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NECESSARY ENDINGS: A Manual on Church Closure

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“Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

On an average day in the United States, nine churches close their doors for good. Since 2014, one PSEC congregation has closed, on average, every six months. This isn't often talked about in church circles-- partly because that news is filled with feelings of profound loss and grief. It's the source of uncomfortable shame—that somehow church members failed to do all they could do to maintain their sacred space. It provokes questions about the power and/or presence of God. Taken together, these things make it difficult to say what sometimes needs to be said: “It's time for our ministry to end.”

No one ever wants their church to close. It is easier to hang on to memories of what once was, to the good that could be, and to the outside chance of survival. It is tempting in these times to cast blame. ‘Why didn’t our Pastor, or our leaders, or the Conference, or God do something?’ Blame only gives death the final word and for Christians, death never has the final word. God repeats throughout scripture the reassurance, “Do not be afraid. Be strong and courageous. I have led you this far, and I will never forsake you.”

Someone once observed that none of the churches written to in any of Paul's letters of the New Testament exist today. Congregations come into being for a time to serve their members and the world. A time comes in the life of every church to end their mission and their ministry so that new ministries might emerge. In the ending is a new beginning.

This manual is for congregations engaged in the courageous conversations about bringing an end to their ministry. Our purpose with this resource is not to close congregations. Rather, it is to help brave pastors and lay leaders transition through the difficult passage of church closure; a process that requires thoughtful planning for a multitude of important tasks--the most important of which is the future care for current church members.

This guide has been written by people who have lived through the end of their congregation's ministry and who want others to benefit from their experiences. They want to help congregations that can no longer carry the weight of their ministry think through their options, and to understand that in some situations, closure can be a faithful and life-giving decision. They acknowledge the many feelings that arise in the process and affirm the possibilities and the freedoms of resurrection life that is always and everywhere being offered to us by God. We hope you will discover that in the pages that follow.

With prayers for your ever-deepening connection with the resurrected Christ,

Rev. William P. Worley

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SPIRITUALITY AND CLOSING A CHURCH

Introduction

The title of this section can feel like a contradiction; how can closing a church be connected to spirituality or even spiritual health? The thought that a church/your church may need to close is difficult to accept, and making the decision to do so is fraught with feelings and concerns that deeply touch our heart and faith. Closing a church and ending a ministry with deep roots and history in a particular community may feel like a failure or even a death. Even entering the process of discernment to move in this direction can be accompanied by feelings of guilt and regret or shame. HOWEVER, it is important to understand that the process, and even the decision to close, can be a sign of spiritual health and fidelity to God. Taking this path and making this journey can also be an opportunity for deepened faith as well as a unique connection and gift to the body of Christ.

Discernment as a spiritual journey

St Ignatius of Loyola (the founder of the Jesuits) considers discernment, making choices about life and direction, to be a spiritual task and practice. Similarly, the process of discernment about whether to close a church is indeed a spiritual journey. It involves prayer and more prayer at each step of the way, and is oriented to hearing God's voice, or noticing the movement of the Spirit in the decisions being made. There are several ways to go about making a decision regarding closing a church. It can be seen simply as a business decision, or a practical one, or one that has to be made regardless of feelings or grief that may arise. But, couching the discernment process in terms of spiritual journey is more attune to our faith and practice, and doing so can help a church navigate the various spiritual and practical concerns that may arise.

Coping with challenging feelings, attitudes and values

Of course, rather intense feelings can and should arise during this process. Identity and meaning can become difficult questions to address. Congregants feelings of purpose or direction can be threatened. Issues like shame or unattended guilt and regret can fester and lead to despair, anger or bitterness, and be accompanied by a sense of diminished hope. These are serious issues that are of vital importance to spiritual health and wellbeing, for they are deeply connected to issues of vulnerability, relationship, mystery and fear. The way we deal with such feelings and issues will affect our faith and relationships, not only in the here and now, but also the way we perceive our ultimate destiny. Since such feelings and issues can and will occur, it is especially important to see this process of discernment and decision in spiritual terms - as a journey embraced by God's care and grace.

Loss and grief – a path to healing and faith

In a way, this work is similar to that of hospice and palliative care patients and their families, or anyone who must deal with significant, life changing loss. When loss and grief are embraced as teachers, it is possible to explore things like gratitude and forgiveness. Often hope is given deeper and richer meaning as the person with a life limiting illness or who experiences deep loss comes to grapple with their prognosis or circumstances. In a similar way, churches that discern the need to close can also meet challenging feelings and spiritual issues with honesty and humility, coming to understand this process and decision in light of our faith – a faith that tells us that life can indeed come out of death, that new light can shine in the darkest places.

Resurrection and new life

Although this process may be considered dying with dignity, or viewed as a necessary letting go, it can also be seen as preparing for the new life and adventures ahead. In fact, members of a church that decides to close have a critical voice in how new possibilities can potentially emerge. In other words, by being attentive to the Spirit a congregation that is closing can be an agent for new life and transformation, not only for a new church or ministry, but for the members of the closing church as well. For example, a local church in the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference recently made a decision to close. In their discernment process, they made the choice to donate the funds from the sale of the property, which were substantial, to new church starts and to help Members in Discernment making the journey toward authorized ministry. When the announcement was made at a PSEC Spring meeting it did not feel like a death, but more like resurrection and new life. The closing church indeed gave new life to the Body of Christ, and their action transformed what could have been a dark chapter in the life of the local church and Conference, into new light and purpose. They were, in one understanding of Communion, remembered into the body of Christ. In other words, their ministry did not die, but was continued in life giving sacrifice for others. What a way to follow Jesus!

Encouragement

Whatever decision is made, or wherever the discernment process may take your congregation, it is essential to understand that others will walk with you, encourage you, pray for you, help you. Mostly, as Jesus promised again and again, his Spirit will be with you. In fact, as the angel proclaimed to the women at the tomb, the resurrected Jesus has already gone on before us into the world, to prepare the way for deepened faith and encounter. May it be so...

Summary: Important Points

- *This discernment process, and even the decision to close, can be a sign of spiritual health and fidelity to God.*
- *Seeing the discernment process as a spiritual journey is attuned to our faith and practice, and can help a church navigate the various spiritual and practical concerns that arise.*
- *The process involves prayer and more prayer each step of the way, as a way to hear God's voice and notice the movement of the Spirit.*
- *Intense feelings can and will surface during this process – especially around issues regarding identity, meaning and purpose. Shame, or unattended guilt and regret, can fester and lead to despair, anger or bitterness, and be accompanied by a sense of diminished hope. Profound feelings loss and grief will also arise.*
- *Since such feelings and issues can and will occur, it is especially important to see this process of discernment and decision in spiritual terms - a journey embraced by God's care and grace.*
- *By being attentive to the Spirit a congregation that does decide to close can be an agent for new life and transformation, not only for a new church or ministry, but for the members of the closing church as well.*
- *In this discernment process, others will walk with you, encourage you, pray for you, help you. Mostly, as Jesus promised again and again, his Spirit will be with you.*

Rev. Butch Kuykendall, D.Min.,

OUR GREATEST ASSET: UCC MEMBERS

As a church moves through the process of concluding its congregational ministry, a great deal of attention and energy is devoted to the best use of the congregation's assets. What is to be done with the church building? What do we do with the furnishings and the sacred appointments? How should any remaining financial assets be distributed? Sadly, little attention is often paid to the future of any congregation's principal asset, the church members themselves.

The operative assumption seems to be that church members, being adults, are perfectly capable of fending for themselves. They remain members of the particular congregation until it ceases to exist, and then they are on their own. Perhaps they will choose to unite with another United Church of Christ, perhaps they will unite with another nearby church of a different denomination, and perhaps they won't do anything at all!

To be sure, most church folk experience our United Church of Christ and understand their participation in our denomination through the lens of the local congregation to which they belong. Remember, though, these words from the answer to the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism, "I belong — body and soul, in life and in death — not to myself, but to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ." In baptism, each of us is incorporated into the universal church, the body of Christ, but our participation in Christ's Church is enfolded through union with a local congregation. When a local congregation comes to the end of its life, it is imperative that the connection of the remaining individual members to the universal Church be maintained by making some provision for them to be received into another local church.

Of paramount concern must be the provision of ongoing pastoral care for sick and shut-in members. They may not be able to decide for themselves where they would wish to establish church membership after a church closing. As a church moves through the closing process, leaders must take responsibility to make some arrangement for these folk, even if those church leaders believe that the other church members are capable of choosing to find a new church home on their own. Especially with older shut-in members, it is often the case that relatives who look after their affairs, being uninterested in church themselves, fail to appreciate the importance of pastoral care, sacramental ministry, and a tangible connection to a particular congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ that will sustain an elderly nursing home resident or homebound individual through the final phase of earthly life until they transition to their heavenly home.

- To that end, every shut-in should be contacted by the pastor of the closing congregation. In that conversation, the shut-in should be allowed to choose another UCC church in which to become a member. Once the choice has been made, the pastor of the closing church should be in touch with the church of the shut-in's choosing and set a time to introduce the shut-in to the new pastor. In this way the shut-in knows that he/she will continue to be a part of a community of faith that will care for him/her spiritually.
- If the shut-in is unable to make a choice, church leadership should consult with the person(s) responsible for managing the shut-in's affairs (responsible relatives or power-of-attorney) to identify an appropriate choice. Once the choice has been made, the pastor of the closing church should be in touch with the church that has been selected and set a

time to introduce the shut-in to the new pastor. In this way the shut-in knows that he/she will continue to be a part of a community of faith that will care for him/her spiritually.

- If even this is not possible, contact another UCC church geographically close to where the shut-in resides. Meet with that pastor to arrange for their church to take responsibility for ongoing pastoral care, and then go with him/her to visit the shut-in so that the shut-in is aware of who this person is.

As for those other church members, it seems incumbent upon congregational leaders, if we value our membership in the United Church of Christ, to take positive steps to encourage and enable congregants who are dealing with the disappointment and dislocation that result from the death of their church to move forward in the United Church of Christ. Moreover, it seems wise to encourage congregants to seek to deploy the remaining assets of the dying congregation in a manner that serves to strengthen the ongoing ministry of the United Church of Christ in another congregation. There are a number of approaches to accomplish this end.

- It is essential that every effort be made to connect members with nearby UCC churches. Even though a local church may be closing, the remaining members are still part of a covenantal relationship with the rest of the United Church of Christ.
- Perhaps the remaining members could all decide to transfer together to one other UCC congregation, thereby continuing to be part of the UCC and offering a significant boost to that congregation. Depending upon the number of remaining members, it might be wise to engage in a period of discussion about how members of the closing congregation would be incorporated into the life of the receiving congregation.
- Perhaps the remaining members could be transferred together in groups to two or three nearby UCC congregations based on geographic proximity to members' homes, thereby continuing to be part of the UCC and offering a boost to the two or three receiving congregations. Depending upon the number of members in each group, it might be wise to engage in a period of discussion about how member groups from the closing congregation would be incorporated into the life of the receiving congregations.
- Perhaps the Consistory/Council, in consultation with the local Association, could arrange to transfer, upon dissolution, all church members to one other UCC church as a temporary default, while members seek individually to explore options and eventually choose a more permanent new church home. In this model, some members would simply be passing through the default church after a short time, while others might decide to remain there on a permanent basis. In any event, though, all members are always part of some church congregation, and there is always somebody who is responsible to provide pastoral care in the event of an emergency.
- At the very least, congregational leaders should prepare a list of nearby UCC congregations with worship times and locations. Give this to every member. Ask permission to share your members' contact information with nearby UCC congregations, therefore allowing other congregations to let your members know that they are valued as UCC members.

The most important factor in discerning the future of a congregation is the members! It is people that make a community of faith. When members gather together to be the church into which God calls us, those members become the very living, breathing body of Christ. To discern faithfully to end the life of a congregation, the Church must consider very carefully the future of the members that remain and ensure that provisions are made to maintain their connection to the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Rev. Michael Baal

TESTIMONIAL: CLOSING A HISTORIC CITY CHURCH WAS NOT WHAT I SIGNED UP FOR.

When I accepted the position of Interim Pastor for First UCC, Reading, in July 2014, little did I know my role there would change over time, and just two short years later, the church would be ceasing regular worship after 263 years! It was known as the “Mother Reformed Church,” the church which “gave birth” to 14 other churches in the city over two centuries. It dated back to 1753, 23 years before the country was established, and the land was given to the church by Thomas & Richard Penn, sons of William Penn. It houses one of the largest pipe organs in the state! How was all of this possible?

My arrival was after a long-time pastorate had ended, and the members were tired. The Consistory was disempowered, there were no new members asked to serve, and the vacuum created after the pastor retired stirred up angst, fears, sadness, and conflict on many levels. Although the church was situated in the “heart of the city,” it didn’t have a clear mission for members to focus their energy, and the members were aging and no longer able to cast a vision for its future. Needless to say, it was a situation in need of the Lord’s help.

We made revisions to the by-laws to change the structure from a Consistory to a Leadership team, decreasing the number of members to better reflect the active number of members. We created four Ministry teams which included Vision, Congregational Life, Mission & Outreach, and Administrative, in hopes of creating new vitality and energy. We worked on infrastructure matters including organizational and administrative areas, identified deferred maintenance and ways in which we might revitalize the church to better address the needs of the community and maybe generate an income source.

The Leadership team was blessed to have some members who had a vision beyond the four walls of the church. Some were able to “think outside the box” and get creative with our space. We transformed an unused space into a chapel. We had contacted a realtor and she assessed the building. With a building of 18,000 sq. feet, surely, we could find another congregation or agency who may need space. She knew of a congregation who was looking for a church to “launch” a new congregation in the city who would solely focus its mission on the city of Reading. We contacted their pastor and were able to lease the church to them on a six-month trial basis. The relationship worked out great. This new congregation brought young families, men who were able to help with minor building projects, and their vision for the city was taking off. We had the idea of what it might look like if they were to take over the building. That is, not sell it to them, but “give it forward” just as Thomas & Richard Penn did for the early settlers in the 18th century.

We analyzed the finances and had huge concerns. The expenses were far exceeding the weekly offerings and we were withdrawing way too much from the Endowment Fund, with no plans to “pay it back” or break even. The Endowment Fund policy was not being followed, and it was evident that if we did not make some decisions, we would be left with no other alternative but to close.

It was important for the members to have the assurance that if they might be hospitalized or should die, there was a pastoral presence available to them. Losing the church which has offered

spiritual support and nurturing their entire lives can be devastating. I officiated at funerals for 12 members; five of them since the church has closed. These members have joined the great clouds of witnesses who have joined the great church triumphant. Their family members and friends were reminded that Christ's peace, which passes all understanding will sustain and uphold them.

The Leadership Team decided to have Dessert and Discussion (D&D) sessions with members. These were designed to offer a time of fellowship at a local restaurant (along with dessert) to ask the members where was God in all of this? We discussed the situation of expenses exceeding income, contracting membership, and a plan to close the church, gift the church to Reading City Church, and take the Endowment Fund and transfer it to the Berks County Community Foundation (BCCF), so that we would be able to offer grants to various areas of interest that were important to First Church. With this plan, First UCC would be able to continue as a "ministry without walls" to Berks County in perpetuity.

The member's reactions to the Leadership Teams vision were mixed. Some people were in denial there was even a problem, even though letters addressing our situation were mailed. My preaching for over a year was focused on change, hope, and new possibilities. Others were encouraged there was a possible plan to continue the ministry in the city of Reading and Berks county. Some, quite honestly, were relieved there was a way to "die with dignity" as they knew the church would no longer be able to keep on going the way it had.

There was a congregational meeting held on September 18, 2016 to vote to close, with a final worship service on Reformation Sunday, October 30, 2016. Reformation Sunday seemed to be an appropriate Sunday to close as we celebrated our Reformation roots, using the traditional Reformed liturgy. A luncheon was held at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel after the morning worship. It was decided that each member shall find another church to become a member.

The church filed for dissolution of the corporation with the state, and the court approved the transfer of the building to the Reading City Church in June 2017. The Endowment Fund was transferred to the Berks County Community Foundation. The Senior Center program established over 30 years ago continues to operate, but at another UCC church. Members still participate monthly in providing a meal at Opportunity House, a homeless shelter in Reading. Both of these are examples of ministry without walls, and tangible ways of caring for others in our community.

