

2018 ANNUAL REPORT



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST
God is still speaking,

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**First Congregational United Church of Christ – Sarasota
Annual Meeting: January 27, 2019 – 12:15 p.m.**

Call to Order	Bob Goldman, Moderator
Opening Prayer	Lori White, Vice Moderator
Confirmation of a Quorum	Janet Tipton, Parliamentarian

2018 Annual Report

Approval of Team Annual Reports & Membership Report	Bob Goldman
Review & Approval of 2018 Annual Meeting Minutes	Susan Moore, Secretary
Nominations Committee Report • Nomination & Election of Team Members • Nomination & Election of Officers	Bob Goldman
Financial Reports • Endowment Fund • 2018 Balance Sheet • 2019 Budget	Rick McDaniel, Chair, Endowment Judy Black, Treasurer Warren Bacon, Chair Finance, Funding, & Stewardship
Proposed By-law Changes	Bob Goldman
Recognition of Immediate Past Moderator, Lynn Jones	Bob Goldman & Lori White
Passing of Gavel Closing Prayer Adjournment	Bob Goldman Pastor Wes

Necrology 2018

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date Joined</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Vince Amoroso		1/20/18
Dorothy Reed	1/30/94	1/21/18
Ann Nevin		1/30/18
Samuel Tutt	2/12/95	2/25/18
Linda Rogers	8/18/13	3/2/18
Steven Falk		4/22/18
Melton Miller	11/23/97	5/28/18
Billie Knauss	11/23/97	6/18/18
Lois Samuel	12/10/95	6/27/18
Jan Gagel	6/22/14	6/27/18
John Hay	2/7/88	11/12/18
Lyman Farrar	11/8/05	12/5/18

2018 Membership Report

New Full Members	18
Associate to Full Membership	0
Reaffirmation of Faith	2
New Associate Membership	0
Confession of Faith	0
Total New Members	20
Members leaving the church by:	
Letter of transfer	2
Removed from Rolls (full)	6
Removed from Rolls (associate)	0
Associate to Full Membership	0
Deceased Full Members	12
Deceased Associate Members	
Inactive	20
Total Removals	40
Total Membership year ending 2018	438

**Minutes of the 2017 Annual Meeting
First Congregational United Church of Christ, Sarasota
January 28, 2018**

Moderator Lynn Jones called the meeting to order at 12:17 pm. Vice Moderator Bob Goldman offered an opening prayer. Parliamentarian Janet Tipton confirmed the presence of a quorum. Lynn Jones presented the membership report.

The membership of the church stands at 466. In the Annual Report there is a typographical error on the report saying the membership is for 2016. It has been corrected to read 2017. Dale Moore moved to accept the report. Rick McDaniels seconded. APPROVED

Secretary Susan Moore asked for acceptance of the 2017 Annual Report. Susan Raines seconded. APPROVED

Moderator Lynn Jones presented the report of the Nominating Committee. She explained the rationale behind establishing the new Membership Team. She also noted that since the Peace and Justice Team is so large that the only names shown are those not on other teams. The report shows that the officers for the coming year are: Lynn Jones, Immediate Past Moderator; Bob Goldman, Moderator; Lori White, Vice Moderator; Susan Moore, Secretary; Judith Black and Cindy Walsh Co-Treasurers. Lynn also recognized the following team leaders who are moving on: Janet Tipton, Bill Wendling, Judy Black and Jean Marie Steele. Lennie Hoffman moved to accept the report, and Bill Moore seconded. APPROVED

Lynn reviewed the Core Values of the church, showed who comprised the church staff and gave an overview of our congregation, our future and the changing church. A Report for the Endowment Committee was given by Rick McDaniel.

