



*Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Vamos*

## From Our Pastor

Blessings to all for a happy and fruitful 2020! This letter is something new this year, since there is much important information that we need to communicate to all who support the ministry of PCOL. Just as Berkshire-Hathaway sends a “shareholder letter” to those who have a stake in the company, we are sending this to inform you of critical information about where we are, and our strategy and decision-making for the future. But this is really a leaf straight out of the New Testament: you could think of all of Apostle Paul’s messages to his churches as “shareholder letters” for those supporting those ministries. We’re all stakeholders in PCOL’s ministry.

**Please take time to read this.** This letter is presented by me and your leaders who are making key decisions, so we can all be “in the same boat” as we move ahead. It is not an annual report per se, but a letter with certain key information we feel that every member and friend of our church needs to know. We know you care deeply about the ministry of this congregation, and we are asking all of us to renew our commitment to this 322-year-old congregation as we move into the future.

In Christ,

*Jeff Vamos*

### Preamble: What business are we in?

We can never get into the mode of thinking that we’re here to keep an institution going for its own sake. We are creating a strong institution so we can do the work of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, and the Head of the Church. So, here’s one way to summarize our mission: **we are in the people transformation business.** All we do, from youth and children’s ministry, worship and Bible study, training ex-offenders with job skills, hosting a basketball camp for local kids: it’s all about being, becoming and equipping disciples of Christ, and bearing Jesus’ light into the community outside our walls. We’ve come far, but we still have much exciting work to do in the future. So how about rolling up your sleeves with us?

### This year’s theme: No time for business as usual.

God has done so much through this congregation since 1698. We’d like to emphasize to the congregation that now is a time when we need to recommit ourselves to the amazing

ministry that God has given us to do, and to address ourselves both to a bright future, and some present challenges.

### Our present reality and future vision: being a center for the community.

Most of us are well aware of the results



THE  
COMMUNITY WELL  
Be well. Do good.

of the strategic planning process of about six years ago: the plan to create a community center on the footprint of our existing facilities. And so the Community Well was born. In its three and a half years of existence, the Community Well has brought over 35 organizations together to provide wellness and other services to the community, bringing hundreds of people into our doors. We’ve created the New Directions counseling center, which is now having a great impact on the mental health of our entire community, especially young people. We’ve created a job training program, CookWell, to equip formerly incarcerated persons with culinary job skills, for which we’ve raised over \$70,000 from sources outside

our church. All this activity has brought over \$38,000 of new yearly revenue into our church budget, more than the expenses to operate the center; a better than break-even result for a brand-new business.

**A developing partnership with the Princeton and Capital Area YMCAs.** A key element of our business plan for the Community Well is not to provide services ourselves, but to create mutually-enhancing partnerships in which other organizations provide the services, and they themselves receive benefit from being part of the center. Recently we've begun an extensive conversation with the CEO's of both the Capital Area YMCA and Princeton YMCA to envision future programming here at the Community Well. We're very excited about how this partnership is unfolding, as we might think of the YMCA's programming as an "anchor" to all our Community Well programming.

We have accomplished a lot! All this to maintain the vitality of our worship, and to enhance our core programs of Bible Study, excellent youth and children's programming, and ministries of care and compassion that connect us together.



**New and renewed facilities enhance existing programs and enable future ones.** Last year, we embarked upon an

ambitious capital campaign to provide the resources to enable PCOL truly to be a "center for the community." The "Our Hope for Years to Come" campaign raised more than this congregation has ever raised: \$2.3 Million. These new facilities will enable us to secure new revenues through expanded activities of the Community Well, they will bring new people into contact with our core ministries, and they will greatly enhance our own congregational programming. Please read more about what we're doing with the money we raised on the last page of this letter.

## **A congregation that is vital and growing.**

This congregation continues to be a beacon of light to our community: a place where people are practicing and growing their faith, and being transformed through the Word of God, and the ministry of the church. Here are some snapshots.