This testimonial only offers a glimpse of what happened during my pastorate at First UCC, Reading. There were many Holy Spirit moments along the way as well. Moments which offered us hope and the assurance that the decisions we were making were to the glory of God and were right for this particular congregation. I've learned there will not be a "cookie cutter cutout" way to close a church. Each church will have to discern what will work for them, be reflective of their history, mission and context. I'm certain the more time that passes, and as the members of First UCC reflect on the process we took, they may perhaps share it with other churches who find themselves in similar situations. I am still processing the experience. There are "lessons to be learned" and surely ways we could've handled things differently, but we felt we made the best decisions we could at the time with the information we had available to us.

Rev. Corrine Dautrich

LEGAL ISSUES IN CHURCH DISSOLUTIONS¹

The United Church of Christ has prepared a resource guide entitled Living Legacy: Church Legacy & Closure Resource (“Living Legacy”) for churches contemplating closure. A copy of Living Legacy is available through the United Church of Christ’s website at www.ucc.org. Chapter 7 of Living Legacy identifies legal issues faced by churches seeking to dissolve or merge. While self-explanatory, some commentary is warranted.

Once it becomes apparent that a congregation must close, discernment transitions to process, specifically, making sure the letter of the law is followed to fully comply with all federal, state, local and canon law requirements. Failure to adhere to these laws can affect a church’s tax-exempt status and may even subject a church’s officers and directors to personal liability. For this reason, although not required, it is recommended that legal counsel familiar with non-profits be retained to help guide the church leadership team. If such retention is not feasible, most congregations have at least one lawyer who is a member. At the very least, he or she, even if not versed in the law of non-profits, should play an active role in the closure process as that lawyer will in all likelihood be familiar with routine legal issues faced by his or her congregation over the years, issues that may need to be addressed as part of any closure or merger. The Pennsylvania Southeast Conference does have an attorney on retainer whose assistance can be arranged in consultation with the Conference Minister.

To assist counsel, the leadership team should gather together all governing documents, including without limitation a copy of the church’s By-Laws or Constitution, Articles of Incorporation, any Endowment Policy, and to a lesser extent, Deeds of Title to real estate. While these documents will vary in form and substance from congregation- to-congregation, most prescribe the general protocol to be followed in winding-down a church’s affairs. It is important to bear in mind that under the United Church of Christ polity, our churches are autonomous, meaning there are no policies or procedures at the national church or regional conference level that must be followed as part of any church closure. The national church and regional conference will be able to offer written and verbal guidance and support throughout the dissolution process, but that guidance is suggestive only and does not impose any binding obligations. In the end, it is a church’s own governing documents that will control how dissolution proceeds, to the extent those documents do not otherwise conflict with state law. It is important for counsel to review those documents to ensure they do not contain any provisions that may delay closure in the ordinary course.

Once it becomes apparent that a church must dissolve, the next step in the legal process under most By-Laws is for the church leadership team, by motion at a duly called regular or special meeting, to recommend dissolution or merger to the membership at large. That recommendation must follow an opportunity for debate among the members of the leadership team and must

¹ This article should not be considered legal advice or a comprehensive guide to the legal requirements for any church closure. Churches contemplating dissolution are advised to seek experienced local counsel to assist with their decision-making.

culminate in a vote. Most church By-Laws allow for the passage of such recommendations by simple majority, but churches should be guided by the terms of their individual By-Laws. In practice, however, the larger the majority vote by the leadership team in favor of recommending closure, the easier it will be to sell the recommendation to the membership at large.

After the leadership team votes, it will then have to call a special meeting of the entire congregation to either approve or disapprove the leadership team's recommendation. Special attention here needs to be paid to each individual church's set of By-Laws, as they will vary when it comes to the quorum required to conduct a vote and the number of votes required to approve the recommendation. A meeting of the membership almost always requires notice of the recommendation in writing to be provided in advance of the meeting. The vote must follow an opportunity for debate among the members after motion. If the church By-Laws are silent on voting requirements for dissolution, most By-Laws include a reference that Robert's Rules will control the parliamentary procedure to be followed in conducting the vote.

Legally speaking, once a congregation votes to approve dissolution, prior to actually filing Articles of Dissolution with the Department of State, decisions need to be made regarding the disposition of church assets, including without limitation the sanctuary, personal effects of ministry, and any endowment fund. Options abound and may include (subject to any limitations contained in an individual church's By-Laws) selling the assets and gifting the cash proceeds or gifting the assets outright to other non-profits that might have been an integral part of the church's missionary outreach over the years, gifting the proceeds from the sale of assets to the United Church of Christ's Cornerstone Fund to assist new church start-ups, or as one church within our Conference recently did, gifting its sanctuary to a non-denominational church that had been leasing the sanctuary and gifting its Endowment Fund to a secular community foundation establishing a trust in the church's name that will continue the church's mission in perpetuity. For churches with an endowment fund, reference to any formal endowment fund policy is necessary to determine if there are any restrictions on the church's ability to dispose of or transfer ownership of the fund corpus. In all instances, Internal Revenue Service 501(c)(3) regulations mandate that any such gifts may only be made to another qualified non-profit. Failure to comply with this requirement will subject the gift to federal and possibly state and local tax liability.

Once a church has disposed of its assets, if the church has been incorporated under Pennsylvania law, the legal entity will have to be formally dissolved by the filing of Articles of Dissolution, otherwise the church will be subjected to continued filing requirements with the Department of State and wage tax authorities, and in theory will continue to be subject for liability for all sorts of acts or omissions, even though the church may no longer own any assets. Experienced counsel can assist with the filing of such Articles.

One final issue with legal ramifications needs to be addressed by churches dissolving, and that concerns the disposition of church records, including minute books, baptismal, marriage and death records, membership lists, pastoral records, church archives, photographs, property maintenance documents, and other important records in the history of the congregation. While there is no formal legal policy respecting the disposition of such records, there are several local venues to consider in weighing options. Local historical societies are often interested in records

of churches with centuries-old roots in their communities, and the Evangelical and Reformed Church Historical Society affiliated with the Lancaster Theological Seminary is willing to accept such records in exchange for a small donation to its ministry. If another congregation will be occupying the UCC sanctuary being closed, the leadership team of the closing church may deem it appropriate to provide copies of certain records to the new church that will be worshiping in the former UCC sanctuary. Regardless, it is important to publicize to members of the dissolving congregation where certain baptismal, marriage and death records will be maintained, in case those members or their families ever need access to those records.

David R. Beane, Esquire

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE BUILDINGS?

The liquidation of church buildings can be problematic because of the unique nature of the structure as well as most in urban areas have an extreme lack of off street parking for the amount of square footage of the building. It is not always bad news when these properties are being sold. Often local municipalities will work with potential buyers of these buildings and grant waivers to their zoning ordinances that will allow conversions of these buildings into alternative uses.

Over the past few years our company has sold several of these properties and there has been a number of different end users. Often, we hear from very small, non-denominational congregations looking to grow into a larger, more traditional space to worship than their often basement type meeting space. The issue that surrounds this type of buyer is the lack of funds to acquire the building and more importantly the funds to sustain the building. Lacking strong financial backing, these buyers usually cannot complete a purchase.

Other end users have been conversions into residential housing. Some very unique single-family homes have been created. Conversions into apartments, condos, and co-ops have made some very interesting end uses. A couple of buildings have been re-purposed as restaurants, micro-breweries and craft distilleries tasting rooms. Others uses have been event centers and community centers. Often, they are used as community playhouses, non-religious wedding venues, music venues, and lecture halls. Lack of onsite parking can be a challenge for a number of these users.

As a side note to this, it has been seen several times that when a community gets upset with the sale of these properties it often revolves around the stripping of these buildings of items like stained glass windows, pews, ornamental trim work and other unique aspects of buildings like these. We have witnessed on more than one occasion where these items have been posted online sites like Craig's List or E-Bay and sold to the highest bidder.

In closing, the unusual non-traditional nature of these buildings creates some challenges, however with some creative thinking and a bit of imagination and vision of a buyer these properties can be sold and repurposed into new and innovated uses.

Joseph A. Peterson
Associate Broker
RE/MAX of Reading

FINANCES, FURNITURE AND OTHER THINGS BELOVED

What do we do with all our church stuff? (e.g. furniture, seasonal decorations, children's department materials, choir music and robes, sometimes pianos, etc.)

Getting It Done

- Designate 3-5 trusted members who will be the “empty the building” czars. Their decisions have to be respected as final.
- Identify a large space where most things that have to be disposed of can be spread out on tables. This may include all manner of things that hang on walls, things that people sit in (yes, some folks will be happy to place a pew in their rec room at home)—in other words, all manner of items that do not have archival value (see below) and that may have meaning for certain people.
- Announce that all these items are there for the taking. Anyone may help themselves.
- Set the deadline date when what's left will be “removed.”
- Engage a business such as *College Hunks Hauling Junk* or *1-800-Got-Junk* (Google ‘we got junk’ to check your local area) to dispose of all that's left. They will recycle everything they can (that's how they make some of their money) and know how and where to take what's left over.
- Special case: choir music, robes, electric organs and pianos
 - **Used pianos** have no market value. It's almost impossible to even give them away, so consider junking them. Grafton Piano and Organ Co. in Souderton (<http://www.graftonpiano.com/>) is among the best sources of information in our region.
 - **Organs:** see Grafton (above) for advice about electronic organs. For pipe organs, consult with whoever has been doing maintenance on your instrument. If you have no such relationship, Emery Brothers in Allentown (<https://www.emerybrothers.com/>) may be accommodating. (One of the original Emery Brothers served as the music director at Zwingli UCC for many years.)
 - Consult Young's Music in Whitehall, PA (<http://www.youngsmusic.com/>) to deal with used **choir music**. That's their business.
 - **Choir robes** have no market value. Try eBay.
 - The Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society (see next item) will receive **communion sets**. They deeply appreciate a donation when you ask the Society to be the depository for your communion ware.

PAPER, PAPER, PAPER

The Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society (<http://erhs.info/>) is the archive for documents of former E&R congregations. The Society provides a complete guide for organizing church records. Ask for the guide, and then sort what you have according to the large topics listed in that document (or other large categories, e.g. church school, consistory, etc.) The Society is interested in archiving local church records. Contact them regarding your specific questions.

MONEY

This theme is covered elsewhere, but this point requires emphasis. The assets of your congregation as they presently exist are not yours alone. They are the accumulation of generations of people who preceded you and who also contributed to your congregation. So the question to answer is this: What legacy does your congregation want to leave that will enhance

the ministries of the wider church and/or continue to contribute to the well-being of your community? Seldom will your members have the opportunity to give away as much money as will likely be possible as you total the amount received when sell your church building and whatever financial assets exist besides your building.

Mr. Bob Fogel, UCC Licensed Pastor

Guide to Arrangement and Description of Local Church Records

Prepared by Rev. Richard R. Berg, Archivist Emeritus, Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Church records are vital to the life of every congregation. Not only is the church's story told in its records, but the current work of the church is also recorded. Often churches do not think about their records until a significant anniversary is celebrated, a church profile needs to be developed, or a disaster destroys the records. The retention, organization, and preservation of records enables the church to respond to these events. Records are also vital for the church's understanding of itself. For churches to understand why they currently have a particular mission or what their current ministry is, they need to understand their history and follow what has happened in the past that influences the present and helps to plan for the future.

As an aid for churches to begin the process of gathering, organizing, and preserving their records, this guide provides both a method of organizing local church records and standardized terms to describe the various types of records usually found in local churches. The list is not exhaustive and records will probably be found which do not fit exactly into this suggested scheme. In such cases a new term can be devised or the records can be placed as a subgroup under one of the larger headings. In any case, a note should be made describing how the records were handled. In addition to suggesting this list be used by local congregations, the Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society uses the list when organizing and describing local church records in its collection.

Particularly important for local churches is the need to identify and preserve vital records. Vital records are those needed to conduct the life and work of the church if a disaster should occur. Although the definition of vital records may vary from church to church they usually include: constitution, charter, current deeds, membership and giving records, current budget and financial report, baptisms, confirmations, marriages, funerals, list of bank accounts with account numbers, current insurance policies, consistory or council minutes. To insure the availability of these records they should be copied and the copy stored off site in a designated repository. Copying can be in any of a number of formats: photocopies, digitizing to a CD, or microfilm. If digitizing to a CD is the selected method of preservation, the information should be migrated to a new CD every five to seven years because the long-term viability of CDs has not yet been determined. Also, be aware that technology changes rapidly and hardware in the future may not be able to read CDs made today.

The Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society is the designated repository for all records of the former Reformed Church in the United States and the Evangelical and Reformed Church as well as its local congregations founded before 1957. The archivist is available for workshops on church records and to consult with churches on an individual basis. The Society encourages churches to take a records inventory and send a copy to the Society to be included in your church's file.

ARRANGEMENT OF RECORDS

1. **ANNUAL REPORTS** (these are usually prepared by the various committees for distribution at the congregation's annual meeting)
2. **ARTIFACTS** (Including communion ware, anniversary plates, offering plates, etc. After deciding which items are to be permanently retained they are entered into an artifact database and housed in appropriate acid-free containers)
3. **AWARDS, CERTIFICATES, RECOGNITIONS, etc.**
4. **BULLETINS** (Sunday and special worship service bulletins are usually kept as a record of the types of services held, the order of service, hymns, etc. Many congregations have these bound together as books.)
5. **CEMETERY and CEMETERY ASSOCIATIONS**
 - (a) burial records
 - (b) Constitution
 - (c) Minutes
 - (d) Plot maps
 - (e) Tombstone inscriptions
6. **CHARTER and/or INCORPORATION DOCUMENTS** (These are usually legal documents specifying the legal name of the congregation and its date of founding.)
7. **CHURCH RECORDS** (These are probably the most important records for genealogists.)
 - a) Baptisms
 - b) Confirmations
 - c) Marriages
 - d) Deaths
 - e) Communicants
 - f) Directories and Membership Lists
 - g) Attendance Records (these are not generally retained permanently, except for the number attending each service)
 - h) Guest Registers (These are often not retained permanently)
 - i) Transfers In and Out (these are not generally retained permanently provided the information is found in the church's master record book)
 - j) Statistical Reports.
8. **CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS** (This category is for minutes and actions from congregational meetings keep separately from annual reports and/or Consistory minutes.)
9. **CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS** (Organized chronologically)

10. **FINANCIAL RECORDS** (These are permanently retained records. Bank statements, cancelled checks, paid invoices, vouchers, etc. need only be retained for as long as necessary following local, state, federal and other legal requirements. Churches should consult with their legal counsel and financial advisor about length of retention).
 - a) Annual Treasurer's Report (These are often included in the Annual Reports, #1 above. If so, they need not be included here.)
 - b) Auditor's Reports
 - c) Bank Records (see the note above about retention)
 - d) Budgets (only the final approved budget for each year need be kept)
 - e) Endowment/Investments (include all organizational and governing documents, annual reports, audits)
 - f) Ledgers (often referred to as Treasurer's Books, these contain details of income and expenses and assets and liabilities)
 - g) Offering (the amount given/pledged each week by members)
 - h) Pew Rents
 - i) Subscriptions (Often in early churches expenses were met by members pledging a certain amount toward a specific item such as the pastor's salary, building fund or renovations, organ fund, parsonage fund, etc.)
 - j) Taxes
11. **HISTORY** (Includes published histories, pamphlets, booklets, news clippings, anniversary celebrations, etc.)
12. **LEGAL AND BUSINESS RECORDS** (These can be combined as here or made two separate categories depending on the quantity of records)
 - a) Bequests
 - b) Deeds, Indentures, Bonds, etc.
 - c) Insurance policies (only current policies are retained, policies no longer in force are discarded.)
 - d) Personnel records, including pastors (Includes W4 dependents form, W2 wage and tax statements, salary reports, job descriptions, performance evaluations, termination letters and/or agreements, contracts. These records should be restricted to those who need access for legal, fiscal, personnel issues. Only biographical information and job descriptions should be retained permanently. All other pieces should be destroyed after a resignation, termination or litigation is concluded). You may wish to create a file folder for each pastor including full name, birth and death dates, dates they served the church or you may want to place pastor's file folders at #13 below.
 - e) Property (including blueprints.)
13. **MEMORIALS** (monetary or other gifts)
14. **NEWSLETTERS** (These are an important record of the activities and programs of the church)

15. **PASTORS** (if not included in #11 above. Include full name, birth and death dates, dates they served the church, biographical information, correspondence, pastoral letters, photographs).
16. **PHOTOGRAPHS** (This category includes pictures of the exterior and interior of the church building and pastors. A representative selection of photographs of church members and activities are kept only if church building and pastors. A representative selection of photographs of church members and activities are kept only if they are identified in pencil on the back of each photo with names, activity and date.)
17. **PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES** (This category includes informational brochures and promotional materials about the church as well as information about special programs and activities which the church developed and implemented as part of its ministry such as Heifer Project, One Great Hour of Sharing, mission projects, building projects, fundraising projects, Christmas programs, etc.)
18. **SCRAPBOOKS**
19. **COMMITTEES**
 - A. Consistory/Council (or its equivalent)
 - a. Minutes
 - b. Reports
 - c. Other
 - B. Deacons
 - a. Minutes
 - b. Reports
 - c. Other
 - C. Elders
 - a. Minutes
 - b. Reports
 - c. Other
 - D. Christian Education (Until 1920's and often later, the Sunday school was established as a separate entity with its own officers, its own treasury, its own organization. Beginning in the 1920's the Sunday Schools became an integral part of the organization of the local congregation and the name was often changed to Christian Education Committee. This category is for minutes, programs, etc., of the Christian Education Committee. Use Auxiliary Organizations for Sunday School records of the more independent Sunday school of the 19th and early 20th centuries.)
 - a. Minutes
 - b. Financial Records (if kept separate from general church financial records)
 - c. Reports
 - d. Other

- E. Music
 - a. Choirs (includes information on the purpose and membership of choirs)
 - b. Directors and Organists (includes information about the individual)
 - c. Programs and history (includes information about various programs carried out by the choirs, printed programs for various events, and history of music and music groups in the congregation)
- F. Other Committees (Worship, Outreach/Social Action, Evangelism, Stewardship, Pastoral Relations, etc. Records should be organized the same as those for Christian Education.)

20. AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS

- A. Sunday School (See the note under Christian Education for difference between Sunday School and Christian Education.)
 - a. Minutes
 - b. Financial Records (if kept separate from general church financial records)
 - c. Membership and/or Attendance Records (There are generally not retained permanently.)
 - d. Programs (includes information about various programs carried out as well as printed programs for various events.)
- B. Women's Groups
 - a. Constitution and By-Laws
 - b. Financial Records
 - c. Membership/Attendance Records
 - d. Minutes
 - e. Programs
- C. Men's Group (Organized the same as Women's Group)
- D. Youth Group (Organized the same as Women's Group)
- E. Others as needed

Prepared 4/15/2001; Revised: 5/7/2001; 10/18/2001; 5/28/2003;
 9/8/2004; 8/29/2006; 10/3/2006; 10/15-2006; 10/24/2006; 5/7/2007;
 5/24/2007; 9/12/2008; 6/13/2010; 12/21/2001; 4/28/2014; 11/11/2014

BECOMING A LEGACY CHURCH IN PENNSYLVANIA SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE

The conversation and discernment around church closure is difficult and hard work. We hope that the pages of this document and the resources included might make this process a bit easier if that is possible. We are told in Ecclesiastes that for everything there is a season. Knowing that does not ease the pain and anguish of closing a church where your family has worshipped for generations.

The Pennsylvania Southeast Conference (PSEC) believes that your church can live on into the future. We are a denomination that believes in resurrection, not the finality of death. To that end, PSEC has created a New Church Start Fund. The UCC Cornerstone Fund stewards these funds on behalf of the Conference which are restricted for the use of creating a new community of faith.

No one knows what the church of the future may look like. God does. It is our responsibility to let go of some of the structures and ways of being church today in order that a new community of faith might be created for tomorrow. In order to create this new thing, financial resources are needed.

We ask that you prayerful consider becoming a Legacy Church in the PSEC. Please give to the New Church Start Fund so that your church will live on in a community of faith in the future. Your church's name will be recognized when any new community of faith is created. In this way, your congregation will live into whatever new thing God is doing.

Rev. Sharon Morris

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Invest in the future of the United Church of Christ Penn Southeast Conference (PSEC).

“2020 VISION” of the PSEC

VISION—a unified portion of the Body of Christ moving in one direction to effect for God and for good the lives of all people living in Southeast Pennsylvania.

MISSION—strengthen local churches and pastors by making the five Associations of the Penn Southeast Conference agencies of connection and accountability.

OBJECTIVES—keeping Jesus and the gospel at the heart of everything we do, by 2020 we will create an ethos of expectation, experimentation and transformation.

One of our 2020 goals is to:

Prepare for the birth of six new vital spiritual communities through recruitment of excellent entrepreneurial leaders to lead the effort, recruiting partner churches to provide support and infrastructure, and raising funding to adequately empower the movement.

Together, we now shift the narrative of Mainline decline to a story of hope for a generative future. We are the model for those seeking transformation in their denominational settings across this nation. We believe in the God of resurrection, and in God we place our faith and hope.

Let us begin...

The PSEC New Church Start Fund

Through a generous endowment of a legacy gift from Pilgrim Community UCC and other churches and individuals within the Conference, the PSEC New Church Start Fund was established in early 2017. The Fund is available for communities of people and their leaders who are seeking to begin new churches within the Conference. This Fund is under the careful stewardship of the United Church of Christ Cornerstone Fund, a trusted investment and lending institution.

Support new communities of faith

Contributions to the New Church Start Fund can be made by individuals and churches, including churches who may be coming to the end of their lives—creating new communities of light in our region. To learn more about how you can contribute to the PSEC New Church Start Fund, please call the Conference at 484-949-8774.



United Church of Christ
CORNERSTONE
FUND

Living Legacy

Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ and United Church Funds offer the new *Living Legacy* workbook as a discernment and decision-making resource for "Legacy Congregations"—churches that conclude their ministry and seed new ministries.

Living Legacy is a mixture of narratives, guidelines, inventories, and resources. It's designed for use by leaders from all church settings who work with congregations considering their "capstone" ministry.

Living Legacy is ideal for any

- Leader/member of a congregation who wonders if you need to 'get real' about your church's future
- Congregation seeking guidance in implementing your decision to close
- Pastor who seeks to guide your congregation in implementing a decision they have already made
- Conference staff or volunteer consultant to congregations
- Interim pastor who specializes in transitioning congregations
- Member of your Association Church & Ministry Committee and assisting churches

Workbook contents are loose leaf and three-hole punched for a binder. 90 pages.

Also available as a downloadable PDF. <https://www.uccresources.com/products/living-legacy-workbook-church-legacy-and-closure-resource?variant=1209547376>

To learn more, visit the Living Legacy [website](#).

Lessons Learned Along The Way...Thoughts from Consistory Members

Long before decisions are made – items to consider

- Think outside the box, beyond the closed world of the congregation
- Look at the needs of the community, and ways of ministering to those needs
- Be open to other ways of doing things that might be more effective
- Ask questions, start the discussion/process years ahead
- Develop a Vision Team comprised of folks able to “think outside the box”
- Know if your church is incorporated and where the papers are, become familiar with the by-laws

What we missed? Items that could’ve been done differently

- Listened to the advice from the conference
- Had a long-term planning team in place, long before one was needed
- Analyzed statistics, financials, declining members, active members
- Removed members from the roles who asked to be removed
- Be more intentional about reaching out to members on a more regular basis
- Making changes, trying to do things in a different more meaningful way
- Regular meetings with the congregation for suggestions and updates much earlier in the process
- Mission and outreach to the community should have long been in place
- Reaching out to other strong, active, mission oriented UCC churches in the area

Items that went right

- Have a strong leader who insisted on having discussions
- Have a good hardworking Consistory
- Have mission projects and outreach up until final worship
- Identify items, records, photos, etc. for Evangelical & Reformed Historical Society
- Planned a meaningful final worship service
- Created a “ministry without walls” utilizing endowment fund

Submitted by Consistory Members of the former First UCC, Reading
September 2017

RESOURCES

MEET THE TEAM

David R. Beane, Esquire, is a lifelong resident of Berks County having graduated from Exeter Township High School in 1981. David graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Albright College in 1985 and cum laude from the Syracuse University College of Law in 1988. While in law school, David served as a law clerk with the United States Attorney's Office in the Northern District of New York, and with the United States Department of Justice Organized Crime Strike Force in Syracuse, New York.

Upon graduation from law school, David joined the regional law firm of Stevens & Lee where he practiced for 22 years as a member of the firm's Environmental Group (the last 14 years as a shareholder).

In the Spring of 2010, David left Stevens & Lee to found Berks County's very first boutique law firm dedicated exclusively to the practice of environmental law. Named Beane LLC, David's firm counsels clients on environmental, energy and sustainability law, with a sub-concentration in the area of asbestos risk management. David has extensive practical experience in many aspects of environmental regulatory and transactional counseling and environmental litigation.

David is a member of the Environmental Roundtable of the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Berks County Bar Association's Environmental Section, the American Bar Association's Environmental, Energy and Resources Section, the American Bar Association's Committee on Climate Change, Sustainable Development and Ecosystems, and the Pennsylvania Bar Association's Environmental, Mineral and Natural Resources Section. David is the immediate past Chair of the City of Reading's Environmental Advisory Council and a four-term past Consistory President at First Reformed UCC in Reading. David serves as a member of the Board of Directors of Sustainable Energy & Lighting Solutions LLC and the World Affairs Council of Greater Reading. David is the co-editor of the monthly newsletter for the World Affairs Council of Greater Reading, serves as an Assistant District Administrator for Little League District 8, and has been active for more than a decade coaching and umpiring Little League baseball and girl's fastpitch softball, including District and Sectional Little League international tournament assignments.

Rev. Corrine Dautrich has shepherded two congregations which have transitioned into omega status. One was an inner city church (First UCC) in Reading, PA and the other was a rural congregation (New Jerusalem UCC) in Fleetwood, PA. She has been able to use her work as a chaplain and dealing with "end of life" situations to assist congregations with the stages of loss, fear, and grief and help these congregations to see the hope and possibilities of "new life" possible relying on God.

Mr. Bob Fogal has been active in the church his entire life--as a musician, missionary, Stephen Minister, lay leader (with various labels), fundraiser and (presently) licensed pastor in PSEC. Now pastor at Carversville UCC, he previously served St. Luke's UCC/North Wales as they went through the process of selling their church building. While the St. Luke's congregation still worships together, many issues of closing a church relate to emptying the building as the St. Luke's congregation had to do. Experiencing those issues inform Bob's contribution to the manual *Omega Church Document*, Finances, Furniture, and other things beloved.

Rev. Butch Kuykendall, D.Min., is currently Senior Pastor at Zwingli UCC in Souderton, PA and has spent 25 years as an authorized minister in Las Vegas, NV and Pennsylvania. Butch also serves as a volunteer hospice chaplain and in various ministries for the wider church.

Mr. Joe Peterson, entered the real estate business in 1976 at age 18 and has been a Broker since 1980. Currently part of the senior management team at RE/MAX of Reading, the largest RE/MAX single site facility in the United States.

Mr. Peterson has a background in residential, commercial, land development, investment real estate, and property management. Past President of the Reading-Berks Association of REALTORS, the Pennsylvania REALTORS Education Foundation, and a current member of the Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS Board of Directors. A faculty member of the Schlicher-Kratz Real Estate Institute for nearly 30 years. He has been directly involved in more than 2,500 real estate transactions.

Civically Mr. Peterson is the Mayor of Birdsboro, Pennsylvania, and have served on the borough planning commission for more than 30 years. The borough has recently experienced the closure of two of its churches.

**The Process of Completing the Ministry of Zion's United Church of Christ,
Reading, PA
Rev. Dr. Robert Aregood**

In January of 2010, The Consistory of Zion's UCC met for its annual planning meeting to discuss and schedule the programs, projects and worship for the year ahead. While there was much in the way of ministry to be done, the Consistory realized in discussion that the church could not come up with the resources to continue to do ministry. Six years earlier the pastor took his church retirement and social security at age 63 and continued as pastor with the congregation for \$1000.00 per month (paid when possible) and health insurance. All along there was strong lay leadership, a healthy multigenerational community and vibrant worship and music. Visitors and street people were welcomed and included in the gathering.

As the meeting progressed, there was an appropriate time of mourning of about ten minutes and the Consistory began to look at what needed to be done in order to complete their ministry as ministry. The concerns listed were:

1. Planning a process of closing that included as many members and friends as possible with transparency throughout the journey, faithful to the church's historic ministry.
2. Care for the people in the challenge to find a new community of faith.
3. Dispose of the property and resources of the church in a way that was congruent with the concepts of ministry inherent to the life of Zion's Church
4. Proceed with a process based on the theological concept of Death and Resurrection with the belief that the concept is as valid for God's church as it is for God's people.

1. The Consistory, at the February meeting voted to begin the process to complete the ministry of Zion's Church with a congregational vote taking place the first Sunday of May; preceded by an informational meeting the Sunday prior and projecting a closing worship on Christmas Eve of 2010. It was understood that this time line depended on the sale of the building and the dispersal of funds and furnishings.

At the February Consistory meeting, a challenge was given to the congregation members who had not contributed or communed in the past two years to return to the community. Those who did not fulfil their responsibilities on or before Easter Sunday would forfeit their membership. Inactive members were sent an initial letter with a follow up phone call and a reminder post card just before Palm Sunday to cover those who don't open church mail. This was done to include as many members as possible and at the same time to stabilize the membership. Historically there have been votes in non-profit organizations swayed by inactive members who were encouraged to take sides resulting in unworkable outcomes. The after Easter membership rested at 72.

The congregation was kept informed weekly by time given in Church School and Worship. The emphasis was on the challenge of a faith journey to seek a new community of faith using imagery of Moses in the Wilderness and the travels of Jesus and Paul. Primary was the story of Abraham setting out, but not being sure of where he was going, trusting in God having a place for him and his family. Phone numbers were in every bulletin and newsletter and people were encouraged to contact Consistory members or the pastor with questions or concerns.

2. The Consistory was sensitive to the unsure footing felt by the members because they were dealing with the same feelings. On the first Sunday in August, coinciding with Zion's Anniversary Celebration, we held an open house to which we invited all the churches in Reading Assoc., the local judicatory, to join our congregation for worship if possible or if not, after the service and share a five minute information and invitation to join their church upon Zion's closing. Following the presentations lunch was shared with conversations among the churches.

During September, a letter was sent to all members with a list of the association churches with addresses, time of worship, phone number and pastor's name. Those churches that attended the open house were indicated and churches close to Zion's members were marked as were Pastor's recommendations. Those members living outside the association were given churches close to them.

Each association pastor was offered a mailing list of Zion's membership in print or on mailing labels.

All Shut-in members were visited by the pastor to discuss placement. Some had been members of other churches and wanted to return to them; others had friends and requested those churches while others were willing to take the pastor's pick. The pastor then contacted and requested that the church accept a shut-in from Zion's. All churches consented.

Sometime after the shut-ins were placed, Zion's sent a donation to each church to be used for ministry among God's people in appreciation of their hospitality.

This was in response to a number of churches that wanted to receive all of Zion's members and all of Zion's money. The Consistory blew its top at this. Churches that cooperated in nothing suddenly "felt our pain". The Consistory believed it was vital to the process that the members renewed their faith by undertaking this challenge of finding a new "resurrection church". Those who did not accept the challenge would be of little use to any church.

The initial results were not as good as hoped, but as time goes on others begin to see the value of a new Christian community. At the completion of the ministry at Zion's, those members who had not joined another church received a letter indicating that they were a member of Zion's UCC when it closed.

3. Zion's was the last of a seven church merger discussion to withdraw from the process which culminated in the last two churches completing the merger; at which time, Zion's tried to sell its building on its own. This time shortly after the vote, we hired a quality real estate agent. She separated the wheat from the chaff and we did not need to deal with unrealistic offers. Our property was appraised at \$235,000 rather than the self-appraisal of \$125,000 and the church sold to another congregation for \$215,000 in less than two months. Some items in the church like memorial Bibles were returned to the people who donated them, but even though the church furniture, dishes, altar Ware etc. could have been sold for pennies on the dollar, it was the decision of the Consistory that it would be better for the ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ that they remain to be used by the new congregation, so that they would not need to buy new things for its ministry. The new congregation wanted closing the end of September, so Zion's worshipped in their building for the last time the last Sunday of September 2010. Arrangements were made for a Christmas Eve Service at a UCC retirement community with one last Baptism in the church record.