Increases for the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2017: Gifts Routson, Bolan, Knight, Norton 13,500 gift, Elwood/York Scholarship Fund 25,000, Value of investments 175,430. Decreases from 2016

4% Disbursement to the Church 30,329

Scholarships 6,634

Combined balance of Designated and Undesignated Funds: \$1,452,733

Undesignated fund activity for the quarter ending December 31, 2107:

Dividend/interest income

2017 4% Disbursement to Church

Finance, Funding and Stewardship Team chair Bill Wendling delivered a Finance Presentation for 2107, which included a year-end financial report, a 2018 budget proposal, and the financial objectives. The church was in the black for the 4th year in a row, had \$180,000 in reserves and \$520,000 in pledges to date.

Roger Weiss moved to accept the report. Bill Moore seconded. APPROVED

Jean Walker was thanked for her service as treasurer for four years. Jean highlighted the \$111,502 net income for the year and referenced expense control as the key. She emphasized that the budget was based on pledges, but that we also received money from guests or non-pledge members for up to \$50,000. She talked about reserves, which had been depleted but now had \$70,000 in capital expenses, \$5,000 in disaster reserve and \$104.5K in operating reserves.

Lynn thanked outgoing former moderator Myron Robinson for his work as an officer of the church and presented him with a gift.

Pastor Wes thanked the congregation for a successful year. He showed the plaque thanking the estates of Bob Eaton and Joyce Mahon for the handicapped accessible doors in Syster Hall.

Pastor Wes led us in prayer for Myron and for the doors. Lynn Jones turned over the gavel and Moderator Bible to the new moderator, Bob Goldman.

Myron thanked people for coming and led the congregation in prayer.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:20 pm.

Pastor's Annual Report 2018

We are on the cusp of celebrating our 65th Anniversary in 2019. Sixty-five years means that we have gathered to worship in our sanctuary over three thousand four hundred times. Over sixty-five years, we have founded ministries that have shared God's light and love in Sarasota and beyond. We formed Plymouth Harbor as a safe, caring place for retired people. We founded New College as a safe, caring place for young adults to learn and grow. We formed SURE (Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity) as a commitment to make our community a more just place. We were instrumental in building Orchard Place as a safe, caring home for people who are on fixed incomes.

It has been a blessing to be your pastor for the last five of those sixty-five years. Over the last five years, we have continued to deepen and expand our relationships with each of the institutions we help found. Over the last five years we have addressed maintenance issues on campus that had been delayed, deferred while keeping our commitment to being generous in our mission. This past year, we faced the difficult decision of saying, "Good-bye" to our Little Pilgrim ministry. It is hard. I miss the children in chapel on Monday mornings belting out, "This Little Light of Mine." I miss seeing the children out on the playground or parade in costumes on Halloween. The building that housed our preschool ministry is sacred and holy ground because of the young lives that were shaped there. I am committed to making sure that what happens in that sacred space will continue to form and fashion lives. I feel like we are on the cusp of a new ministry in that space. I pray we will continue

to listen to the slow work of the spirit as we dream new dreams for the worship, community, and service that will happen there.

This coming year will also offer a ten-week sabbatical for me. This will be my first sabbatical in seventeen-years of ministry. I am so grateful for the generous financial gift so many of you offered our family. I am so grateful for this time away. I am so grateful for Rev. Sarah Melcher and Rev. Dr. Craig Collemer who will be leading worship on Sundays and offering care while I am away. My heart overflows with gratitude. During my sabbatical there is time for family (Alaskan cruise); writing a devotional I pray will bless our church when I get back; and service to the wider church as I serve as chaplain of the week at Chautauqua Institute in July.

It remains a privilege to serve as your pastor. I celebrate our staff. Greg, Bobbi, Mark, Julie, Gordon, and Bill lead with faith and love. I celebrate our leadership. The moderators, chairs of Teams, and all who serve give so much of your energy, passion, care, and love. I celebrate our growing ministry together. The laughter around Bible Study tables, tears as we celebrate the lives of church members at funerals, moments we sing out with gusto, times we sit quietly together, gatherings where we speak out for justice, equality for all God's children, experiences of listening and learning from each other, and so much more. As was said at a meeting in October, "There is an embarrassment of riches here." Yet, I prefer to think of **our church as blessed to be a blessing**. That is who we have been, are, and will continue to be together for the years to come. Thank you. Thank you for all you do and who you are. You are a blessing.

