

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO

# NEWSLETTER

Lent 2021

## REST & REFUGE IN LENT

By Rev. Dr. Ken Hughes

Let me offer an immediate clarification so that the theme of Lent 2021 is not misunderstood. By “rest” I don’t mean inactivity – heaven knows we’ve had enough of that forced on us in these nearly 12 months of pandemic. And by “refuge” I don’t mean some high-walled citadel that blocks the world out.

No, the “rest & refuge” we should aim for in Lent imagines *rest* as an experience of renewal and reinvigoration, and *refuge* as a place (or attitude) that promotes self-awareness. Rest and refuge are not the same thing, but they reinforce each other. That’s a worthy combination in Lent.

We’ll pursue these two practices primarily through worship. Beginning on Ash Wednesday, February 17, we’ll select a scripture lesson lifting up rest or refuge to focus on. We’ll surround it with prayer, responsive readings, music, a brief message, and occasionally a surprise video. That practice of mid-week worship will continue all the way through Holy Week. Our final Wednesday gathering will be on March 31<sup>st</sup> as we ready ourselves for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter.

There will be other ways to embrace rest and refuge. The Lent-long study of Mark, which will be held on Tuesdays at 6 pm, will be fertile ground for renewal and reflection. Here’s how Rowan Williams, the author of our class text, *Meeting God in Mark*, describes his purpose:

*"[My book] is an attempt to help us read Mark slowly, to go back over the surface simplicity of the text and tune in to some of the deeper themes – above all to listen to the various ways in which Mark is challenging us not simply to read but to expose ourselves to a new and transforming relationship with the figure at the heart of his story."*

And then there will be the inevitable surprises of the next six weeks. Times and events when personally and collectively we find the need, and opportunity, for rest and refuge. If the past year has taught us anything, it is that we cannot go this alone. In Lent, Psalm 27 provides a guiding thought: “Come, my heart says, ‘seek his face!’ Your face, LORD, do I seek.”

Blessings,  
*Ken*

# CHURCH LIFE LENTEN MISSION PROJECT

By Elder Jean Hess

“Be generous, and you will be prosperous. Help others and you will be helped.”

Proverbs 11:25 (Good News)

As we enter the season of Lent, we remember that it is a time of reflection and preparation. This past year has given us many opportunities to reflect on the fact that we have more than we need and more blessings than so many others have.

The Church Life committee would like to extend a hand to homeless people here in Buffalo during this pandemic. Several faith based missions for the homeless such as Hearts for the Homeless and the City Mission have an ongoing need for “Help Packets” for their clients. These packs might include personal care items, snacks and warm clothing items. We will focus on the personal care items as our Lenten service project.

Our goal is to have members and friends of First Church purchase items from the list below which will then be assembled into these help packets. Items may be dropped off at church or pick up may be arranged. Contact Jean Hess at (716) 883-5351, (716) 713-4274 or [hessjb290@yahoo.com](mailto:hessjb290@yahoo.com)

The most requested items are:

- Adult toothbrushes**
- Toothpaste (small or travel sizes)**
- Shampoo (small)**
- Deodorant**
- Hand sanitizer or wipes**
- Washcloths – darker colors preferred**
- Bar soap (individually wrapped)**
- Multipacks of razors**
- Tissues (small packs)**
- Sturdy combs**
- Lip balm (any brand)**



Choose one or several items to help out with this project. Drop them at church or call for a pickup. Many items come in multipacks which we will divide.

Let's aim to get our items to church by March 1! We will have a socially distanced assembly once we have the items. If you are interested in helping with assembly, let me know. Remember Matthew 25:40 – “Whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters, you did for me.”

# MEMBERSHIP THOUGHTS

By Elder Liz Kamke

Worship  
with us  
from  
HOME

If you don't have a computer, you can still get to the service with your phone, and it doesn't even have to be a smart phone. You can dial in even from a landline. I expect it's sort of like listening to the service on the radio, but you can tell us that you are there and it will be like old home week when we hear that you are with us! I always felt that when I went to church I was "plugging in". What's God's plan for me this week? What am I supposed to hear or learn or do?

