enjoyed the interaction, enrichment and the guidance our teachers gave. The Weekday School Family was indeed to many the ONLY outside community interaction many had, and all were grateful! At the end of the school year, we had a DRIVE BY GOODBYE! It was a happy, but emotional time to see all the teachers at their classes times seeing their “littles,” giving out their artwork and other things from the classroom in a distancing way, and some fun things to do over the summer break! For the first time in memory, we had no summer programs, but we were GETTING READY FOR AUGUST!!! Miraculously, we were able to break even at the end of our fiscal year, but much of that was because 8 of our 9 months of tuition for 2019-2020 was already collected before Covid hit, some of the parents send in the month of April in support of our teachers, and 98 percent allowed us to keep our May tuition, paid the summer before.



August came, and with some EXTREME safety measures put in place over a LONG summer of communication with a Weekday School Covid Task Force newly formed (including two physicians and an attorney,) parents, teachers, Weekday School Division, Dr. Baer and our Session, we CELEBRATED being able to open ON TIME and provide some normalcy and social interaction for all of our littles, and in fact for their parents, too. Though no parents came inside the building, and ALL classroom teachers greeted their respective students in the mornings in carpool, and returned them to their parents, ALL were absolutely DELIGHTED with the safety, education, and loving atmosphere we were able to provide. Extreme measures such as 9 separate Parent Meetings (the only time they DID come in for the first few months) helped keep us safe, but helped them feel informed of how SERIOUS we were about safety during this time. We were able to devise ways to have an outdoor, distanced Muffins with Mom, and also very safe and social distanced Thanksgiving and Christmas programs. We were dedicated to keeping our numbers lower than normal, so the 20 or so children who dropped out of registration (due to Covid concerns with grandparents as part time care takers or just concerns in general!) over the summer were not replaced, though demand was high as school after school did not seem to be opening. The fact that we could not mix classes prevented our Earlybirds and Lunchbunch programs from occurring, which, again, hurt financially. But the “Bones” of our preacademic program that nurtures and loves children, provides for their social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual growth ROCKED the Athens, Georgia preschool world, and we were the ONLY program in downtown Athens that combined opening ON time, for ALL age levels, and STAYING open! Only 1 of our 9 classes closed for two weeks one time to prevent spread of COVID, with the measure being successful at stopping spread from the one case that appeared inside the school walls.

Having approximately 115 students during the fall hurt us financially, but we felt it was the fiscally sound thing to do to maintain more physical room between children, as children do NOT socially distance. We were thankful that the funding from the government payroll protection plan was a possibility for use, as the 2020-2021 School Year was where COVID hurt us significantly financially. But we stood STRONG in the field of Early Childhood Education, were thankful for teachers willing to do ALL the extra to keep people safe, and thankful for parents willing to follow strict protocols of 14 days or testing for ANY symptom that was on the CDC list for Covid. This was a tough row to hoe, since MANY childhood illnesses cause fever, or a cough, or many other symptoms. We were all impressed as grateful parents did this with a happy heart, knowing we were all protecting each other.

As January 2021 neared, with the cloak of protection God covered us with, the committee felt good about adding some children who had been on the waiting list all fall. Most of our spots were then filled.

Our 9th Annual Weekday School Live Nativity was held in a different way, but was amazingly successful! Though one of our top objectives has been for children to experience the birth of Jesus in a HANDS-ON way, that was not a possibility ON SITE this year. But they did experience the story in a lovely drive through event that included the holy family, the animals, including the camel, music provided by the handbell choir and John Coble on the organ, and even our traditional ornaments, through as a take home kit handed out in a distanced way by the teachers as the cars rolled by. We saw almost 250 cars come through between 6 and 8 p.m., and it was beautiful candlelit tribute to that special night long ago when our Savior was born. We look forward to having the children AND FAMILIES inside the classrooms and moving through the church again next year so that they may ponder what MORE this building could mean in the life of their family. And more importantly, we look forward to them being able to approach the animals, touch them, get close to Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus, and actually make the Christmas ornament inside, while enjoying Christmas music, possibly placing the baby Jesus in the straw of their very own ornament to take home for their tree. We had Weekday School families, church members, and community members attend!