Just a few key highlights:

- 11 baptisms in 2019! (the envy of all churches in the presbytery)
- 17 new members including 4 confirmands, with 8 confirmands this year! (ditto)



*Some of our Cookwell trainees in the kitchen with Chef Frank.*



*A new weekly community basketball program through the Capital Area YMCA takes place in our Fellowship Center.*



*Shane Claiborne, a celebrated activist and author, addressed over 130 people at our "Breaking the Chains" conference.*



*Jessica Harbaugh and Chelsea Koch, two of our 2019 confirmands.*

- 35 partner organizations now operate services through The Community Well
- A new fellowship group for parents of young children has 32 members
- 251 adult learners in 2019
- Worship in a New Key is eleven years old
- Our softball team had its most wins (3) in a single season

## Let's be clear: PCOL has challenges; we will meet them.

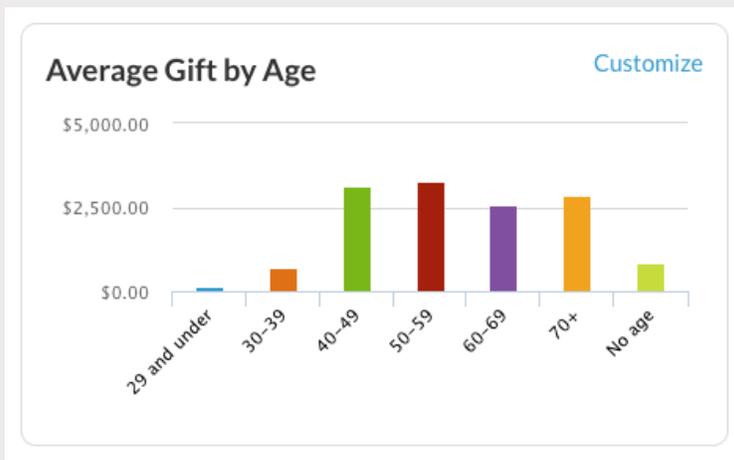
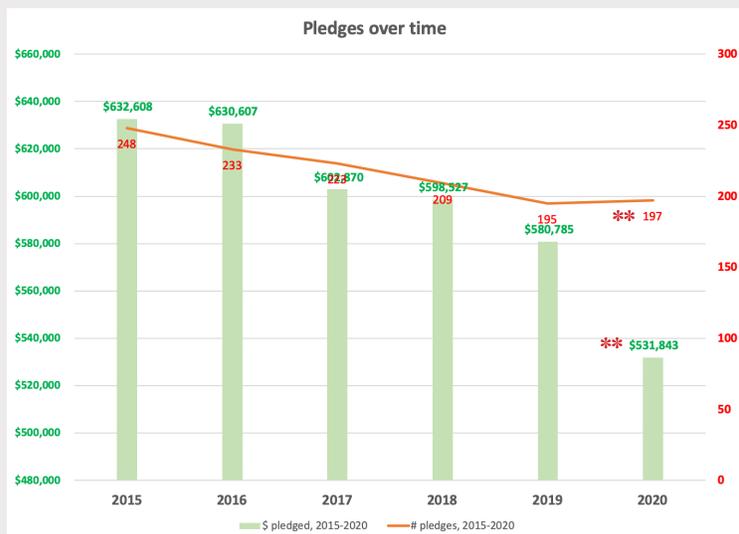
To fully implement this vision and to continue the vitality of our congregation, however, we can't go into the future thinking we can simply do things the way we've done them. We have a current financial challenge we need to meet. When we've been clear and straightforward about challenges we've faced in the past, this congregation has always risen to the need; we are confident this will be the case now.

**The broader context.** This challenge is not unique to our congregation, nor does it exist in a vacuum. Although giving to religious institutions is still the largest piece of the charitable giving pie, total giving to churches has

declined over 50% since 1990, and dropped 4% in the previous year alone. According to the Pew Research Center, the number of American adults describing themselves as Christians is down 12 percentage points over the past decade. These are "headwinds" that churches of all sizes are experiencing. The giving statistics of a flagship church in our area with about 1,500 members mirror our own: giving declined 3% in 2019, and their 500 pledge units in 1999 decreased to 360 in 2019. In light of all this, we're not doing too badly. But we have much room for improvement.