With the money from the sale of the building, the pastor was paid back salary which has accrued and three staff members were given per annum gifts in appreciation for ministry well done.

The body of the money was divided among 8 or 9 UCC ministries designated by the Consistory. The members each had about \$1300 to designate for one or two of the ministries chosen by the consistory. With each contribution went a plaque in honor of the life and ministry of Zion's to be displayed by the organization.

4. From the very beginning, Zion's used the theological concept of Death and Resurrection from which to both think and believe. Zion's was not closing or quitting, but rather completing out ministry as part of a changing and renewing journey. The life of the people was not dead, but was ending at one place and beginning at another. One church dies, but we are a part of a new resurrected one.

For Everything There is a Season
Completing a Congregation's Ministry
Rev. Dr. Robert G. Aregood

A. The Completing a Congregation's Ministry

The understanding of urban congregational change was not a new topic for conversation at Zion's UCC in Reading. It was a part of the metanarrative which established a foundational hum pervading the congregational life and yet subliminal enough to be ignored in the everyday life of the church. Prior to my coming to Zion's in December of 1968, the church had already attempted mergers with 5 different churches in 4 years, by which time, feeling like an unwanted bride and the pastor having left they decided, with much determination but few resources to again try to go it alone. I was selected out of a field of one to become Zion's pastor for what the Conference Minister projected to be a period of 6 to 9 months. Then they would close.

In the intervening years, Zion's tried numerous ways to continue doing ministry: 6 years of sharing the pastor with another church, conversations and studies and negotiation with 10 other churches, money raising projects, cutting expenses, until January of 2010 when at the annual planning meeting, the consistory decided that they could not plan to continue, there were insufficient resources, but they could plan to complete their ministry in a way dictated by their faith and their community.

Each of your churches has a narrative. Perhaps you recognize parts of your church journey in this, perhaps yours is very different, but when we reach the realization that there is no viable course, we can either decide to hunker down until the last person turns the lights off and locks the doors or we can plan to make the best use of our resources so that the ministry important to our community will continue as an integral portion in the feast of witness in the eternal life of the Church of Jesus Christ.

B. Preparation for the Vote

Following the planning meeting, the consistory thought about the decision until the regular February meeting at which they voted to recommend to the congregation that we complete our ministry at this location and, if approved by the congregation, find ways to convert what was becoming a liability to assets for ministry.

1. The pastor and a committee of volunteer consistory members composed a list of options for Zion's future and a statement of giving for 2009. The congregation was also encouraged to ask questions of the consistory or pastor.
2. The consistory sent a letter to all persons who were, by their nonparticipation, eligible for removal from the membership rolls; encouraging them, by attendance and contribution, to renew their life as part of our fellowship. This was followed by a postcard indicating that if they did not respond by Easter, they would be removing themselves from membership. This was done to stabilize the voting membership and to insure that the resources would be given in line with the life of the church as represented by the active members.
3. Sunday, April 25, 2010 the congregation was invited to an informal gathering after worship to discuss the vote on the resolution to complete our ministry. The next Sunday, May 2, 2010, the vote would take place. Included in the mailing for the April 25th meeting was a list of questions and answers about church records and memorials, the building and contents and other points of interest. Discussion and conversation were for the first week and only the vote for the second week. Food was served at both meetings. That is just the way it is. The resolution was to close the church and authorize the consistory to do so, with dates to accomplish the process. The resolution carried with a strong majority, but also involved a clear decent.

C. Following the Vote

1. Immediately after the meeting, the consistory selected a realtor to assist in selling the building. The appraisal for the building was much higher than we had expected. We put together a list of recent building up grades and repairs and the contractors who had done maintenance work on equipment and building.

2. The pastor, treasurer and a consistory committee consolidated the various funds and cash reserves the church owned. There had been a push during the present pastorate to not designate memorial contributions too tightly, rather trusting the consistory to use the resources as was most functional for the present needs of the church. There was only one designated fund which was for the upkeep of the pipe organ. There was little left in it and we borrowed it. Obviously if there are many designated endowments, legal counsel will be necessary. There are many ways to circumnavigate designated endowments and most of them are legal with a good attorney. If a church goes with the new Conference bylaws and turns over its assets to the conference it may be designated as the successor to the church and the endowments might be able to be transferred to the conference.

On that topic, if a church wants to dispense of its assets, it needs to amend its bylaws to do that or as I read the conference bylaw amendments being voted on at this meeting, the church's resources will go to the PSEC. Unless that did not pass.

Within a month, which was far quicker than I expected, we involved in negotiations with the eventual buyer. The closing date was set for the end of September, rather than the end of the year as we had planned.

We changed our mailing address to a post office box getting that out of the way. The insurance policy was altered to eliminate insurance on the building as of the closing date while retaining insurance on fiduciary processes and people while carrying out our church business.

D. The People

In most cases when a church finishes its ministry, membership of people is transferred to a nearby church along with the resources. Entities approached Zion's visibly drooling for members and money which both hurt and infuriated church members. The consistory decided that if this was to be a journey of faith, members should each look for a new family of faith of which they could become a part.

People were challenged to reflect on what they would like in a new community of faith.

With that information in mind, on the first Sunday of August, the celebration of Zion's 129th Anniversary, We invited all the churches of Reading Association to join us for worship, if possible, and following the service to give a five minute presentation about their churches with handouts, if available. After the presentations, we ate and mingled, getting to know each other or renewing acquaintances. After the last service in Zion's building, each member was sent a list of the churches of Reading Association designating those that came to the gathering as well as those located close to member's homes. Members were challenged to visit churches in which they were interested two or three times before making a decision.

Letters were sent to association churches advising them to look for visitors and offering a membership list with addresses and phone numbers in hard copy and computer friendly form.

Pastors were also asked to accept shut-ins into membership. We had more offers than needed and asked the shut-ins if they had a preference. Some did not others had been members of other churches before and wanted to go back.

Much later we sent each church \$500.00 for each shut-in they accepted in appreciation for their kindness. While some members accepted the challenge to join another church, the response was slow and disappointing. However, for those who responded, the end was a new beginning.

The congregation gathered for worship two more times after the last service at Zion's building on September 29, 2010; on Christmas Eve and in spring of 2011 for worship and a meal, as we completed our time as a community; both were at Phoebe Berks.

E. A Gift to the Future

Throughout this process the consistory had the leadership role with the congregation giving its support. All past debts were paid. Even a six year old shortfall to OCWM as well as the current year support. They gave all staff a gift of appreciation for years employed at the church as a sign of recognition of having worked for less than they should have been paid as well as back compensatory time. Money was kept for closing expenses, the remainder of which was given to Reading Association.

The main portion of the money was divided among 9 ministries of the United Church of Christ chosen by the consistory. Each of the 9 was asked to accept a plaque honoring Zion's ministry to be displayed prominently. All accepted.

Each member of record at the time of the vote on May 2, 2010 were given the opportunity to designate an equal share of the available money to be donated to one or two of the ministries chosen by the consistory. In this way, each member had a part of the ongoing life of the church to which their gift of faith was given.

Conclusion

It has been five years since the closure was complete. The records of the church have been sorted and evaluated by a certified archivist, Dr. Karen Guenther, and reside in the archives of the Evangelical and Reformed Church at Lancaster Theological Seminary. They have been the source of three articles about aspects of church life in Pennsylvania. The prayer shawl group still gathers monthly and the choir and pastor lead worship at Phoebe Berks twice each year. Many others keep in random contact as life goes on in lives reborn under a God who makes all things new.

On the Closing of St. Paul's Memorial United Church of Christ December, 2005

After the conclusion of Rev. Jerome Slack's part-time pastorate, the people of St. Paul's Memorial Church contracted with Rev. James Killian to serve as their stated supply pastor. At this point, the congregation had come to the realization that it was time for them to conclude their ministry as a church of the United Church of Christ. Rev. Killian led them in discussions about winding down the congregation's affairs. They contacted the Reading Association Committee on Ministry and the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference to determine what might be expected of the congregation in its process of dissolution. Conference Minister Rev. F. Russell Mitman encouraged the congregation to consider transferring at dissolution any remaining financial assets to the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference where they would be placed in a dedicated fund for the sole purpose of new church development. The Association's Committee on Ministry asked (1) to be informed of progress throughout the dissolution process; (2) that the leadership of St. Paul's Memorial Church select a temporary "receiving" church to which all members of the congregation would be transferred upon St. Paul's Church's dissolution; and (3) that a closing service be planned for a time other than Sunday morning, so that the clergy and people of the Reading Association could join in and support the people of St. Paul's Memorial Church.

Financial Matters

As with most congregations, St. Paul's Memorial Church's constitution included provision for the disposition of assets upon dissolution of the church. I have never known what was on record at that time (Rev. Slack had actively disparaged the United Church of Christ during his ministry), but Rev. Killian did much to counteract that work during his tenure. In any case, a major thrust of the process he devised with the congregation was to prepare a "will" for the church; the act of deliberating upon the distribution of the church's assets to further the purposes of the congregational ministry and to preserve for the church a legacy that would endure beyond the life of the congregation itself proved salutary. As the people contemplated the approaching death of their church, they took comfort and found purpose in determining the best ways to bequeath their remaining financial assets to other ministries.

As I recall, the final disposition included substantial gifts to our area United Church of Christ institutional ministries, Bethany Children's Home, Phoebe Homes, and especially Lancaster Theological Seminary, as well as a significant gift to the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference. Of course, these allocations were a reflection of St. Paul's Church's traditional mode of dispensing of monies for ministry beyond the local church's domain. There were several other smaller gifts, including a portion designated for St. Andrew's Church, which had been chosen to receive remaining congregational members at the dissolution date.

Church Membership

It was never clear exactly how many people remained on the rolls of St. Paul's Memorial Church as dissolution drew near. As the congregation had dwindled and pastoral leadership had become ever more part-time, accurate and detailed record-keeping fell by the wayside. At some point the Consistory informally determined that the membership would be defined simply as those who continued to gather for worship. In 2005, that number was about twenty; two people dropped out after the decision for dissolution was made. All of the remaining members were quite insistent

that they would not be willing to withdraw from the membership rolls so long as St. Paul's Church continued in existence. When Rev. Killian reported this to the Committee on Ministry, the plan for a "receiving" church was devised. The leadership of St. Paul's Memorial Church were to select any other congregation of the Reading Association for the purpose, and upon the dissolution of St. Paul's Memorial Church, its remaining membership would automatically be transferred there. It was understood that this church would serve as a default church. All St. Paul's people would be free to determine/discover where to make a new church home after dissolution, but there would also be uninterrupted access to pastoral care in the event of any emergency.

Since 1991, St. Paul's Memorial Church had engaged in annual shared worship experiences with one of its daughter churches, St. Andrew's Church, Reading. Because of that relationship, St. Paul's Consistory selected St. Andrew's Church as their receiver. Rev. Killian prepared an official list for the membership transfer, which included fifteen active worshipers plus one shut-in member. Eventually, about half of the St. Paul's people moved on to other church homes. (Most transferred to First Church, and one each moved on to Rosedale Church, St. John's [Hain's] Church, and to Maidencreek Church.)

Closing Worship Service

The Committee on Ministry was cognizant of the special emotional burdens that would attend the planning and conduct of the closing service itself, but the Committee was equally firm in its belief in the importance of gathering for that service many representatives from the wider church to stand together with St. Paul's congregation in celebration and remembrance and to offer comfort and support in the midst of grief. St. Paul's Church representatives were invited to participate as fully as they wished in the planning of the service, and they were assured that if the idea seemed too burdensome that was also perfectly understandable; in that event, a service sensitive to their particular traditions and practices would be prepared on their behalf and offered to them for their review prior to its finalization.

The custom at St. Paul's Memorial Church was to follow the basic outline of the Sunday morning service of the Evangelical and Reformed Church as it appeared beginning on page three of *The Hymnal*, so that was the pattern for the closing service. The musical responses were those in regular use by the people of St. Paul's Church. The congregation always took great pride in their organ, a fine three-manual E. M. Skinner pipe organ that dated from 1928. Although it was in need of a thorough refurbishing in 2005, it had been consistently maintained and was in good working order. Chester Coleman, the church organist, offered a half-hour recital prior to the worship service. Elizabeth Wilson, who had been the choir's long-time soprano soloist, and congregational member Ward Miller each presented a special musical offering. Rev. Killian reviewed the long and distinguished history of St. Paul's Memorial Church, and Conference Minister Rev. Mitman offered a brief homily. The service was well attended, and the difficult emotional reality of the finality of the occasion only welled to the surface toward the end of the service. After declaring the conclusion of the ministry of St. Paul's Memorial Church and prior to the recessional hymn, six representatives of the congregation stood by various symbolic church furnishings to affirm the ongoing ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ, and that was very difficult for all present. On the whole, though, the closing worship service seemed to have been both comforting and reassuring.

Some General Observations

With regard to the issue of church membership rosters, this model provides for the retention on membership rolls of all those persons who were considered to belong to the dissolving congregation. To be sure, there was some significant culling (however haphazard the process) of the rolls prior to dissolution, but this model does not require a positive action by each individual church member to claim a place in a new church home. It was Rev. Mitman's observation that he thought congregations ought not to be too severe in their periodic purging of the membership rolls: he believed that significant life events — the birth of the child, a serious illness, the death of a loved one — can often provide the impetus for a person to seek a renewed connection to church. If the church has already said "no" to the person by dropping him/her from the membership rolls, he/she is much less likely to seek to renew that dropped connection than to look elsewhere. There is virtually no denominational loyalty left among most people today, so it seems unlikely that those set adrift at the time of a congregation's dissolution would focus their search on finding a local United Church of Christ congregation at some future point of crisis in their personal lives. We ought not, then, to be over zealous in inadvertently closing off the possibilities for future renewal of faith commitments among those who have already in their past pledged some allegiance to our United Church of Christ.

As to the closures of the other former city congregations of the United Church of Christ: the process began in 1973, when Second Church merged back into First Church. In the mid-1990's Faith Church closed, but as Rev. William Albright was serving that congregation, its remaining membership was simply folded into his other congregation at Olivet Church. Of course, when St. Stephen's closed, it was merged with St. Luke's Church in Kenhorst to form One U.C.C. When Zion's Church began the process of concluding its congregational ministry, the Reading Association Committee on Ministry asked of the leadership the same three things that had been asked of the people of St. Paul's Memorial Church; Zion's Church chose neither to designate a church "receiver," nor to agree to holding a closing worship service at a time other than Sunday morning.

**Actions to keep First UCC, Reading, open.
January 2015 – May 2016**

Action	Comment	Results
Visit to First UCC, Lancaster. Meeting with their Leadership team. Feb. 2015	We are 15 years too late.	Need commercial kitchen, elevator large enough for a casket, handicapped bathrooms on sanctuary level, handicap seating in the sanctuary, more members, increased giving, more dedicated time to mission & outreach.
PSEC presentation on revitalizing churches. May 2015	Mixed	Congregation must be willing to make changes in all areas of worship and community. Pastor's salary paid by national, so not a legitimate success story.
Reading Berks Council of Churches presentation of church greeting and welcoming. March 2015	Helpful	Requires greeters, more friendly bulletins and congregational training.
Letters to Al Boscov (2) Spring 2015	No reply	Wanted to host a meeting of Our City Reading and tour of church for future use.
Calls to Reading Community Players (2) Spring 2015	No reply to messages.	No reply.
Tammy Mitgang, Realtor with NAI Summer 2015	Very helpful	Suggested possible renters of our space. Conducted and appraised the church and gave us an estimate of \$425K if we are to list the building. That does not include the organ or pianos. She feels it is high as the most any church has sold for in the city is \$300K. Sound mechanicals.
Meeting with County Commissioners Leinbach & Barnhardt Summer 2015	Doesn't meet codes.	No air conditioning/ventilation, code requirements for rental potential.