Dr. David Bond and Rev. Ken Hughes are working hard every week to bring this possibility to us, to be able to worship in a safe way. The big surprise for me is how well the "connection" is working, how plugged in I feel. If you aren't joining in on the Zoom opportunity, you are missing out, and we have a big welcome ready for you when you decide to take a risk and give it a try! If you have questions or need inspiration, give me a call or text at 716-400-3770.

Have you connected to our Zoom service yet? Who would ever have expected it to be satisfying?! Certainly not me!

Due to the Pandemic and a construction project, Pierce and I have been living in Angelica since May, but I've been able to get to "church" every Sunday thanks to the Zoom. Lou Ann and Marv Riegle would be stopped at the border but they are able to be with us, and so are Dan and Kathy Fitzmorris who grew up in First Church but now live in Saratoga County. I think we are at about 25 participants so far, but this column is aimed at folks who haven't tried it yet.

There is a strong feeling of community, even though we are all so isolated. If you tune in early (10:15) you get to greet everyone, check in on how everyone is doing, and get yourself ready for the Worship service at 10:30. Enjoy your coffee and say hello.

Rev. Ken Hughes manages to make us feel like we are right there with him, and between Maria Oakley, James Gardner and Don Houck the Children's sermons are another highlight. James' three kids really add to the message!

## BABY BOOK SHOWER

**SUNDAY, MARCH 21  
AFTER WORSHIP VIA ZOOM**

*Save the date for an online book-themed baby shower  
honoring Lucas & Connie Lloyd.*

*More details to come as time gets closer.*

*We have 3 couples expecting babies this year!  
The Membership Committee is planning ways to celebrate  
each family! Stay tuned!*

# THE WORK OF THE “FUTURE OPTIONS” TEAM

Over the next 3 pages you'll find an update on the Session's efforts to explore and define possibilities for First Church, an activity being led by the "Future Options" working group. This report is offered against the background of recent downward trends in membership and finances. The Session has completed a review of our membership rolls, which resulted in a reduction of our active membership from 255 to 114. Obviously, this did not occur overnight, but over a span of a decade or more. Still, it is an important factor as we continue to seek a future for First Church that roots itself in God's will for our ministry.

We are hoping to schedule a "hybrid" annual meeting of the congregation by the end of March, allowing for both in-person and online participation. In the meantime, we welcome questions and comments from the congregation on this status report on "Future Options."

For the Session, with blessings,  
Pastor Ken

Throughout the fall and into early winter, the Session and other church leaders have been engaged in a thorough review of First Church's circumstances and ministry. This followed the summertime sermon series Rev. Hughes preached on our congregation's purpose and vision.

In the ensuing months, the Session has engaged with the Presbyterian Foundation, a PCUSA department that assists churches in transition. Rev. Ellie Johns-Kelley and Paul Grier have provided Foundation consultancy services, free of charge.

The Foundation's expert, objective advice is shaping First Church's options as it looks to the future. To manage this ongoing conversation and analysis, the Session formed a working group, which includes Elders Jean Hess, Don Houck, Kailee Van Brunt, Mark Armesto, Liz Kamke, and Janet Hill. Mike Henry, president of the Corporate Board, and Rev. Hughes, are also participating.

The purpose of this note is to bring the congregation up to date on the working group discussions with the Foundation, to share some of the "products" of that engagement, and to outline where we go from here.

## Financial Analysis

A key piece of information was a comprehensive review by the Foundation of First Church finances, both from the perspective of congregational giving patterns and overall financial status.

### Giving Patterns

The Foundation's key findings on giving can be summarized as follows (details are provided in charts below):

- The bulk of First Church givers are in their 60's, 70's, and 80's.
- Very few donors give \$10,000 or more.
- 40 percent of all giving comes from donors 80 and older.
- A significant number of members contribute \$20 weekly or less.
- Rather than "bell-shaped" curve to overall giving (i.e., evenly distributed across ages), donations are very lopsided toward older givers.