With great love ~~ Wes

Moderator's Annual Report 2018

It has been a privilege for me to be Moderator this past year. I am especially thankful for the help and support of Vice Moderator Lori White and Immediate Past Moderator Lynn Jones. The Church Council has been an exceptional group, dealing with the normal concerns of the Church with grace and understanding. Special thanks to Susan Moore in her role as Secretary and Judy Black and Cindy Walsh as Treasurers.

We are so very blessed to have the Reverend Dr. Wes Bixby as our Senior Pastor and Greg Chestnut as our Minister of Music. Sunday morning continues to be the Core of our Church Mission, and the meaningful sermons and sacred music centers us all in our relationship with God.

The Council has dealt with several difficult decisions this year, especially the closing of Little Pilgrim as a Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten School. The hard work of Deb Hayes, Bill Wendling and their committee made this decision one of acceptance and understanding for the Council.

The Council has seen continued improvements to our campus. The windows in Syster Hall have been upgraded, the bathrooms in the Sanctuary and in Syster Hall have been renovated, the Plaza has been finished, and enhanced plantings have been completed. Plans are under development to add a Labyrinth to our Campus in the New Year.

We continue to be a generous Church. Our financial commitments have been pledged and met. We volunteer with great enthusiasm in Mission work such as SURE, the Brady Campaign, Pride Activities, and countless other community efforts.

We are in the midst of planning for our 65th Anniversary celebration Year. The events and recognitions already planned will bring great joy and pleasure to us all. We have much to Celebrate and be Thankful for.

As I leave my year as moderator, I wish Lori White, Moderator for 2019 and Warren Bacon, Vice Moderator, my prayers for a successful year. I know our Congregation will be ready to assist you in keeping our Church the wonderful place it is.

Bob Goldman, Moderator

Celebrating Worship Report

The team ensured that various supporting roles were staffed for all worship services. We are thankful for the many faithful congregants who welcomed visitors; and who served as greeters, ushers, liturgists, and communion servers.

The team conducted the MLK worship service on January 14, 2018. We were all very gratified by the many positive comments we received that Sunday. Planning has been completed for the January 2019 MLK worship service.

COLLAGE Report

Collage of First Congregational UCC is made up over 70 members of the LGBTQ community as well as straight friends and supporters from within the church. We

have a three fold ministry. First, we strive to be a support network for the LGBTQ family within the church, caring for one another when one is hurt, is ill, injured or loses a loved one or when other problems arise ... as well as sharing our happiness and successes; second, to reach out to others in the LGBTQ community in the Sarasota area, to witness that whoever they are or where ever they are on life's journey they will find an open and affirming family at First Congregational UCC; and third, to assume responsibility for, and take an active role in the life and welfare of our church community.

Collage members meet the fourth Sunday of each month at the Bravo Restaurant for a time of fun but also planning ways we might fulfill our mission. We have had representatives from ALSO, The Senior Friendship Center and Equality Florida speak to us about the services they provide and ways we might be supportive.

We also enjoy getting together to socialize at potlucks and parties during this year. This past year 37 of us enjoyed a lovely potluck at Sarah and Barbara's to honor some of the published authors in the group. At Christmas 27 of us enjoyed a potluck and gift exchange at the church. We have hosted booths at both the Manatee Pride and Sarasota Pride events where we distributed over 100 brochures about Collage and First Congregational UCC and spoke to many people. For the first year we sponsored a full page ad in the Watermark, a magazine that reaches hundreds in the LGBTQ community here in our area. Some of our members provide worship services at the Lifecare Center once a month. Others are active in community organizations such as S.U.R.E, Equality Florida and Meals On Wheels.

As an active part of this congregation, Collage was proud to host the Fellowship hour on Mother's Day, an event that is becoming a tradition for us. We hosted the remainder of that month. In addition, we joined with Peace and Justice to host a fellowship hour in December and we joined with the Women of the Church to co-host Granny's Attic, the church's Christmas sale which raised over \$3000.

