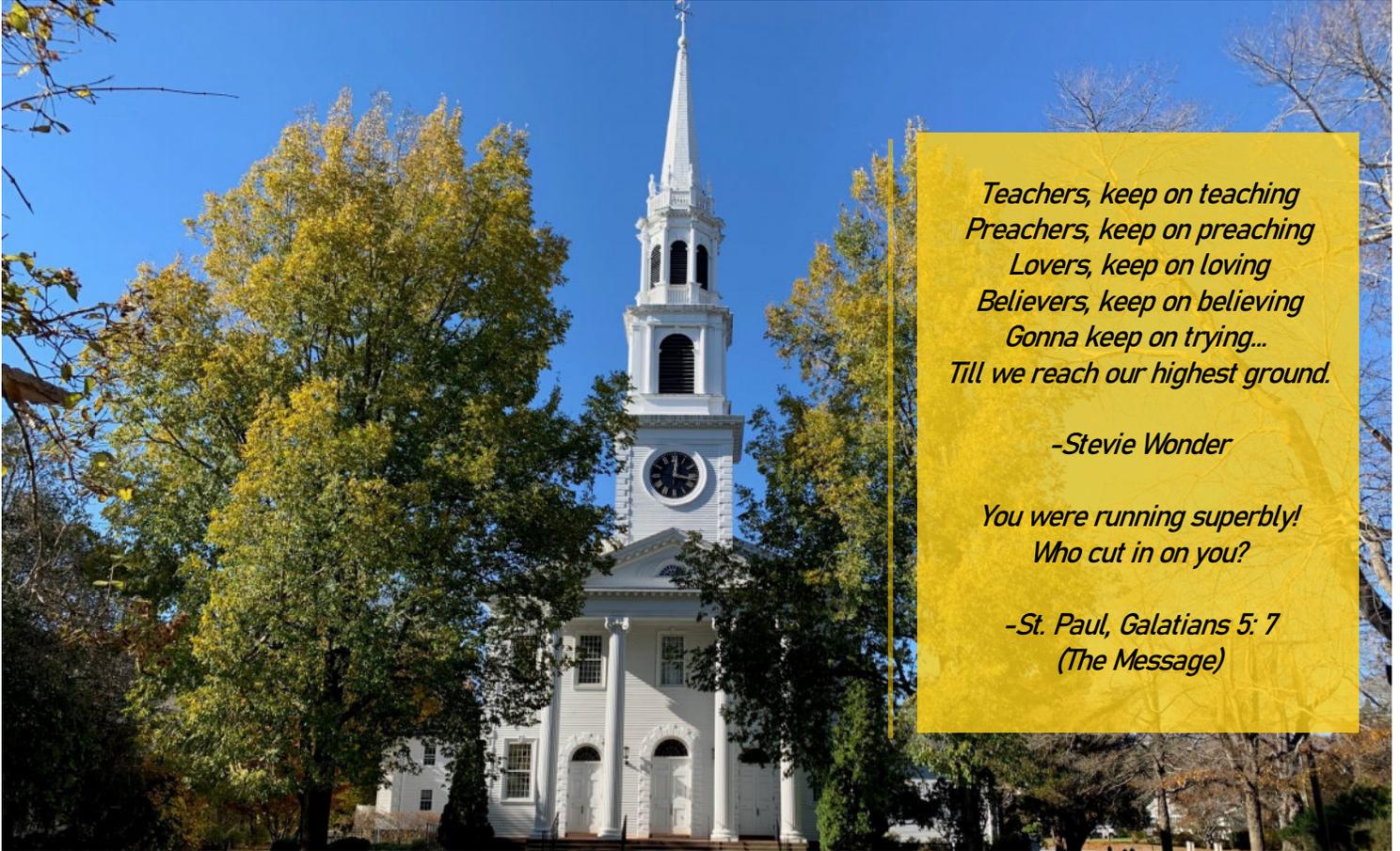


2021

JANUARY & FEBRUARY

The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme



*Teachers, keep on teaching
Preachers, keep on preaching
Lovers, keep on loving
Believers, keep on believing
Gonna keep on trying...
Till we reach our highest ground.*

