

## **Moderator's Annual Report 2020**

It has truly been an honor to be Moderator this past year. I am very thankful for the support of Carol Fields, Vice-Moderator and Lori White, Immediate Past Moderator. We continue to be blessed with strong lay leadership, including our Church Council, our co-Treasurers, Sarah Dousa and Robin Reich (ably supported by our Collector Gordon Quimby and bookkeeper Bill Lewis) and our members -- who continue to gift us with their time, talent and experience. When the ancients turned the phrase "May you live in interesting times", they could have had the year 2020 in- mind. In early spring, our normal church life, with in person services and committee meetings, wonderful choir and other musical performances, the comradery of Fellowship Hour in Syster Hall and the constant use of our campus by wonderful community partners, ended abruptly. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused us, individually and collectively, much uncertainty and anguish. It is a true testament to our faith, energy and sense of church community that – when we were confronted with a pile of lemons – we made lemonade. Thanks in large part to the Bixby family, we adroitly shifted from traditional in-person to livestreaming services and started Zoom coffee hours. With the recognition that a "digital church" is here to stay, our members pitched in and our digital capabilities have expanded, with simulcast live streaming on both Facebook and our church website, and using Zoom to realize the potential of the new Oasis Center to expand our ministry and spiritual support. Not only is the Oasis Center a space conducive to thoughtful reflections and new perspectives, it also houses new ministries, such as Finding Water Conversations, Story People, Grief Counseling and Sacred Conversations on Race, all of which enrich our church community. Additionally, Church Council approved the formation of a Technology Team, recognizing the important role technology will play in our Church's future. This team will initially operate under the Moderator's oversight, just as the Green Team operates as part of the Peace and Justice Network.

Other noteworthy items include the issuance of the Church's statement on Racial Justice, which has fostered heart felt conversations to better understand this important issue, and the Green Team's work to move us towards the status as a Creation Justice Church. Happily, we began outdoor services on Sundays at 9 a.m., which heralds an important step back to normalcy. Our commitment to our community continues, such as the monthly community meal for anyone in the Sarasota community in partnership with St. Paul Lutheran, and active support for SURE and other organizations, such as Baby Basics and Family Promise.

We enter 2021 on a sound financial footing, reflecting both continued conservative fiscal management and the generosity and understanding of our members. The year 2021 will bring exciting opportunities for all of us. We welcome Carol Fields as our new Moderator, as well as our new Council members and team chairs. I am thankful to be part of a congregation that continues on a strong, positive path as we continue to live in "interesting times".

## **Annual Report – Green Team**

*Living Green for God and Creation*

The Green Team (part of the Peace & Justice Network) typically meets separately once a month. We have met regularly in the year 2020 (by Zoom after the onset of the pandemic). Our primary purposes are three-pronged: 1) to discern how First Congregational United Church of

Christ can make creation care and justice integral to our ongoing theology and worship; 2) to search for ways to make our practices and spaces environmentally sustainable; and 3) to expand our circles of awareness and advocacy. With and through these actions, the Green Team is working to become a Creation Justice Church and will present a Creation Covenant to the congregation at the Annual Meeting in January 2021, asking our members to ratify the Church Council's unanimous decision to adopt the Creation Covenant Statement.

Much of the Green Team's work this year has been in anticipation of submitting our application to the denomination for First Congregational United Church of Christ to be designated a Creation Justice Church. This is a team effort by the Green Team, led by Barbara Smith-Bacon, a Co-Chair of the Green Team.

The Green Team has been in contact with the various teams in our church, as well as the congregation at large, to see what recommendations they might have for the church to be more environmentally sustainable. With this input, the Team has created a checklist of actions in furtherance of our three-pronged purposes. These actions include many already taken by the church, as well as additional near-term - and more long-term, aspirational - goals. We have especially worked closely with the Facilities and Grounds Team and we have been encouraged by the many actions they have taken toward sustainability. Barbara Smith-Bacon undertook a preliminary exploration of the logistics and costs of solar panels for the church, with that information now in the hands of the Facilities and Grounds Team.

When we examined our draft Creation Justice application this year (2020), we realized that an important aspect of our work needed to be expanding our circles of awareness and advocacy. To that end, The Green Team developed a slogan to describe succinctly the work that we do (shown above). We also sponsored many monthly nature walks, conceived by Bill Lewis, which were very well received. People from our congregation and outside were welcome to take part. After the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, these walks became self-guided, with a follow-up participant discussion on Zoom led by Bill. Often, someone from our Green Team would write a short article to appear in the monthly church letter. And, we helped with the planning for Earth Day worship. And, the Team developed and shared a list of resources that our congregation could use to inform themselves about environmental concerns.

In addition, the Green Team has sponsored several book studies: *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible and the Ecological Crisis* by Patricia K. Tull; *An Altar in the World* by Barbara Brown Taylor; and *The Gulf: The Making of an American Sea* by Jack E. Davis. We offered the congregation the opportunity to view and discuss the movie, *This Changes Everything*, which features actions being undertaken globally on behalf of environmental sustainability. Finally, Sarah Melcher, Co-Chair of the Green Team, arranged a speakers' webinar for January 14, 2021 "Positive Impacts on Local Sustainability: a Conversation with Local Experts."

Respectfully submitted,  
Barbara Smith-Bacon  
Sarah Melcher