Members of Collage serve on most church boards and committees. In addition, they drive the bus, organize and prepare communion, sing in the choir, serve on the lay visitation team, and usher among other tasks vital to the life of our beloved church.

We have lost some wonderful friends and loved ones this past year whose work and inspiration will be sorely missed. But we are grateful that God has also given us new members who bring new insights and energy to the group. We look forward to tackling new challenges and opportunities in 2019.

Facilities & Grounds Report

As a church, we continually try to provide a warm welcome to everyone. Our church campus – inside and outside – provides an opportunity for us to express an extravagant welcome. We have made major improvements over the past years and 2018 was no exception. Over the last year we have:

- Designed and dedicated a new outdoor gathering plaza in-between the sanctuary and Syster Hall. Many thanks to Bill Brackett and Dick Miller who provided funding in memory of Ann Brackett and Sharon Miller. A heartfelt thank you to Norman Hervieux who lent his design insights.
 - Renovated and remodeled the Syster Hall men's bathroom. Many thanks to Bud Rives, Bruce Knight, and Mark Swain for all their hard work and help. Thank you also to Bud for all the projects he works on around the church!
 - Re-landscaped the exterior flower beds on either side of the sanctuary with matching plants.
 - Re-landscaped the exterior flower bed in front of Syster Hall.
 - Trimmed the palm trees and flower bed in front of the church.
 - Many thanks to Page and Carol McCloud who helped move the compost area.
 - Installed a new fence to block the view of the air conditioner in Syster Hall.
 - Improved the lighting in Sanctuary and made repairs to the t-loop system.
- We are so thankful to our crew of lawn mowers: Buck Greenlaw, Thom Reeves, Dick Miller, Mike Knupp, Stephen Landers, and Mark Swain. Thank you to Joe Coccia who pressure washed the sidewalks this year. We offer a heartfelt thanks to Mark for his tireless work all around our campus. In the coming months we will be repainting the sanctuary and continuing to keep our campus warm and welcoming.

Fellowship & Special Events Team

The Fellowship & Special Events Team facilitates and supports special events and opportunities for fellowship within our church. Team Members in 2018: Drue Murray (Team Leader), Sandra Smith (Secretary), Len Murray, Joan Beach, Nancy Morris, Becky May and Linda Pursley

Fellowship Events:

- Coffee Hour–To assign teams for monthly coffee hours. The coffee hour host calendar will be provided at the January 2019 leadership meeting by Sandra Smith to team leaders & office admin.
- Birthday Cake Sunday–In 2018 Sandy Smith suggested that the first Sunday of each month at coffee hour we would decorate and serve cake to celebrate

birthdays of our members for that month. Sandy directed the host teams for Birthday Cake Sunday, which has proven to be successful. We support continued Birthday Cake Sundays for 2019.

