

**Minutes of the 96th Annual Meeting of
The First Congregational Church of Woodstock
31 January 2021
via Zoom during the pandemic
Not yet approved by vote of the Congregation**

1. Moderator Robert Kirk convened the meeting at 11:02 a.m., following online worship and “coffee hour,” all conducted via Zoom. A quorum of 35 persons was established by count, and 46 persons attended (44 members, two friends), all told.
2. Reading of the Call: Clerk Alexandra Lyman read the call to the meeting.
3. Roll Call: The clerk took the roll by head count of the images of persons displayed on the computer screen, with member list as reference.

Bob welcomed all attendees and introduced the format for the meeting - that each person would raise a hand to the computer screen to be recognized, that the right hand would be raised to enter a vote, and that only members would be allowed to vote on motions brought before the meeting.

4. Convening Prayer: Rev. Dr. Kevin Downer, our new settled minister, offered a prayer, saying that we can see beyond convention and familiarity, with God’s help, and can move forward in a sense of healing and resurrection hope.
5. Minutes of the 2020 Annual Meeting: Minutes of the annual meeting of 26 January 2020 were accepted as published in the annual report. MOTION to accept: Charles Bottieri/2nd Susan McKechnie, passed unanimously, no abstentions.
6. Reports of the Pastor, Director of Family Ministries, Church Council, Boards, Committees, and Church Historian: Bob noted that the annual report contained an interesting record of the church in the year 2020. MOTION to accept with appreciation the reports entered in the annual report: Bruce Lyman/2nd Carl Davis. Discussion of some length followed after comment by Frank Olah, who expressed concern about the report of the music committee, where cuts to the music budget were cited, along with the resignation of music director Ted Bradley. Frank’s question rested on the lack of full information to make sense of these two factors, and the possibility of a violation of labor law. Elsewhere the trustees reported that a PPP (Paycheck Protection Program) loan of \$19K was granted to the church to maintain staff salaries. Moderator Bob counseled that the motion was entered to “accept with appreciation” the reports, not to approve them or comment on their content. A motion to amend the motion on the floor was offered. MOTION to accept the reports with appreciation, with the exception of the report of the music committee: Lynn Davis/2nd Tom Singleton. Discussion on the amendment consisted of comment on need for more information from the trustees about supervision of staff, during the time when we did not have a settled pastor; the record of handbell activity in the year 2020; and a path to resolution of the concerns. The motion to amend passed with one abstention. The original motion to accept reports with appreciation passed as amended with no abstentions.
7. Treasurer’s Report: Treasurer Carl Davis noted that it was “A pretty good year,” all things considered. The COTH fair raised almost \$10K, an amazing outcome given the outdoor and

online nature of the event under pandemic restrictions of masking, social distancing, and sanitizing. The PPP grant brought \$19K to support staff salaries. A generous gift from a church member, with matching donations from others, supported replacement of some shed roofs on portions of the church. (The roof on the sanctuary was replaced in the year 2019 under a Maintenance & Repair grant from Preservation Connecticut.) With conservative budgeting for the year 2020 and no settled minister in place until mid-October, we ended the year with a surplus. All off-budget funds have been restored in full after the borrowing of the years 2002 and 2010. Line items under 320,000 contain funds to support capital expenses, an essential measure for caring for old buildings like the church and parsonage. Carl noted the “exceptional generosity” of the congregation during difficult times. A conservative, cautious approach will serve us well as we move forward. MOTION to accept the report: Charles Bottieri/2nd Tom Chase, passed with one abstention. Bruce Lyman offered thanks to Carl for his investment of many hours and his expertise in maintaining the accounts. Frank Olah voiced kudos for the restoration of the off-budget accounts, a satisfying measure that was a long time in coming. Carl noted further that the New Century Fund for investment began at \$217,600 at the start of the year 2020 and ended at \$232,133, even with the withdrawal of \$10,300 to support the budget.

