

November 2021

Dear Friends –

A few years ago, I was in a drawing class, and the teacher instructed us to “be careful about naming something as we draw it” because as soon as we name it (“this line is a leg, or a tree,” etc.), “our eye thinks we understand it and our drawing becomes distorted.” She then asked us to flip over the picture we were attempting to re-create, so we wouldn’t be attempted to assume we knew what it was. For most of us, the drawing was vastly improved. It’s good advice for many things – our relationships, our politics, and certainly our life together here at First Church. Once you think you understand who we are and what is happening here, you stop actually seeing or experiencing it in the same way.



For the last 20 months, it feels to me as if our communal life has been turned upside down. What is the Christian church when you cannot “touch and see” (Jn 20:27) the physical bodies of its members? What is love when it compels distance, instead of proximity? What is hope in the face of a global pandemic?

Here at First Church, we have gone remote, then risen to the challenge of installing new technology, and then welcomed many back into the Sanctuary for a hybrid service that works to include us all. We have delivered Advent, and Easter, and Gathering kits – bringing church to your door! We launched a Visioning program, held study and sermon groups on discipleship and discernment, and said goodbye to our beloved Minister of Music, Dr. David Neiweem. We began our new search (we’re getting close – really!), initiated major collaborations with College Street – Peace Camp, Youth Group, Worldwide Communion and Service Sundays – and welcomed new members to the fold. It’s been quite a year.

For me, flipping the picture upside-down has allowed me to see First Church with an entirely new appreciation. As the Rev. Gary Lewis remarked a couple of Sundays ago, when he gamely pinch-hit for me, “[First Church] is a machine – but unlike most machines – it is fueled by its heart. WOW! I am so so impressed with what you and the community at First Church are doing. While some churches and organizations may be circling the wagons in self-preservation – First Church is dynamically looking to the future from a solid foundation of faith and hope....”

Friends, in the least religious state in the country, First Church is alive and well. The past 20 months have not dampened the enthusiasm or vitality of the congregation, but solidified its place in our lives, by allowing us to see more clearly its value for us and the wider community. Whether we have been able to return to worship physically, or are worshipping digitally, we now know that First Church is here because we need it – each and every one of us.

And it needs us, too.

In our new [First Church Stewardship Brochure](#), you will find descriptions of the many ministries that have taken place here, and our hopes for the year to come. They are the “compass points” we hope will help you discern how God is moving in your life through the work of First Church, and the ways in which you might be called to give yourself to the work in 2022.

Of course, this past year has turned many of our lives upside down, too, and we know that many folks are not in a position to give as generously this year as last. Please know we understand – and that the beggar’s gift of 5 cents means more to God than the millionaire’s \$50,000. If, however, you have not found your lives turned upside down by this pandemic, we hope you will consider that in your giving, as well.

And while this booklet was compiled with our Financial Planning in mind, please remember that Stewardship is a matter of our lives, not just our livelihoods. Although our *collective* giving is because God’s work of Love needs it, our *personal* giving is for *us*. Financially, or in terms of time, we give because *we* need it. If this doesn’t make sense to you, flip the picture of your giving over. You might just be surprised what you find.

Maybe, just maybe, you might find God.

In faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Elissa".

[The Rev. Elissa Johnk](#), Lead Minister