

# STEWARDSHIP 2021 - GIFTS OF GRACE

January 1, 2021

*Dear Members and Friends of First Congregational Church,*

As we turn the page on the calendar, we will surely look back on 2020 as one of the most unusual years any of us has experienced. It was a year that laid bare hard truths – a pandemic that took the lives of more than 300,000 in our country, politics that further exposed the deep divisions among its citizens, a renewed reckoning with racial injustice, and one natural disaster after another illustrating the urgency of our climate crisis. A sense of uncertainty accompanied our grief and anxiety about the future.

And yet, discoveries have also come to light that are softer and more gentle. Quieter, they are inspiring, nonetheless. Many of these Gifts of Grace have found expression in our congregation – a heightened appreciation of our connectedness, our care for one another, and joy in each other's company. Our flexibility and creativity have enabled us to try new ways to be together, while holding health and safety as primary. A deep well of compassion has always characterized our church, leading us continually to be generous in our service and giving to those in need. Our commitment to social justice encourages important conversations about hard topics. We are forming new ministries focused on racial justice and climate action. In the center of it all is the growing awareness of how deeply our shared worship sustains and shapes us.

Having experienced the fragility of our institutions and our own vulnerability, there may be less that we take for granted. Perhaps we now know more fully how all that is good comes to us as gift. And yet, we also recognize how that goodness must be tended to and nurtured in order to thrive.

The life and love we share as First Congregational Church, God's good and grace-filled community of kindred hearts and shared commitments, are worthy of that attention and care. Our worship, music and art, learning and service, compassion,

justice, and mercy – all the Gifts of Grace we value – need our support to sustain us and strengthen our bright witness to God's love in the world.

During the month of January, we encourage each other to reflect on our giving and to respond with generosity, making a financial pledge to the church for 2021. We invite you to think of your church giving differently than your other charitable giving. Our faith calls us to bring the portion of our income that reflects the magnitude of all that God has done for us and our own gratitude for the grace of God, given to us as a gift.

On Sunday, January 31, while we give thanks to God in worship and consecrate our pledges for 2021, we will join our hearts in dedicating all that we have and all that we are to God's good work in the world.

*With gratitude for you and for every Gift of Grace,*



**Rev. Christina L. Braudaway-Bauman**  
Senior Minister

## Your Stewardship Team

Libby Black, Betsy Barrett, Chris Braudaway-Bauman, Karen Cumbo, Allison Hamm, Jon Hinebauch, Jeanne Lounsbury, Laura McCutchen, Nicole Speer, Nancy Stevens



## OPERATING BUDGET INCOME

Pledges and Donations \$781,345 (77%)

Other Income \$228,773 (23%)

Total Income \$1,010,118

Expenses \$1,010,118

### Worship and Music - \$221,394

Makes it possible for us to find inspiration, experience spiritual growth, and glorify God in vibrant worship, relevant preaching, and musical excellence on Sunday mornings online and in person, and in special services all year long, including Christmas Eve, Holy Week, and Sundays when we highlight one or more of the Covenants that express our commitment to justice and inclusion. Our Chancel Choir, Bell Choir, Faith Singers, and Joyful Noise Choir bring diverse and inspiring music to our congregation and community. We are also able to invite professional musicians to enhance special services and maintain good stewardship of our splendid pipe organ.

### Learning and Congregational Care - \$259,270

Makes it possible for us to offer small groups online and in person, including study groups, memoir writing, poetry, Bible study and fellowship groups, Sunday morning forums, and retreats for women, men, middle and high school youth, and eighth grade confirmation classes. Faith formation programs for more than a 100 children and youth engage them in year-round Sunday school, summer Arts Camp, and an annual weeklong Mission Trip. Through ministries of fellowship, visitation, spiritual support, and mental health we build a beloved community where all are welcome.

### Communications and Administration - \$227,809

Makes it possible for us to maintain our website and communicate information about ministries and programs electronically in our Weekly Update and Weekly Devotional. We are also able to support accurate and trustworthy financial systems and provide necessary technology to facilitate hundreds of program ministry events a year.

