

Pastor's Report to the Annual Meeting

1-18-2026

Submitted by Rev. Michael Roca-Caine

Recently, in a meeting about the upcoming 300th Anniversary, a leader said, “Well, the celebration has to be forward-looking because soon we’re going to be looking for a ‘replacement Michael” The acknowledgement of my “expire by” date surprised me. Also, the word choice – chances are my successor won’t be any more like me that I am like Geneva! But on timing, the statement was not untrue! Not sure if I should be talking about it this early, the comment convinced me it’s time.

I have told the Elders already that, God willing, I look to retire when I turn 68. That still leaves us with a movable retirement date, let’s say, not before summer of 2028 and not after the Annual Meeting in 2029... Let’s see how things are going when we get closer and what you all think the congregation needs.

We have about as much time now as we did for the Covenant Ministry when I began at Old First. And we have a lot to get done in that time. (It’s a lot of work doing church and being Old First even when you don’t have a 300th Anniversary or to prepare for a pastoral change.)

Why is this important now? Because finishing a ministry is not unlike finishing psychotherapy: without a good ending, the congregation and the pastor lose some of the progress and growth (in all the various meanings) we’ve made together. And if we leave business unfinished and issues unresolved, they often can get carried unhelpfully into our next chapters. For the congregation, that could mean unnecessarily complicating your pastoral search process and your start with your next pastor.

Long term pastorates can be hard to follow, and I am going to do everything I can to leave well. I want only the best for you and my successor: it’s a sign of my success that you prosper – do even better – with the next pastor.

You don’t have to worry about the search process until I leave, and the Keystone Conference will guide you. Anyway, first, we have the Anniversary to attend to. And some other big goals (I’ll sketch them below). Anyway, day to day, my pastoring and our work together probably won’t feel that different, even as we need to add on, attend to some issue relating to the end of my tenure.

But first, what have we accomplished this year:

- Post-pandemic, we’re getting back to more normal regular visits, follow up and integrating new folks again. (It was great seeing Josh and Jill as our worship leaders this past Sunday.)

- We have grown the trained tech team to the size and skillset we need to follow through on our promise to provide hybrid service every week (and Adam gets to sing with the choir sometimes).
- Sunday School is stronger. Darla is doing a great job as "Superintendent" (and that's taking a burden off me). We have a dedicated crew – a full complement – of teachers. Our kids seem to be coming at a slightly higher frequency. Our biggest challenge is our families' busy schedules.
- The volunteer pool for our Saturday breakfasts is delightfully healthy. We cannot completely account for that success. Some of it is certainly strong working partnerships with neighboring Christ Church and Arch Street Friends. It may also be about our offering only once a week volunteer opportunity. Or maybe it's the bad political times in our country making more people feel the need to volunteer?
- Thankfully we also now have a team to work in the shed keeping our clothing donations in order: Todd & Lisa and MacKenzie and a new crew of volunteers she's recruiting.
- Old First House opened, and the building is really lovely. The landscaping too. But we have realized, finishing the building wasn't the end goal we thought it was. Making the house a home for 34 residents is what it's all about. We don't play a direct role in house operations or social services but our role as a partner is turning out to be important. As things settle down into a routine over there, I hope we will find consistent ways to help build community among the residents and with the church.
- We got the basics of the landscaping on our side of the front courtyard done and are working on a way, a staffer — other than the pastor, to assure the maintenance of the landscaping property-wide.
- We have moved into and are working well out of our spaces in the new building. Our offices and the Sunday School space are particularly helpful. We have more space to grow into.
- We have successfully remedied the woefully underinsured Sanctuary building, bringing our insured value to a more appropriate figure of \$13M.
- The historic sign has been updated (our history as well as the text on the other side about Philly's colonial and contemporary religious life) and reinstalled giving us some name recognition out front (until we get the metal name sign reinstalled).

