

# Annual Meeting 2022

February 2, 2022

## Agenda

### Reports

Moderator (Hannah)

Pastor (Liz)

Treasurer (Lisanne)

Numbers from 2021

Budget for 2022

Buildings & Grounds (Jenny)

Godly Play Sunday School (Sheela)

Fellowship Committee (Jenny)

## **Moderator's Report**

2021 was surely another challenging year of ups and downs for our church community. That winter was a particularly dark and difficult time in the pandemic, and often our congregation felt fragmented. Nonetheless, we learned things about ourselves as a community, and over the course of the year, the various kinds of gatherings that we've had have been bright spots in a tumultuous time.

In the spring, feeling a new imperative to explore and address both the challenges and the strengths of our particular little church, the Parish Council planned a series of visioning meetings. These meetings culminated in a wonderful dinner and final meeting at the home of Lianne and Patty. While embracing the things that make our church special and unique, we also had an honest reckoning with the fact that we are a small church held up by a small number of people. We brainstormed a number of ways to build community and participation and also take care of the building and support the day-to-day tasks of keeping a church going. We wondered if there was a possibility of a new relationship with Gould Farm to take up these tasks, and that conversation is still in the early stages of exploration. Also out of this conversation arose the desire to have a Fellowship Committee.

Over the second half of the year, it was refreshing to be able to be together, in-person, in worship and in a few activities planned by the Fellowship Committee. In fact, we had more gatherings outside of Sunday worship this year than we have ever had since I started coming to the church nine years ago! These included a celebration of Liz's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, an apple pie social, and Christmas-tree decorating. Because packing an indoor space was still a poor choice, Gould Farm graciously hosted a Christmas Eve service in their sheep barn, a perfect setting. We sang "Silent Night" outdoors together in the snow, standing in a circle, holding our candles.

In September, Sheila Clary stepped down from the position of church moderator, which she had held so faithfully for ten years, and I stepped into the role. Also during the fall, Sheila started up a new children's Godly Play gathering. It was a great joy to see five children listening to the stories and wondering together.

The end of the year brought new pandemic challenges and a return to Zoom. As we look to the months ahead, we anticipate returning once again to our sanctuary, adapting and finding new ways forward as needed, supporting each other in as many ways as we can, and continuing to grow and discover ourselves as a church community.

--Hannah Fries

## Pastor's Report 2021

2021 was another year amidst COVID, which made everything more difficult—and not just when it comes to congregational life but when it comes to *everything*.

That said, when it comes to congregational life, as was pointed at a recent Boundary Awareness Training I attended, COVID didn't introduce any new dynamics, it just sped them up. The challenges of Christian worship and life amidst a largely secular context merely made themselves more urgently felt. Congregations all over Berkshire County (and beyond, I'm sure) founder and face likely closure. Pastors are exhausted and demoralized as their tasks multiplied and the constancy of next Sunday, while the unlikelihood of next year, to say nothing of next decade, combine to make functioning, not to mention excellence, incredibly difficult. Congregants—either isolated and lonely like never before, or cloistered with family demands and so pressed upon like never before—can hardly find time for the demands Congregationalism has always put upon its members and participants.

In sum, this is all really hard.

But we of the Monterey Church regrouped and rallied, decided to engage with reality. A series of three conversations this summer pointed to a need and possibility, coming to operate under the auspices of Gould Farm.

Still very much in the exploratory phase, this builds upon the long-standing fact that we function more as a chapel than as a church, with most of our participants being people who can't commit to helping in the operations of the congregation, which, small though we are, are still quite demanding. Our building is old and in need of regular attention. Our investments and financial workings are demanding enough to need weekly and monthly overseeing. I, as a pastor, realized I can't sustain working without regular input from lay leaders and participants. Deciding upon and seeing through all the many aspects of our life together has proved too much to do mostly on my own.

This coming year, this exploration will become more specific, as Gould Farm will assess whether this would contribute to their mission or be a drag on it, and as we assess whether such a move would free us to worship and raise up disciples in Christ, having given over the operations to another organization, or would remove from us any sense of mission at all.

Meanwhile, we decided to take a year in offering monthly fellowship opportunities to see how much people can invest themselves in the life of this congregation beyond Sunday worship. COVID, of course, made it so fellowship isn't as easy as gathering in a room to do something together. So, we made use of our great outdoors, gathering on our front lawn for an apple pie coffee hour in October and Christmas tree decorating in December.