The graph to the right depicts how giving to First Church falls out by age group. The bottom half of the chart (slices in dark blue, light blue, and green) indicates that over 70 percent of total donations and pledges comes from members in their 60's, 70's, and 80's.

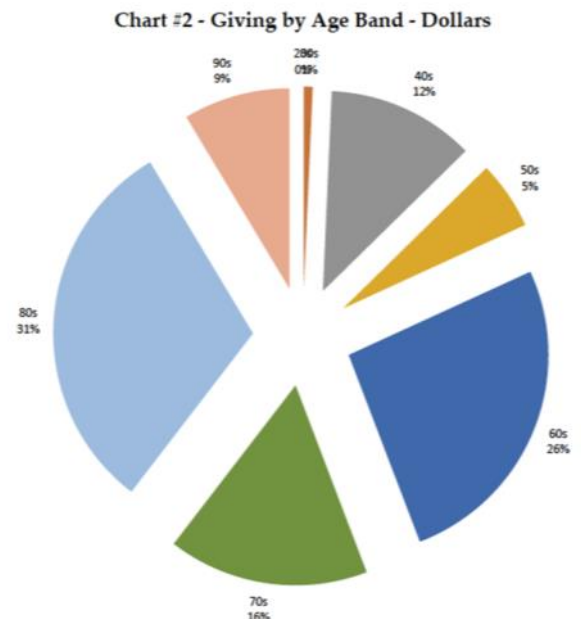
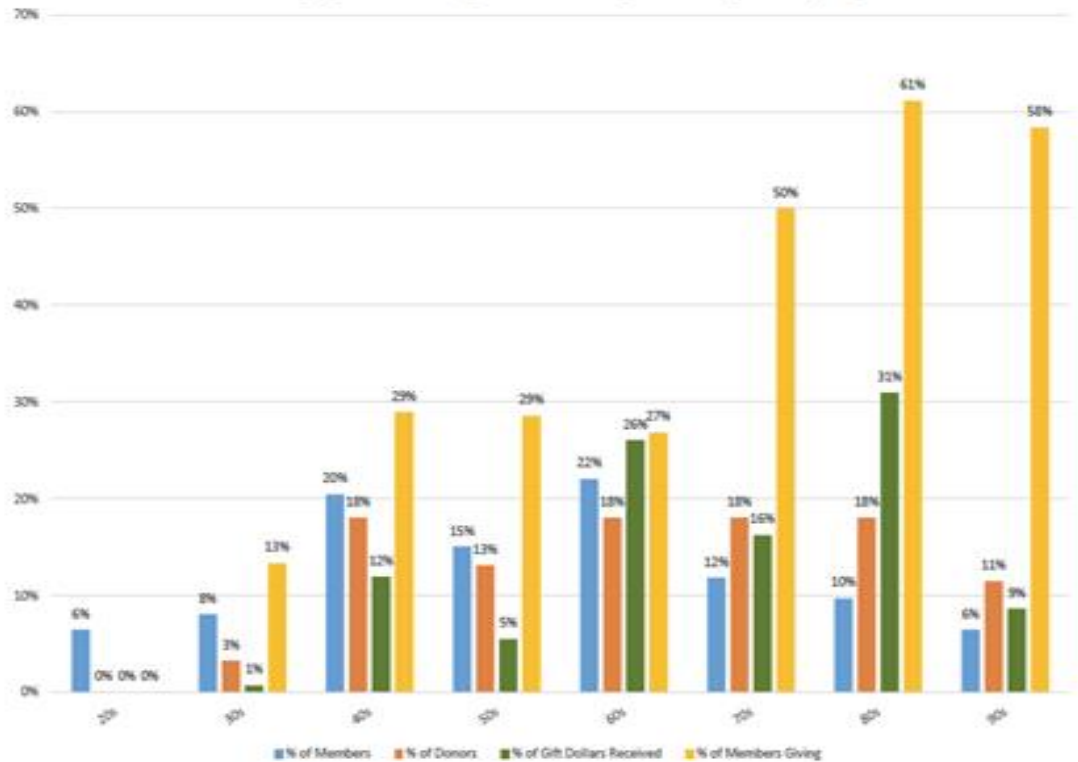




Chart #5 - Congregational Composition, Giving, & Participation by Age-Band



The chart to the right provides details of giving within specific age bands. Of particular interest is the fact that while donors 20-50 years of age account for 46 percent of membership, they contribute only 18 percent of gift dollars received.