- Spring Fling–April 13, 2018, this year we tried something new; The Lethal Luau dinner murder mystery, which was a great success. The price was \$10.00 per guest including dinner and a raffle ticket. There were additional raffles and 50/50 tickets sold. Feedback was very positive with members asking for another such event.
- The Labyrinth team is hosting a murder mystery fundraiser on February 16, 2019, called “Death by chocolate”. It was decided that in lieu of another murder mystery the Fellowship team will support a Fifties Themed Spring Fling to honor our 65th anniversary on Friday, April 5, 2019.
- Palm Sunday-Hot Cross Buns were donated by Detwiler’s and the youth group decorated and gave them out after Easter Services at coffee hour.
- Pancake dinner-fund raiser on Valentine’s Day for our youth group; we coordinated the set up and cooking. Juice and fruit was donated from Detwiler’s. Sausage was a big hit which helped to make it a successful fundraising event.
- Thanksgiving 2018-UCC 4th year was held at the new hotel meeting rooms behind the Der Dutchman restaurant. Member Joan Beach coordinated the selling of the tickets. The feedback from those who attended said the new room was perfect for the event. The Fellowship Team agreed at the December meeting we support the same venue for 2019.
- Grannies Attic Christmas-Fellowship member Nancy Morris chaired the sale and directed raffle ticket sales which were both a great success. Drue and Len Murray, and Karen Abel sold brats, hot dogs, chips and bottled water at the event. Feedback was positive but many people asked for chili as well.
- Christmas Bus Tour-Drue and Len Murray provided bus tours of Sarasota for the fourth year. Coordinating two dates for members to enjoy holiday lights, caroling and fellowship. Feedback was very positive, and the Fellowship team supports this event for 2019
- Team Players-Pastor Wes has organized a chili dinner on Sunday January 06, 2019 at Syster Hall at 4pm. The purpose is to have families gather to eat and have fun while promoting the youth group activities on Thursday’s. Drue and Len Murray will cook the chili for the event.
- Continue to work with the Joyce Kuhn and the Kitchen clean up team.
- New carts were purchased and paid by UCC women. The shelving/cabinets purchases were also approved, and the final drawings will be presented to

the UCC in early 2019. Len and Drue Murray will continue to work with Grounds member Dave Abel on that project.

- We will continue to offer kitchen solutions to assist with the goals to become a “Creation Justice Church”.
- In 2019 the fellowship members will offer our assistance to other teams with special events. It was discussed that events that gather people from same geographic areas or zip codes may be considered
- 2019 add Monica Geary as a team member.

Finance, Funding and Stewardship Report

Our church, thanks to the love, generosity, and commitment of our congregation, had --- for the fifth year in a row-- a financially strong year. As we celebrate our 65th anniversary in 2019, we are on sound financial footing to explore what it means to be “On The Brink Of Everything”! One of the high points of the year for your financial team was a series of meetings with representatives from the UCC National Conference. Among the many valuable learnings was the realization that our church is well positioned to step back, take a deep breath, and truly consider what “Everything” can mean – for ourselves, our relationship with God and our community.

While the year is still young, two “Everythings” come to mind: partnering with St. Paul's Lutheran Church on the Community Meal Project to feed the homeless; and the possibilities for now expanding our mission of Worship, Service and Community focused through a repurposed “Little Pilgrim” building. The key here is to conceptualize the building as only one part of a greater spiritual opportunity. These and other “Everythings” will be supported by the intelligence, caring and life experiences of you, our congregation, and enabled by our financial strength.

We are pleased to report that the church had an excellent financial performance during 2018. For the fifth year in a row, our income was greater than expenses. A significant reason for our strong performance is the constant attention to containing expenses. Our staff and team members held their expenses to more than \$79,000 below the amounts we had budgeted for the year. These savings were reinvested as additions to both our Operating Reserves and our Capital Reserves. Over the past five years, we have now restored more than \$210,000 in reserve funds that were drawn down during the Great Recession. During the past year, we have also taken steps to enable our church to plan for needs well into the future.

With the concurrence of Church Council, your finance team opened a second banking relationship to ensure that our bank accounts remain fully protected by FDIC insurance. Center State Bank will continue to house our operating accounts, Chase Bank will house additional accounts that will be invested in CD's and other high quality, safe investments. The intent is to stay under the umbrella of FDIC insurance while benefiting from rising interest rates on bank accounts and CDs.

Going back to the learnings from the UCC National meetings, several stand out. First, we are well positioned, financially and because of our strong, involved and diverse congregation, to make a deeper impact on the Sarasota community. Many churches have the will, but not the means. We have both. Second, compared to many UCC churches, we have a higher percentage of our overall income derived from pledges (84% vs an average of 72%). This reflects the strong support of our congregation. This also points out that there is room to grow our non-pledge income, such as the Endowment and rental income. Third, our expenses reflect a conservative and effective approach. For example, our expenses for both staffing and building expenses are lower than many churches. Conversely, our Missions expenses are our third largest expenditure compared to it being second for most churches. Finally, we benefit from our debt free campus and our proactive maintenance of the campus. We can continue to use our campus to leverage our missions of Worship, Community and Service. The full UCC National presentation is available for those interested in the details. This coming year will be an exciting one for our church, as we strengthen our service to one another, our community and God. If you would like to be in the middle of things, please contact the FF&S team about volunteer opportunities