Children GLOWED as they came and went this past fall, loving this special place we call the Weekday School. We are so very thankful to have a supportive church family, student families, and a wonderful staff to allow this to happen! THANKFUL, BLESSED, GRATEFUL!!!

Respectfully Submitted,

Elaine Johnson, *Weekday School Director*

Church Administrator

While the year began in a normal manner, it turned out to be anything but normal, even with our finances. Although a more comprehensive discussion of the church's financial results is contained elsewhere in this report, we were able to obtain the \$235,000.00 government Small Business loan, which has been forgiven. In addition, with reduced expenses due to the pandemic and maintaining the 2020 budgeted expenses, there was a \$75,000 surplus.



As we celebrated our church's 200th birthday in December with luminaries lining the steps, it was wonderful to greet our church families as they drove by. They represented generations of families who have worshipped here and shared this wonderful place – in joy and in sorrow – everyone appreciating it together. I feel blessed to be the “caretaker” of the funds you so generously give to continue the journey of worship and fellowship in this place. Even without the physical presence of the whole congregation, our commitment to the community and outreach continues to grow. Although many “outside” groups were absent from our facilities during this pandemic, we did host Family Promise for two weeks in the PIT, and our ministries continued with food drop-offs and online giving. We continued to have some weddings and were able to resume a limited in-person worship service in the fall.

During a normal year, our facilities would be maintained and updated on a regular basis, but this year even more improvements were made. In addition to the acquisition of an electrostatic disinfectant sprayer because of Covid, hand sanitizing stations were placed around the church. Our Weekday School was able to operate in person, with safety precautions in place. Our reliable cleaning crews and subcontractors, with our members' generosity, made our facilities continue to function and adapt to this “new normal” of the pandemic.

Smith Wilson and his team worked diligently to make many physical improvements to our church, including a total renovation of the balcony in the sanctuary to accommodate the new audio-visual technology and provide space for a future organ enhancement. Jack Palmer, Bryan Owens, and Rebecca Carlton worked on the audiovisual improvements to enhance our Sunday online worship services. Extensive interior and exterior painting, carpet and upholstery cleaning, lighting repairs and maintenance were done throughout the church building. In addition, design plans were drawn up for a future columbarium.

Many of our activities occurred via Zoom, but there were some drive-by events, including a successful Live Nativity, with over 500 people viewing the animals on our front steps. Our youth leaders were able to think of innovative ways to use the back parking deck for safely distanced celebrations.

We look forward to a new year when all of us will be able to enjoy in-person worship together and rejoice in our vibrant congregation. It is exciting to be a part of this caring church community and working with this staff and First Pres congregation.

Roger Burbage

Church Administrator

Administration Commission

Commission Members: Chair Carl Nichols, Ed Ferguson, Mixon Robinson, Elizabeth Earl, Jennifer Abbott, Avery McClean, Smith Wilson, Senior Pastor Ryan Baer and Church Administrator Roger Burbage.

The purpose of the Administration Commission is to manage the resources God has entrusted us, maintain our assets with care, and love and nurture our personnel. Four Teams comprise the Administration Commission and each Team is charged with specific responsibilities in Finance, Nominations & Elections, Personnel and Property.

We viewed the successful administration of all church functions during this year as vital to the ongoing effort to continue our growth as a congregation, the maintenance of our facilities and the faithful management of our financial resources, all while enduring the pandemic. To that end, the Administration Commission is proud to report:

- We set a realistic operating budget for 2020 and our revenue and expenses were significantly better than budgeted despite the pandemic.
- The **Property Committee** was organized with Smith Wilson as the Committee Chair. As you might imagine with a historical building such as ours, this is one of the most active committees in our church. Many projects were completed while the building was mostly idle for 9 months of the year.
- The **Personnel Committee** Chair was Elizabeth Earl. This committee was busy this year annual reviews and compensation evaluations.
- In 2020, the Chair of the **Finance Committee** was Carl Nichols. Much work continued with the campaign to eliminate the remaining renovation debt. With the support of the whole congregation pledges and contributions have been and continue to be successful and will continue into 2021.