**Our current financial picture.** Simply put, we must increase our giving and decrease our spending in the short-term in order to fully fund our ministry. 2018 saw a deficit of over \$70,000 due to unexpected expenses and unpaid pledges, and although the picture in 2019 improved, our expenses this year are projected to outpace income by an annual rate of about \$60,000, a situation that is clearly unsustainable. We continue to lose larger givers to death and moving who are not being replaced by new givers as rapidly. The Session is committed to structural change that will bring our budget into balance, and we will need to cut mission funding or our personnel budget unless we can raise our revenue.

## Some Interesting Statistics about our Giving



\*\* These numbers reflect an additional \$39,980 from 32 pledge units who have pledged consistently in the past and we anticipate will do so for 2020.

## 2020 PLEDGE DATA

To the right is a table relating to pledges received thus far in 2020. This does not include those who pledged last year whom we still expect to pledge. The pledges represented here total \$14,962 more than in 2019.

Increase	46	Pause	2
Decrease	21	Total	491,593
No Change	84	Difference	14,962
New	12	Pledges	163
No Pledge	5		

## Yes we can! PCOL responds.

We have a faithful and well-crafted strategy for the future, and resources to implement that strategy. More resources will come from the Community Well, which will be enhanced by our capital improvement/expansion plans (see below). But, we want to be clear about the current financial challenge, and the prospect of painful cuts if we don't respond. Meeting the need is very do-able: if all who already support the church financially simply increased their giving by a dollar a day, we'd have more than enough to balance our budget. We will be in touch with you about responding to this need in future communications.

## "Our Hope for Years to Come" capital campaign projects: an update.

It is truly amazing that our congregation has raised over \$2.3 million to restore, maintain and expand our facilities, and to further our mission. The vision that we put forth to the congregation required \$3 million to fulfill, and our



*Rendering of the Fearon Atrium*



*Rendering of the South Lobby Area*

Capital Projects Team (CPT), chaired by Bob Sargent, has been working diligently to put together a plan that will do as much as we can given the resources we have raised.

- *Restoring and Maintaining our Facilities.* The CPT is facilitating key deferred maintenance/upgrade projects. Some have already been accomplished: HVAC in the classrooms/lounge; manse porch restoration; painting the Meetinghouse vestibule; installation of an air conditioner in kitchen. Other projects will be tackled soon (partial list): painting the cupola, restoration of the vestibule flooring, and refurbishing exterior fixtures for the Meetinghouse; and kitchen upgrades. The CPT is devoting as many resources as possible to these projects, but some aspects, such as painting the Meetinghouse interior, will wait until more resources are available.
- *New Construction.* The CPT and Session have made careful decisions about the wise use of our resources given new construction and economies of scale. For this reason, the CPT is devoting sufficient resources to build the Fearon Atrium, and an expansion of the south lobby area (see illustrations), though we do not have the resources to add a second-floor addition. However, the plan does call for other accessibility upgrades, such as an elevator to connect all levels of the chapel area.
- *New construction requires new services.* Because the CPT has committed resources to new construction, it will require new services to be brought into the church such as water in order to construct the sprinkler system required by code. These improvements will greatly enhance the safety of our facility, but was not anticipated in our earlier case, meaning that the team's plan needs to be as efficient as possible.
- *Fellowship Center Improvements.* The CPT's plan will commit as many resources as possible to the renovation of the Fellowship Center; some aspects of that renovation will be completed at the end of the campaign or when resources become available.
- *Mission and Endowment.* The CPT/Session plan commits at least \$300,000 to build up our endowment, provided by one generous legacy gift, and will commit the same proportion (9%) of the total raised as in our original case to mission.

Questions? Comments? We're always eager to hear from you. Please feel free to talk to me at [jvamos@pclarencville.org](mailto:jvamos@pclarencville.org), to any of the staff members, or to email us at [office@pclarencville.org](mailto:office@pclarencville.org).