-Stevie Wonder

*You were running superbly!
Who cut in on you?*

*-St. Paul, Galatians 5: 7
(The Message)*

Dear Friends,

Business first, and then some words of encouragement. At the close of the 2020 calendar year, we sent out a letter detailing the budget deficit we were then projecting. It represented the cumulative effects of a difficult year, when the White Elephant Sale couldn't happen, when the Sunday morning offering wasn't taken, when our building wasn't used for lectures or concerts or much of anything at all, and when many people struggled to fulfill pledges. It was cause for concern among many of us. But I have two pieces of good news to report as we

move into the new year.

First, you responded with extraordinary generosity to that year end appeal. I say extraordinary, but in a way, it was quite ordinary – it's what you always do, and for that we are exceedingly grateful. And then second, just as the year was coming to a close, we received word from the federal government that a Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loan we had received back in April had been forgiven. Taken together, those two factors mean that we were able to close the books for

2020 without a deficit. But it also means that FCCOL was able to fulfill our commitment for worthy organizations and programs in our region, and indeed around the world, that depend upon communities like us for support. I'm proud that, even in the midst of such daunting challenges, we were able to maintain those commitments. Thank you, thank you, thank you for that – from all of us at FCCOL!

Continue reading on p. #5



What's happening at FCCOL

Ladies Who Stitch

We look forward to reconvening sometime in 2021. In the meantime, we continue to create things in our homes. Some of our most popular items have been made out of second-hand jeans. However, we have used up our supply.

We have plenty of winter, spring and summer things in our inventory. Remember us for your personal shopping and gift-giving needs. Contact Eunice via email: eunicetaylor@me.com - for details. All proceeds go directly to the Ladies Benevolent Society to benefit the many missions and programs of FCCOL.

Stay safe and well,
Eunice Taylor
Coordinator for Ladies Who Stitch

Book Group

On Tuesday January 12th we will meet via zoom from 11:00 AM- 12:00 PM to continue our discussion of Caste, The Origins of Our Discontents by Isabel Wilkerson.

On February 9th we will meet at the same time to discuss Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Please join us! All welcome whether or not you have read the book. Email Martha Beaudoin at mrlake86@comcast.net for zoom link.

Walking Group

Wednesdays from 9:00-10:00 AM on January 6th, 13th, 20th and 27th.

Minister Drop-ins

Wednesdays 10:30 AM -12:00 PM on January 6th, 13th, 20th and 27th.

Happiness Book Group

January 13th and 27th—7:00—8:00 PM. Call Carleen for details.

Lenten Pause

Join us for a regular contemplative prayer practice through Lent on Wednesday evenings from 7:00-7:30 PM. Details to follow.

Bible Study with Becky Crosby

After our Christmas break from Bible Study, we will take a Christmas break from Bible Study and resume on Zoom on Thursday, January 14 at 11:00 AM and meet every Thursday throughout the winter months. During the months of January and February, we will continue our study of Genesis beginning with Chapter 10. All are welcome -- all you need is a Bible! If you are interested and not already on Becky's list, please email her at rtcros@ftcrosby.com so that she can include you in her Zoom invitation.

Adult Ed Forum Conscious Grieving

Sunday, January 24th at 5:00 PM.

"The strength you seek to survive grief's demands is not found in resistance but within the tenderness of your loving heart." Lisa Irish, author, chaplain and spiritual director will engage us in a presentation and conversation about grieving using wisdom from her book, *Grieving - The Sacred Art: Hope in the Land of Loss*.