Growing and Caring Team Report

At the beginning of the year, the Caring for the Congregation and Growing and Inviting teams were merged. The new team was re-named Growing and Caring. The team worked collaboratively on efforts to make the campus more welcoming (banners reading "Worship," Community" and "Service" hung from light poles in the parking lots, the plaza with seating and gathering spaces was completed), and discussed proposals to make Syster Hall more welcoming and informative about our church, especially to visitors and groups that rent the space.

The team helped to staff three new-member luncheons and a new member reunion; some team members also served as sponsors for new members.

Welcome bags for visitors were placed in the narthex throughout the year. Easter lilies and Christmas poinsettias were delivered to members of the congregation who were not able to attend services. Team members also made telephone calls to

those who had not attended for some time, encouraging them to re-engage if possible.

Lay Visitation Ministry Report

The Lay Visitation Ministry (LVM) Team began its ministry on behalf of the congregation in April 2015. Currently, there are thirteen members the LVM team. At its simplest, Lay Visitation Ministry is a ministry of presence and active listening. It's a ministry of being truly present for someone and to deeply listen to him or her. It is a ministry in which we believe we are vessels through which God can work. Much of our work is learning to get out of the way of our own agenda and feelings so that we can truly listen and let God work through us. It is one dimension of the ministry of pastoral care to the congregation of our church.

The members of the LVM team visit members and friends of the congregation who are confined to their home, in a nursing, rehabilitation, assisted living facility, are a patient in a hospital or hospice facility and generally unable to attend worship and other activities at the church or they currently experiencing a difficult time in their life. Our visits are to be a ministry of presence and deep listening wherein we bring the love of God and the congregation to these individuals and/or their families.

Hundreds of visits were made in 2018 on behalf of the congregation.

Our team meets monthly for a two-hour time of education, support, and reflection.

Usually the first hour consist of an educational component related to topics or issues we might experience during our visits. Some of the topics include: grief, bereavement, active listening skills, communicating with persons living with dementia, the power of music to communicate, etc. Following a brief time of refreshments and fellowship, one member of the group will then share a report on a visit(s) made recently. The purpose of these reports is to deepen our understanding of how present we were to the person we visited and to gain insights as to how me might make a future visit more meaningful for the person we're visiting.

Everything shared in our monthly gatherings is kept in the strictest confidence.

The members of the team feel blessed to be able to bring the congregation's love and concern to the individuals they visit each month.

The members of the team are: Janet Baker, Joan Beach, Alleyne Kess, Kika Landers, Sherry Mange, Judy Manville, Diane Miller, Dick Miller, John Shaeffer, Barbara Shaver, and Cindy Woodling. Craig Collemer and Sara Little are the co-leaders and Pastor Wes is a supportive member of our team.

Mission Team Annual Report 2018

A major responsibility of the team is to plan and administer the Christmas and Easter Love Offerings. The Christmas Love Offering gives to organizations in our local community. In January 2018 we distributed \$17,500, collected by the 2017 Christmas Love Offering, to All Faiths Food Bank and its Backpack Program, ALSO Youth, Baby Basics, Bethesda House, Children First, Mental Health Community Center, Little Pilgrim Preschool; Orchard Place, Resurrection House, SURE, Second Chance Last Opportunity, and the UCC Christmas Fund. A donation was reserved for Family Promise to be given when the organization had completed its reorganization; that reorganization has not yet been completed. Another group, JOY, had ceased operations and returned their donation check. The Easter Love Offering is designed to help people throughout the world. We distributed \$16,000 among the UCC's One Great Hour of Sharing, Neighbors in Need, and Strengthen Our Church; and to Church World Service, Back Bay Mission, the Joseph Evans Scholarship Fund (for seminary students), the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Open and Affirming Coalition of the UCC, Partners in Health, and Helps International.