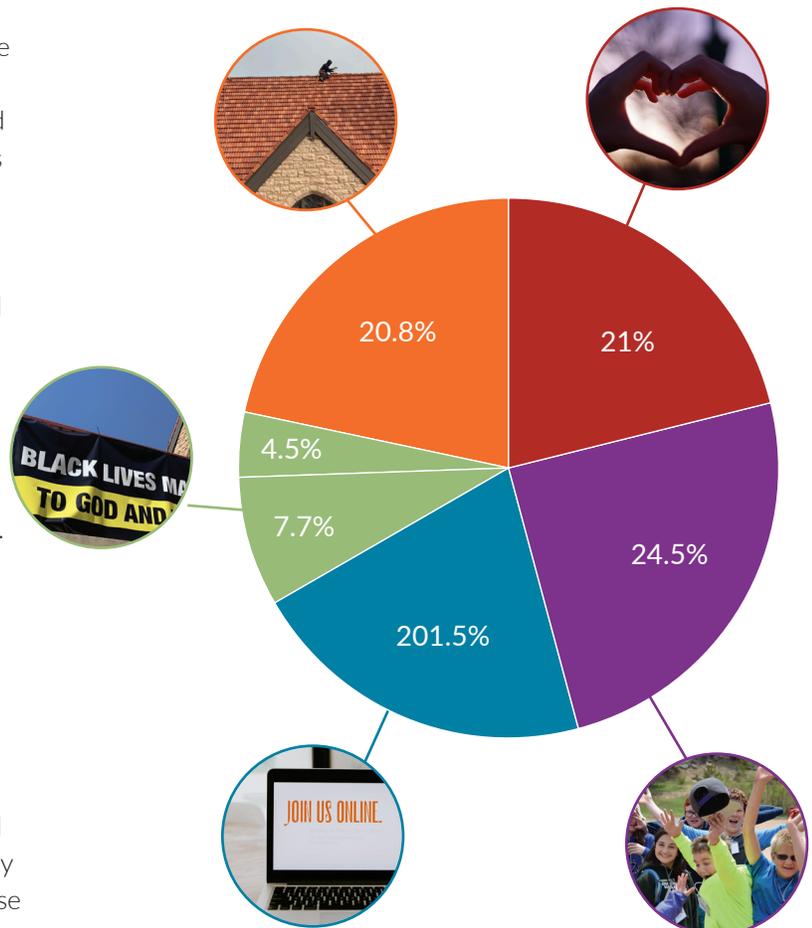
### Outreach and Social Action - \$81,230 Operating Budget and \$47,154 Benevolence Fund

Makes it possible, with proceeds from our Benevolence Endowment Fund and our Operating Budget, for us to build relationships and offer financial support to more than twenty social service ministries beyond our local congregation. These ministries include outreach to children and families, justice issues concerning poverty and housing, environmental and

climate change, and local and international development work. We support Mindful Works, our church-wide mission partner who maintains a job-training program for people recovering from mental illness, and also contribute substantially to the United Church of Christ through Our Church's Wider Mission and our membership dues.

### Facilities - \$220,415

Makes it possible for us to be good stewards of our magnificent facilities, ensures scheduled cleaning, routine maintenance, and necessary repairs to our infrastructure and systems, all of which will enable us again to offer hospitality to nearly 40 groups and organizations beyond our congregation. Our facilities serve as a significant expression of our outreach ministry to the wider community as well an essential resource for our congregational life.



## 2021 STEWARDSHIP: WHERE WE WANT TO BE

Every Member A Pledge!

Average Pledge: **Grow from \$3,123 to \$3,156**

- 80% of families and individuals increase their pledge
- Increase our number of pledges from 248 to 258
- Continue last year's success of zero one-time gifts required to reach our goal (2019 required \$35,000 in one-time gifts)

The graph below shows that every pledge is important!

- 62% of our pledges are between \$100 and \$2,999, providing 25% of total dollars pledged.  
*We can't do it without them!*
- 5% of our pledges are above \$11,000 and yet they also provide about 25% of total dollars pledged.  
*We couldn't do it without them either.*
- Every pledge counts – small, large, and in between.