Due to the pandemic under way, we are experiencing loss and grief

Notice of the FCCOL Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme will be held on the 31st day of January, 2021 at 12:00 pm in the Meetinghouse on Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/97218097504?pwd=eFJHWTBONFBheHpkdM5NROVSEpzUT09>

The Purpose of the Meeting Shall be:

- To receive the reports of the ministers, boards and committees, and the church officers for the year 2019;
- To receive and approve the report of the nominating committee;
- To elect officers and board members for the coming year;
- To approve the church budget for the year 2020;
- And to conduct such other old or new business as shall properly come before the meeting.

collectively, in addition to the personal events in our lives. The unprecedented separation from family and friends, and our hospitalized or dying loved ones “disenfranchises” our losses, thereby complicating our grief experience. Conscious Grieving asks us to trust a path of healing that honors the reality of love and draws from the resources of hope. For more information, email fccol@fccol.org. See also <https://www.lisairish.com/conscious-grieving/>

Ash Wednesday

February 17th is Ash Wednesday, marking the beginning of the season of Lent which is the 40 days leading up to Easter. Details to be shared as we monitor the virus and how we might gather on Zoom or in other ways.

New Grief Group: Healing in Good Company

“How shall the heart be reconciled to its feast of losses?” – Stanley Kunitz

Loss comes in many forms. Physical separation, death, and the unresolved, open ended heartbreak of ambiguous losses. Join us for this monthly gathering on Zoom as we offer one another support, reflection and resources for hope in a safe and gentle space. Begins Friday, January 29th at 10:00 (also, February 26th) Co-facilitated by Laura Fitzpatrick-Nager and Mary McGannon-Kollman. For more information, lfitz.nager@gmail.com.

Need Help?

If you need help with outdoor work? Call Adrian Enrique at 787-316-1087.

White Elephant Sale

As this newsletter goes to press our WES committee has begun to wrestle with the many questions about how/if/when we might anticipate a sale this coming summer. Our uncertainty about the virus makes all of this long-range planning difficult. Lots of ideas are being discussed. More information will be forthcoming. A special thank you to Bob Davis, Jane Marolda, Natalie Fogg, Roxie Gallagher and Anita Allen who are the current members of the WES steering committee.

Memorial

- Pat Saltsman 1/2/2021

In the midst of this winter, I thought I'd search out some stories from our young people who are at work now in their fields of study, making this world a better place for all of us. We'll start with Hugh Cipparone, recently graduated from Bowdoin College in Maine with a major in Marine Biology.

Thanks, Hugh! Carleen

A week from now I'll be on a commercial fishing vessel in the Bering Sea. As an onboard biologist, my job will be to provide real time data to fisheries scientists and managers on the health of fish, seabird, and marine mammal populations. Sitting here in my Old Lyme bedroom, it's difficult to imagine the rocking boat and frigid temperatures I'll face a week from now. Still, I look forward to the adventure ahead.

I grew up, like many of you, fascinated with the saltmarshes and beaches

surrounding our town of Old Lyme. I spent hours fishing from the boardwalk under the Baldwin Bridge and the dam on Rogers Lake. My love of fishing soon grew into an interest in marine biology – an interest furthered by my high school biology teacher, Mrs. Fried, and summers spent under the wing of Dr. Jim Carlton at the Mystic Seaport. After high school, I attended Bowdoin College to further explore my interest in marine biology, where I researched variation in the feeding behaviors of the invasive European Green Crab.

Yet even as I studied “pure” research topics – topics without direct policy or conservation application – I always felt drawn towards applied questions – the questions and answers required to protect our oceans from overfishing, climate change, and acidification. It's this drive to better our world that has sent me since graduation to research on sustainable fish cultivation,

work as a fisheries interviewer tracking the fishing efforts of recreational tuna fishermen, and now a position as a commercial fisheries observer in Alaska. In each of these positions, I've felt a real opportunity to help the world.