8. Report of the Nominating Committee: Debby and Bob Kirk served as the nominating committee for the 2021 slate. Debby displayed progress thus far with most board positions filled. Deb and Bob have not worked on the committees as yet, because several groups are on hiatus during the pandemic. Bob requested a show of hands to accept the report.
9. Stewardship Report: Carl Wisnosky, chairman of the stewardship committee, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to do the work of this body, and gave thanks to his cohort, Paula Wilmot and Glenn Boies. Conducting a successful campaign despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the committee gathered 47 pledges, down from 59 in 2020, continuing the trend over the past few years. The good news is that three new pledges were received, and half of those pledging raised their gifts, some quite substantially. A median pledge of \$1200 in 2020 grew to a median of \$1800 for 2021, with the ultimate result of \$140,500 to support the work of the church. MOTION to accept the report with appreciation: Laura Bond/2nd Lisa Nowak, passed unanimously. Bob Kirk offered thanks to the committee for their devotion and diligence.
10. Proposed Budget for 2021: John Cimochowski, senior trustee, presented the budget draft. Because most of the attendees at the meeting had been present for the Lunch & Crunch discussion in early January, John limited his comments to a brief review of his power point presentation at that time. One difference is that \$412 was added to line item 510.100 to bring the church’s donation to the SNEUCC conference to a full 6% of pledged funds, for a total of \$8412. The trustees drew on the 2020 surplus to balance this budget, assigning the remainder to the non-restricted capital reserve account. We can expect fundraising to be diminished again in the year 2021. John broke down the items in the professional services line item 504.111 at \$5K for a bookkeeper, \$1 to 2K for an audit of the church books, \$2200 for the appraisal underway of church property and assets, and funding for Vanco and MinistryWorks services. He noted also that three payments of property tax (or 150% of amount due) were made to the town of Woodstock in 2020, so only one (50%) will be due in 2021. The year 2022 will include full payment of tax in the budget draft. MOTION to approve the budget proposal: Board of trustees/2nd church council, passed with one

abstention. Bob Kirk commended the board of trustees and Carl Davis for prodigious effort in the budget process.

11. Correspondence: Alexandra Lyman exchanged notes with the family of Eleanor Adams, who died on November 22nd.
12. Appreciation of Leaders: Rev. Kevin gave thanks to the board members who have completed their terms, for their passion, commitment, and adaptability. It is obvious that hearts are in the work. Kathryn Tanner, professor theology at Yale, has written that “community is messy,” but it is worth the effort to create a foundation for the future. Remember to breathe. A gift awaits each person who has completed service on a board, courtesy of Rev. Kevin – a book of reflections of Brother Lawrence, leaning into the idea that God is with us, wherever we go. The departing leaders are John Cimochowski and Lisa Nowak from the board of trustees, Laura Bond and Noah Gourlie from the board of deacons, and Deborah Kirk and Paula Wilmot from the board of outreach. Bob Kirk expressed gratitude to retiring clerk Alexandra Lyman; our transitional pastor, Rev. Debra Pallatto-Fontaine; and our new settled minister, Rev. Kevin. Each has been presented with a gift as a gesture of our appreciation.
13. Other business: The clerk read the list of those within the fold who died in the year 2020:
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| February 2 | Gladys Westerberg |
| February 18 | Lois Siegmund |
| April 9 | Linda Wilmot |
| April 26 | Elizabeth Putnam |
| May 20 | John Miller Sr. |
| November 22 | Eleanor Adams |
| December 12 | Barbara Rosen |
| December 17 | Edna Hansen (friend) |
| December 17 | Kimberly Wilcox |

Paula Wilmot expressed her profound thanks to the chairmen of the search committee – Charlene Swanson and Jim Nowak – and to Carl Wisnosky for his leadership of the stewardship committee. All three were models of grace and efficacy for Paula, who was a member of both bodies.

Tom Chase noted that music was given prominence in the survey of 2019 and that we need to pay attention to reviving that facet of church life. Charlene said that it was wonderful to see Earl Brazeal in attendance at the meeting, and Frank Olah gave thanks for prayers and cards after the death of Karen’s mother, Jane Johnson, and for Rev. Kevin’s comforting visit to Jane.

14. Moderator’s Comments: Bob Kirk noted that it has been a difficult year. The good news is that our beloved community of friends in Christ is intact. His word for 2021 is loving-kindness. “May it radiate from us and out into the hurting world.” Bob led the meeting in a brief Buddhist-style meditation on that thought. Kevin requested a summary of that meditation for the February issue of SHARE.
15. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m., followed by Rev. Kevin’s closing prayer.