Carl Nichols, *Administration Commission Chair*

Congregational Care Commission

Commission Members: Jeanne Nadenicek, *Chair*, Judy Scanlon, Jeff Bangle, Tom Landrum, Bill Patterson, Arlene Shirley, Lawton Stephens, Greta Covington, Harry Shuford, Madeline VanDyck, *Parish Nurse*, Carol Strickland, *Associate Pastor*, Margaret Davis, *Parish Pastor*, Lucy Bell Johnson, *Church Staff Liaison*

The mission of the Congregational Care Commission is to nurture, care and respond to the needs of the congregation. Our committee and its multitude of volunteers have been hard at work to do just that. From breaking down flowers after Sunday service and delivering them to those who might need a little lift, to providing rides to those who may not otherwise be able to attend church functions, the ministries of the CCC are aimed at sharing God's love with all of our members.

The mission of the *Congregational Care Commission* is to nurture, care and respond to the needs of the congregation. Even though some of our ministries are on hold because of the pandemic, the members of the commission have continued to serve our congregation.

The flower committee, after a brief hiatus, resumed providing beautiful arrangements for the sanctuary for our online church service on Sunday mornings and is now delivering flowers to our members who are homebound or living in Senior Care.

The Prayer Chain and Correspondence Team volunteers continue to reach out to members who request prayer, and cards and notes are sent to acknowledge important events in the lives of our members.

Stephen Ministers and Lay Callers support our congregation virtually or by other means of communication. These two ministries are especially meaningful and important during this year.

Dot's Closet is still open to loan medical assistance items between members.

The commission also approved and implemented new ways to serve the congregation:

- In late May, we approved a request to build a prayer station on the front porch of the church. The beautiful space became an interactive place for members of our community to say a prayer for peace and justice and tie a ribbon on the railings. The theme for the prayer station was based on Amos 5:24 "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream."
- Grieving is a long, difficult process. We want to support our members who are coping with the loss of a loved one by continuing to offer help and healing. We have implemented a program of sending bereavement CareNotes at 3 weeks, 3 months, 6 months, and 11 months after their loss. Jeanie Burbage is coordinating this program.
- One of the highlights of any year for our seniors is the Senior Christmas Tea. Unfortunately, we were not able to sponsor this event this year. However, CCC was determined to do something special for our seniors to celebrate the Advent/Christmas season. Due to the work of many volunteers, we were able to give 50 homebound seniors a gift of Christmas cookies and an Advent/Christmas devotion booklet. Thanks to the many cookie bakers, assemblers, and delivery folks who gave of their time and talents to make this event a joyful occasion. We all agreed that this was a special event for both the givers and the receivers.

Many thanks to the enthusiastic and devoted Congregational Care Commission members and amazing church staff who didn't let the pandemic dampen their love for our congregation and continue to nurture, care, and respond to the needs of the congregation.

Jeanne Nadenicek, *Congregational Care Commission Chair*

Education & Discipleship Commission

Commission Members: Meghan Bawcum, *Chair*, Julie Hayes, Chris Pope, Courtney Pittman, Kim Ness, *Director of Youth Ministries*, Natalie Bishop, *Director of Children's Ministries*

The Education and Discipleship Commission is charged with the following responsibilities: Church Nursery, Children's Church, Vacation Bible School, Sunday School (all ages), Middle School and High School Youth Group, Confirmation Class, Wednesday@First/Fellowship@First programming, Bible studies, small groups, and the Church Library.

Adult Education

On New Year's Day 2020 we breathed in the smell of 365 new opportunities for growth and change and new beginnings—and boy, did we get some opportunities for growth and change!

Adult ministry, like literally everything else on Earth, had to (in the enduring words of The Magic Schoolbus's Mrs. Frizzle) "take chances, make mistakes, and get messy!" Because the adult Sunday school classes at First Presbyterian are led by incredibly passionate, charismatic, and enthusiastic people we have adapted and overcome some tremendous obstacles. We have navigated virtual gatherings with grace and laughter, reminding each other when we are inadvertently not on mute or how to share a screen. We have worshipped with each other from afar, hammering home the idea that the church is a people, not a building. Some of us have even figured out how to safely meet in person while adhering to the CDC's guidelines for social distancing.

In a year where everything changed overnight, it has been nice to experience the familiar comfort of our Sunday School families—even through a screen.

