



ANNUAL REPORT

2020

BRECKSVILLE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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From Pastor Allan

I am going to assume that anyone looking back at this report is looking for ideas and inspiration about how the church faced the COVID19 crisis. The church was fortunate in recognizing the threat early, before the lockdowns began. We were looking for alternative ways to worship before we had to, so when we had to close, we were ready to transition to an online service right away. We chose to use Zoom as our meeting app. In order to make it work, we had to have a Zoom host for admitting people into the meeting, as well as for taking emergency measures if the Zoom meeting got 'bombed' by hackers looking to disrupt and upset parishioners. We also had to have a slide runner to take care of presenting the PowerPoint bulletin via screensharing.

We worked hard to make the service as accessible as possible to as many people as possible. Instructions on how to use Zoom were sent out to members. We knew that some people would be calling in via telephone, so we made sure to read out important numbers or important website addresses in full, and not just assume that everyone could see what was on the screen. At one point we had intended to move back into broadcasting from within the sanctuary. This held some technical challenges, but we were working on them. However, the governor's premature decision to re-open, against medical advice, caused numbers to skyrocket and the plans had to be put on hold.

The communications ministry worked hard to keep the website up to date as a source of information for the congregation. Emails were also sent out. The minister wrote several rounds of cards to the entire congregation in longhand. There was not room on the cards for the necessary apologies for the poor penmanship! The minister provided many ways for the congregation to return the contact: snail mail, email, home phone, cell phone, virtual office hours. Nonetheless, communication was not easy. We realized that our phone data was not up to date nor was it complete. The situation improved as time went on.

As people settled into the routine of the early pandemic, the church held meetings of small groups twice a week in the parking lot to provide at least some way for people to see each other. As Summer and Fall turned into Winter, those meetings stopped, but were planned to resume in the Spring.

The church was able to serve members who had gone to Florida or elsewhere for the winter. They could continue to participate in the service. We also had people from other churches signing in to our services. Some of them went on to become members in virtual services.

The congregation lost one adherent and his wife to Covid, and several members to age or infirmity. Funerals were difficult. Some services were held outside with social distancing and masks. Others were held at funeral homes with sterilization and social distancing of smaller groups. This didn't work well, as there were always people who refused to mask
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From Pastor Allan (continued)

properly, and who wanted to hug and greet each other in their grief, in spite of the safety protocols in place. Some services were delayed until the pandemic eased enough to be able to gather properly. As I write this, some services have yet to be performed in April of 2021.

As the vaccine became available, finding out where to get it proved a challenge. Some members who were able to access resources more easily reached out to other members to make sure that they could find appointments. Others provided transportation for people to get to their vaccine appointments. This was a valuable service.

The pandemic forced the church to adapt to the situation and to adopt technology that, in the long run, should improve our ministry outreach. The church was thrust into the 21st century in the third decade of it; better late than never!

Some lessons:

1. Put a plan in place to go virtual early. This saved us a lot of trouble.
2. Be clear about the dangers of meeting in person anywhere, not just in church. Our adherent was lost because he got COVID at a VFW meeting; his wife got it from him. If we had been more forceful about stressing the dangers of meeting anywhere, this might have had a different outcome.
3. Keep your contact information up to date on a regular basis.
4. Be prepared to adapt. Many things we tried early didn't work. We still haven't got it all figured out, but meetings are becoming more regular again, and contact with each other is getting better.
5. Good things can still happen. The church partnered with a neighbor to establish a Little Anti-Racist Library, in the midst of the pandemic. The church also worked with the Tri-C Culinary Arts Program to prepare a fundraising fish dinner at the beginning of Lent. This was a delicious and successful collaboration.
6. We aren't through this yet, but it's already clear that the world we left behind is going to be changed when this is all over. We will mourn the things we loved that are lost, but we have to keep our eyes open to the new world that God is bringing into being, full of opportunities and possibilities for ministry in the future.

Music

Respectfully submitted on April 7, 2021 by David Debick, Director of Music, Brecksville UCC

On February 23, Brecksville UCC celebrated Mardi Gras with traditional New Orleans-style music, colorful hats, beads, etc. The professional band included: Bob Gref, clarinet; Steve Ostrow, trumpet; Bruce Lehtinen, trombone; Gary Adams, tuba; and Steve Kraus, banjo. As always, the service was followed by a mouth-watering Mardi Gras potluck downstairs in Pilgrim Hall. This was our last big in-person event of 2020

In March, not long after our choir/seasonal choir had begun preparing music for Holy Week, Covid-19 started spreading across the globe. Governor Mike DeWine ordered most schools, bars, restaurants, gyms, and churches closed. Many companies' employees were forced to work virtually from home. Millions of jobs were lost – either temporarily or permanently.

