

Dear Friends –

As you may know, my grandfather was also a UCC Minister. While he was mostly retired by the time I came of remembering-age, I do recall how much he disliked Annual Meetings. No matter the health of the church, he would say, the Annual Meeting was when everyone who wasn't involved the rest of the year would come forward to criticize the work of those who did. It's not an uncommon feeling amongst clergy, in fact. But for the fifth time in a row, First Church folks came together last weekend to prove him wrong.



Together, we have negotiated the sale of the parsonage, and the holding, or use of funds until visioning work is done. We have undertaken that same, thorough visioning work all while navigating a global pandemic, and meetings on Zoom. And we have done so *well*.

Indeed, from a little after noon last Sunday, until roughly one-thirty, an active quorum of First Church folks was ably led by President Paul Hobbs through an ambitious agenda. There was a top-ten list, presented by Past President, Caroline Crawford (which you can watch [here](#)) that celebrated the highlights of our time together. There was conversation about what staffing might look like in the near future particularly considering our aging population, and what sustainable investing looks like. We had an appropriately-lengthy discussion about whether and when to allocate \$100,000 of the Parsonage sale funds to the next phase of the Visioning and Strategic Planning work.

This, in particular, was a moment to lift up. Conversations about money are never easy, and especially not when discussing large sums. Yet differences in opinion were heard and held respectfully. We took seriously the work we are doing, *and* the amount of money we are discussing, understanding that “where our treasure is, there our heart will be also,” (Mt 6:21). A compromise resolution was put forward, stating that the funds not be used for new work until after the congregation does its discernment work together in March. This compromise passed with 93% of the vote.

This type of discussion will be a regular occurrence in the next few years of our life together. I believe they are a necessary part of any endeavor worth doing. How do we move forward together? How do we best steward the resources we have? There is no perfect church, and we will certainly stumble, and fail. But through it all, we can trust one another, and hold one another with humility and grace. If we continue to be able to do this, I am amazed to think of what God will do with First Church in this time.

In fact, after this lengthy conversation, and thanks to the overly-capable presentations of Treasurer Mike Knauer, the budget passed with minimal comment, and we were thrilled to welcome Susan Ellwood as our next church President. We ended with laughter, and humor, and a chorus of joyful (and perhaps fairly hungry) *Amens*. I would like to think it would have been the kind of meeting my grandfather would have wanted to attend. I know I am glad I did.

In gratitude, and faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elissa".

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