I credit much of this drive to better the world to the teachings of the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme. There are very few institutions – religious or otherwise – that advocate so clearly for justice and the value of doing good. Whether it was bringing food to the Homeless Hospitality Center, going on the Midnight Run to New York City, or my trip to Israel and Palestine, this church has taught me that to live a fulfilled life is to leave the world better than you found it. I can only hope, on the eve of my departure for Alaska, that I'm doing just that.

Hugh Cipparone
Bowdoin College '19

God's Neighborhood



The children and their families in God's Neighborhood participated in Advent Wreath lighting on Zoom every Sunday during our Advent season. Each family was able to pick up an advent wreath kit to decorate using their own creative minds! What a great way to remind us of Hope, Love, Joy and Peace— together with our SPF leaders reading devotions and prayers and through the stories we heard together. We also produced a pageant together using pictures from our incredibly creative families and the spoken word of our PF students. It was definitely a time of appreciating the opportunities that this year presented us and of appreciating our blessings of gathering with families through Zoom.

God's Neighborhood Sunday School will be continuing to learn about the Beatitudes this month while meeting for Zoom and meeting in person. We will be participating in projects to bring these ideas to life.

During January our Beatitude is Matthew 5:6: "*Blessed are those who seek justice, for they will make a difference*". We will meet on Zoom on January 10th and 24th. Our plan is for grades 3 and under students to take part from 9:30-10:00 and for the older students (grades 4 and above) to remain or join us on Zoom from 10-10:30. We will tell stories and do meaningful projects based on our theme with each group.

For Zoom Links and information, please contact Lisa at godsceneighborhoodfocol@gmail.com

H O P E

January 10th— we will meet to hear a story written by our own Marilyn Nelson called *Lubaya's Quiet Roar* and participate in a project based on that book.

January 17th Grades 3 and under will meet on Zoom at 9:30 am for a justice themed activity. Please use Zoom link from email. Grades 4 and up will meet at church at 9:30 AM for continuing with our special project. Please email an RSVP for the walking tour.

January 24th we will meet for a story about having perseverance when speaking up for justice and hearing about a real life hero who did just that!

January 31st we will meet for an outdoor activity...the activity and location is dependent on the weather! Also, pick up materials for February God's Neighborhood events.

SPF January Event

January 17, 2021 SPF Jackbox Games Night from 7:00—8:00 PM— please email Lisa for the Zoom link.

During February, our Beatitude is "*Blessed are the Merciful, for they will receive mercy.*"

On **February 7 and 21** we will meet on Zoom, hearing stories about forgiveness and participating in a related activity. Our plan is for students in grades 3 and younger classes to meet from 9:30-10:00 am. Older students (grades 4 and above) will meet from 10-10:30 a.m for discussion. You may remain with us from meeting with the younger class or join us later.

JPF Jackbox Games Night from 6-7. Please email Lisa for Zoom link. Remain or join us on Zoom from 10:00-10:30.



On **February 14th**, Valentine's Day (!), there will be an activity with a story on our FCCOL FaceBook family that you may access at your convenience.

February 17, 2021 Children of God's Neighborhood will begin a daily lenten collection to be delivered on March 28's at our Sunday School Walk for Hunger. Children may choose to collect coins to add to a container or may choose to collect shelf stable food in a box. These items will be donated to our Food Pantry. More details will be explained by email and FCCOL Face-

book Family at the beginning of February or email Lisa for more information.

On **February 28th**, we will meet for an outdoor activity. Please watch for more details both on FCCOL Facebook Families and through your emails. If you are not receiving contact Lisa.

SPF February Event

SPF will hold a February movie night—date to be announced. We will watch Just Mercy together with discussion. Please email Lisa for more information.

Dear Friends Continued

The coming year will have its own challenges, and it may well be that they're just as difficult, as the financial effects of the pandemic keep on cascading. We'll need to remain vigilant about that. But I want you to know that right now, in this moment, we're doing ok. Much of that can be attributed to you, and so again, know how grateful we are.

