

ABOVE ALL,
LOVE

1 Peter 4:8-11



2019
ANNUAL REPORT
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
WEST CHESTER, PA

Dear Friend and Ministry Partner,

Our beloved hymn “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” contains a strange and foreign word which may confuse many a worshipper on Sunday morning. Together we sing:

*Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by thy help I'm come;
and I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.*

It's a beautiful hymn, but what is an Ebenezer? In 1st Samuel 7:12, after a pivotal moment in the life of God's people, the prophet Samuel piled up a few stones on the side of the road as an important memorial of God's mighty works. The intent is that for generations, anyone who looks at the pile of stones (the Ebenezer) will remember that God is powerful, gracious, merciful, and that the acts of God through God's people make an enormous difference in this world. The memorial stones are known by the Hebrew word “Ebenezer” which means “stone of help”.

In these pages, you will find our most current Ebenezers. It is by no means a comprehensive report of everything that happened at First Presbyterian in 2019. It is however a small sampling of what God has done through the ministry of God's people in this corner of West Chester.

This has been an amazing year for our church. We have seen God at work with increased attendance at all our services and solid involvement in Bible studies from elementary to youth and adult small groups. We held a Lent men's retreat focused on the cross of Christ with close to 100 men in attendance.

Our Session spent the better part of 8 months planning a church-wide, multi year focus on addressing the homelessness crisis in Chester County. As a result, we have strengthened ties with local mission partners involved in homelessness, selected an all-church book study for 2020, participated and in some cases led events with area organizations like Sanji Strong, Friends Association, Decade to Doorways and West Chester University. As an example, I was deeply touched to see that the attendance at the community memorial service for homeless people who died over the past year doubled this year, where 90% of those present were from First Pres.

Financially, God allowed us to have an amazingly good year. You can read more about it in the financial report, but in short we had a great pledge campaign, strong year round giving and careful monitoring of all expenses, resulting in an end of the year surplus. Additionally this happened without our use of most of the standard portion of investments we budget to transfer every year.

This year we learned from worship series like “My Verse”, “The Jesus I Never Knew”, “Difficult Texts about Money”, and even kicked off our Fall season with a clay artist during worship.

These pages are only a few Ebenezers, memorial stones reminding us that God has been good and faithful. They also remind us of the blessing of being a small part of God's work in this world. As you read ahead, may you remember God's works, and look forward with anticipation to 2020.



Blessings,
Greg Stovell
Lead Pastor, Head of Staff



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PASSIONATE WORSHIP

Music Ministry

The Chancel Choir sang at over 50 services, performed 2 concerts, and had 2 Saturday morning workshops.

The Column Classics fine art series hosted 4 events, including the extremely successful Candlelight Christmas Concerts, which hosted 600+ attendees and 70 performers.

The Children's Choirs joyfully participated in the annual Candlelight Christmas Concert and presented a spring musical at First Pres and Barclay Friends.

The Worship Band continues to grow and excel in the 10:42 service.

Six choral scholarships were given to WCU students who play an essential part in the life of the Chancel Choir.

The Brass Ensemble was renamed Miner Street Brass and became an integral musical group for Sunday morning services.

The bell choirs maintained a busy schedule throughout the year and presented a successful Spring Concert in March.





Worship Committee

Prepared and served communion to 2000 members.

Presented 16 children and 2 adults for baptism.

The 10:42 contemporary service continues to thrive in its first full year with 71 in average weekly attendance.

Upgraded camera and audio technology and continued to recruit and train new tech volunteers to provide enhanced streaming services for the 120 individuals worshipping with us online.

Provided ashes and palms for Good Friday and Palm Sunday services.

Welcomed 647 worshipers at the Easter services, including 73 individuals who attended the scenic and peaceful Sunrise Service at The Barn at Spring Brook Farm

Celebrated Christmas Eve with nearly 1,000 worshippers at 4 distinct services.

Partnered with Barb Snyder to host monthly prayer meetings for various ministries including Caregiving, Worship, Christian Education, Congregational Life, Youth, Service & Outreach, Staff & Lay Leaders, and Stewardship & Finance.

Combined the ushers, greeters, and Welcome Center ministries into the Hospitality Team.