At the time of this report, the 2018 Christmas Love Offering has met its goal of \$18,500 and will distribute funds early in the new year. The 2018 Christmas Love offering solicited funds in a more environmentally responsible way, reducing the amount of printed and mailed material.

Collecting items in our Narthex baskets for local organizations is another Mission Team project. We collect food the first Sunday of each month, but in addition collected food each week during April and May for the All Faiths Food Bank Campaign against Summer Hunger. In June and July, we collected backpacks and school supplies that were given to Alta Vista School. During November, we collected baby items for Second Chance, Last Opportunity's Teen Mother's program.

In April, the team recognized volunteer activities by members of the congregation, compiling information and during worship services on April 15 reading the names of groups where members have volunteered.

During December the Mission Team took the beginning steps toward future participation in the Community Meal program at St. Paul Lutheran Church

Music & Fine Arts Report

Our music program under the direction of Greg Chestnut continues to significantly contribute to our worship services. But we are also thankful that we reached out to the community through several events.

* EnsemblenewSRQ continues to use our sanctuary for their performances and consider this to be their home.

* In January, we hosted Deux Voix, a trumpet and organ duo based in Texas. We sold tickets to members of First Congregational but also to the public.

* In November, Sorella Duo presented a cello and piano concert in our chapel. Sisters Natalie and Rebecca Helms, introduced their new album, Holidays with Sorella Duo. Tickets were sold primarily to our membership.

* In March, we were fortunate to have Dr. Doreen Rao as our Artist In Residence. She directed our choir when they performed Faure Requiem. She exposed our choir to many new invaluable techniques during our retreat. Not only choir members but the congregation experienced her talents and expertise.

Newly formed Team Players , children and youth mid-week program, led World Communion Sunday (Oct 2) and the Christmas Pageant (December 16). They will contribute to other services during the year.

The Christmas Pageant took a different direction this year using poems and musical selections. They will significantly contribute to several services throughout the year. The Music & Fine Arts team provided snacks for the youth between services.

* Following the death of the choir's Bass Section leader, Steven Falk, Brady Truedinger has been hired for that position. We look forward to his contributions.

* We are delighted to report that Greg has been selected as president-elect for UCC Musicians Association. His presence on this board for the past 3 years has given our church a national presence.

* Last year we purchased new choir robes that the choir is enjoying. The question of what to do with the old robes was answered when they were donated to a church in Tully, NY. That church paid the shipping costs.

Many thanks to all the Music and Fine Arts team for their willing participation throughout the year and we look forward to another busy and exciting year.

Peace & Justice Report

With our diversity of concerns about injustice and inequality, the Peace and Justice Network members continue to work on SURE's ongoing projects (Civil Citations, Restorative Justice strategies in the County Schools, and Affordable Housing), as well as many other issues. To improve Voting Rights, petitions were circulated to get Amendment 4 on the ballot, restoring ex-felons' right to vote; in addition, applications to vote in Florida were provided in Syster Hall, along with Vote-by-Mail forms. The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence kept us apprised of actions needed to improve gun safety in Florida, and the Network supported a vigil in December in memory of the many victims. We also held a letter-writing campaign, supplying address stickers and other materials for our congregants to express their concerns about Gun Safety to our state and local representatives. Members approached the Church Council about becoming a Creation Justice Church by establishing a "Green Team" to study ways we can conserve energy. A member of Plymouth Harbor's Conservation Committee attended our meeting and shared suggestions on energy conservation, and in October, the Network also sponsored a workshop, led by Sarah Melcher, called "Caring for the Earth, an Interfaith Dialogue," with speakers from Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian faiths.

The Network participated in the John Dear Book Event, the Crop Walk, and Equality Florida's persistent work to pass anti-discrimination laws throughout the state. In November, EQFL honored two of our members, Lee and Fred Brockmann, with their annual Voice For Equality Award. Many of our members are liaisons to other outreach programs, such as Meals on Wheels, ACLU, Women's Interfaith Network, SPAARC, Selah Freedom, and Resurrection House, as well.