Now for the encouragement, if such it is. Winter has arrived, meaning that more of us are trapped indoors. The days are short, and the nights are long. We've come to the end of our Netflix cues and we've had as many Zoom meetings or conversations as we can stand. Everyone is exhausted – the teachers and preachers, the lovers and believers, everyone. But relief is coming. It's hard to say when, exactly, but it is coming. Our task for the next several months is this: not to fall apart. Not to let up. Not to let our guard down, or to throw up our hands, or to get sloppy. In the words of Stevie Wonder, we need to find our higher ground. Or we need to remain there. That way, we can avoid the fate of the Galatian church, to whom Paul wrote, when he wondered why the wheels had come off, why they had given up the race, why, after they had been doing so well, they had suddenly collapsed. We need to find our higher ground to get us through the remainder of this ordeal.

I have a couple of suggestions in that regard. First, don't underestimate the importance of faith. In the words of the Psalmist, God is our refuge and our strength, an ever present help in times of trouble. We're Congregationalists, which means that many and varied understandings of that word God are at work in our midst. But I understand it to mean that a source of strength and wisdom greater than ourselves is at work in our lives and in the world around us. It's a source of strength that we can reach for, call out for, and depend upon. It's not magic. It can't overturn the laws of nature. But it can provide the confidence, that we have what it takes to keep on going, the assurance that we can endure. Don't underestimate that, even if it feels weird, or naïve, to open yourself in such a way. That's one part of what it means to find higher ground.

Another part has to do with envisioning the goodness that's on the way. I see it like this: January, February and March will be a matter of gutting it out. Which means we need to keep on reaching out to one another, keep on checking in, and keep on taking care of our bodies and our minds, reading good things, cooking good things, setting our sights on good things. April, May and June will see (we trust!) more and more of us receiving the vaccine, and as the weather warms, it will mean

more opportunities to be together. July and August will (we trust!) allow for even more restrictions to be lifted, including (we hope!) the freedom to travel, or to visit those we miss most. By September, it may be that we can begin to gather again in the Meetinghouse, or to share meals with one another. It may be that the choir can sing again. It may be that some semblance of the normal can at last return. I hope it won't be later than that, but it might be sooner. Let's keep envisioning that time. Good things truly are coming.

In the meantime, let's keep searching for higher ground, so that the teachers and preachers, the lovers and believers, so that all of us can stay sane, stay healthy, and most of all, stay human.

Love to all of you in these winter months. Keep it together. Stay human...



Reading: *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*, by Robert Farris Thompson; Shakespeare (various works); *Team of Rivals*, by Doris Kearns Goodwin.

Listening: Prince, *Sign O' the Times*, Moses Sumney, *Grae*

Watching: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Soul*, *The Sopranos*, Season One



Please Be a Stewardship Valentine!

Many of you have already made a commitment to the 2021 Stewardship Campaign, for which we are extremely grateful. If you have not yet made your commitment, now is the time!

In a normal year, Stewardship funds account for over 80% of the Church's income. This year, due to a lack of collection plate funds on Sunday, canceled events like the White Elephant Sale, and canceled fees for building usage, Stewardship commitments must raise more than ever.

The Covid pandemic has made the need for our ministries and missions even more acute. We support more than 75 charities and services, such as the New London Community Meal Center, the Homeless Hospitality Center, and the Food Pantry, which are struggling to keep up with the record number of families needing their services. They depend on us to help them.

Our Church continues to provide pastoral care, online Sunday Worship

Stewardship

Services, meaningful programs, and spiritual support to each one of us, giving us a firm foundation to see us through these uncertain times.

We cannot do it without you.

Please follow your heart and give as generously as you are able this year.

With our sincere appreciation,

The Board of Stewardship,
Sandy Long, Leslie Alexander, Ross Higgins, Tom Grant, Allison Hine, Doug McCracken,, Wayne Mountz, Mike Winterfield

Stewardship Testimonial

I love a phrase that Steve and John Kiker coined for our stewardship letter this year -- "a foundation firm enough to steady our feet."