Action	Comment	Result
Meeting with Reading City Church	Very positive	Conclusion is that they are renting space from us and their mission is the City of Reading and First UCC. They bring life to the church with younger people and are very willing to help us with projects. They are now part of the property committee. They are also meeting with us to see if we can partner with the Y summer programs.
Meeting with the YMCA Spring/Summer 2015	Positive	Director Ken Borkey was very positive about the building. To date we have participated in their summer camp and with the Chef Sprout program for 7th grade students from Southern Middle School. The Y received grant money for the program and we have received a portion of it for kitchen repairs. We look forward to working with them on more programs including RCC, and perhaps RCC can work with them on getting more grants to ultimately help the church.
Meeting with Spiritual Exploration Project Summer/Fall 2015	Mixed	Spearheaded by Rev. Harry Serio, who is actively involved with Spirit on Tap. This project would include the new DoubleTree hotel. Pastor Corrine and S. Schmehl attended three meetings. We are still receiving their email, but are not attending their meetings. Since they are a start-up group the decision was made to stay in the loop, but put our energies to First UCC.
Meeting with St. Peter's UCC, Wilshire, Rev. Kris Hayden & Elders May 2016	Mixed	Purpose of the meeting was to explore possible pulpit exchanges leading to merger and/or combined mission work in the city.

Action	Comment	Result
Meeting with St. Thomas UCC, Reading Spring 2015	Hopeful for a merger.	St. Thomas decided to close and sold the building. They are now worshipping in Teel Chapel at Albright College.
More community involvement via mission outreach.	Very well received.	Would be nice if more people were involved so it isn't always the same people.
Fellowship 1st/3rd Sundays	Well received.	More people are staying and engaging in conversation. There is a sense of community developing among many who stay.
Continuation of Senior Center Program	Very positive	The long-standing program is probably one of the best mission projects First UCC has for bringing new people to the church and involving the congregation in mission. The people who organize it are looking for some new helpers.
Changing the governing body of the church.	Running Better	Prior to the change to a Leadership Team the governing body was a Consistory. It required too many people based on the number of active members attending worship and willing to serve. Consequently, it was difficult to get a quorum. The Leadership Team concept is running better after its second year of existence and since each team has a budget. We also have a quorum for meeting purposes.

Action	Comment	Result
Going from 2 services to one.	Mixed	This change was implemented as a result of a survey to make us more attractive to an incoming pastor and because attendance at the early service was about 8-10 people. The change was not received well. Not so much because there was only was service, but because of the service time change and people not wanting to change their Sunday schedule. The Order of Worship was also changed to reflect both services. The latter change was not received well either. The Order of Worship change was also done to make us more attractive to possible pastoral candidates.
ACTIONS TO LEARN ABOUT OTHER CHURCHS IN SIMILAR SITUATIONS		
Meeting with Rev. Jim Dunn - New Jerusalem UCC		
Meeting with St. John's UCC, Reading (June 2016)		
Meeting with Rev. Bill Worley & Rev. Sharon Morris of PSEC.		
Reading information published about churches and church trends in 21st century.		

First United Church of Christ

611 Washington Street, Reading, PA 19601 (610) 374-8594

Rev. Corrine R. Dautrich, Transitional Pastor

E-mail: office@firstchurchreading.org Website: www.firstchurchreading.org

April 2015

Dear Members and Friends of First UCC,

Greetings from the Leadership Team. We thank you for being part of First UCC, Reading.

We believe that as faithful leaders and stewards of the church, it is important to communicate the status of the financial health of First UCC on a regular basis. As we move into the second quarter of the calendar year, we want to offer an update to you on the financial giving. The following is a snapshot of the offering/expense totals as of March 31, 2015.

Year-to-date Offering – \$19,373.00

Year-to-date Expenses – \$58,615.90

Difference – (\$39,242.90)

The total expense budget for calendar year 2015 is \$223,930.74. The membership of First UCC is 185 people. The congregation is comprised of 150 giving units (offering envelopes for each couple/member). Using these totals, the annual amount for each giving unit would be \$1,492.87. Another way to interpret this, is if each giving unit would contribute \$28.70 per week, or a total of \$124.40 each month, no additional funds would need to be withdrawn from the endowment funds, and/or we could increase our mission projects. However, we do recognize that not everyone will be able to give at these levels, and other members may be able to give more than this illustration. Know that whatever you are able to give is important to the ministry of this faith community.

As you review this information, you will see that offering totals are not meeting expenses. The good news is that we have time to recover from this deficit, but will need your support. We ask that you and your family prayerfully reflect on the abundant blessings God has bestowed upon you in your life. Perhaps you could take some time to discern how God is calling you to “give back”.

We ask that you consider increasing your offerings to First UCC, so that we will be able to remain in covenant together and embrace the mission and ministry of this church family. We are grateful for the various ways our members contribute to the life of the church by offering their time and talent to help carry out the work of the church. Some members sing in the choir, others are handy with their hands and help out with projects. Some members are excellent cooks and others are gifted in leadership qualities.

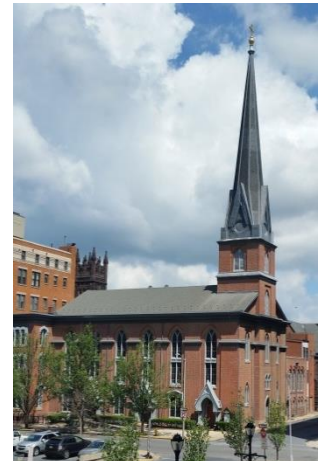
During this period of transition and change, we need both your participation and prayers as we continue our 262 year commitment of ministry to one another, and to the City of Reading. Thank you for your prayerful considerations as we move forward.

Blessings from the Leadership Team:

Lorraine Bell
Pastor Corrine Dautrich
Cindy Diehl
Stuart Johnston

Sandy Kolson
Brian Lineaweaver
David McGaughy, Chair
Geri Nease

Susan Schmehl
John Sellers



First United Church of Christ

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October 15, 2015

Dear Members and Friends,

We hope you had a wonderful summer season and are enjoying the Fall, ready to give thanks for God's blessings.

Enclosed is your third quarter giving statement along with a condensed financial report. Please take time to read and evaluate both reports. The average worship attendance for the 3rd quarter was 35.

We are three quarters of the way through the year and have received only 1/3 of the budgeted income. Please think about ways to help. We want to continue ministering to downtown Reading, but the financial reality will be a driving force in decision making in the future.

Here are some "Joys and Concerns" the Leadership Team is facing.

JOYS

- ❖ We have a dedicated and talented staff.
- ❖ We have a committed leadership team.
- ❖ We have a church that wants to rent space from us.
- ❖ Building maintenance continues.
- ❖ Most custodial work is done by service volunteers.
- ❖ Senior Center continues.
- ❖ Narcotics Anonymous meets here Saturdays.
- ❖ We are working with the YMCA on future programming.
- ❖ We have an endowment.

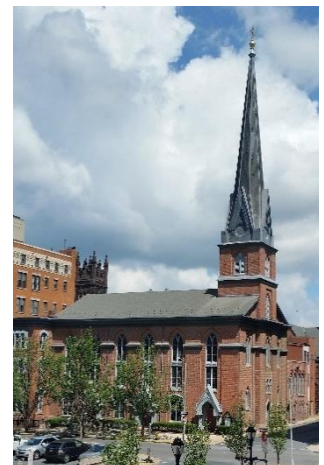
CONCERNS

- We need more church volunteers.
- We need more members to serve.
- There are many logistics that need to be considered to rent out space.
- The building needs paint, exterior and some interior.
- The giving does not match expenses.
- Sunday church attendance is low.
- Souls of Hope is defunct.
- The aging congregation.
- We are withdrawing too much to cover expenses.

To that end we are having an "Ask the Leadership Team Forum" Sunday, October 25th after church during fellowship beginning at 10:30. WE hope you will attend. WE hope to work together to come to consensus. WE hope to see this large church used to fulfill the mission that is so needed in downtown Reading.

Thank you for all you do and have done. We look forward to seeing you in church and hope you will help us plan our future.

God Bless,
The Leadership Team



First United Church of Christ

611 Washington Street, Reading, PA 19601 (610) 374-8594

Rev. Corrine R. Dautrich, Transitional Pastor

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July 2016

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Galatians 5:22, 25

Dear Members and Friends,

We hope you are enjoying the summer season! The above scripture reminds us of the wonderful attributes associated with our daily lives when we focus on the Spirit and live in accordance to God's ways. The Leadership Team is relying on God's Spirit to help guide us as we handle difficult decisions facing the congregation of First United Church of Christ.

We were saddened to learn that Charles (Chuck) Diirner, who was a 3rd generation steeplejack, tragically died in June. He owned CJ Diirner & Sons Roofing Inc. He had completed over two decades of work for the steeple at First at various times. His brother Jacob, will continue the business, and they will be repairing the steeple later this summer.

This summer we are pleased to participate in the camping program again with the YMCA. There will be an Arts & Crafts session for the Kindergarten – 3rd grade children, and there will be a cooking program in the afternoon with 4th-7th graders. We are excited to participate in this each Tuesday in July.

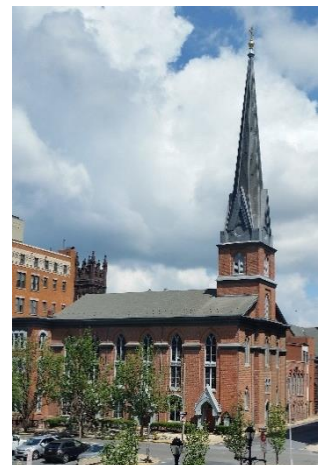
Everyone is invited to the Annual Church Picnic on July 17th. The picnic will be at the church this year. There will be a combined worship with the Reading City Church congregation in the auditorium at 11:00AM. Hot dogs and a covered dish meal to follow. Please bring a dish/dessert to share. Beverages will be provided. Dress is casual. There will be guessing games and games for the kids.

Two quarters of 2016 are history, and enclosed is your giving statement for the second quarter (April – June). After six months, the weekly attendance average is 33, and the weekly offering average is \$1,486. Total offering for six months is \$36,941.80 and expenses have been \$77,596.43.

The Vision Team completed the Dessert & Discussion sessions. Thank you to those members who participated in them and offered feedback.

For all you do and have done, thank you. We ask for your prayers, support and attendance as we continue the ministry in downtown Reading.

God Bless,
The Leadership Team



First United Church of Christ

611 Washington Street, Reading, PA 19601 (610) 374-8594

Rev. Corrine R. Dautrich, Transitional Interim Pastor

E-mail: office@firstchurchreading.org Website: www.firstchurchreading.org

August 22, 2016

Dear Fellow Members,

This letter comes to you as a follow-up from a previous letter dated July 20, 2016, when the Leadership team voted to prepare a resolution to close First United Church of Christ. Enclosed is the resolution that was unanimously passed by the eight members present at our last meeting on August 15, 2016. We ask that you prayerfully read it, and consider it thoughtfully, for it was not considered lightly, or without considerable work, thought and prayer.

First UCC has existed since 1753 and has served its members and the community well. But the time has come to “pass the baton” to our viable tenant, Reading City Church, who will continue to worship and offer ministry from the present location of 611 Washington Street. First UCC will continue to provide ministry through a fund held at the Berks County Community Foundation.

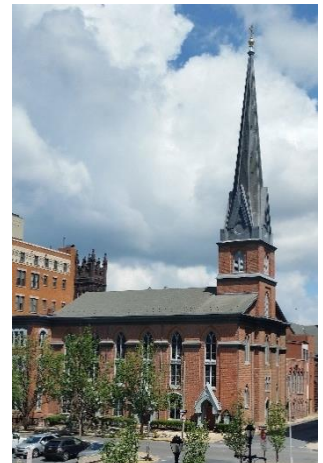
As a member of First UCC, you are encouraged to attend a specially called congregational meeting on Sunday, September 18, 2016. Near the conclusion of the worship service there will be a vote taken to affirm resolution. The vote will be by a paper ballot. Statements will be allowed in the meeting, but questions need to be asked of the Leadership Team prior to the meeting.

After worship there will be fellowship time when our church family can gather and hopefully remember the UCC slogan, "God is still speaking." God is speaking to us and to members of Reading City Church. We pray for God's blessing and continued presence in the City, as they and we work together in ministry.

Friends, Pastor Corrine and the Leadership Team certainly hope you will share yourself in whatever way possible during the next few months. Come and worship. Help us prepare for the future. We are called to "Go forth into the world in peace. Be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good. Render to no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint hearted; support the weak. Help the afflicted. Honor everyone. Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit." May it be so.

In Hope,

For the Leadership Team



FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, READING, PENNSYLVANIA

LEADERSHIP TEAM'S RESOLUTION RECOMMENDING TO THE MEMBERSHIP THAT WORSHIP SERVICES CEASE AND THE CHURCH'S ASSETS BE REDEPLOYED

WHEREAS, in 1753, the German Reformed Church of Reading, Pennsylvania, began ministering to the spiritual needs of men, women and children in the City of Reading and throughout Berks County;

WHEREAS, since 1753, the congregation of the German Reformed Church of Reading, Pennsylvania has been known by different names, specifically First Reformed Church, First Evangelical and Reformed Church, and of late, First United Church of Christ ("First UCC");

WHEREAS, the accomplishments and faithful service of First UCC over the past 263 years have been a credit to the congregation, the community served by First UCC and to the wider church;

WHEREAS, for the past several decades, First UCC has witnessed a steady decline in the number of supporting members who regularly contribute to the ministry of the congregation;

WHEREAS, during the past several years, the decline in supporting members who regularly contribute to the ministry of the congregation has become precipitous;

WHEREAS, the recent precipitous decline in supporting members who regularly contribute to the ministry of the congregation has resulted in First UCC being unable to balance its operating budget without withdrawals of principal from its Endowment Fund;

WHEREAS, the recent precipitous decline in supporting members who regularly contribute to the ministry of the congregation has left First UCC without sufficient resources to effectively carry-out the mission and day-to-day work of the congregation;

WHEREAS, in 2015, to address a decline in supporting members who regularly contribute to the ministry of the congregation, the Leadership Team embarked upon a year and a half study to identify ways to increase membership and to outline a path forward that would allow First UCC to sustain its ministry over both the short and long haul, which assessment included without limitation the following: brainstorming sessions with fellow members of the Leadership Team, co-opted members of the congregation and with representatives of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ; Town Hall meetings with members; discussions with representatives of local non- profits and/or congregations from other denominations interested in sharing First UCC's sanctuary; and reaching out to other churches within the denomination to explore merger and/or cooperative ministry opportunities;

WHEREAS, as a result of that assessment, the Leadership Team has concluded that no viable, sustainable path exists to continue ministering, worshiping and offering mission to the wider church in a meaningful fashion;

WHEREAS, the Leadership Team, after much discernment, thought and prayer, has arrived at the conclusion that it would not be a faithful exercise of our stewardship responsibility to apply First UCC's Endowment Fund to keep the Church open until the last member standing, in effect wasting First UCC's financial assets;

WHEREAS, the Leadership Team believes that worship at the Church must be discontinued and the Church's charitable mission perpetuated by other means;

WHEREAS, to that end, the Leadership Team proposes to hold a final regular weekly worship service on Reformation Sunday, October 30, 2016, and thereafter to (a) donate the Church's real estate and contents, with the possible exception of the Church organ, to First UCC's viable tenant, Reading City Church; and (b) donate the Church's Endowment Fund and other financial assets to the Berks County Community Foundation, to establish indefinitely in the name of First UCC a fund for charitable purposes of benefit to the local community, giving from the newly established fund to be guided in substantial part by support First UCC has given the community historically.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Leadership Team of First UCC, that the membership be asked to approve this Resolution and to authorize the officers of the Leadership Team, in the name of and on behalf of First UCC and its members, to take all steps and to execute all documents that are necessary for or to facilitate the actions just described, including without limitation all filings with the Pennsylvania Corporation Bureau and all documents to convey title to First UCC's real estate, and to negotiate the terms of the donations to Reading City Church and the Berks County Community Foundation last described.

DULY RESOLVED, this 15th day of August 2016, by the Leadership Team of First UCC, in lawful session, duly assembled.

FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

By: _____ Susan
Schmehl, Chair

Attest: _____ Sandy
Kolson, Secretary

First United Church of Christ

611 Washington Street, Reading, PA 19601 (610) 374-8594

Rev. Corrine R. Dautrich, Transitional Interim Pastor

E-mail: office@firstchurchreading.org Website: www.firstchurchreading.org

September 18, 2016

Dear Members,

We hope you are well and enjoying each day to the fullest of your ability.