As I write this annual report (April 2021), more than 556K U.S. lives have been lost to Covid-19. Globally – including the U.S. – there have been >133M cases, with 107M+ recoveries and 2.88M+ deaths. Fortunately, several effective vaccines have been developed, and schools, churches, businesses, gyms, restaurants, and movie theaters are gradually reopening.

Because of the pandemic, services at BUCC had to be done via Zoom starting in March 2020. Our adult and children's choirs stopped in-person rehearsals in mid-March, as did the recorder/dulcimer/guitar ensemble and the youth percussion group. For Christmas season 2020, Jim Duffy helped me extract several holiday pieces for our Zoom holiday services. This was true of Holy Week 2021 as well. My sincere thanks to Jim for helping me with these special projects.

For our weekly services, I have relied on YouTube videos and recordings for preludes, musical offerings, and postludes, and BUCC singers and instrumentalists have assisted with musical offerings and hymn support. As always, I try to keep the hymns and musical offerings relevant to Pastor Allan's sermons.

There is talk of forming a taskforce to handle reopening the church for services. I have offered to participate with this taskforce. There is a recent rise in Covid cases in Ohio, so our reopening will depend largely on diminishing Covid cases/deaths and ever-increasing vaccinations.

Christian Education

From Kate Klonowski

We started off the year strong with efforts to finalize our youth protection policies and background check procedures to only have everything shut down right before implementation. All tentative speaker engagements were postponed, and efforts shifted to adopting online and alternative ways to connect with the younger people of the church.

Ms. Mindy, the early elementary teacher, took it upon herself to create weekly care packages with lessons for the all the students at BUCC (regardless of grade level) and either sent out or hand-delivered these items. For holidays and special occasions, these care packages included wonderful and fun gifts for the children to make sure they felt included and stayed part of the joy of being in community with us. As the year progressed and the move to online services was made, a 9:30 am time with children was created on Zoom before the regular service at 10:00, for Ms. Mindy to teach the students and work together on the projects she sent out earlier in the week. Her husband, Mr. Jesse, has also been a major player in this effort. Both Ms. Mindy and Mr. Jesse have essentially kept CE going through the pandemic. Ms. Mindy has graciously agreed to take on the mantle as chair in 2021.

Communication & Outreach

From Jim Duffy – **Members: Paul Kuzmins, Ben Rehling, David Ritchey, Valerie Tyler**
Chairperson: Jim Duffy

2020 started out slowly, but changed in March, as we lost some of our primary methods of communicating among ourselves and our community. We could no longer meet in person, (at church on Sundays), nor could we invite the community inside.

So, as a congregation, we adapted:

- As new methods of holding our worship services via Zoom were developed, we put together the training materials to be sent via email and the Pillar.
- Bought and installed a large banner for the front door, promoting our Virtual Service.
- To develop and approve our 2020 Congregational Vision, we held Zoom meetings to discuss the source documents. We issued conducted a Google Docs-based survey to gather input. Then we met, again via Zoom, with a small group of Council volunteers (Cliff Cribbs and Bridget Sproul) to refine the vision. Then the Council reviewed and made additional changes. This completed vision was shared with the congregation on at our Zoom service on Pentecost Sunday, 2021. It was posted on our website at:
<https://brecksvilleunitedchurchofchrist.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/bucc-vision-2020.pdf>
- The website, **<https://Brecksvilleucc.org>**, was reorganized to make the opening page more exciting and inviting. We also moved the important content, promoting our virtual worship services and events, closer to the “front” of the site. We also improved how the site looks when viewed on mobile devices.
- We posted Zoom recordings of our worship services on Facebook for all to see. We also posted links for them on the website These have been viewed by an average of 15-20 people each week. Our Christmas Eve recording was viewed by 103 people.
- We used our Facebook group (for our members) and our Facebook Page (for everyone) to communicate news and events.

Facilities

From Cliff Cribbs

- The concrete ramp leading to the entrance by the parlor was repaired.
- The LED light replacements were installed in the offices, upper commons and kitchen.
- Automatic hand sanitizer dispensers and four stands were installed in the church.
- The hot water tank in the rental Unit B Arlington house was replaced.

Finance

From Bruce McCain

As damaging as 2020 was to the community life of BUCC, the financial side of the church held up remarkably well. That testifies to the commitment members and friends of the church have to the ongoing mission of this community of faith.

Total church income, exclusive of property rentals, came to \$171,288. The vast majority of that came from contributions. Total income exceeded what we anticipated by \$14,293, helped by an unexpected stock market windfall and a larger share of givers fulfilling their pledges. Total church-related income for 2020 also came very close to 2019's total of \$175,673.