What needs to get done this year:

- Solve the electrical supply issue for the Sanctuary building by either bringing in a new 3-phase electrical line or installing a new 2 phase converting transformer. This is necessary before summer if we are to have a/c anywhere in the building.
- Repair the floor in the kitchen. The "torn up spot" is a trip and fall hazard.
- Firm up the plans for the 300th Anniversary.
- Figuring out how to begin marketing / using the Sanctuary and other spaces for outside groups more often. Shelly Stackhouse has taken on leadership of the Sanctuary Use Committee, and I think they will make progress.
- Install matching bollard lights along the new sidewalk east of the main walkway to the Orianna exit.
- Reinstall the lighted name sign and the bulletin board in the front courtyard.
- Purchase the furniture for the archives and move the materials back onsite from storage.
- Develop and engage the congregation in an Outreach visioning process. "Now that Old First House is up and running, what do we want our Outreach program to look like?"
- Repair the dry rot on the back side of the shed and replace the doors on the east and west sides of the Social Hall (not sure about the matching kitchen doors or the nursery doors).
- Finish reorganizing storage in Sanctuary building (much is still just where it was squirreled away when needed to get out of the Fox and CE Buildings prior to construction beginning). Janice's lovely new shelves under the front balcony stairs will be a great help in this.
- Install (with a service camp) a brick patio behind the back exit walkway as a surface for our trash cans.
- Ask Janice to build (with a service camp) one more bench for the front courtyard.
- Get a roof on the smoking area so that it works in wet weather.

- Ask Janice to build from old pews the permanent but mobile shelves for the children's play area in the Sanctuary.
- We have planned to tuck a washing machine into the mop closet in the corner of the Social Hall, which would allow us to handle the kitchen linens and table cloths at church.
- Continue to figure out how to support one another in these dark and difficult times in our nation, including how we can resource people with the power of our faith for meeting the challenges that are facing us.
- I wonder if we are using our new online capabilities to their fullest; in particular, are there Christian Education possibilities and on-going or follow up experiences with Service Camps that are waiting to be developed with our zoom setup?

Things on the horizon (that ought not be let go too long – many of these are things I hope we get done before I leave so my successor doesn't have to face them right away):

- Our HVAC system has been less than reliable and expensive in repair costs in recent years. Our system has outlived its expected half-life, now by some years. We have begun a conversation with Bradley-Schiochetti, but realistically, they do not seem to be completely up to the task. Reuben (Janice's husband) and I have spoken about the need to bring in a HVAC engineer to think through our needs – it's a very specific building, especially with the needs of the large cubic Sanctuary space.
- In the reorganizations that have happened around the construction of Old First House, the church has lost two appreciable revenue streams, the appreciable, outside donations we used to receive for the shelter and the space sharing that we used to receive from weekday parkers in the front and back lots. In a tight budget, those losses are felt. It is hoped that some of that hold will be filled by income received by an increase in outside community groups using our spaces, particularly the Sanctuary. (Such uses also provide us the added benefit of making a wider community aware of our church and its ministries). As well, we are in the early stages of investigating if there might be ways to raise additional income for our Outreach endeavors. This is an important financial reality for the church going forward.
- Our stewardship growth this year, when it's all said and done, could be as high as 16%. That's incredible and hopeful. (Thank you, Beth D. for your effort, and Grant too!) I'm not sure we can keep up that rigorous a growth in our contributions for our own community, but it's an important factor in our financial health / accountability. Jonathan V., when he was Treasurer, used to always advise: "as long as member giving is good and nothing really expensive breaks down, the budget will be ok."

Finally, my thanks to our congregation for its inspiring faithfulness and support; Old First is really a special place, community, promise of how God means our world to be. Thanks to all our lay leaders involved in the governance, outreach, pastoral care – for their unyielding and consistent hard work and care of the institution and the community. To my colleagues, Bill, Arthur, Oscar and almost Michelle, the OFH Director. And the community of people we serve who we mean to include in our understanding of “this church.”

It’s good that God has gathered us together, especially perhaps for (or against?) times like these. Church is a lot of work, but it’s all worth it in what it adds to participants’ lives and to the world around us.

Honored to be serving among you,

Michael