

Elders' Report

Submitted by: Julie Steiner and Bobbie Benjamin, Co-Chairs

Mostly what the Elders did this year was say “Yes.” If you read through the reports of the ministry teams, standing leadership groups, directors, and staff of our congregation (and I hope you will), you will see that many people have been working to get things done. Our congregation has done SO MUCH this year, despite distance and pandemic. We have worked together to imagine our congregational life beyond the pandemic, when we will gather in revitalized space with a sense of renewed and renewing mission and purpose. We have not stopped. And it has been a great joy to see new leaders emerge, long-time leaders stretched and energized, and Old First poised in the year ahead to reinvent who we are as we approach our 300th anniversary.

At our monthly Elders meetings, we heard about our congregation’s faithful generosity. We heard about ideas for keeping us connected to each other and to our city, state, nation, and world. We heard about work to revamp our Sunday School program, and we heard so (so!) much about the process of renovating the sanctuary. And mostly, we said, “Yes.” Yes to trying new things, yes to taking faithful risks, yes to calling (so many) congregational meetings to discuss and decide what our course of action should be. You showed up to those meetings, you thoughtfully considered the issues on the agenda, and we made congregational decisions after productive and clarifying discussion. Your patience with this process resulted in an accepted design plan for the sanctuary that’ll be completed this year, an approved call for a Missionary Minister for Worship and Nurture, and several decisions to spend more money than we originally thought we would, so that the sanctuary project can be done as well as possible.

My dad has always held that member giving is an important metric of congregational health, and I would say that /in the midst of a global pandemic/, our record-setting member giving—in completion of 2021 pledges AND pledges fulfilled for the Sanctuary renewal campaign AND in 2022’s pledges to date, points to the willingness of our congregation to dig deep and bring to fruition mission and ministry that two years ago may have only been dreams. As a congregation, we have been proactive about the opportunities in front of us, proactivity that we have funded through generous, hopeful giving.

Now, the elders did say, “No,” a few times this year, mostly to whether we as a congregation (or a group) could meet again in person. Our attempts to continue to provide safe worship and fellowship opportunities have been driven by science and have evolved over the past year. We look forward to returning to the sanctuary and to worshipping in

person, but we also recognize the blessing of worshipping with people geographically distant or otherwise unable to attend in person. We dipped our toes into returning—outside at summer early services and at small memorial services in the courtyard. We will continue to follow the science that keeps the most vulnerable among us as safe as possible, while keeping us as open and expansive as we know our church to be. It's a challenging balance, especially in uncharted territory.

We look forward to 2022, and all the changes it will bring to us here at 4th and Race. We believe that we will return to in-person worship in a revitalized sanctuary. We know that the current Fox and CE buildings will be demolished (except for the historic front of the Fox building), and construction work will begin on Old First House. We will have new leadership opportunities and challenges ahead. As Elders, we embrace these opportunities and challenges, saying “Yes!” to Old First’s continued and evolving mission to Love First.

Respectfully submitted,
Julie Steiner and Bobbie Benjamin, Elder Co-Chairs