

Annual Meeting: July 12, 2020

Senior Minister's Report

The date on this report betrays what we have experienced in our world. Our Annual Meeting is usually between late April and early May. A global pandemic put a halt to that prospect as the world scrambled to adjust to a new way of living.

The church universal was not spared in this adjustment. In a very real way, the way in which FCCRO lived being the Body of Christ in 2019 no longer exists. The Body of Christ now worships and communicates remotely even while the Spirit unites us across city borders. Holy Week and Easter were experienced online as the numbers of infections and deaths continued to climb. As time went on, we all began to realize this was going to be a marathon and not a sprint.

Pre-Pandemic, this church was in the infant stages of a discussion about the mission of God and what this community is called to be and do within God's mission. We had just settled on a group of people who would help to orchestrate the conversations of the larger community when it became apparent that the world was facing a life changing event. All of that was put on hold as we scrambled to adjust to a new way of being church.

The usual events celebrated in the church, (baptisms, funerals, weddings) had continued over the months since our last Annual Meeting in April of 2019. The church office was renovated over the summer and the Wi-Fi was upgraded in the building. We came to an agreement with a disgruntled neighbor about the volume of our church bells. Plans were set in place for Confirmation, New Members, Christmas, Holy Week, and the other normal rhythms in our life as church.

In the fall of 2019, a baker's dozen of churches received a bomb threat via email. FCCRO was one of them. We were told it would go off mid-Sunday Service. Although it proved to be an idle threat, I can vividly remember standing at the front of the Sanctuary/Meeting House with the weighted feeling of responsibility while I looked out at the gathered community that I had come to love. I absolutely breathed a sigh of relief when the designated time came and went; even though there truly was no risk. In retrospect, this incident was a glimpse of the responsibility that we all hold to care for one another and to weigh our options carefully as we protect our most vulnerable members.

This is why, as hard as it is to remain physically distant, we are still not worshipping within our Sanctuary/Meeting House. Current scientific data suggests that churches and the way we worship (singing, sharing peace, sitting together, praying in unison, etc.) put people at a higher risk of contamination if someone is infected; and someone can be infected and not be aware. We

have had to “love our neighbor” by worshipping online even as the numbers of infections and deaths decline because churches are considered high-risk. We will not return to “normal” soon.

The discussion of God’s mission and our part in that mission has not changed, however. We have not been able to engage in the conversations and prayer as we would have liked, but navigating this new “abnormal” as the Body of Christ at Northwood and Crooks has reminded me yet again that God has given us everything we need to live out the mission of God no matter what we face. The fact that “the church” is the people and not a building became a lived reality.

- In bringing together the talents of various members and staff, we now have our Sunday Service online via YouTube; even engaging in virtual Communion.
- More people use this online option as a time of worship on a weekly basis than when we gather in person.
- Some of our Senior Members who can no longer be with us on Sunday have been able to worship on Sunday morning for the first time in many years.
- Sunday School lessons are also online so that we continue to support our young families who teach their faith to their children.
- Outreach continued to a larger group of people as economic hardships grew when our economy came to a halt in order to protect the health of all people.
- In reaching out to each other via notes, phone calls, and emails, new friendships and relationships have developed.
- We have learned how to navigate technology and still do the business of church with our Boards and Council.

We may have found ourselves scrambling to live the Gospel differently, but the Gospel itself has not changed. We have had the opportunity to show the world that the Church need not rely on buildings to do the work God has called us to do. We do not know what the future holds for us at this writing, but I firmly believe that the Spirit of God will continue to lead the church and call us to renewal, service, and grace no matter what we face in the world.

God’s Blessings and Peace,

Rev. Carrie M. Orlando
Senior Minister, FCCRO
June 5, 2020