



A Message from Office of the Moderator
"Mini-Minutes" from the January 12, 2021
Church Council Meeting and
January 18, 2021 Special Meeting

January 19, 2021

Dear Members and Friends of the Hills Church,

Advent and Christmas, all twelve days of it, are over. The Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love signs have been put away until next season (we hope!). In our homes, the Christmas decorations are going back to the attic although the vacuum cleaner keeps picking up stray pine needles. We have begun a new year, with a sigh of relief that 2020 has finally been consigned to history. Most of us are feeling a bit of cautious optimism about 2021. Covid-19 and deep divisions in our country are still with us, but there is reason for hope that the vaccine, and continued good public health measures, will turn the tide of the pandemic, and that a fresh start in Washington will help us bridge the political gap. Some might say that these are pipe dreams, but this is the time of year for aspirational thinking ("I will exercise every day this year!"). We are more likely to accomplish something positive this year if we start off hopeful than despairing. So let's give 2021 the benefit of the doubt!

Church Council met by Zoom last week and this, the first meetings of 2021. Some of the notable topics discussed are summarized below:

Matt Wooster

- Commented on what a strange experience it was for him and the other clergy after so many years of leading multiple worship services on Christmas Eve, to switch to a mode of recording and editing services and a concert over a number of days, meeting with worship participants in order to include readings by church members and special candle lighting.
- Commended those who invested a great deal of energy and time in creating these services in such a different way, including Sally Tomasetti, John Finney, Martha Stowell and members of the bell choir, Kevin Groppe, Emily Gauthier, Christian Figueroa, Shannon and Stephen Lebron, Laurie Otten, Judy Swahnberg, and Anne Marie Holloway, as well as our lay readers and participants in the pageant.
- Was surprised and pleased by the recognition of the 20th anniversary of his ordination. He is grateful to be in ministry with this community, as we are grateful to have him here.

Judy Swahnberg

- Led a group each Tuesday in Advent reflecting on Richard Rohr's Devotional, Preparing for Christmas.
- Continued (with others) to provide Pastoral Care for Seniors during Advent including providing them with Advent Calendars (Susan Walton), arranging for a prerecorded Christmas Concert on December 17 (John Finney, Laurie Otten), distributing homemade Christmas cookies and poinsettias (Elaine Vildzius, Tina Vasconelles, Deacons) and hosting a Zoom Christmas Tea (Seniors Ministry).
- Continued to provide pastoral care to those in mourning and those affected by illness including Covid-19 in

coordination with Deacons, Hills Bells and the Care Teams.

- Continued with her 'Ministry as Usual: the on-going programs:
 - Weekly Morning Meditation: every Tuesday morning with Mary Canavan
 - Weekly Facebook Live: Noontime Prayer
 - Weekly Care Team assignments
 - Caring for the Caregiver: meets monthly
 - Connections: 13 people joined us for our Christmas Tea Zoom on December 11

Anne Marie Holloway

- With Sally Tomasetti and a 'cast of thousands' organized and recorded a virtual Christmas Eve Pageant and worship service which is this season's 'must see' viewing event.
- Organized and hosted a Christmas Eve Drive-Through with Sally Tomasetti, the clergy, our Deacons and some volunteers from Parish Life. They kept the sanctuary open from 12:00-3:00 so that families and church members could (one at a time) safely visit, pray, hear familiar hymns, light a candle and leave with the gift of a "Twelve days of Christmas Calendar" and Christmas Eve Candles to light at home during "Silent Night".
- Participated in a special evening prayer service: 1/7 Prayer for our Nation. In response to the domestic attacks on the US Capitol we gathered online to pray together.
- Continues to lead a number of small groups, plan for services, especially with Lent approaching, co-lead the Confirmation Class with Mimi D'Angelo, and support the Church School Program along with Sally Tomasetti.