### Financial Status

In looking at First Church’s operating budgets and financial reserves, the Foundation emphasized in particular:

- First Church faces existential questions about its future. Across the nation many historic Presbyterian congregations long for a past when the church was larger, more influential, more engaged in the community, and had high member energy and commitment. Such churches must reconcile their impressive histories with the realities of today’s church life.
- As a general rule, church leaders must ask themselves and their members:
  - Does our church have a clear mission and purpose?
  - Is our church spiritually vital and alive?
  - Is our church willing to change to meet new challenges?
  - What would draw new members into our fellowship?
- More practically and immediately:
  - The church must find ways to stop operating at a deficit.
  - Financial information must be made clear to all members of Session and other leaders so that decisions are based on accurate and timely understanding of data.

### Session Response

Grateful for the broad and detailed analysis and recommendations of the Foundation, the working group has concentrated its efforts on developing “Future Options” for First Church.

Specifically, the working group is examining four possibilities, with the understanding that other options may emerge or combinations of the following may develop as viable alternatives. Within this table are factors that must be considered by the two-person teams examining each option (see next page):

Liz Kamke; Ken Hughes	Jean Hess; Janet Hill	Mark Armesto; Don Houck	Kailee Van Brunt; Mike Henry
<b>Remain &amp; Grow/ Remain &amp; Close</b>	<b>Nest/ Merge with new church</b>	<b>Redevelop Property/ Acquire Partner</b>	<b>Sell building &amp; move to new site</b>
Growth strategy requires robust Ministry Plan	Begins with assessment of candidate churches	Requires church capital investments	Would have to balance losses in current membership with expected new site gains
If growth is unsuccessful, “glide path” to closing would be necessary	How would congregation respond to choice between nesting & merging?	Need to identify “partner” possibilities, e.g., developer, <u>charitable</u> foundation?	Would have to ensure market value of church meets expected purchase costs

**Critical Factors**

Influencing the development of future options are several critical factors that will heavily influence recommendations and proposals. They are:

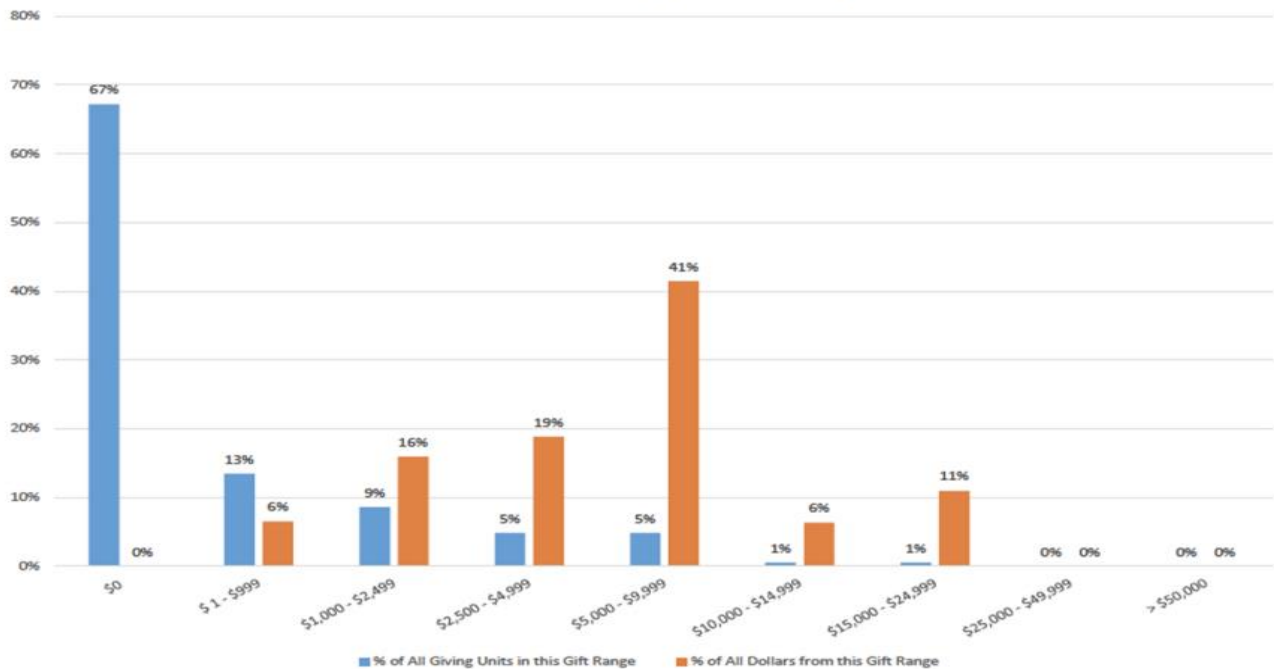
- Income**
- Expenses**
- Staffing**
- Property**

Any proposed future course(s) must gauge the impact of these factors on probable success and sustainability. For its part, the Foundation will continue to assist the Session and working group in evaluating proposed actions and solutions.

**Next Steps**

The working group teams, even in a COVID-19 environment, are moving as quickly as possible to gather information, identify problems and possibilities, and formulate initial ideas. For a variety of reasons, all four teams cannot necessarily move at the same pace, so the congregation can expect occasional updates and recommendations as they are developed between now and spring.

**Chart #7 - Giving by Gift Range**

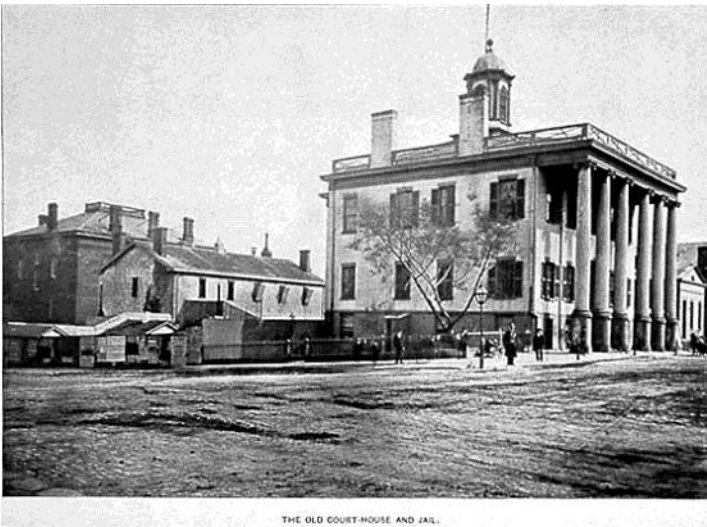


# CLERK'S CORNER

By Elder Janet Hill

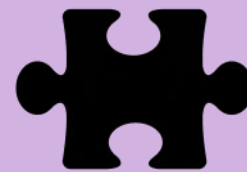
The following actions were taken by Session during meetings in November and December.

- ✓ Suspended in-person worship effective November 29 until further notice.
- ✓ Notified other organizations that use the church that they must comply with the COVID restrictions of ten people or less.
- ✓ Authorized Rev. Dr. Ken Hughes be given access to the pledge list.
- ✓ Approved vacation for Rev. Dr. Hughes on December 27.
- ✓ Reimbursed Houghton College \$1,300 for food for the students for the prior semester.