That's exactly what Tom and I were searching for when we went church shopping four years ago. New to the area, new to retirement, feeling adrift, we frankly came here for the comfort of a community. And did we ever find that in abundance here -- so many friendly open people, reaching out, hoping we would love and commit to this church as they had before us. and that was very nice.

But ultimately what kept me here, in a way, is the opposite -- it's the challenge to examine my easy centrist views of undocumented immigration, of Palestinian suffering, of white privilege and ultimately of the role of religion in my life. I'm not saying I always end up with a changed view, but I do end up having been challenged to think honestly, compassionately.

It is the very challenging nature of FCCOL which in turn provides the foundation. I like that Steve never fails to connect scripture to action, I like that he sends me back to my roots as a college Religion major to examine my responsibility in this world/for this world. I like that this is a safe space where "evolving" is a permanent state of thinking, not a transitory step to the perfect truth. And I LOVE that the church does so much to help others, through missions and through 10's of small acts each week.

With my Stewardship hat on, I remind you that while Steve and Laura and Carleen do all of the heavy lifting here, the mundane needs of the budget go on -- another kind of foundation for the church. And we build it each year brick by brick, gift by gift. Last year was an extraordinary year. This year we recognize that many in our pews and living rooms are not in the same position -- what we are hoping is that we all can add a brick, no matter the size, so we all can claim a piece of our church's foundation as our own. And that those who can will help those who cannot.

Tom and I have made the difficult decision to move back to the Hartford area, to be closer to our growing family. We will never forget the generosity, faith and actions of FCCOL -- surely a firm foundation for our next chapter.

-Mary Kate Cox

On the Environment

Getting a Handle on Connecticut's Waste?

In her December article on the horrifying amounts of plastic waste generated in the United States, Carleen urged us as individuals to find alternatives to plastic bags, containers, and utensils. In addition to following this advice, we can be aware of two potential, admittedly partial, legislative solutions.

Plastics known as PFAs are abundant in food packaging, especially fast food, because of their water and grease resistance. Known as “forever chemicals” (they never break down), they're found in our bodies, where they are associated with cancer risks, endocrine disruption, impaired immunity, and low birthweight. Last February H.B. 5291 was introduced in the Connecticut General Assembly to prohibit the manufacture and sale of food packaging containing PFAs if a “reasonable alternative” is available.

A related issue is the need to update Connecticut's 1978 container deposit law (“bottle bill”), which has lagged behind changing markets trends and inflation. Our container redemption rate is under 50%, among the lowest in this country. H.B. 5340, introduced in the General Assembly in 2019 but stalled by opposition from manufacturers and distributors, would expand redeemable items (beer, carbonated soft drinks, carbonated mineral water) to include juices, teas, sports drinks, and other non-carbonated drinks. Also pro-

posed is an increase in the redemption value from 5 to 10 cents. Both measures would increase consumer redemptions and reduce municipalities' costs of collecting trash and processing recyclable materials.

In 2021, let's watch for developments with these bills—and urge our state representatives to support them.

Patsy McCook

An Update from FCCOL's Environmental Teams

For several years this page has featured articles from two FCCOL groups—a working group on climate change, and a committee covering numerous environmental topics. Now, as we welcome a new year and a new administration in Washington, it's appropriate for us to start anew and open up our efforts. In addition to merging our two groups, we'd like to include the FCCOL congregation in our work. As we continue covering subjects like climate justice, fossil fuel reduction, plastics/recycling, and environmentally sustainable eating, we invite you to suggest your own ideas. Meanwhile, please send us your email address if you're interested in joining this refocused team.

For the environment,
Don Gonci
(DonGonci@gmail.com),
Patsy McCook
(PMcCook125@gmail.com),
Mariette Brown, Tink Willauer,
Carleen Gerber, Tom Sherer

Tree of Life



New Supply of Olive Oil!