Meghan Bawcum, *Education & Discipleship Commission Chair*

Fellowship & Evangelism Commission

Commission Mission Statement: *The Fellowship and Evangelism Commission provides growth opportunities for our members to connect and build relationships with one another outside of the regular Church and Sunday school time. The commission also welcomes guests to our church, invites them to become part of our family, encourages new members, and communicates about the life of the church with the larger community.*

Fellowship and Evangelism includes: Most Church wide dinners and receptions, Fellowship@First Wednesday Night Dinners, Atrium Refreshments, Annual Picnic, Red Coat Band Picnic, First Things (New Member Class) and Reception, Sports Teams, Presbyterian Women, First Friends, Primetime Presbyterians (PTP's), New Member engagement and Evangelism efforts.

Commission Members: Grace Lu, Sydney Jackson, Michelle Clendenen-Shaw, Andy Jordan and Rosemary Stancil, Chair

A Zoom Game Night, was held June 10th, four months into the Covid 19 pandemic and the suspension of in-person church activities.

The more we know each person's story the stronger the bonds we create. That was the goal of Game Night. Donning their favorite hats, participants were asked by emcee John Brantley to share stories about a variety of seemingly random topics – your first car, trips abroad, favorite family memory, seemingly random encounters that changed their life, and many more. As each person shared their stories, we discovered new dimensions of who they were, building stronger bonds and connections between the participants.

In the divided world we live in today, these types of experiences create the sacred space to see each person as a unique child of God which brings greater listening and understanding, and the space to be honest in a constructive way. – John Brantley

The goals expressed for Game Night are essentially the Commission's goals for all the activities it plans. Other fellowship activities, six **Fellowship@First** Wednesday night dinners, a **new elder reception**, two **new member receptions** and the **Annual Meeting** lunch, all held before mid-March, were opportunities for participants to meet, visit, learn about each other and build relationships. Those who worked together to make these events happen, experienced increased opportunities for fellowship and relationship building.

About 10 volunteers are needed to make each Wednesday night dinner possible. In addition to cooking and serving the meals, many members contributed by setting tables, making tea and coffee, baking desserts, welcoming and checking in, setting up and cleaning up.

Because church members have been preparing Fellowship@First meals themselves for the past two years, we were able to accumulate a budget savings. These savings were used to purchase much needed items for meal service - new Hunter Green and White tablecloths and flatware.

The purpose of **Atrium Refreshments** is to invite those who attend the 11 o'clock worship service to linger a few moments to visit with each other and to give a personal welcome to visitors. Many thanks to Michelle who scheduled volunteers and to everyone who helped provide refreshments. Atrium refreshments were disbanded mid-March because of the pandemic.

Since we couldn't host our usual New Member Reception in the fall, we initiated a **New Member Sponsor program** to help new members feel welcomed and to help them become engaged in the life of the church.

First Friends is a fellowship of women who meet the fourth Tuesday at a restaurant, enjoy a meal, talk and share our personal and church lives. We share our struggles and receive support from our 'First Friends'. This helps us to see God's light. We've met only a couple of times during the pandemic. – Nancy Bostrom

Rosemary Stancil, *Fellowship & Evangelism Commission Chair*

Mission & Outreach Commission

Commission Members: Rob Haire, *Chair*, Karen Burg, Jimbo LaBoon III, Tom Reigle, Denise Horton, Julie Hayes, Mary Burton, Bertis Downs, Ann Dunn, Brenda Glasscock, Sydney Jackson, Richard Lane, Joe Neighbors, Jerry Rogers, Sally Vandiver, Tom Wilfong, Frank Sherrill, Carol Strickland, *Associate Pastor*

As the year began in January, Mission and Outreach Commission (M/O) got off to business as usual by allocating the \$218,500 approved by the Session for benevolence. As it turned out, we had no idea how important that funding would be for those in our Community and beyond who were hit hard by COVID.

Later that month, in honor of **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr** and our 200th Anniversary, we asked the Congregation to perform 200 community service hours for January. The two "organized events" during the month were sorting food at the Food Bank of NEGA and cleanup of the Project Safe Thrift Store, where sales from the store go to assist those subjected to domestic violence. The outpouring of helpers from our Congregation was truly outstanding. While we asked for 200 hours of community service, we actually got 400 hours logged during the month! Great start to the year.