And, of course, I've continued in the regular tasks of ministry, which I tease out here:

## **Leading Worship**

My highest priority any given week is preparing for and leading worship. The worship life of a congregation is its beating heart, and the sacrament of the word, always crucial, is even more so when our connection with one another is otherwise distant.

The winter and into the spring was a struggle for me as our congregation was divided, Gould Farm still in quarantine while others weren't. So, I led in-person worship, which generally drew 5-8 people, and later in the day Zoom worship, which generally drew 6-8 people. (Looking to another winter of Gould Farm in quarantine, I'm hoping to lead hybrid worship, streaming while leading from the sanctuary. This might be a better solution to a winter last year I do not want to repeat. If hybrid doesn't work, I'll ask a member of the Parish Council to join in Zoom worship each week so we don't fall into the thinking that in-person is "real worship" and Zoom is dismissed as lesser than, as felt to be the case in 2021.)

## **Committee work**

Parish Council has recently begun to meet monthly, always on Zoom (for now). I attend that. The possible "merger" with Gould Farm has also had me in meetings of various sorts.

## **Communication** (Email, website, bulletin, podcast, etc.)

Messaging with the congregation and wider public generally takes about 5-10 hours a month.

## **Pastoral Care**

This has becoming challenging during the pandemic, with in-person visits not possible for the most part. As usual, I reiterate my availability for care however it might be needed. I also encourage people to let me know when a pastoral emergency arises. Never assume I already know or someone else has already told me.

## **Faith Formation**

The (both-church) lectionary Bible study, which takes place on Zoom, is sustaining and enriching, with a regular number of participants of 4-10 people. The (both-church) book club, also on Zoom, has allowed in-depth study of whole books of the Bible, and is also open to theological exploration, cultural criticism from a Christian perspective, or literature, which we decide as we go. This is about 1-2 hours per week, depending on whether the book club is active or between books.

## **Special Services**

I officiated at one baptism (Oscar!), and three funeral/memorial services this year. We had Zoom Maundy Thursday and Good Friday once again, and a Christmas eve service of lessons and carols in the Sheep Barn at Gould Farm. Memorial Day and Veterans' Day had me in attendance of services in cooperation with the town.

### **Wider Church**

I continue to serve as the Chair of Church & Ministry. I continue as an emeritus board member of Volunteers in Medicine. I wrote two articles last year that will appear in the coming year *The Christian Century* and two others in their email publication. The weekly podcast of the preaching continues to gain about 70 downloads per episode.

Faithfully submitted,

Liz Goodman

### **Property Committee**

The primary responsibility of the Property Committee is to oversee and manage all aspects of the Meetinghouse and its physical plant. Over the past year, the Meetinghouse was host to Coffee Club, The Monterey Food Pantry, as well as weekly worship. Projects this year included designing and installing a new sign (thank you Liz and Todd!), fixing leaky faucets (thank you Dan and Steve!), and replacing the furnace (Thank you to all of Parish Council on that one!).

Property Committee is a way to participate in the life of the congregation and ministry of the church in a practical and hands on way. We facilitate the space where we gather together in worship, as well where we feed our community, and foster friendships. Projects for the next year include updating the lighting in the Sanctuary, repairing the front steps, creating a master list of service providers, as well as a checklist of things that need to be looked over on a regular basis. Please consider joining the property committee to support the ministry of the church and continue to create a safe and comfortable space for our community.

--Jenny Daily

### **Godly Play Children's Sunday School**

Godly Play resumed in the fall of 2021, with Donal Clary, Tito and Talia Chait, Amos Brown, and Ari Lewin. We met once in November, and twice in December. Sheela Clary is the instructor, with moms Hannah and Erika and Aldeth helping out with providing treats for our communal feast at the end of the story. I hope to resume our in-person stories in February, with once a month meetings going forward.

--Sheela Clary

### **Fellowship Committee Report**

The mission of the Fellowship Committee is to enhance our Congregational life in friendship, faith, and fellowship. We do this by creating opportunities for Congregants to gather outside of worship, in an effort to deepen our bonds and connections with one another. The committee started in the Fall of 2021, and we have gathered together to celebrate Autumn with apple pie and cider on the front "lawn", as well as an afternoon making crafts and decorating the Christmas Tree. The fellowship committee is comprised of Liz Goodman, Sharon Kokoefer, Susan Quinn, and myself. The committee facilitates these fellowship activities by reaching out to fellow congregants to get involved in creating and hosting these events. Thank you to all of you who have volunteered to do so, I'll not list, lest I forget someone! If you have an idea for a fellowship activity, be in touch with one of us, we are happy to support you in bringing your fellowship ideas to life!

--Jenny Daily