## HAPPY 209TH BIRTHDAY TO US!

209 years ago on February 2, 1812, the First Church in Buffalo was organized, and began its journey. The services on that impressive occasion were held in the then unfinished Court House. There were 3 child baptism, communion was celebrated, and 29 pioneer members made a profession of faith.



### First Church Puzzle

Piece together an architectural gem! First Church jigsaw puzzles are available for sale for \$25 each. A stunning photograph of Symphony Circle with the church prominently featured was shot by drone photographer Scott Siegel. The Membership Committee purchased rights to the picture to make this fun 252-piece puzzle.

[Contact the Church Office](mailto:email@firstchurchbuffalo.org) (716-884-7250, ext. 200 or [email@firstchurchbuffalo.org](mailto:email@firstchurchbuffalo.org)) to order; shipping can be arranged for an additional \$7.95. Proceeds benefit the church's Smiley Mission Fund for the Poor.

### Prayer Shawls

The Prayer Shawl group has been unable to meet since the pandemic began, however that doesn't mean the ministry can't continue. Thanks to generous donations by Women's Association, funds are available to provide yarn and needles to those who would like to knit. The pattern for a prayer shawl is very simple and can be provided. If interested in learning more, please contact the Church Office at 716-884-7250, ext. 200 or [email@firstchurchbuffalo.org](mailto:email@firstchurchbuffalo.org).

## FIRST CHURCH STAFF

Rev. Dr. Ken Hughes, *Pastor*

RevKen@firstchurchbuffalo.org

Voicemail extension: 203

The Reverend John Long, D.D.

*Parish Associate for Community Outreach*

JohnRLong17@verizon.net

The Reverend Jack Smiley, *Pastor Emeritus*

Christina Banas, *Communications & Office Manager*

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Voicemail extension: 201

Dr. David Bond, *Organist/Choirmaster, Bookkeeper*

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Voicemail extension: 204

Cory Connell, *Maintenance Coordinator*

Voicemail extension: 200

Rama Salim, *Custodial & Security Assistant*

RSalim@firstchurchbuffalo.org

Voicemail extension: 202

## RESIDENT PARTNERS

More than “tenants” to us, these organizations share space in our building:

- Rise & Shine AA Group
- Explore Buffalo
- FBITES
- Friends of Harmony
- Holiness Mennonite Congregation
- Houghton College Buffalo
- Native Offerings
- One Symphony Circle, Inc.
- The Serendipity Shoppe
- Village Church

## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

One Symphony Circle, Buffalo, NY 14201-1213

(across from Kleinhans)

Sunday worship 10:30 AM via Zoom

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www.firstchurchbuffalo.org

email@firstchurchbuffalo.org

Facebook.com/1stChurchBuffalo

Twitter & Instagram: @1stChurchBflo

## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OFFICERS

### SESSION AND TRUSTEES BY CLASS AND TERM

#### *Class of 2021*

James Gardner (1)

Jean Hess (1)

Tina Osei (1)

#### *Class of 2022*

Mark Armesto (2)

Don Houck (2)

Liz Kamke (2)

Gifty Koramoah (1)

#### *Class of 2023*

Janet Hill (2)

Quinton Meyer (1)

Tim Hess (1)

Kailee Van Brunt (1)

### BOARD OF DEACONS BY CLASS AND TERM

#### *Class of 2021*

Mary Field (2)

Jim McKeel (1)

Sheila Miller (2)

Shannon Rogers (1)

#### *Class of 2022*

Russell Carlson (1)

Olga Rico-Armesto (1)

Denis Wettlaufer (2)

#### *Class of 2023*

Ilsa Cooper (1)

Earl McColgin (1)

Suzanne Pilon (2)

Eli Van Brunt (1)

## OFFICERS OF THE CORPORATION

Michael Henry, President

Karen Lewis, Vice President

Mark Armesto, Treasurer

Janet Hill, Secretary



*The mission of historic First Church is to bring diverse people of metropolitan Buffalo together to follow Jesus Christ through worshiping God, fostering spiritual growth and serving the community.*