In February, once again Joe Neighbors organized our **annual blood drive**. In celebration of FPC's Bicentennial our goal this year was to reach 31 units of blood, one for each founding member and former FPC pastor. We had 34 donors who signed up and were willing to give blood for this effort. These units of blood went to help save those injured in accidents and burn victims, as well as to hospital patients and those battling cancer.

By March, the impacts of COVID were just beginning to hit Athens and our surrounding Community in earnest. The city of Athens, trying to get COVID under control, began limiting the size of indoor meetings. Therefore, First Presbyterian cancelled all churchwide meetings and functions. While Mission and Outreach continued to assist our community where needed, we cancelled our March in-person meeting to keep our members safe. Little did we know that we would not have another in-person meeting for the rest of the year.

In April, **Family Promise of Athens** (FPA) was one of the first agencies to be hit hard by the impacts of COVID. We were scheduled to host several FPA families during April, but due to Coronavirus, we could not host at the church, so the families were housed initially in hotel rooms. United Way began covering the cost of housing, feeding and transporting the families, but there was concern by FPA that the funding would run out. Accordingly, M/O used our contingency funds to give FPA an extra \$500 for food/gas during the month. Later, when a static church site was in place, we sent volunteers. And in December while our Weekday School was on Christmas break, we hosted the FPA families at our church for two weeks, providing the volunteers for one of those weeks. Susan Boatwright, Frank Sherrill, and Jean Bock have faithfully led this ministry.

As the threat of COVID continued to spread in 2020, we were forced to discontinue preparing our normal morning/lunch meals for **Our Daily Bread** (ODB) due to virus exposure concerns. To help make up for the loss of food that we normally prepared and gave out, we again used our contingency funds to give an additional \$350 to ODB to help cover cost.

Due to COVID, the normal food donations from local restaurants to the **Homeless Day Center** (HDC) dried up almost overnight. But the need to feed the homeless whom it serves did not go away. Accordingly, our Commission used our contingency funds once again to give an additional \$1,200 to purchase pizza from Mama Sid's, a locally owned and operated pizza restaurant. This provided pizza once a week for 10 weeks. The M/O gift was offset by Kim Ness's generous donation of \$325 leftover from the Youth Ministry's "Souper Bowl of Caring." Finally, due to the increase of the homeless population using the HDC, there was a great need of additional toiletries. Luckily, the Youth had previously gathered toiletries for another project, so we were able to give the HDC the additional toiletries from the stash in the PIT.

In May, due to continued coronavirus exposure concerns, FPC suspended all direct volunteer participation in food preparation at ODB. Accordingly, Fran Lane/Patty Whiten/Ann Dunn requested, and were granted, an

additional \$400 to help provide breakfast and lunches that we were not able to prepare and distribute to our local homeless population.

As the summer began in June, Leslie Trier and **Athens Community Council on Aging (ACCA)** asked our commission to take responsibility for transporting twice-a-week food delivery from ACCA to drop-off sites for its aging and disabled clients. Sally Vandiver got us organized and we picked up and delivered hundreds of bags of groceries, fresh fruit, crates of milk, apples, and bread. Also, to help with the economic impact of the COVID pandemic on ACCA, we sent an above-and-beyond gift of \$3,000.

During this time we also heard from **Bethlehem Ministry** and the **Athens Area Emergency Food Bank** about how COVID was seriously impacting their ability to feed and serve their clients. Accordingly, M/O approved an additional \$1600 to Bethlehem Ministry as well as \$1600 to go to Athens Area Emergency Food Bank.

In July we began hearing presentations from all the organizations that received financial support from First Pres, through M/O, in 2020. It became immediately clear as we heard from all of these organizations that COVID has made it more difficult to house, feed, and care for those in need. While it was tough to hear about the hardships many were facing, it also made us realize what a difference the contributions of First Presbyterian, in terms of both financial assistance and our time, made to these organizations and to the people they serve.

As the dog days of summer arrived in August, we were asked by ACCA to continue our food pickup from ACCA and delivery to the assisted living facility at Columbia Brookstone. What began as a responding to a temporary request stretched into a commitment to provide assistance as long as needed. Our selfless volunteers helped through the fall months.