Thanks to Nick Westbrook's perseverance and with the help of Ibrahim Wali and Wail Al-lababidi, we now have a new supply of olive oil, olive oil soap, za'atar, and olives! Please send me an email - da-vidwgood@fccol.org or

call or text me at 860-304-3144 if you would like to make a purchase. “Omar” (my nom de plume) is happy to make a safe and free delivery to your home. Checks can be payable to T.O.LEF. Here are the prices:

Olive Oil (750 ml bottle)	\$25
Olive Oil (1 Liter can).	\$20
Olive Oil. (3 Liter can).	\$50
Olive oil soap squeeze bottle	\$5
Olive Oil Bars.	\$4
Za'atar (1 lb bag).	\$10
Za'atar. (100 gram bag).	\$5 .

We like to refer to this as “Education in a Bottle” as ALL proceeds support our Tree of Life Educational Scholarships for Palestinian youth.

Next Tree of Life Journey!

Depending on Covid-19 and availability of vaccines, our next Tree of Life journey is scheduled for late June/early July 2021! During this journey we hope to meet with Palestinian olive farmers in the Nablus area from whom we receive our olive oil products. Also, we hope to meet with teachers and students to learn more about education in the Holy Land, and in meeting with some of our scholarship recipients, we will come to a better understanding of the high value Palestinian families place on education. Please let me know if you'd like further information about this journey!

The Rev. David W. Good
Minister Emeritus

A Moment for Planned Giving

The new Stimulus package recently passed provides some continuation of benefits to charitable giving for 2021.

If you use the Standard Deduction, then up to \$300 per person or \$600 per couple is deducted from income before taxes are calculated. In most cases for 2019 you were not able to get a charitable deduction, so this is a big improvement.

The Required Minimum Distribution from retirement plan assets for 2021 is now back in place. However, this RMD is not required unless you are 72. If you are over 70 ½, it may be a good idea to transfer retirement plan

assets to the church to reduce future RMDs and not create additional taxable income.

I have talked about the use of Charitable Gift Annuities to get a tax deduction and receive tax advantaged income. Due to the low interest rates the tax deduction has been reduced but the tax advantaged income has increased significantly. Please let me know if you would like to get more information on this topic.

If you are thinking of passing your home to the church at some point in the future, you can set this up now, have life use in your home and receive a substantial income tax deduction now. This technique has be-

come more attractive with low interest rates.

Charitable Planning continues to be important as it provides tax benefits to you and helps those organizations that really need our help in these most difficult times. Please feel free to contact me should you wish to explore any giving opportunities.

Tom Grant
Planned Giving Committee
860-598-9419
Tcgrant9215@gmail.com

Message from the Treasurer

By the spring of 2020 we knew that the year was going to be a challenging year financially for our church. Our income was to be seriously reduced for a number of reasons – no White Elephant Sale, worship service open plate or weddings and building rentals, among other shortfalls. In addition, some members and friends would most likely be struggling financially due to the pandemic effects. In addition, much of our expense budget is fixed in the short term. By early December we were facing a potential income deficit of well over \$100,000.

We did receive a loan under the government's Payroll Protection Plan program in the spring which allowed us to keep our full staff compen-

sated, but it was far from clear if the loan was going to be forgiven which was "promised" but not approved.

During December several blessings came our way. The government loan was forgiven, our members and friends responded VERY generously to the minister's year-end financial appeal, and contributions from stewardship commitments were received at a very high level. Taken together these allowed us to finish the year with balanced books, and importantly, we were able to keep our budgeted commitment to benevolence giving, and we could make our annual loan payment to the Endowment Fund.

Thank you all for your wonderful generosity and commitment for the financial health of our church!

Bob McCracken, Treasurer

If you have transferred the following securities to the church, please call the church office at 860-434-8686 or email to fccol@fccol so we can give you the proper credit, thanks:

- 26 shares of Blackline
- 46 shares of Exxon/Mobil