RISK-TAKING SERVICE

Missions Committee (formerly Service & Outreach)

The Missions committee had a busy 2019 year, including the church's first annual Senior Week, which partnered with a variety of local organizations to offer service and learning opportunities with and for our older members and neighbors. Projects included volunteering at the West Chester Food Cupboard alongside residents of Barclay Friends, a learning session on spirituality and dementia, a senior/toddler story time, and a health fair at the West Chester Senior Center, along with an art exhibition by local photographer Darcie Goldberg. The summer was no less busy: the church coordinated a book drive for students at the Global Leadership Academy in Philadelphia and the Green House School in Cameroon, a sock collection for survivors of human trafficking, and organized family service projects with the West Chester University gardening program and Safe Harbor.

The fall and winter were spent organizing events with our local mission partners: a Halloween costume drive for kids served by the Friends Association, Thanksgiving meals for WCU students experiencing homelessness, hosting the Sanji Strong Christmas Party, a Rise Against Hunger packing event with our friends from Guatemala, the Migrant Ministry party and gift collection, and the annual Giving Tree drive which supported hundreds of our neighbors around the holidays. The church also supported individuals and families experiencing particular challenges in the past year: First Crew led a large renovation of Matt Hess' home after he was seriously injured in an accident, and members of the congregation financed and furnished an apartment for a local woman experiencing homelessness. The Missions Committee continues to financially support over twenty local, national, and international organizations through the generous support of our members. 2019 recipients included the West Chester Food Cupboard, the Barn at Spring Brook Farm, Act in Faith, and mission partners in Thailand, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and North Korea. A full list of organizations can be found on our website. At the end of 2019, the Service & Outreach committee made the decision to rename itself the "Missions" Committee to clarify and better communicate its purpose.

THE AGAPE TEAM

The Agape Team provides daily visitation to First Pres members who are receiving care at Chester County Hospital. A number of these individuals can no longer attend worship regularly due to age or illness, and these visits are an important connection to the church. The Agape Team also reaches out to those who are grieving at holidays and the anniversary of a loss.



OPENING OUR DOORS

As part of our mission to and for our neighbors in West Chester, First Pres opened its doors for a wide variety of one-time and ongoing events over the past year. The Women's Resource Center hosts their monthly legal clinic here, and we regularly serve as a Red Cross blood drive site. We hosted a Girls Advisory Board meeting for the Chester County Fund for Women and Girls, host staff meetings for the Maternal and Child Health Consortium, and provide space and volunteers for the Friends Association's family events, including their spring fling and holiday party. In April, First Pres was chosen to host a livestream featuring Temple Grandin, welcoming many families, experts, and others affected by autism. The West Chester Chess Club rents space from the church each week. Coffee, Kids, and Chaos, a free, drop-in playgroup for young children and their caregivers, fills Fellowship Hall on Thursday mornings.

FABRIC MISSIONS

First Pres Fabric Missions is comprised of two groups of women who use their artistic skills to serve the community and enjoy fellowship with one another. Sew Many Blessings makes comfort quilts, lap quilts, and pillowcases for those in hospice at Paoli Hospital and for children served by the foster care system in Chester County. Sweet Dreams crafts quilts for children baptized in our congregation and for young patients at Chester County Hospital. The two groups collaborated on their most successful fabric sale to date in November, selling a variety of homeware, decorative items, and ornaments.

STEPHEN MINISTERS

The Stephen Ministry team expanded this year to include two new members. This was a welcome addition given the continued demand for one-on-one support among members of our congregation and community. Stephen Ministers also regularly reach out to members of the church who have gone through a loss over the past year. Over the holidays the group sponsored a learning session and retreat for those grieving the death of a loved one with a local bereavement expert.

GUATEMALA PARTNERSHIP

This year, a team from our sister church in Guatemala spent a week us!

This November, we hosted three guests from Guatemala for a week of learning, fellowship, and fun. We shared meals, worshipped together, experienced Philadelphia and D.C, and built connections across cultural and geographical borders. We look forward to members of First Pres visiting Guatemala later this year. We are grateful for the partnership as we continue to serve Christ together in spite of the distance.