In September we finished up 18 weeks of providing pizza to the Homeless Day Center. We are grateful for Robbie Bryan's leadership of this ministry. Also, during this month, the First Presbyterian **Our Daily Bread** volunteers, under the leadership of Fran Lane/Patty Whiten/Ann Dunn decided it was safe enough, with increased protocols in place, to resume participation in lunch preparation on our regular first Wednesday of the month. They began preparing our 'regular' lunch menu in the First Baptist kitchen and packaged it there for distribution outside by ODB staff to the homeless and hungry in our community.

As October rolled around, we agreed to support a new effort organized by the **Interfaith Clergy Partnership of Greater Athens (ICPGA)**. This effort was described to us by Carol Strickland, a member of the ICPGA, as an effort to show appreciation at the holidays to our local elementary school teachers and staff who had given so much to their students during these difficult times. The ICPGA arranged a December date for the coordinated effort of supplying catered, grab-and-go lunches for school personnel. We chose to sponsor Barrow and Chase Street Elementary and were fortunate enough to have Bertis Downs and Sally Vandiver work this project.

Moving into November, Mission and Outreach stepped up and took on coordination of the **Thanksgiving Food Bag** collection in support of the **Athens Area Emergency Food Bank (AAEFB)**. With the help of many drivers and Kim and the Youth, we delivered over 60 bags of food to the Emergency Food Bank. At approximately \$40 a bag, that is about \$2,400 of in-kind donations. Also, in another inspiring, but not surprising show of our congregation's support for those in most need in our Community, members donated over \$2,900 online for Thanksgiving bags. At about \$40 a bag, that is over 72 bags of food. So, depending how you look at it, our congregation donated over \$5,000 or 132 bags' worth of groceries to help those most in need celebrate Thanksgiving.

In December, as 2020 (finally!) began to come to a close, we turned our attention to **Casa Baskets** and the **Salvation Army Angels**. This year the continued threat of COVID required us to modify these gift-giving experiences. Rather than buying specialized ethnic groceries and preparing dozens of baskets for distribution to the Latino families served by **Casa de Amistad**, we provided \$40 gift cards for each family. Our congregation donated over \$4,000 for this effort which allowed one hundred families to have a brighter Christmas. We thank Kitty Donnan for championing this project.

For the **Salvation Army (SA) Angels**, we reached out to Pat Tritt who graciously handled most of the heavy lifting (figuratively and literally) for us, as he has had along connection with the Salvation Army. Instead of an actual Christmas tree with children's names on it at the Church, we participated in the "virtual" tree on the SA website. We had a hundred children set aside for First Presbyterian Church, all of whom got subscribed. Thanks to our members' generosity, these children had a more joyous Christmas.

Our Annual **ACCA Holiday Meals on Wheels** went off without a hitch this year. Of course, that is probably because Kitty Donnan was leading that effort for us (yes, if you have read this far you will see how much Kitty does)! She did a great job of keeping everyone safe, and on their way as the Congregation delivered meals on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's. Given COVID, we weren't able to do as much socializing as we normally do, but the people who received the meals were most appreciative of our efforts—and we gave the regular drivers a well-deserved rest during the holidays!

Finally, to wrap up the year, the **Benevolence Market** was held, but once again, due to COVID restrictions, we had to come up with a way to hold a "virtual" Benevolence Market. Instead of having tables set up in Fellowship Hall as we normally do every year, our lead, Denise Horton, with the help of Paulo, Jennifer, and Roger, designed a Market that allowed our congregation to give financial support to one of the many organizations dedicated to helping our community. While the online "virtual Benevolence Market" was not as much fun as browsing the tables in Fellowship Hall as in past years, the congregation once again stepped up to the financial need in our community and donated over \$11,400 this year! Also, in view of the pandemic, we directed the Christmas Eve/200th Anniversary special offering toward two health ministries, one local and one foreign. **Athens Neighborhood Health Center** and the **Clinic at Bethlehem Ministry in Haiti** each received \$2,152.