Leadership for the Peace & Justice Network is provided by Laurie Etter, Chair; Sarah Melcher, Recording Secretary; Sara Little, Council Representative; and Lee Brockmann, Corresponding Secretary. We invite visitors and new members to our meetings, held on the 4th Tuesday of each month.

Spiritual Education & Growth Report

2018 was another busy year for SEG. In March, Leigh Melton resigned as coordinator of youth programming. After much prayer, input from parents and discernment, it was decided to advertise the position as an eight-hour per week

Faith Formation coordinator position. At this time, further decision-making is on hold. Pastor Wes with the assistance of Greg Chestnut and a good number of volunteers has done the planning and carrying out of youth programming. UCC Team Players meet on Thursdays for study units about specific worship services and then help with the services themselves. These are short-term units, and they have been well-received by the youth and their families. Sunday morning classes continue as in the past. Recently they have been moved to the 11:00 service from the 9:00 service to see if attendance improves.

Lynn Jones is now coordinating the mission trip and fundraisers for the youth. FEAST took place again during Lent. Speakers included a yoga instructor, a speaker from the Buddhist tradition and Greg and Wes. Everyone was together in one group rather than breaking into small groups.

Bill Lewis led a discussion group on the book *The Nonviolent Life*. Budd Friend-Jones has arranged for The Jesus Seminar on the road. The topic is *Ancient Texts for Troubled Times: When Truth and Compassion Meet*. This will be February 8 - 9, 2019. We are most grateful to Budd for arranging this for the congregation.

Toska Strong and Nancy McElroy organized a summer movie and dinner night for the congregation. This was very well-attended.

Jim Cross has been working with a committee to build a labyrinth on church grounds. He foresees this as a meaningful spiritual experience for the congregation and community.

Staffing Team Report

The Team consisted of Dick Miller (chair), Dennis Crooks, Florence Jackson and Linda Pursley. We were joined by Immediate Past Moderator Lynn Jones, ex-officio member, and Pastor Wes Bixby, both of whom brought their considerable insight and expertise to our proceedings. Throughout the year, the Team was in close contact with the Moderators and the Council, as well as the Chairs of several Teams. At the start of the year, the Team expressed our appreciation for the great leadership of Judy Black, who departed the Team to become Church Treasurer. Early in the year, each Team member was assigned at least two Staff members to whom they reached out to discuss their goals for the year and any needs they may have. In August they were also part of the annual staff reviews led by the Supervisor of the Staff member. The reviews consisted of a review of the past year as well as goal setting for the coming year.

The first Team priority for 2018 was to address the vacant CE Coordinator position. In February, we agreed as a Team to embark upon a 90-day period of research and reflection on this ministry to children, youth and families in our church, which we chose to call "Faith Formation". We obtained input from parents,

from current youth in the program, from former graduates and leaders, and from the Florida Conference. We also examined other programs in the Florida Conference. Most importantly, we agreed to remain open-minded. Once completed, we looked at where we have been, finding many successes. We observed what we can do better, discovering that faith formation ministry has changed considerably in recent years. The inclusion of the entire congregation into programs for youth and families, and being open to change, were shown to important components of success. Finally, in May, a new job description for the Faith Formation coordinator was written. However, a job search for this position was unsuccessful. Thus, volunteers were recruited and trained to support this ministry in the fall. There will be continuing discussions regarding this position in the coming year.

As the Staffing representative for the Little Pilgrim staff, Florence Jackson became a part of the Committee which after many months of research and hard work, made the difficult decision to close Little Pilgrim. In November, the Staffing Team said goodbye to Sue Spiegel, and celebrated her 5 years of service as Church secretary. The Staffing Team feels the Congregation is blessed with a caring, hard-working and exceptionally competent staff to support our Church as we move into our 65th anniversary year!