

Lay Leader's Report to Church Conference
January 3, 2020

This year has been like none other in church, not only for Newtonville but for all churches. January came and went like any other winter but by February and definitely March everything changed due to the pandemic. It has been a year of trial and error with many learning to negotiate Facebook, Zoom, and You Tube. The congregation has not been able to worship together in person, share joys and sorrows, or participate in typical holidays of Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. One of the most challenging things has been caring for those who live alone or have been in need of care, hospitalized. As always, I am incredibly grateful for so many in our congregation who have reached out with phone calls, food, outside visits, etc. on a regular basis. Pastor Steve has worked hard to create a virtual format and share bulletins on line for worship so that we all can participate as best as we can.

One of our first undertakings in March was convening a "Reopening Committee" to discuss new regulations from the State and Conference, determine what we needed to do to prepare the church for "in person" worship when it was allowed, and gathering enough volunteers to make reopening possible on each Sunday morning. This committee worked diligently to take the needs of all into consideration with health and safety being our priority. Pastor Steve provided services outdoors once the weather permitted and has been very imaginative in the ever changing settings of worship.

Our Lay Leadership participants that began a year ago fall, completed their course work in June. They also had to convert to virtual meetings. There are now many tools we can use to reach and involve our congregation. Due to the disruption caused by COVID it has been very challenging to act on many goals. Efforts right now are focused on worship and reaching as many people as possible so all feel cared for and included. When we can once again come together in worship our immediate goal is the same as last year, "to find a way to determine what our current congregation needs, where they want to go in the future, what will help them to grow in their spiritual journey". It will be exciting to begin this process.

We are incredibly blessed in our congregation with our congregation's financial commitment to the church. During these very difficult time, pledges have continued and people have found ways to contribute above and beyond. We are grateful to our Finance Committee for negotiating these unprecedented times despite having to cancel our fundraisers (Brooks Barbecue and the annual Garage Sale).

Our newest blessing has been the addition of our Blessing Box that one of our members took upon herself to organize. She has created a volunteer rotation, the box was built by another member, and food is constantly being donated by many. The contents of the blessing box have been constantly accessed by the community and it's been a wonderful to have a way to "give back" in mission right now. This same person organized our "adopt a family" for Christmas and with the help of many others were able to make this a much happier holiday for two family with both food and gifts. Members such as these are the backbone of our congregation for whom we are extremely grateful. We have many, many volunteers that help and pitch in whenever there is a call or need. We are truly blessed by their commitment.

Our Music program has undergone some unexpected changes with hiring a new Music Director, Brandon Malowski. He has brought new energy and excitement to our program. He has been limited so far to playing instruments and singing solo in church but is eager to get the

choir, musicians, and congregation involved. It will be a joy to see where all this creativity takes us.

Our Sunday School program has tried many different ways to engage our young people during this challenging time. With schools being virtual it is difficult to ask them once again to get in front of a screen for Sunday School. Stories have been read, grades 4-7 have had access to a class thanks to Sam Smith, and people are constantly talking about ways to keep the children involved. Pastor Steve and others invited our children to participate in a Christmas pageant filmed individually on a farm owned by one of our families. It was enjoyed by all who came and also by all of us who were able to watch it online. Such a wonderful celebration and so good to see the children we have not seen in months.

As always our Trustees and Sexton have been busy keeping up with our building and grounds. They were instrumental in researching and purchasing supplies to prepare the church for reopening. The Church workday in the fall was a blessing to all who attended. Once again, the rare gift these days to catch up with friends.

As we leave 2020 behind, there is so much hope for renewal, reconnecting, and worshiping as one. Newtonville is a vibrant congregation that will only continue to grow.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pamela LaCasio, NUMC Lay Leader