INTENTIONAL FAITH DEVELOPMENT

Christian Education

Started Faith-ing Forward, an e-newsletter for families with resources to help build and strengthen faith at home.

Offered two new educational programs over the summer: a weekly program for children during worship and an adult book study that brought approximately 15 people together for 6 weeks to share lunch and grow in their faith.

Led three gatherings of the Let's Talk Politics series, providing opportunities to consider how our faith influences how we speak and think about partisanship, politics, and prophetic ministry.

Strengthened weekly faith formation activities for all ages, including two adult classes and two children's programs on Sunday mornings.

Supported multiple women and men's study groups that provide regular opportunities for growth and fellowship.

Provided summer faith development activities for families, including multiple all-ages service projects, take-home worship boxes, and Vacation Bible School.

Led a men's retreat centered on the doctrines of the cross in Mark 8, with implications to consider what it truly means to be a follower of Christ.



Presbyterian Women

Five circles met monthly for fellowship, study, and to support church programs, as well as local, national, and worldwide missions. PW served and supported 18 organizations and contributed \$5,000. Each circle coordinated 2 service projects this year to raise awareness and help make an impact in the lives of those in need.



Great Escape Trip



Took over 20 students on summer trips to Fun in the Sun and The Great Escape.

Launched a new yearlong service initiative called "Love Where You Live."

Collected 145 lbs of food for families in Chester County

Donated \$145 to Gethsemane in Guatemala for their hunger relief initiative.

Provided games for the Friend's Association party.

Hosted the 4th annual Bill Hess Invitational and the 8th annual Youth Spaghetti Supper.

Packed hygiene and dishwashing kits for the West Chester Resource Pantry.

Annual Lock-in brought 70+ students to the church.

Food Donations



RADICAL HOSPITALITY

Congregational Life

Offered new member classes and welcomed 30 new members to First Pres.

Prepared and served two all-church brunches during coffee hour in Fellowship Hall.

Rolled out a brand-new event in place of the Easter Egg Hunt. Operation Easter Basket saw 170 of attendees for breakfast and together we made 150 baskets for children of local mission partners.

Supported our neighbors at the first ever Denney Reyburn Block Party with popsicles, marketing help, and event volunteers.

Got to know our neighbors over food and yard games at our Neighborhood Block Party on a summer evening in August.

Hosted over 600 people who attended our indoor Trick-or-Treat, including many community members (a 20% increase in attendance!)

Handed out cookies and coffee to Select Strings concert attendees at First Pres. Our booth on the front sidewalk enabled us to also share goodies with the people walking up to the WC Christmas parade.



Deacons

The deacons continue to lead First Pres's caregiving ministries. Along with visitation for members who can no longer regularly attend worship, they coordinate home communion, lead worship in local nursing homes, deliver flowers at the holidays, and provide touch points for new members and families going through the baptism process. The deacons coordinate and serve coffee on Sunday mornings and provide emergency financial assistance to church members experiencing an urgent need.

Trustees

Repaired and resurfaced the parking area behind the rental properties to improve access and eliminate hazardous conditions. The fencing was also replaced.



The Darlington Street parking area was redone to improve curb appeal and replace broken pavers.

Faded and yellowed Plexiglass panels covering the stained-glass windows on the Darlington Street side of the sanctuary were removed. The window frames were repainted, and tempered glass panels were installed for continued protection.

Contracts for landscaping and snow removal were approved.

Basement windows on the East and North side of the church were replaced.

Reviewed and approved Knox Hambleton's Eagle Scout Project to build the beautiful garden along Darlington Street.

The baptismal font was refinished.

HVAC improvements were completed at 126 West Miner Street.

Active Members of First Presbyterian Church: 1,096



THE BUCKET SCHOOL



The Bucket School is having another joyful year with 95 students enrolled (ages 2-5) and 16 dedicated staff members. Our newest 2 day full day pre-k program has been a wonderful addition this year. With the help of fundraisers, we were able to create an engaging block center in our library as well as several fun thematic dramatic play bins for classroom use. The children have benefitted from these fun additions to our school.

