



First Unitarian Church
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From the President of the 2020–2021 Board of Trustees

Well, has this been a strange year or what? Last year at this time, who'd have thought we'd spend the next 12 months meeting on Zoom, watching services on YouTube, sharing joys and sorrows virtually, masking up, socially distancing, voting by mail, picking up groceries curbside? And who'd have ever predicted that your Board president would grow a ponytail to rival Ward Kelsey's?



To say it's been challenging may be the understatement of the year. Yet, as a church, we've made it through, haven't we? So far at least, I believe we have.

Still a church

Every time a Zoom meeting flickered into existence, and your smiling faces began popping onto the screen, Brady Bunch style... every time Ellen Gozion's hands danced across the keys as she sang a song of hope... every time Erica Shadowsong recited a poignant, thoughtful story... every time Kris Rust performed all the parts of a round, even accompanying himself on piano or drum... every time Reverend Connie said, at the beginning of each service, "While our building may be closed, our church is not" ... every time Jim Cunningham opened our covenant group by saying, "Phyllis, would you like to check in?"... every time Chris Beregi closed our UU Christian Fellowship Group meeting with, "Have a great week everyone!"... every time something like this happened, I felt a shiver of appreciation, a surge of life-affirming happiness. Because although we might have been physically distanced, we were still close at heart. We were still vibrant. We were still a church.

Sincere thanks

...to Rev. Connie for her leadership in helping us to weather this storm; to Ellen and Kris for inspiring us; to Erica for somehow managing to find a way to continue dynamic religious education programming for both kids and adults; to our commissioned lay minister Stephanie Pawlowski for ably stepping in to give Connie an occasional rest; to the liturgists, the other musicians, and the technical team for doing their part to make sure we stayed strongly connected; to all the other leaders in the church for keeping their committees and teams and groups heading in the right direction. Thank you all so very much.

Prioritizing health and well-being

As you know, the Board of Trustees has taken a cautious view of the pandemic. As former Board President Martin Schmidt said at last year's Annual Meeting, "We have prioritized the health and well-being of our community above all else." We have protected our members, friends, visitors, and staff. Yet we see hope on the horizon, as the Safe Reopening Task Force (Peggy Parsons, Shelley Ross, Kirk Striebich, and LRED Erica Shadowsong) uses sound judgment, science, and health policy to advise the Board on decisions around how and when to reopen our building. Additionally, the Board has created a Reopening Implementation Working Group to turn the task force's recommendations into action. One day soon, we'll meet in person again.

Going into the pandemic, the Board had serious questions about our church's financial outlook. Knowing we would lose rental income and other sources of funding, we took out a Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loan last spring as an insurance policy in case we were unable to afford to retain our staff or meet other obligations. Thus far, we have been able to keep all staff employed with full compensation and to pay all our bills, and we were able to repay the PPP loan in April. We could do this because of the hard work and ingenuity of the Finance Committee and the Annual Budget Drive Committees and, of course, because of the abundant generosity of every member of our congregation. Heartfelt thanks to all of you who have contributed your support.

Looking to the future

...the Board has approved the formation of a Reimagining Fundraising Task Force to think creatively about how our church might optimize its fundraising efforts. We look forward to seeing where this initiative leads us.

Throughout the year, Rev. Connie, the Board, and other church leaders have addressed a number of other significant issues. We completely overhauled our church's Bylaws and governance policies. We extended the term of the Board an additional month to June 30 to create a transition period where overlap in leadership and

knowledge-sharing can occur. We also considered a request to ordain Jessica Halperin, a former youth leader in our church. While Jessica has put this request on indefinite hold, the Board nevertheless learned a lot about ordaining Unitarian Universalist ministers.

Improvements have been made to the church building and property—something to take note of when the building reopens. It also appears that the church was successful in helping to influence a city proposal to retain parking on Ellsworth Avenue while also better accommodating bicyclists. The currently favored proposal would reduce both the quantity and speed of vehicular traffic on Ellsworth, which could make it safer for parkers and pedestrians alike. And as a church, we accomplished so much more, the details of which are outlined in the reports that follow.

Deep gratitude

I would be remiss if I didn't express my deep gratitude to the other members of the Board of Trustees: Vice-President Heather Masterson; Secretary Eleanor Mayfield; Treasurer Kyle Gracey; Board members Lee Carnes, Julie Downs, Sam Hens-Greco, Lynne Porterfield, and Kate Snow, as well as Ebe Emmons, who served as vice president for a good part of the year; Rev. Connie as ex officio member; and Kurt Summersgill, who served as recording secretary. Every single one of these folks stepped up and took ownership of a piece of the leadership puzzle. I'm not exaggerating when I say that there were about a dozen Board presidents who contributed at different times during the year—that's how important each individual was to our church leadership.

Soon, we will bid goodbye to Rev. Connie. We owe Connie a deep debt of gratitude for her steady guiding hand in shepherding us through these last two years and for working to restore the trust we must necessarily have in anyone called to ministry at our church. Her presence at our church will leave a lasting impression on our congregation. We are a stronger religious community because of her time here. After the service on June 6, we'll celebrate Rev. Connie with a special event.

New settled minister

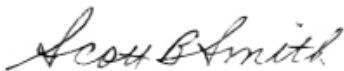
That brings me to First Unitarian Church's biggest news of the year: ***We have called the Rev. Dr. Kate R. Walker as our new settled minister, to begin serving on August 1.*** As you likely know by now, Rev. Kate was approved by 100% of those voting.

The calling of a new minister is by no means an easy process. Over the past year, the Ministerial Search Committee put in countless hours, untold creativity, and boundless energy in determining the congregation's preferences in a minister, showcasing our

church for ministerial prospects, interviewing and evaluating candidates, securing an agreement with the top candidate, introducing the candidate to the church, and calling for a vote—all the while keeping the congregation informed of its progress. We sincerely thank search committee members Chris Beregi, Mary Denison, David Doorley, Brian Junker, Peggy Parsons, Jim Reitz, and Michael Safran. It was a labor of love the likes of which we have rarely seen in our church. Rev. Kate promises to bring renewed synergy, dynamism, and growth to our church. Our future is certainly very bright!

So, yes, it's been a challenging year—but also a year of renewal. We faced fear and uncertainty with courage and grace. We learned a lot about who we are. We lost some deeply loved friends and gained some new ones. The year ahead will be one of continued challenge but also of increasing hope. Together, all of us at First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh will continue working to build the Beloved Community to which we aspire.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Scott Smith".

Scott Smith

President, Board of Trustees

2020–2021