Today at a congregational meeting the members of First United Church of Christ voted to close the Church. The vote was 40-4 for the resolution. We also voted to change the bylaws and re-create the consistory to comply with PA laws for church incorporation. Results of that vote were 39 for and 4 against.

Speaking to the closure, we don't think anyone wanted it; we do think all who voted for it feel it is the best decision considering our current circumstances. We are pleased another church will inherit our church. We consider using our endowment for mission a positive. Working with the Berks County Community Foundation gives First Church a legacy for ministry and mission in Reading and Berks.

There was a theme today, and we believe it is true. We talked about a new dawn for First UCC and Reading City Church. Yes, we are turning off a light, but it is because darkness is over and dawn is beginning. Help us celebrate the dawn. Come to church. There is still time to share and continue God's work.

God Bless,

For the Leadership Team

PS. If you have any church stories or fun facts you are willing to share we would love to have them. Contact the church office [610-374-8594](tel:610-374-8594); or email at office@firstchurchreading.org. Or contact a Leadership Team member.

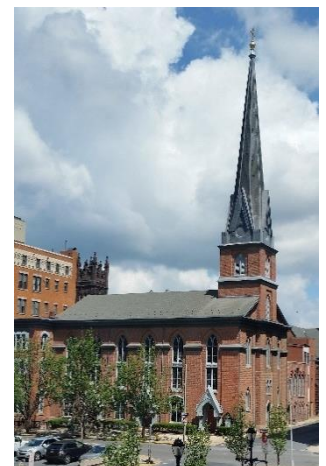
Mark Your Calendar:

Oct. 2 – World Communion Sunday service at 9:30AM

Oct. 9 - David Gross Organ Concert at 3:00PM

Oct. 30 – Final worship service with Holy Communion at 9:30AM

Rev. Charlie Nease preaching. Brunch to follow at The Abraham Lincoln Hotel.



Appendix C: Service of Leave-Taking

NOTES ON THE SERVICE OF LEAVE-TAKING:

Ordinarily the setting for this service is in a building that a congregation is vacating.

Whenever an alternative location needs to be arranged (because of serious damage to a structure, for example) this service may be adapted and altered as necessary.

A pastor of the congregation may serve as the presiding minister for this occasion. The synod bishop or another synod representative, if present, may preside at the service or at the sending.

Choices of wording that are appropriate for either the leaving of a church building or the closing of a congregation are provided in italics. Worship leaders will need to select the wording that is appropriate to the given situation, or prepare similar wording suitable to the context.

The presentation of congregational records and assets is normally used only at the closing of a congregation, although the transferring of assets may be appropriate if a congregation is moving to a new building and handing the existing building over to another congregation.

If the congregation is closing, one or more volumes of congregational records may be brought by the secretary, the president, the pastor, or another congregational representative and handed to a leader of another congregation with which the congregation is being merged, or to a person having oversight of regional church archives.

If the congregation is selling property or handing over assets to another congregation, a synod, or other organizations, information about that transfer may be conveyed at this time.

Representatives of organizations receiving various assets may come forward to have them presented at this time (for example, the symbolic handing over of keys to a building or the presentation of an official document or a bank check).

If it is desired, some worship appointments that can easily be carried in procession at the conclusion of the service, such as a cross, candles, a Bible or lectionary book, communion vessels, banners, and other items, may lead the congregation as they take leave of the building. If the congregation will be taking the items a short distance to a place that it will occupy next (either to a new building or to the facility of another congregation with which it is merging) the procession may continue directly into the other building. If the congregation is closing and is giving all of its property to other entities, including worship appointments, these items may be carried in procession by people who are assuming custody of them, such as representatives of another congregation, or a regional church archives center. Instructions about how the items

are to be handled and where they are to be placed at the conclusion of the procession should be provided to participants ahead of time. Information about where the items are going should also be conveyed to the assembly.

The propers for the Sunday on which the service of leave-taking occurs are normally used.

When the service occurs at a time apart from the primary service/s of the congregation, or on a Sunday for which the color is green, propers may be selected from those listed here.

Prayer of the Day

O God, you have promised through your Son to be with your church forever. We give you thanks for those who founded this community of believers and for the signs of your presence in this congregation throughout its life. As this congregation *name* concludes its time together [in this place], grant that we may ever follow in the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia. We have a build- ,ing from God,
a house not made with hands, eternal ,in the heavens. *Alleluia.* (2 Cor. 5:1)

Suggested Readings and Psalms:

Note: you may wish to incorporate Scriptures from the congregation's dedication or founding.

2 Samuel 7:18-29: *The house of Israel*

Isaiah 43:1-7: *The LORD is with Israel*

Isaiah 66:1-2: *Heaven is the throne and earth is the footstool of God*

Jeremiah 29:1-7: *Israel plants gardens in Babylon*

Psalms 46: *The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.* (Ps. 46:7)

Psalms 90:12-17: *So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.* (Ps. 90:12)

Psalms 103:1-8, 22: *LORD, you are full of compassion and mercy.* (Ps. 103:8)

Psalms 122: *I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."* (Ps. 122: 1)

Psalms 136:1-4, 23-26: *God's mercy endures forever.* (Ps. 136: 1)

Acts 17:22-31: *God does not live in human shrines*

Ephesians 2:11-22: *No longer strangers and aliens, but members of God's household*

1 Peter 2:4-10: *A living stone, chosen and precious*

Revelation 21:1-4, 22-27: *The temple is the Lamb*

Matthew 6:25-34: *Do not worry about tomorrow* Matthew

16:13-20: *On this rock I will build my church*

Mark 10:23-31: *How hard it is for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom*

Luke 9:57-62: *Jesus says, "Follow me"*

John 15:1-11: *Christ the vine*

Suggested Hymns (*hymn numbers below are from ELW, Evangelical Lutheran Worship*):

Note: you may wish to incorporate those hymns that are the most valued by the congregation.

308: O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright!

429: In Our Day of Thanksgiving

441: Oh, Happy Day When We Shall Stand

503-505: A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

524: What Is This Place

526: God Is Here!

579: Lord, You Give the Great Commission 596,

597: My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less

627: O Day Full of Grace

22

632: O God, Our Help in Ages Past

633: We've Come This Far by Faith

639: When We Are Living

645: Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation

647: Glorious Things of You Are Spoken

652: Built on a Rock

654: The Church's One Foundation

656: Blest Be the Tie That Binds

729: The Church of Christ, in Every Age

839, 840: Now Thank We All Our God 858,

859: Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Service of Leave - Taking

For use when leaving a church building or closing a congregation

The service here may replace or supplement elements of the service of Holy Communion.

GATHERING

Address

Following the prayer of the day the presiding minister introduces the purpose of the service in these or similar words.

Today we gather [for the last time] in this place as the people of *name of congregation*. We give thanks for the ministry that has happened in this *building/congregation*, and for the people who have been fed and nurtured in the Christian faith here. Even as we mark the end of an era in one place, we acknowledge how we all are participants in God's mission that continues beyond this day and these walls.

Former pastors and other leaders of the congregation or its related institutions may offer brief remarks or greetings at this time.

WORD

Thanksgiving for the Means of Grace

Following the sermon and the hymn of the day, the presiding minister addresses the congregation in these or similar words.

At the dedication of a church building, it is customary to ask God's blessing on the places of the word and sacraments. Today we return to these symbols of God's grace in our lives. Because proclaiming the word and celebrating the sacraments are the heart of a congregation's ministry, we give thanks for the ways that God has nurtured this congregation throughout the years and has led us to serve others in Christ's name.

The presiding minister may go to each of the three primary areas where the means of grace are offered in worship: the places of the word, of baptism, and of the sacramental meal. When the space around each of these centers is large enough to accommodate all worshippers who are present, they may be invited to gather in each of those respective places.

At the place of the word

Let us pray.

O God, your mighty word at the dawn of creation
breathed life into the earth and all of its inhabitants. By
the gift of your incarnate Word in Jesus,
you brought good news of life and salvation to all humankind.
Through your word proclaimed in worship here,
this congregation has been challenged and healed. Let
your voice, which has sounded in this place,
echo in our lives as we proclaim your message of peace into
the places you will send us;
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

At the place of baptism

O God, through the flood in the time of Noah, and
through the waters of the Red Sea,
you saved your people of old.
Through the waters of baptism in this place,
your people have been born to new life
and have been commissioned for service in Christ's name.
May all the baptized continue to give witness to
your saving grace throughout the world; through
Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

At the place of the meal

O God, through manna on a wilderness journey
and through loaves of bread multiplied on a hillside,
you fed people who needed sustenance for their bodies and souls.
May all who have been nourished here with the body and blood of Christ give
themselves away as food for the hungry.
May all who have feasted here welcome others to the banquet of salvation;
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Prayers of intercession are prepared locally for the occasion and include petitions for the church, those in need, and all of God's creation.

One or more of the following petitions may be included in the prayers of intercession.

For the one holy catholic and apostolic church in all times and places, of which this congregation and its building have been a part, we give our thanks and praise.

For the men and women who founded this congregation, who made personal sacrifices in order for it to grow and flourish, and who used their talents and skills in building up a community of faith, we give our thanks and praise.

For this congregation's ministries throughout its life, its gatherings for praise and prayer, its faithful use of the means of grace, and its study of the scriptures, we give our thanks and praise.

For the work of mission this congregation has supported

{here specific names of global mission and relief agencies may be mentioned}

, for our local partners of ministry

[here names of area ecumenical organizations and local mission efforts may be mentioned]

, and for all the lives that have been affected by God's work through us.

For this building that has sheltered *name of congregation* for *number of years*, that the memory of this place will continue to inspire devotion to the God who makes all things possible.

For all who hold special attachments to this congregation [and to this building]; for those who have been baptized, nurtured in faith, confirmed, or married in this place;

that the Holy Spirit's gifts continue to sustain them

even as this congregation's outward expression

takes on a new form / comes to a conclusion. For

the members of this congregation,

who will continue gathering as a people of God in a *new place / other communities of faith*,

that today will mark not only the end of an era

but also the beginning of new opportunities for worship and service.

For a congregation that is merging:

For *name/s of other congregation/s*,

with which members of *name of this congregation* are joining,

that various gifts for ministry may be offered and shared,

and that renewal in life and mission may flourish.

For the *name of synod*, its present and past bishops, staff, and other leaders

who have helped this congregation throughout the years,

especially as they have led us to be faithful in our proclamation of the gospel.

For all who have been a part of the ministry of this congregation throughout its life,

those who have remained constant in the face of challenges,
those who have moved away,

25

and all who have died and now rest in you, we give you thanks,
rejoicing that we are joined together in one eternal communion.

MEAL

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Gracious God, at your table you strengthen us for service
wherever you will send us.

As we leave this place that has been a home for worship and mission,
help us to gather in *our new setting / other settings*
that will provide further opportunities for our life and ministry.
Welcome us forever into your embrace,
until that day when all your people throughout the world
worship together around the throne of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

SENDING

CONGREGATIONAL RECORDS AND ASSETS

When a congregation is closing, A representative of the closing congregation speaks the following or similar words while handing over official congregational records.

In remembrance and with thanksgiving, we hand over the documented history and official records that symbolize the joys and sorrows of the people of God in this place. Receive and preserve them so that the ministry of this congregation may be remembered.

Information about the transfer of congregational assets may be conveyed at this time.

DECLARATION ON LEAVE-TAKING

The presiding minister addresses the assembly. When present, a synod bishop or another synod representative may offer the declaration.

At the leaving of a building

With thanks to God for the work accomplished in this place,
I declare this building to be vacated for the purposes of *name of congregation*,
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

May the witness of the people
who have ministered here in the name of Jesus Christ
continue to live on as they leave these walls and begin life in a new place.

Amen.

Or

At the closing of a congregation

With thanks to God for the work accomplished in this place,
I declare this congregation *name of congregation* to be closed
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

May the witness of the people
who have ministered in the name of Jesus Christ through *name of congregation*

be undiminished and continue as they leave this place.

Amen.

BLESSING

The presiding minister proclaims God's blessing in these or similar words.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,
in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him

who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Almighty

God,

Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit,

bless you now and forever.

Amen.

DISMISSAL

The assisting minister sends the assembly into mission.

Let us go forth in peace,

in the name of Christ. Amen.

PROCESSION

A hymn, psalm, or instrumental music may accompany the assembly as it processes out of the worship space with primary worship vessels and objects (e.g., chalice and paten, pulpit bible, processional and/or altar cross, baptismal shell...).

Note: If you have a closing procession, give careful thought to where the worship items will go after the end of the service.

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*Celebrating the Life of First United Church of Christ
611 Washington Street, Reading, PA
October 30, 2016
9:30 AM*



First United Church of Christ
Reed and Washington Streets, Reading, PA

* Those who are able please stand

Moment of Joys and Concerns

Welcome to Reading Association Sister Church Representatives

Passing of the Peace

Prelude – “As the Deer”

arr. by Douglas E. Wagner

Silent Prayer before worship

We do not know how to pray, but the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. Our hearts, our hands, our voices are yours, O God. Increase our faith, sustain our hope, and send us out to do your work and show your love. In the name of Jesus Christ, who is our all in all. Amen

***Opening Hymn: “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past”**

No. 63

***Solemn Declaration**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Introit

Leader: The Lord of Hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed: and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

Call to Confession

Beloved in the Lord, let us draw near with a true heart, and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching him, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to grant us forgiveness.

Confession (in unison)

Almighty and most merciful God, we humble ourselves before you under a deep sense of our unworthiness and guilt. We have grievously sinned against you in thought, in word, and in deed. We have come short of your glory, we have broken your commandments, and turned aside every one of us from the way of life. Yet now, O most merciful God, hear us when we call upon you with penitent hearts, and for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us. Pardon our sins; take away our guilt; and grant us your peace. Purify us, by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, from all inward uncleanness, and make us able and willing to serve you in newness of life, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Kyrie (sung)

No. 518

Leader: Lord, have mercy upon us.

People: *Lord, have mercy upon us.*

Leader: Christ, have mercy upon us.

People: *Christ, have mercy upon us.*

Leader: Lord, have mercy upon us.

People: *Lord, have mercy upon us.*

Assurance of Pardon

Hearken now unto the comforting assurance of the grace of God, promised in the Gospel to all that repent and believe: if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Amen.

Praise

Leader: Oh Lord, open thou my lips.

People: And my mouth shall show forth thy praise.

***Gloria Patri**

No. 493

Collect for the Day – Let us pray.

Almighty God, who, through the preaching of thy servants, the blessed reformers, hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine forth; grant, we beseech thee, that, knowing its saving power, we may faithfully guard and defend it against all enemies, and joyfully proclaim it, to the salvation of souls and the glory of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. Amen

The Reading of the Scriptures

Old Testament: 2 Kings 2:1-14

Epistle Reading: Acts 1:6-10

Gospel Reading: Luke 24:1-9

Sermon – “Passing the Mantle”

Rev. Charles S. Nease Jr.

***Nicene Creed (in unison)**

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God; begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the prophets. And we believe in one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

In the Midst of New Dimensions

391

Julian Rush, 1985: alt.

Gen. 9:12-16; Exod. 13:21-22; Num. 14:14

C C/B F C F Am7 Dm7 G7sus4 G7

1 In the midst of new di-men-sions, in the face of chang-ing ways,
 2 Through the flood of starv-ing peo-ple, war-ring fac-tions and de-spair,
 3 As we stand a world di-vid-ed by our own self-seek-ing schemes,
 4 We are man and we are wom-an, all per-sua-sions, old and young,
 5 Should the threats of dire pre-dic-tions cause us to with-draw in pain,

C C/B F C F Am7 Dm7 G C

Who will lead the pil-grim peo-ples wan-dering in their sep-arate ways?
 Who will lift the ol-ive branch-es? Who will light the flame of care?
 Grant that we, your glob-al vil-lage, might en-vi-sion wid-er dreams,
 Each a gift in your cre-a-tion, each a love song to be sung,
 May your blaz-ing phoe-nix spir-it res-ur-rect the church a-gain.

Refrain
 Am Em F C F C G7 C Dsus4 D7 G7sus4 G7 Am

God of rain-bow, fier-y pil-lar, lead-ing where the ea-gles soar, We your

Em F C F C/E F C/E F C/E Dm7 G7 C

peo-ple, ours the jour-ney now and ev-er, now and ev-er, now and ev-er - more.