In all, 2020 was a busy and turbulent year for Mission and Outreach as COVID hit and so severely impacted our community. However, it was a very rewarding and meaningful year for our dedicated gang of Mission and Outreach. It was most rewarding because of all the good works that we got to do for our Community on behalf of First Presbyterian Church. And it was particularly humbling to see that when we called for help, our congregation gave so generously of their financial resources and so freely of their precious time. It made us all proud. Having said that....let's hope we can return to a little more "normal" in 2021!

Rob Haire, *Mission & Outreach Commission Chair*

Worship & Music Commission

Commission Members: Bob Burton, *Chair*, Beverly Phares, Larry Jones, Dr. Ryan Baer, *Senior Pastor*, and Dr. John Coble, *Director of Music and Organist*

Dr. Baer recently observed that in 2020, "we have learned to be the church in new and imaginative ways." Two of the imaginative ways that have had the greatest impact on our worship services are the work of Bryan Owens and Jack Palmer, our audiovisual technicians, and the work of Dr. Coble in planning and bringing the music.

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to shelter at home, few of us had ever tried to attend worship on line by Facebook. We discovered that the transmission was very unreliable with frequent and lengthy interruptions of both sound and picture. Bryan Owens and Jack Palmer have invested countless hours of work improving transmission, and with the help of Smith Wilson, building an audiovisual studio with improved microphones and cameras. They have added the option of worshiping by YouTube, and they voluntarily engineer the transmission of every service. We cannot thank them enough for this vital ministry.

John Coble has worked with two of our most accomplished and dedicated choir members, John Tsao and Kendall Kookogey, to assure that hymns and responses are sung and to provide anthems as well. John also arranged for them to provide some socially distanced duets on Christmas Eve. All of this has required considerable planning and editing. John has recently expanded our music ministry to include, Harper Covington, a soloist with a beautiful, pure soprano voice. I hope that this is just the first of many opportunities for other talented singers to serve as leaders of the singing that most of us must do from home.

Bob Burton, *Worship & Music Commission Chair*

2021 Communion Schedule

Sunday, January 3	January Communion
Sunday, February 7	February Communion
Sunday, March 7	March Communion
Thursday, March 31	Maundy Thursday Communion
Sunday, April 4	April Communion, Easter
Sunday, May 2	May Communion, Scottish Reformation Sunday
Sunday, June 6	June Communion
Sunday, July 4	July Communion
Sunday, August 1	August Communion
Sunday, September 5	September Communion
Sunday, October 3	World Communion Sunday

Sunday, November 7	November Communion
Sunday, December 5	December Communion
Friday, December 24	Christmas Eve (2 services)
Sunday, January 2, 2022	First Sunday of the New Year

Nominations and Elections Committee

Committee Members: Meghan Bawcum, *Chair*, Jennifer Abbot, Vice-Chair, Patti Reed, Jerry Rogers, Arlene Shirley, Chuck Toney

“The function of the Nominations and Elections Committee is to nominate congregational members for the Session, the Church Nominating Committee, the Pastor/Associate Pastors Search Committees and any other committees requested by Session.” (Session Handbook)

In 2020 the Nominations and Elections Committee was tasked with the job of nominating congregational members to the Elder class of 2023. Committee members met with Dr. Ryan Baer to review prospective candidates nominated by the congregation.

Contact was initiated, prayers were offered, and the following ten First Presbyterian members emerged as nominees for the Ruling Elder Class of 2023.

Sarah Bryan
Judy Burch
Kent Burel
Rod Canfield
Melinda DeMaria
Jim Dove
Mark Hopkins
Matt Jones
Robyn McDonald
Keith Oelke

Elected by acclamation at the October 11, 2020 Called Congregational Meeting. Ten elders-elect were examined by the Session on December 6, 2020 at a Called Session Meeting. Along with the entire congregation, the members of the 2020 Nominations and Elections Committee celebrate the installation of the Elder Class of 2023.