The rental operations of the church also netted \$1,322 more than we expected. In 2020, net income from the rental house was \$7,836, while rental of the Christian Ed wing added \$20,508 more to achieve total rental income of \$28,344. That total compares with \$27,022 of rental income in 2019.

Operating expenses were significantly reduced in 2020 because the congregation could not meet in person, as cleaning and other operating costs were reduced. Thus, total operating expenses came to \$211,961, which was \$36,171 less than the deficit the church would have suffered in 2020 if all the projected spending had occurred, and was well below 2019's total expenditure of \$228,147.

The combination of solid income receipts and lower expenses substantially reduced the deficit for the year to just \$12,239. That was significantly better than the \$61,791 deficit projected by the "worst case" budget assumptions for the year, and was also much better than the \$25,453 deficit incurred in 2019.

We are grateful that the congregation was so faithful in its giving in 2020, and that reduced operating expenses allowed for a smaller deficit. In an otherwise difficult year, the smaller deficit gives the church more time to put its long-term finances on a better footing.

Leadership & Development

From Bridget Sproul

Chairperson: Bridget Sproul

Ministry Members: Cliff Cribbs, Julie Bernard, Linda Kriynovich, Beth Rehling, Sue Maier

Leadership Development started the year by visiting with each of the church's ministries. We asked each ministry to tell us about themselves, request that they meet monthly and take notes to place in the church office. We requested that they plan out the year's calendar of activities. We helped brainstorm ideas for their ministries. Sue Maier collected and summarized information about all the ministries. This is now available on the website to be viewed. Once the pandemic closed everything down, the ministry didn't really do anything. By the late summer, we started to brainstorm about finding officers, chairpersons, and members for 2021. It was an extremely challenging endeavor to do without having church meet in person. We did fill most all positions, but very few members joined ministries who weren't involved from 2020. We are hoping that the pandemic ends and that members will be interested in getting involved again.

Membership

From David Pastor

January 5, 2020 - Committee meeting laid out 1 monthly membership activity for each month of the year. Then Covid-19 came to town....

February 23 – Mardi Gras Pot Luck - approximately 60 attendees.

March 1 – Bowling Outing - Approximately 25 men, women, teenagers and children bowlers.

September 16 – Guess the Member Game – Over 17 weeks and 29 members baby pictures were submitted.

Our Church's Wider Mission

From Kate Klonowski

OCWM maintained our "5 for 5" in special collections this year. We decreased the percentage we donated to UCC national as we wished to be cautious (budget-wise) during the pandemic.

We began a virtual book club this year focused on social justice topics, and will continue to carry out this activity indefinitely. We also participated as a church in the Black Lives Matter rally in Brecksville this summer, and were excited to be included in the installation of an anti-racism little library that was installed at the front of the church by a local (non-parishioner) resident. Socks, hats, scarves and other clothing items were collected throughout the fall season and distributed to local shelters and our partner churches during hunger meals. Our year concluded with the Giving Tree collection for the children in the Prentis Autism school.

Spiritual Life

From Janet Renovetz

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we stopped gathering in our church building, and began worshipping remotely, on March 15th, 2020. This continued through the end of the year. But we didn't let this limit us, as we added an extra service for All Soul's day on November 2nd at 7pm. This special service honored our members who died, families of our members, and those who were loved, as there were no formal funeral services due to covid. We heard that it was well received.

We also sent out an Advent book at the end of November. We went through all the previous Advent books, selected verses, emailed the information to Anne Melfo and she put it all together to hand out on the first Sunday of Advent. It was well accepted using verses from previous years.

ILCU and other church members sent out many cards to members throughout this pandemic, just to say "hello" and to let them know that they are not forgotten! In the days before Christmas, poinsettias were delivered to members who were homebound.

Staff/Congregation Relations

From Evie Novak - **Members: Cliff Cribbs, Marge Culver, Mike Westerberg**
Chairperson: Evie Novak

2020 was an active and busy year for the ministry. Our focus this year was in five primary areas:

Job Descriptions:

- We finalized a revision of the Office Manager's Employment Agreement/Job Description and Task List which was nearly completed in 2019.
- We reviewed and updated the Director of Music Employment Agreement/Job Description.
- We created a Job Description for the Nursery Attendant position.

Staff Meetings:

We conducted formal Staff Meetings with Jeannette Kroeger, David Debick and Pastor Allan Lane.