Julian Rush, an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church, has spent more than a decade as director of the Colorado AIDS Project. He wrote this hymn on the theme of "diversity" for a meeting of the Rocky Mountain Conference (United Methodist).

Tune: NEW DIMENSIONS 8.7.8.7. with refrain
 Julian Rush, 1985
 Arr. The New Century Hymnal, 1994

Used with permission.

Pastoral Prayer

Silent Prayer

Prayer of Chrysostom

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee, and dost promise that where two or three are gathered together in thy Name, thou wilt grant their requests, fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them, granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. Amen.

Invitation to the Offering

Offertory – “Faith Begins By Letting Go”

Louise Adams and Lorraine Bell, Vocal Duet

(Words of the song can be found on page 14 in the bulletin)

***Doxology (unison)**

No. 550

Prayer of Dedication (unison)

**Eternal God,
may these gifts be signs of your grace,
and may our lives show forth the coming kingdom,
that when Christ comes again he will find faith on earth.
Amen.**

The Holy Eucharist

Invitation

Leader: Beloved, in Christ, the Gospel tells us that on the first day of the week Jesus Christ was raised from death, appeared to Mary Magdelene, on that same day sat at the table with two disciples, and was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

People: This is the joyful feast of the people of God. Men and women, youth and children, come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, to gather about Christ's table.

Leader: This table is for all Christians who wish to know the presence of Christ and to share in the community of God's people.

The Great Thanksgiving

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to God.

Leader: Let us give thanks to God Most High.

People: It is right to give God thanks and praise

Leader: We give thanks to you, Holy One, almighty and eternal God, always and everywhere, through Jesus Christ, the only one begotten by you before all time, by whom you made the world and all things. We bless you for your continual love and care for every creature. We praise you for forming us in your image and for calling us to be your people.

Although we rebelled against your love, you did not abandon us in our sin, but sent to us prophets and teachers to lead us into the way of salvation. Above all, we give you thanks for the gift of Jesus, our only Savior, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

In the fullness of time you came to us and received our nature in the person of Jesus, who in obedience to you, by suffering on the cross, and being raised from the dead, delivered us from the way of sin and death. We praise you that Jesus now reigns with you in glory and ever lives to pray for us.

Seraphic Hymn (No. 522)

**Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth,
Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory;
Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord,
Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest!**

Words of Institution Prayer of Consecration

Lord's Prayer (unison)

***The Agnus Dei (No. 525)**

**O Christ, thou Lamb of God, that takest away
The sin of the world,
Have mercy upon us.
O Christ, thou Lamb of God, that takest away
The sin of the world,
Have mercy upon us.
O Christ, thou Lamb of God, that takest away
The sin of the world,
Grant us thy peace. Amen**

Leader: Come for all things are now ready.

The Communion

Communion will be served by the ushers to your pews. Children who do not commune, will be offered a blessing.

Communion Music- “How Beautiful”

Twila Paris

***Prayer of Thanksgiving (in unison)**

Almighty and eternal God, you have fed us with the Holy Communion of the body and blood of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ; we thank you for this gift, by which you assure us that we are members of the mystical body of your Son and heirs through hope of your everlasting kingdom. So assist us by your Holy Spirit that we may grow daily in knowledge of your truth, and in faithfulness to your will, abiding in that fellowship in which all your saints have part, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

Litany of Thanksgiving and Passing the Mantle

Leader: Let us offer our thanks to God for the life together as First United Church of Christ and for the blessings God has brought us through this sacred place of worship. For this historic building, the generations of leaders and teachers, and the many activities and fellowship opportunities that have happened here.

All: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

Leader: *At the cross.* Almighty God, this cross has served as a visual symbol of our faith. This cross is a reminder that death is a part of life and the Christian hope that is ours, transcends that experience. It symbolizes Christ's promise of a new life in the here and now. It has reminded us of the ministry to which we are all called.

All: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

Leader: *Looking to the organ.* Almighty God, music has brought us much joy generation after generation. The rich tradition of pipe organ music, along with the choirs, and handbells and vocal, has been a powerful blessing.

Thank you to all members of the choirs who gave of their time and talents Sunday after Sunday, year after year. The gifts of music have helped us experience your presence in this place.

All: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

Leader: *At the Baptismal Font.* Almighty God, at this font, you have received our children and loved ones and made them one with your Son, Jesus Christ, and with us, the Body of Christ. You have given them, as you have given to us, your Holy Spirit, that faith, hope, wisdom and love might abide in all your people. We praise and thank you for the holy waters that have flowed from this font into each of us and out into the world as a river of life that carries your love.

All: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

Leader: *At the pulpit.* Holy God, from this pulpit, we have heard your powerful Word proclaimed. We have heard the stories of faith and the gospel preached. Through your Word of preaching, you have called us. Through your Word of teaching, you have taught us. Through your Word of law and grace, you have guided us. In your Word made flesh, you gave us our savior, Jesus Christ. We praise and thank you for your powerful Word that has been and will continue to be the light to our path and the guide for our lives.

All: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

Leader: *At the altar.* Gracious God, at this table, you have welcomed us to the banquet of Our Lord Savior and given us a foretaste of the feast to come. Your Spirit has united us in a feast of love through the sharing of Christ's body and blood. We have been strengthened for our mission, and for our daily lives and sent us out to share Christ's love with all the world. We have been sustained by the grace and favor shown us through the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and for the hope of sharing this feast with all the saints at the heavenly banquet.

All: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

Leader: And now the time has come when we declare our faith in you by passing these symbols over to the ministry and care of Reading City Church. We ask God, you bless the members of their congregation.

Offer your presence, strength and courageous witness to the work they are doing in the City of Reading. As we pass the keys to this building and these symbols of faith, we do so with confidence and assurance of your steadfast hope and commitment to Christ's mission.

Pastor Clark McHenry, Reading City Church: For all of these things and for so much more, we give you God, our heartfelt thanks and praise. May we continue to be faithful stewards of this holy space as we declare our faith in Christ's name.

Leader: Let us pray. Eternal God, you watch over our going out and our coming in: bless this time of ending and beginning. Surround your people in every time and place: keep us close in your love. Accompany your people in times of joy and in times of trial: prosper all that has been done to your glory. Help all of us to live with courage and gladness in the future you give to us. **Amen**

Leader: To you be all honor and glory, Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever! **Amen!**

Memories from the Past
Fredriksen
Pastor (1977-1986)

A letter from Rev. Dennis

Looking into the Future
Pennsylvania Southeast Conference Minister

Rev. William P. Worley

***Hymn – "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"**

No. 281

***Commission – Benediction**

***Nunc Dimittis**

No. 536

Postlude- “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

Diane Bish

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Part of the liturgy for today was written by the Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (adapted).

+++++

Participants in Today’s service

Rev. Corrine R. Dautrich, Transitional Pastor

Rev. Charles S. Nease Jr., Preacher

Rev. William P. Worley, PSEC Conference Minister

Ms. Kristen Diehl, Organist

Ms. Lorraine Bell, Alto & Ms. Louise Adams, Soprano, Special Music

Mr. Alex Scheidt, Lector

Ms. Kayla Vitabile, Acolyte

Mr. Terry Diehl, Usher

Ms. Cindy Diehl, Usher

Mr. David Beane, Usher

Mr. Craig Scheidt, Usher

Mr. Robert Alba, Greeter

Mr. John Sellers, Communion Server

Mr. David Beane, Communion Server

Ms. Sandy Kolson, Communion Server

Ms. Louise Adams, Communion Server

ALTAR FLOWERS

Today's altar flowers are a gift from the members of First UCC in honor of Ms. Kristen Diehl with gratitude for her musicianship and service.

Please sign the “Thank You” card in the Narthex for Pastor Corrine for her leadership at First UCC.

**UNITED
CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



Communitas

PENNSYLVANIA SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE

1441 Laura Lane, Suite 100, Pottstown, PA 19464
484-949-8774

October 30, 2016

First UCC, Reading, "Celebrates" Its Final Worship Service

On this Reformation Sunday, October 30th, First UCC, in downtown Reading celebrates 263 years of ministry with a final worship service.



We celebrate an impressive **history**. We requested land from the sons of William Penn. Worship began in a log cabin built in 1753, a stone church in 1761 and a larger brick church in 1832. Among the historic treasures is the original deed signed by Conrad Weiser, a trustee of the congregation. It served as a hospital for wounded in the Revolutionary War. Members were officers in George Washington's army. For the next few decades, First UCC started 12 other churches and became known as the Mother of the Reformed Church in Reading and

the surrounding area.

We celebrate its **ministries**. Mission & Outreach has supported local agencies. Meals are served at the local shelter and the church hosts AA and NA meetings. In 1982, a Senior Center began, which provides fellowship, trips and meals to members of the church and the community.

The Music Ministry has always been important. A concert series was provided to the community. The largest organ in Berks County will be expertly played today, and years of choral and handbell choirs will be remembered.

We celebrate its **future**. The endowment fund will be used to continue mission in downtown Reading. The Senior Center will continue to bring joy and fellowship to its members. Another congregation committed to the mission of downtown Reading will worship in the beautiful sanctuary.

We celebrate the accomplishments of all the generations of members who have gone before. Cherished are the memories of worshiping in the church.



*New Jerusalem
United Church of Christ
33 Lyons Road, Fleetwood, PA*



*Closing Worship Service
November 19, 2017*
CLOSING WORSHIP SERVICE

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2017

2:30PM

***All who are able, please stand. Congregation responses are in bold type.**

PRELUDE

WORDS OF WELCOME

***SHARING THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

A time to greet each other, saying ... "Peace be with you."

And to offer the response ... "And also with you."

HYMN "For the Beauty of the Earth"

DIX

Folliott S. Pierpoint, 1864

1. For the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies,

*Refrain: Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.*

2. For the wonder of each hour
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flow'r,
Sun and moon, and stars of light,

*Refrain: Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.*

3. For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth, and friends above,
For all gentle thoughts and mild,

*Refrain: Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.*

***CALL TO WORSHIP** (1 Thess 5, Matt 25)

Pastor: God calls out: "Come and enter my joy!"

People: We gather in thankfulness this day,

as servants of God's blessings.

Pastor: God calls out: "Come, stay awake and be alert!"

**People: We gather in expectation this day,
as children of God's light and love.**

Pastor: God calls out: "Come and share in my happiness!"

People: We gather in faith this day to worship our God.

***PRAYER OF INVOCATION**

Pastor: Our Lord and our God, our Greatest Good and our Living Source –

People: Whether in safety or in risk,

Pastor: Whether the path is well lit or in shadow,

**People: Whether we encounter approval or face insult – we look to you
for guidance.**

Pastor: Some of us seek to understand death, loss, and the suffering of our world.

People: Some of us seek mercy and rescue from the misery we face.

Pastor: Some of us seek to know what to do with the many gifts you have given us.

**All: Help us to turn our eyes to you, trusting that you will answer us
with your mercy, your salvation, and your joy. Amen**

***CALL TO CONFESSION**

Let us turn to the Lord our God, our greatest good and our Living Source, as we confess our sins.

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION (1 Thes. 5, Matt 25)**

Pastor: Merciful God, we are aware of the ways our faith falls short.

People: In our pride, we wait too long to ask for your help.

Pastor: In our self-absorption, we ask that our will, not your will, be done.

**People: Even when you rescue us from our misery,
we quickly return to our careless ways.**

Pastor: Aware of these failures, we turn our eyes to you,
trusting in your love and mercy.

***KYRIE (spoken/sung responsively)**

Pastor: Lord, have mercy upon us.

People: (*sing*) Lord, have mer-cy up-on us.

Pastor: Christ, have mercy upon us.

People: (*sing*) Christ, have mer-cy up-on us.

Pastor: Lord, have mercy upon us.

People: (*sing*) Lord, have mer-cy up-on us.

***ASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE**

Friends, you do not live in the night or belong to the dark. You have obtained life and salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. In him, you belong to the day. Amen

GLORIA PATRI (*sung* in Unison)

Glo-ry be to the Fa-ther, and to the Son, and to the
Ho-ly Ghost; as it was in the be-gin-ning, is now,
and ev-er shall be, world with-out end. A-men.

TIME FOR PRAYER

Silent prayer

THE PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom
come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our
daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And
lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the
kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE (*sung* in Unison)

Hear our prayer, O Lord; Hear our prayer, O Lord;
Hear our prayer, O Lord, And grant us Thy peace. Amen.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

Old Testament: Psalm 90:1-12

(pg. 929-930)

Epistle Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
1841)

(pg. 1840-

READING OF THE GOSPEL

Announcement of the Gospel Lesson

***Response: (*sing*) Glo-ry be to Thee, O Lord.**

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 25:14-30
1542)

(pg. 1541-

***Response: (*sing*) Praise be to Thee, O Christ.**

***HYMN “We Praise Thee, O God”**

KREMSER

Julia Buckley Cady Cory, 1902

1. We praise Thee, O God, our Redeemer, Creator,
In grateful devotion our tribute we bring.

We lay it before Thee, we kneel and adore Thee,
We bless Thy holy Name, glad praises we sing.

2. We worship Thee, God of our fathers, we bless Thee:
Through life's storm and tempest our Guide has Thou been.
When perils o'er take us, escape Thou wilt make us,
And with Thy help, O Lord, life's battles we win.

3. With voices united our praises we offer,
And gladly our anthems of worship we raise.
Thy strong arm will guide us, our God is beside us,
To Thee, our great Redeemer, forever be praise. Amen

WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE FROM PREVIOUS PASTORS

Rev. David Lawton	1994
Rev. David Siegfried	2001 – 2007
Rev. Dr. James Killian	2007 – 2010
Rev. Dennis Schappell	2011 – 2012
Rev. Corrine Dautrich	2017

CALL TO OFFERING

OFFERTORY (*Today's offering will be donated to the Brandywine Heights Community Task Force which is addressing the opioid issue in our community.*)

***OFFERING RESPONSE** (*sung in Unison*)

We give Thee but Thine Own, What e'er the gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone, A trust, O Lord, from Thee. Amen

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION** (*Unison*)

Living Source of every blessing, the gifts you give us are not trinkets to be hidden away. Use these gifts for your service, that the blessings we have received from your hand may increase as they go forth to bring grace to the world. Make our hearts generous, we pray, for you have been generous with us. Amen

HOLY COMMUNION

*Please know any and all who seek the love of Jesus Christ are invited
to take part in the sacrament of Holy Communion.*

GREAT THANKSGIVING

Pastor: Christ be with you.

People: And also with you.

Pastor: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to God.

Pastor: Let us give thanks to the Holy One.

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right and good, and a joyful thing always and everywhere to give our thanks to you, who brought the Israelites from slavery to freedom, giving them water from the rock and leading them through the wilderness.

We give thanks for your presence among us – flickering like fire in the changing color of leaves, glimmering like golden fish below the surface of a stream, fluttering like doves in the beating of our hearts.

We give thanks for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who taught us to live for the sake of others, and to put aside all thought of personal gain and earthly prestige.

Holy are you, and holy is your son, Jesus, who emptied himself of divinity and walked among us, teaching and healing and giving himself up for the healing of the world.

On the night in which he gave himself to us, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples, saying: “Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

When the supper was over, Jesus took the cup, offered thanks and gave it to the disciples, saying: “Drink from this, all of you; this is my life in the new covenant, poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

And so, in remembrance of your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be the body of Christ, present with Christ’s love for the world. God of water and wilderness, God of clouds and rocks and fire and smoke, God of humility and compassion, we praise and thank you for all that you have done. Amen

***BREAKING OF THE BREAD AND POURING OF THE CUP**

THE COMMUNION

Communion will be served in the pews. Please hold the bread and the cup after receiving it. When all have been served we will partake together. Please know that the inner ring of cups contain grape juice, the remaining cups contain wine.

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

All praise is yours, O God. You bring us to this table as sisters and brothers. Lead us now, through each of our moments, to that glorious day when all your children will gather as your one family. Amen

FAREWELL OF A LOCAL CHURCH TO ASSOCIATION

Moderator: We are here to bring our covenant to a close. The people of God known as New Jerusalem UCC and the churches of God gathered in the Covenant Association accept that by the grace of God our relationship in the Association has come to an end.

President of New Jerusalem UCC Consistory: We, the people of God in New Jerusalem UCC, have faithfully participated and shared in the life of the historic East Berks Association, and the newly formed Covenant Association over the past many years. We ask to have our standing removed in the Association.