Meghan Bawcum, *Nominations & Elections Committee Chair*

Congratulations on the Births of:

Margaret Hale Bikoff
Stewart Prescott Gilbert
Eliza-Lee Heath
Ward Burkhart Johnson

William Thomas Jordan
Corley Mozell Padgett
Arthur Lawton Stephens

We welcome our new members in 2021:

Jamie Baer
Larry Baer
Brian Banister
Susan Banister
Abigale Bishop
Andy Butcher
Trish Butcher
Johnny Carr
Diane DeBarry
John DeBarry
Charlee Haynes
Wyatt Haynes
Rachel Huff
Paul Johnson
Sarah Johnson
Kate MacMillan
Ansley McKnight
Mac McKnight

David Magrino
Chelsey Manning
Phillip Manning
Grier Martin-Williams
Gabrielle Mason
Parker Middleton
Ben Ness
Thad Pruitt
Katherine Queen
April Rooker
John Rooker
Isabelle Seward
Al Tammany
Teresa Tammany
Carolina Turner
Annelise Woodall
Neil Woodall
Debbie Yarrow

In Memoriam:

Ruby Thomas Hodgson	<i>January 12, 2020</i>
Martha Belle Isle Sheneseey	<i>January 14, 2020</i>
Virginia “Jinx” Roseman Baldwin	<i>February 7, 2020</i>
Julia Edwards Sanks	<i>February 11, 2020</i>
Paul W. Izant	<i>February 18, 2020</i>
Katherine Baskin Avery	<i>February 27, 2020</i>
Frances Holliman Griffin	<i>March 24, 2020</i>
Joyce McLean Coble	<i>April 2, 2020</i>
Kathleen Henson Wilfong	<i>May 12, 2020</i>
Florence “Jill” Hayden Clement	<i>May 25, 2020</i>
Cardee Friedrichsen Kilpatrick	<i>May 30, 2020</i>
Ruth Margaret Ike	<i>June 24, 2020</i>
Mildred “Millie” Bedgood Warren	<i>August 7, 2020</i>
Edwina Tidwell Ferguson	<i>August 13, 2020</i>
Rosevelyn Collins Garrison	<i>August 28, 2020</i>
Virginia Ruth Lancaster Shields	<i>September 22, 2020</i>
Angel Caffey	<i>September 30, 2020</i>
Carol Buckley Lunde	<i>November 9, 2020</i>
Marion Patterson Ridgeway (Pat)	<i>November 18, 2020</i>
Donald Dwayne Carnes	<i>December 1, 2020</i>

Session

Ryan Baer, *Moderator*, Kitty Donnan, *Clerk of Session*, Carol Strickland, *Associate Pastor*

Class of 2020

Jeff Bangle

Meghan Bawcum

Bob Burton

Julie Hayes

Sydney Jackson

Avery McLean

Jeanne Nadenicek

Carl Nichols

Tom Reigle

Judy Scanlon

Class of 2021

Jennifer Walden Abbott

Michelle Clendenen-Shaw

Elizabeth Earl

Ed Ferguson

Rob Haire

Grace Lu

Chris Pope

Mixon Robinson

Rosemary Stancil

Class of 2022

Karen Burg

Kitty Donnan

Larry Jones

Andy Jordan

Jimbo LaBoon

Tom Landrum

Beverly Phares

Courtney Pittman

Smith Wilson

Staff

Dr. Ryan Baer, *Senior Pastor*

Dr. Carol Strickland, *Associate Pastor*

The Rev. Margaret Davis, *Parish Associate*

Dr. John Coble, *Director of Music and Organist*

Mrs. Kim Ness, *Director of Youth Ministries*

Mrs. Natalie Bishop, *Director of Children's Ministries*

Mrs. Elaine Johnson, *Director of Weekday School*

Mr. Roger Burbage, *Church Administrator*

Mrs. Lucy Bell Johnson, *Administrative Assistant for Congregational Care & Membership*

Mr. Paulo Santos, *Communications Specialist*

Mrs. Jennifer Sunderlin, *Receptionist/Administrative Assistant*

Mrs. Angie Townsend, *Accountant*

Mrs. Marcy Fabris, *Weekday School Administrative Assistant*

Ms. Rita Raines, *Nursery Coordinator*

Mrs. Charlotte Chromiak, *Children's Music Assistant*

Ms. Rebecca Carlton, *Sunday Morning Manager*

Mrs. Madeline Van Dyck, *Parish Nurse*

Waddel Fellow

Ms. Caroline Hurst, *High School Ministry, 2020-21*