

Dear friends,

At Sunday's congregational meeting, I gave a "state of the church" address. As many of you couldn't be in worship yesterday, I am sharing a slightly revised version of that here:

2022 was a year of many joys and many challenges. At the beginning of 2022, a new variant of COVID hit our community hard. Instead of celebrating our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in person with our former pastors preaching, we had to go back to online worship. Our expected February celebration of our 150<sup>th</sup> had to be moved to May. At the same time, our beloved associate pastor Mitzi had been diagnosed with an inoperable glioblastoma brain tumor. We grieved deeply for many reasons.

As the spring progressed, Mitzi determined that she needed to take short-term disability over the summer. That turned into long-term disability by the fall. I am pleased to report that she is doing well and that her disease has remained stable. She maintains a good level of strength and mental acuity and she sends her love to you all.

Knowing that she would not be returning in any full-time capacity, we proceeded to search for an associate pastor. That search led us to Esther Hethcox, who joined us in December and was ordained at the beginning of this month.

In the meantime, our worship and programming started to look a little more like what it had before the pandemic. This fall, we could feel a palpable increase in energy from people in the congregation. Not everyone has returned to worship, however, and this is a source of grief for many of us. However, many who can't attend in person are able to join us online, so our capability to provide streaming services for those who need it has been a huge gift to the congregation. We are so grateful for our sound and live-stream team and would love to have others who

might be interested in learning the ropes so that we can continue this important outreach to those who are sick or travelling.

Here's some good news! Our membership continues to increase. We began 2022 with 524 members and ended with 542! Nine confirmands joined the church, and we welcomed nineteen new members.

We also had three baptisms last year.

We had six members move away and transfer their membership to another congregation. Four members joined the church triumphant.

Our average attendance during the fall and winter has been around 146 in person and 34 devices online. If those on devices average 1-2 people on each device, that puts us very close to our pre-pandemic worship average (not including summer) of around 190.

Our commitment to the community and to those in deepest need remains sound. We give \$220,000 to mission partners in locally and globally. That is 15% of our annual budget, plus \$35,000 from reserves.

Significant support goes to:

- Iglesia Emanuel Presbyteriana

- The First Presbyterian Day School

- Our own Walk-in Ministry, staffed by volunteers

- Housing for New Hope

- Campus ministry at NC Central and Duke Universities

- Global Mission support in the Congo and Guatemala

- Support of local and national Presbyterian USA programs & ministries

- Urban Ministry of Durham

- Habitat for Humanity

- Step-Up Ministries and many other organizations

In addition to this financial support, many of our members volunteer weekly and monthly and serve on boards of these and other ministries and local non-profits.

We are also involved with Durham CAN and other organizations to work for affordable housing and transit and are looking for ways to address gun violence and poverty. We are active in criminal justice reform and work with returning citizens. And I am just skimming the surface.

We also are blessed to have active and vibrant children and youth ministries and wonderful staff and volunteer leaders.

We have a committed and gifted choir that leads us in worship each Sunday.

We have an active Racial equity team that helps us understand white privilege and systemic racism and encourages us to seek active ways to repair damage that has been done through a history of slavery, oppression, and racism.

We were honored to host once again the MLK interfaith community celebration on MLK Day and the City/County MLK celebration in February.

We host numerous concerts that benefit our FPC community as well as the community around us.

We have active participation in our faith formation classes for people of all ages on Sunday mornings and throughout the week.

We host the McPherson lectures and other lunch and learn opportunities that benefit the Durham community.

In addition to all of this, we had a capital campaign that you have given generously to - almost \$3 million dollars – and are moving toward a renovation and expansion plan that will start at the end of the summer, helping us to expand our ability to welcome our neighbors through our gathering spaces and accessibility.

But let me be clear. This is all good and well, and we have much to celebrate, but we are also called to continually examine who we are and how we are building beloved community, growing in faith and love, and following Jesus in Durham. We have not yet arrived. We have much to learn and we want to continue to challenge ourselves to find the ways the Holy Spirit is calling us to grow spiritually, to deepen our relationship with our Triune God, with one another, and with our neighbors.

In a few minutes, you will hear a report from our Thriving Congregations team. They are going to help us move into the future guided by deep reflection and input from you all and from our community through listening sessions. They will help us challenge ourselves to consider what God is calling us to do and who God is calling us to be in the months and years ahead. First Presbyterian Church has been actively following Jesus for over 150 years. We don't intend to stop now.

As for me, I am grateful to be a part of a wonderful and capable staff that loves God and loves you. We are all grateful to do ministry with such an incredible congregation of faithful, gifted, invested, wise, and committed people.

Thank you for all you do to respond to God's abundant love and grace in your life. It is a true joy to do ministry together at FPC and in Durham with you. God has called us to serve this community and we continue to respond in beautiful and faithful ways.

Thanks be to God for God's goodness, mercy, and grace.

Thanks be to God for you all.

With love,

Mindy