Vice Moderator: Members of the Covenant Association, let us acknowledge and give thanks for the years that New Jerusalem UCC has lived in covenant with the Association.

Association Members: We gather to share the love of Christ with the members of New Jerusalem United Church of Christ. We give thanks for the many years of ministry this church has offered to the local community, the Association and wider church. We release your standing in the Covenant Association and will pray for the work that will continue in this building through the ministry of The RealChurch.

PASSING THE SYMBOLS OF THE CHURCH

Pastor: Let us offer our thanks to God for our life together as New Jerusalem United Church of Christ and for the blessings God has brought us through this sacred place of worship. For the generations of leaders and teachers, and the many activities and fellowship opportunities that have happened here.

All: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

Pastor: *At the cross.* Almighty God, this cross has served as a visual symbol of our faith. This cross is a reminder that death is a part of life and the Christian hope that

is ours, transcends that experience. It symbolizes Christ's promise of a new life in the here and now. It has reminded us of the ministry to which we are all called.

All: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

Pastor: *At the Baptismal Font.* Almighty God, at this font, you have received our children and loved ones and made them one with your Son, Jesus Christ, and with us, the Body of Christ. You have given them, as you have given to us, your Holy Spirit, that faith, hope, wisdom and love might abide in all your people. We praise and thank you for the holy waters that have flowed from this font into each of us and out into the world as a river of life that carries your love.

All: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

Pastor: *At the pulpit.* Holy God, from this pulpit, we have heard your powerful Word proclaimed. We have heard the stories of faith and the gospel preached. Through your Word of preaching, you have called us. Through your Word of teaching, you have taught us. Through your Word of law and grace, you have guided us. In your Word made flesh, you gave us our savior, Jesus Christ. We praise and thank you for your powerful Word that has been and will continue to be the light to our path and the guide for our lives.

All: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

Pastor: *At the altar.* Gracious God, at this table, you have welcomed us to the banquet of Our Lord Savior and given us a foretaste of the feast to come. Your Spirit has united us in a feast of love through the sharing of Christ's body and blood. We have been strengthened for our mission, and for our daily lives and sent us out to share Christ's love with all the world. We have been sustained by the grace and favor shown us through the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and for the hope of sharing this feast with all the saints at the heavenly banquet.

All: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

Pastor: And now the time has come when we declare our faith in you by passing these symbols over to the ministry and care of The RealChurch. We ask God, you bless the members of their congregation. Offer your presence, strength and courageous witness to the work they are doing in Berks County. As we pass the keys to this building and these symbols of faith, we do so with confidence and assurance of your steadfast hope and commitment to Christ's mission.

Pastor, The RealChurch: For all of these things and for so much more, we give you, God, our heartfelt thanks and praise. May we continue to be faithful stewards of this holy space as we declare our faith in Christ's name.

Pastor: Let us pray. Eternal God, you watch over our going out and our coming in: bless this time of ending and beginning. Surround your people in every time and

place: keep us close in your love. Accompany your people in times of joy and in times of trial: prosper all that has been done to your glory. Help all of us to live with courage and gladness in the future you give to us. **Amen**

GIFTS FOR COMMUNITY OUTREACH Mr. Bruce Schlegel

PRESENTATION TO PSEC Ms. Jane McAndrew

LOOKING FORWARD WITH HOPE Rev. William Worley

***BENEDICTION**

Pastor: Go forth as children of light, as children of the day,
 Go into the world, knowing that God's gifts
 Of faith, love and hope shield you
 As you share those gifts with others.
 Beloved, go forth to share in God's joy.

All: Thanks be to God!

***THREEFOLD AMEN**

***HYMN "The Church's One Foundation"**

AURELIA

Samuel J. Stone, 1866

1. The Church's one Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation by water and the word:
From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy Bride;
With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.
2. Elect from every nation, Yet one o'er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation one Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy Name she blesses, Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.
3. 'Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,
She waits in consummation of peace for evermore;
Till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,
And the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.
4. Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won:
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we,
Like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with Thee. Amen

POSTLUDE

From The Abingdon Worship Annual 2017. Copyright @ 2016 by Abingdon Press. Used by permission.

Part of the liturgy for today was written by the Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (adapted).

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PARTICIPANTS IN TODAY'S SERVICE

Rev. Corrine Dautrich, Supply Pastor

Ms. Jo Ann Rauhauser, Organist

Dr. Rolf Mayrhofer, Lector

Carter Zavadel, Acolyte

Lily Zavadel, Greeter

Mr. Bruce Schlegel, Mr. Jim Keller, Mr. Clyde Faust,

Ms. Jane McAndrew, Ushers and Communion Servers

Rev. Joseph Motz, Covenant Association Moderator

Mr. Thomas Wright, Vice Moderator, Covenant Association

Mr. Bruce Schlegel, Consistory President

Ms. Jane McAndrew, Elder

Pastor Earl Wise, Pastor, The RealChurch

Rev. William Worley, PSEC Conference Minister

ALTAR FLOWERS

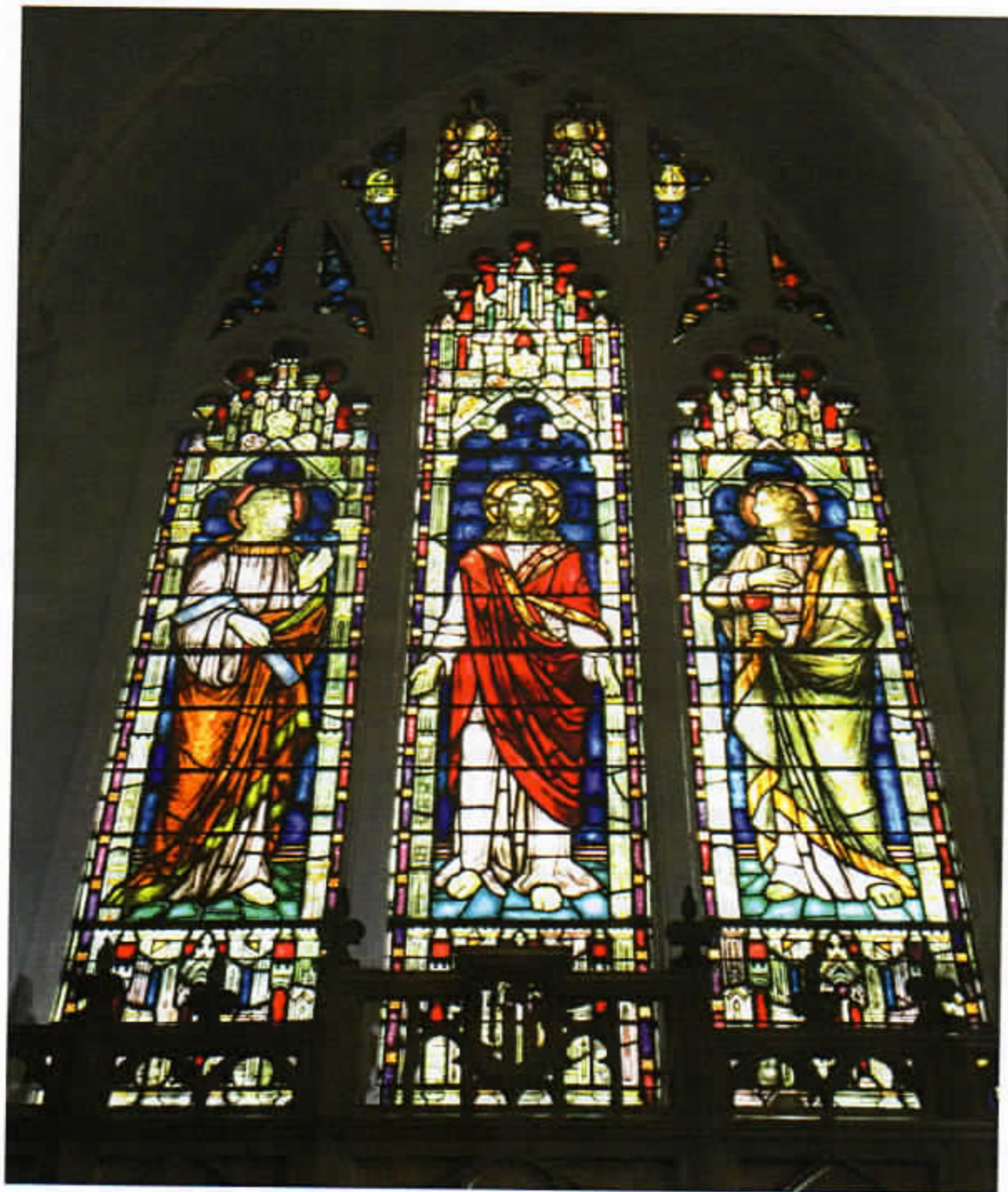
Today's altar flowers are presented by Linda Seyler in memory of her uncle Jacob Seyler.

MEMBERS OF NEW JERUSALEM want to thank you for joining us in today's closing worship service. We have appreciated your prayers and support during this process.



New Jerusalem UCC Mission Statement

We proclaim our belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and we strive to live out Jesus' principles in our daily lives. We will worship and glorify God while sharing our faith and witness.



125 Years

Celebrating the Life of St. Thomas United Church of Christ

11th & Windsor Streets, Reading Pa.

125 Years

Celebrating the Life of St. Thomas United Church of Christ

The Rev. Paul Clark, The Rev. Charles Nease,
The Rev. David Lawton, participants
Anita L. Focht, organist

PRELUDE: Brethren, We Have Come to Worship

GREETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

INVITATION TO WORSHIP:

ALL: People of God, we gather today to mark the closing of St. Thomas United Church of Christ and to remember with thanksgiving the many ways in which God has blessed our ministry and our lives in this place. Let us lift our voices in praise and song to the One who alone will continue to care for and sustain us in this life and in the next.

HYMN NO. 9: "Our God, our Help in Ages Past"

DIALOG OF PRAISE:

LEADER: Give praise to the One who formed us and gathered us as the Church in this place.

ALL: Praise to the God of Israel, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ!

LEADER: Give praise to the One who has blessed us and given us our years of ministry.

ALL: Praise to our God for all his blessings. Give thanks to God's holy name.

LEADER: God has caused his name to dwell in our midst.

ALL: God has stirred our hearts and enriched us by his presence.

LEADER: For 125 years, God has nurtured and fed us in this place.

ALL: For 125 years, God has shown us his love in this place.

LEADER: For 125 years, God has given himself in Word and Sacrament in this place.

ALL: For 125 years, God has empowered our faith through his Holy Spirit.

LEADER: Praise to the Lord for 125 years! Praise him in all times and seasons!

ALL: Praise to the Lord for all our days. Praise him for evermore!

CHORAL RESPONSE: (Tune: LASST UNS ERFREUEN)

Let all things their cre-a-tor bless, And wor-ship him in hum-ble-ness,
O praise him, Al-le-lu-ia! Praise, praise the Fa-ther, praise the Son,
And praise the Spir-it, Three in One.
O praise him, O praise him, Al-le-lu-ia, Al-le-lu-ia, Al-le-lu-ia!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

LEADER: The Lord be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

LEADER: Let us pray.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe. You fill the entire world with your presence; your name is to be hallowed through all the earth. Receive our praise and thanksgiving for the blessings, help, and comfort which you have bestowed upon your people in this house. Continue your mercies to your Church, that we may be conscious of your unchanging love as we take leave of this place of worship; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen

READING: Exodus 33:12-17

Moses said to the LORD, "See, you have said to me, 'Bring up this people'; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." He said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." And he said to him, "If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth." The LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."

GOSPEL: John 14:17-21

LEADER: The Holy Gospel according to John, the 14th chapter.

ALL: Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus said: "This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

LEADER: The Gospel of the Lord.

ALL: Praise to you, O Christ.

COMFORTING WORDS

HYMN NO. 298: I Sing a Song of the Saints of God

PRAYER OF REMEMBRANCE AND THANKSGIVING

LEADER: Let us bring before the Lord our prayers of thanksgiving for our life together as St.

Thomas United Church of Christ and for the blessings God has brought us through this holy place of worship. We thank you for the leaders of this church throughout the generations— Sunday School teachers, Consistory members, volunteers for special repair projects, planners for Victorian teas and fellowship activities, Advent workshops and church retreats, apple dumpling and cookie bakers, chicken noodle soup makers, and dish washers. We also give thanks for those leaders who provided food for the community, held after school programs and led Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls generation after generation.

LEADER: *At the front pew.* Almighty God, here in this place, you gathered us as your Church and filled our hearts with your love through our songs and our praises. You heard our confessions and forgave our sins. You lifted our sorrows at funerals and made us glad in our celebrations of confirmation and marriage. We praise and thank you for our fellowship and your love, for our meetings and our dinners, for our ministry and our mission, and for all that you have been for us and with us in our life together.

ALL: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

LEADER: *At the cross.* Almighty God, this cross has been a visible reminder of our faith. It has been a symbol of the suffering of Christ, who is the source and inspiration of this fellowship of faith. This cross is a reminder that death is a part of life and that the Christian hope, that is ours, transcends that experience. It has been a symbol to all who have worshiped God here, and of his promise of a new life in the here and now. It has reminded us of the ministry to which we all are called.

ALL: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

LEADER: *At the organ.* Almighty God, music has been a means of blessing for all of us. With the help of organ and piano and the St. Thomas choirs, handbell and vocal, we have learned about and celebrated our faith through music and song. Thank you for our faithful choir members who gave of their time and talents Sunday after Sunday, year after year, never tiring of spreading the Word to the glory God. These gifts of music have helped us experience Your presence in this place.

ALL: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

LEADER: *At the Baptismal Font.* Almighty God, at this font, you have received our children and our loved ones and made them one with your Son, Jesus Christ, and with us, the Body of Christ. You have given them, as you have given to us, your Holy Spirit, that faith, hope, wisdom and love might abide in all your people. We praise and thank you for the holy waters

that have flowed from this font into each of us and out into the world as a river of life that carries your love.

ALL: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

LEADER: *At the pulpit.* Almighty God, from this pulpit, we have heard your powerful Word. You have lived among us through the gospel and the biblical stories of your people of faith. Through your Word of preaching, you have called us. Through your Word of teaching, you have taught us. Through your Word of law and grace, you have guided us on our way. And in your Word made flesh, you gave us our savior, Jesus Christ. We praise and thank you for your powerful Word that has been and will continue to be the light to our path and the guide for our lives.

ALL: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

LEADER: *At the altar.* Almighty God, at this table, you have welcomed us to the banquet of Our Lord and Savior and given us a foretaste of the feast to come. You have united us with him and with one another in a feast of love through the sharing of his body and blood. You have strengthened us for our mission and for our daily lives and sent us out to share Christ's love with all the world. We praise and thank you for the grace and favor you have shown us through the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and for the hope of sharing this feast with all the saints at the heavenly banquet.

ALL: We praise and thank you, O Lord, for all these things.

LEADER: For all these things and for so many more, we give you our heartfelt thanks, almighty God. And we ask that you bless us as we go from this place and from this fellowship. Yet in our parting, we declare our faith in you, our only Creator and Redeemer. And we seek your presence for our lives as we affirm that faith this day in the words that have been taught us:

ALL: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.
suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

LEADER: To you be all honor and glory, Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever!

ALL: Amen! Amen!

OFFERING: Musical Interlude

DOXOLOGY No. 356

THE COMMUNION

POST COMMUNION PRAYER:

LEADER: Let us pray.

O God, form the minds of your faithful people into a single will through the sacrament of your Son. Make us love what you command and desire what you promise, that, amid all the changes of this world, our hearts may be fixed where true joy is found: Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

ALL: Amen

BENEDICTION

CLOSING HYMN No. 263: A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

DISMISSAL

ALL: Today we have celebrated with thanksgiving the life and work of the faith community of St. Thomas United Church of Christ. This church has served as a witness to God's presence for 125 years. St. Thomas has provided refuge, comfort, and challenges for God's people. It has served for generations the faithful people of Reading, Pennsylvania. May God continue to listen to us as we move beyond these walls. Give us the courage and strength to go out and joyfully serve the Lord in new faith communities. For the Lord is good and his steadfast love endures forever!

POSTLUDE: Toccata from the Widor 5th Symphony

Acknowledgments: Part of the liturgy for today was written by the Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.