Annual Employment Reviews:

Throughout the last quarter of 2020, we worked diligently on the creation of an employee performance review system. The objective of the system was to create bilateral dialog to improve the staff member's experience. Our goal was to have a system in place by 2021 so that each paid staff member could be reviewed on an annual basis prior to making compensation recommendations for the following year. We got a great start on the project in 2020.

Pandemic Response:

Due to the COVID pandemic, we instituted work from home procedures for staff, return to work procedures, adjustments in Office Manager hours, distributed information to members concerning ongoing changes within the church, and prepared safety practices for members and staff.

Personnel:

- We recorded an employee accident/injury.
- Recruited Office Aids to assist the Office Manager during busy periods.
- We addressed employee and member concerns as they arose.
- We reviewed salaries and made recommendations for 2021. Due to our budget deficit and financial uncertainties, there were no salary increases for 2021.
- After Pastor Allan's one year anniversary on August 15, 2020, we renewed his covenant as Interim Minister twice, for three-month intervals.
- Jeannette Kroeger resigned as Office Manager effective August 20, 2020 and Anne Melfo was hired as Office Manager effective August 17.

Stewardship

From Committee Members: Carol Miller, Pat Rehm, Leroy Ford, Jon Thompson, Matt Wolbert

February 16, 2020

Committee met with Beth Rehling and Bridget Sproul (representing Leadership Development) to review our responsibilities. We updated the 2014 Purpose Statement for the BUCC Ministries Summary as follows:

STEWARDSHIP PURPOSE STATEMENT: Responsible for promoting stewardship of all life and for connecting our spiritual commitment of time, talent, and resources to God's work through the church. This ministry conducts an annual stewardship pledge drive, raises congregational awareness about planned giving, and provides opportunities for members to contribute their time and talents to the church's ministry. The committee provides opportunities to learn about stewardship of church, ecology, self, and our planet.

We brainstormed ideas for additional activities that we can focus on later in this year:

- Work with older Sunday school kids and use audiovisual equipment for education about environmental issues
- Sponsor educational programs about environmental issues
- Sponsor educational programs about estate planning

In **February** we established an email account **buccstewardship2020@gmail.com**

Between **February and April**, we made many attempts to establish an Amazon smile account and were unable to do so, because BUCC does not have an independent 501c IRS status (we are part of the larger Cleveland UCC).

In **April** we sent 5 email blasts with suggestions and activities related to Earthday (April 22).

In **April/May** we sponsored a survey about pledges to get feedback from congregation, about changes in their contributions due to COVID-19. We received 45 responses and passed the results on to Finance, so they could present pledge information to Council for planning.

On **August 22**, Carol Miller and Pat Rehm attended a 4-hour video conference on *What Does Stewardship Look Like in the Time of COVID-19?* Highlights of the conference were presented at Council for the following sessions: Theology of generosity, stewardship principles, technology and giving, and year-long generosity stewardship development.

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Stewardship (continued)

September through November we focused on the annual Pledge campaign with the following activities:

- bought digital materials including 4 “bulletin inserts” from UCC Resources with the theme of Three Great Loves (Children, Neighbor, Creation, Love in Action)
- coordinated with Spiritual Life and Pastor Allen, to incorporate this theme with 4 speakers during Sunday services in November
- mailed 102 letters with pledge cards to congregation
- sent emails and wrote Pillar articles related to the pledge campaign

Periodically during the year, we submitted articles for The Pillar and sent email blasts pertinent to Stewardship activities.

PSNC

(Pastor Search & Nominating Committee)

From Sherrill Witt – Members: Cliff Cribbs, Joy Garapic, Allan Klonowski, Beth Rehling, Ben Rehling, Jon Thompson

Co-Chairs: Sherrill Witt & Cliff Cribbs

The process of finding a new Pastor for BUCC is a lengthy one that can take 12-18 months, and is hampered even more by the Covid pandemic. The new format requested by UCC is an in-depth and honest examination of who we are as a church, and who we want to become as a church community, in order to match us with the appropriate person. Rather than answers to fairly direct questions, the Church Profile is more of a series of reflective essays in response to questions about BUCC, what we would offer to the person who would like to lead our community of faith, and what we would expect from him/her/them.

As part of this new Church Profile, our committee called almost all members of our church, to survey them for their personal profiles and to help make sure our new directory is an accurate one. This was a wonderful experience and we hope the members enjoyed it as much as we did! The input given, regarding how our members view our church and what those members want in a new Pastor, was wonderful and a helpful guide for our search. Next steps will be to set the salary/benefits range, finish and review the final Profile and submit it to Living Waters Association, for comment, review and approval, before it is released to potential candidates. We hope this will take less than 60 days. We pray that this careful and thoughtful process will produce the best possible candidate and leadership for Brecksville United Church of Christ.