-Jen Drap, Preschool Director





Homelessness Initiative

"...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." - **Matthew 25:40**

In the Spring of 2019, Session was challenged to address the question of "What's next at First Pres?" What is God calling us to be about as a church? The question led to a broad discussion and many opportunities, but in the end Session decided to focus on the issue of homelessness with Matthew 25 as a guiding passage.

October 2019 - Trick-or-Treat:

Worked with the Friends Association to include their clients in our Halloween event. Many attended, some of whom also benefited from the church's appeal for Halloween costumes for the children.

November 2019 - Thanksgiving Meals to Go:

Provided Thanksgiving meals for the homeless students served by the Promise Program at West Chester University. The food was prepared in the homes of church members and brought to the church for packaging and distribution alongside our community partners at Sanji Strong.

December 2019 - Advent Worship:

On December 15th, Shane Claiborne, nationally known Christian social activist, was our guest preacher, focusing on the challenge of homelessness. Also during the month, a Christmas event was held for the families being served by the Friends Association.

To follow along and/or participate, go to **firstpreswc.com/m25**.



FINANCIALS

2020 BUDGET

SOURCES OF REVENUE		USE OF FUNDS	
Pledge Income	\$910,537	Personnel	\$858,686
Non-Pledge Income	\$155,122	Programs	\$57,270
Other Income	\$23,440	Administration	\$45,675
Preschool	\$7,000	Communication & Systems	\$19,960
Transfers from Investments	\$60,000	Building & Grounds	\$86,091
Des. Funds & Property Rentals	\$36,000	Service & Outreach	\$124,417
Total	\$1,192,099	Total	\$1,192,099

Financial Update



Year End Update

	December Actual	December Budget	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget
Income	\$148,512	\$160,435	\$1,187,913	\$1,246,388
Expenses	\$106,919	\$107,959	\$1,166,201	\$1,246,388
Difference	\$41,593	\$52,476	\$21,712	\$0

With a very strong contribution from the congregation (**98.9% of goal**) and below budget expenses, we ended 2019 with a \$21,712 surplus.



PERSONNEL

We are blessed to have a gifted and dedicated team serving our church. First Presbyterian Church began 2019 learning to live into our new staffing structure. Our program and support staff answered the call and stepped up to the challenge.

Early in the year, we welcomed three new members to the team who streamlined a lot of the existing processes. Claire Kramer began serving as Temporary Director of Finance and helped to keep us financially stable as we searched for a permanent staff member in that position. A few months later she accepted a permanent position as Administrative Assistant working in partnership with Karen Goldstein, our Office Manager. Claire's contribution this year has been invaluable.

We also called Jeff Somers as our Director of Finance and Operations. In partnership with our Finance Committee, Trustees and staff, Jeff updated most of our financial, stewardship and facilities procedures keeping us flexible, fiscally responsible and in good financial health.

Ann Dickey joined our staff later in the year and has been a blessing in worship leadership. She preached two excellent sermons and has assisted in worship on numerous occasions.

Life is a series of hellos and goodbyes. In the process of this past year we also said farewell and celebrated the ministry of Steve Clark (Associate Pastor).

Steve Clark accepted a call to Concord Presbyterian Church where he is doing very well and serving faithfully. He is missed by many of us, yet we are very grateful to God for Steve's ministry at First Pres.

We would need several pages to simply begin to give thanks to God for the contribution of each of our staff members in the areas of worship, caregiving, mission, education, communication, fellowship, operations and facilities. We are so grateful to God for our staff and pray for a blessing upon each of them, their families and our church.



Claire Kramer



Jeff Somers



Ann Dickey



Rev. Steve Clark

THANK YOU!

2019 was a wonderful year in the life of First Pres. It could not have happened without the countless people who serve, give, pray, and support the work of God on the corner of Miner & Darlington. It is a joy and a pleasure to journey together in the life of faith.



Our Biblical Story

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4:8-11

Our Mission Statement

Called to love God and one another, First Presbyterian Church responds to God's grace by following Christ with ministries of hospitality, worship, faith development, service and generosity.

Our Values

Radical Hospitality
Passionate Worship
Intentional Faith Development
Risk Taking Service
Extravagant Generosity