Christian Service Support Board - Doug Eisenhart reported that the CSSB Is planning a Mission Moment this month to be given by the Executive Director of Friends of the Boston Homeless, introduced by Paul Bruchez. We have supported them through financial outreach for many years. Working with Participation and Involvement, CSSB has identified a full group of incoming board members, and CSSB Chair Harold Wilkinson has agreed to say on in that role for an additional year.

Spiritual Care Support Board - Susan Walton told us that Gary McCabe and Robert Williams, incoming Senior Deacons, along with Participation and Involvement, continue to be in conversation to fill out the Board's membership. The Deacons are also in the planning stages of a Zoom gathering to welcome new Deacons and honor those who are leaving the Board.

Judy's reflection at their last meeting led to the creation of a Welcoming Group to consider the language we use and any indications we might give to the greater community that we are Open and Affirming and allies to Racial Justice. Judy will guide them as they move toward an initial meeting.

Faith Formation Support Board - Tina Andersson reported that Board met recently and are looking ahead to Lent. They are also continuing with the Racial Justice initiatives started last year. Some other possible programs for the spring are a bible study group, book discussions as well as joining some programs produced by others on Zoom.

Stewards Support Board - Tia Pinney noted that the Stewards report would be covered elsewhere on the agenda (below).

Some of the key agenda items discussed at the meeting were:

Stewardship Campaign 2021 - Susan Walton and Matt Wooster reported that the stewardship campaign "Look to the Rock" is in the final phase. As of 1/12 there had been 151 pledges totaling \$831,660.

Annual Meeting - The congregational meeting will be held by Zoom this year at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday 1/31/21. The call will go out by 1/21/21 and will include the materials usually distributed for the Annual Meeting, i.e. the Agenda, the motions requiring a vote, the proposed budget and the slate of officers and Support Board/Ministry Team members. Distribution will be by email, and conventional mail for those who do not use email. Instructions for using Zoom, which runs on both computers and smartphones, will be distributed in advance along with links to instructional videos, and a practice session will be scheduled for those who are not familiar with it. We will ask people to sign up via Signup Genius (a link will be sent) so we can be sure to have a quorum. Note that if your plans change and you find at the last minute that you can attend the meeting you may do so even if you have not signed up via Signup Genius. Rich Sweeting, Mary Canavan and Susan MacDonald are making the necessary arrangements.

Please note that the usual Stewards' Forum to review the proposed budget will also be held by Zoom. A separate announcement will be made of the dates and times.

Budget 2021 - The majority of both meetings was spent reviewing the preliminary financial results for 2020 and considering the operating budget for 2021. Although our expenses were modestly reduced in 2020 compared to 2019 because we were not open for so much of the year, our income was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, primarily due to lower net revenue from the Nursery School. The Nursery School did not run the usual summer program and when it did open in the Fall, it was with a reduced number of students. In some instances, families were not ready to

resume in-person learning, but more importantly, our capacity was reduced by limits to the minimum amount of area per student that we put in place to facilitate social distancing. The Nursery School is running this semester with limited capacity as well, but it is hoped that we will be able to hold the summer program and to expand capacity modestly again in the Fall. However, the Nursery School's contribution to the church's finances in 2021 is still projected to be much lower than it was pre-Covid-19. Projected expenses exceed projected revenues in 2021 independent of the projected decline in net revenue from the Nursery School. As a result, we are looking for ways to trim the 2021 budget and reduce the projected operating deficit. The proposed 2021 budget was approved at the second meeting on Monday, 1/18/21. It will be distributed to the congregation by 1/21/21 and also presented at the Stewards Forum, which will be held by Zoom this year.

Proposed By-Laws Changes - Several changes proposed by the Strengthening Church Governance Task Force were discussed and approved. They were largely a matter of using consistent nomenclature and correcting an oversight regarding our delegates to the UCC. These proposed changes will also be distributed to the congregation in advance of the Annual Meeting.

As always, if you have questions or comments, please contact us individually or at:
Officeofthemoderator@hillschurch.org

In service and faith,

Christopher Stowell Sarah Pedersen Mary Hill Canavan

Wellesley Hills Congregational Church

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