We encourage you to prayerfully consider stretching on your 2021 pledge.

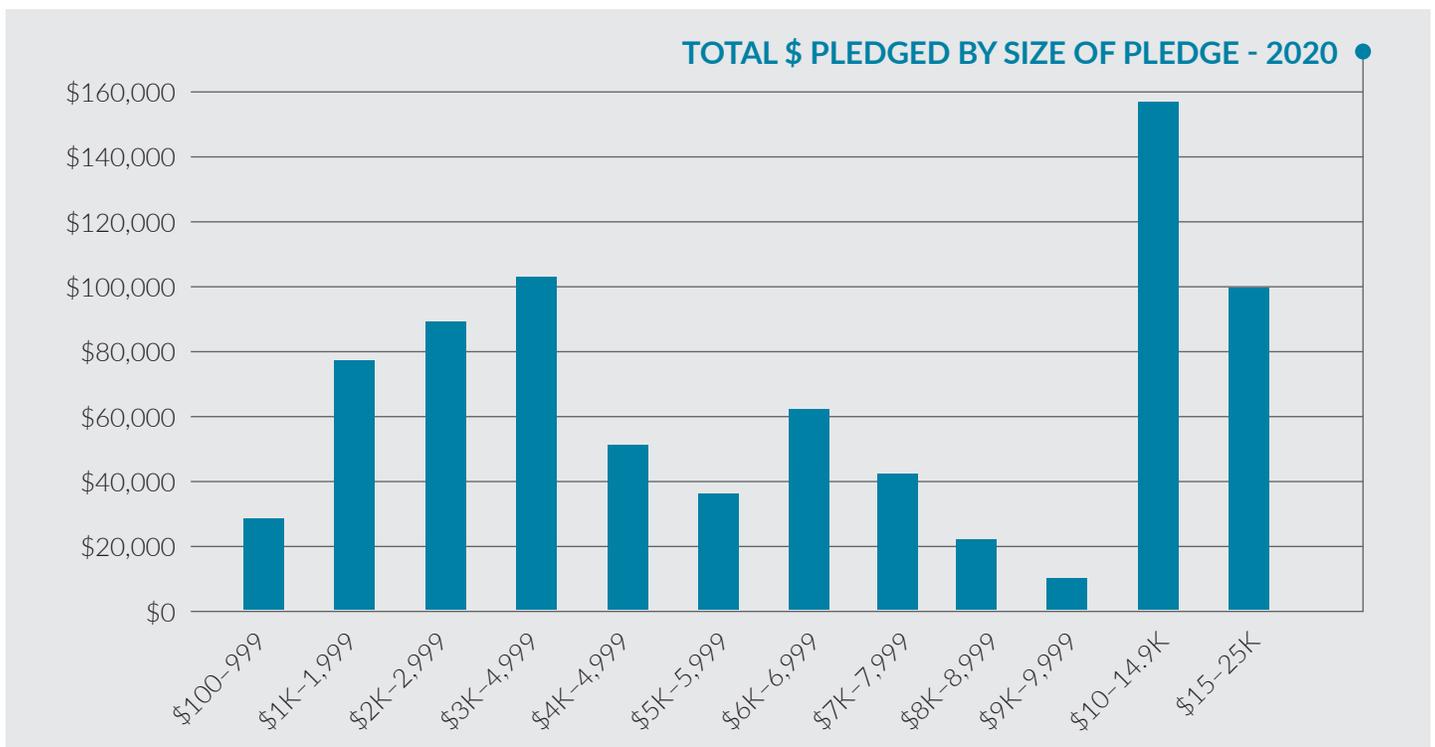
*Giving is a faith practice.  
How are you called to use the gifts that you have been given?*

*What portion of your financial gifts are you called to give to the church and other causes?*

*When we give to the church we are investing in each other, our children and youth, and the wider community.*

*"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:21*

*Thank you for your thoughtful discernment in this important faith-based decision.*



## WHEN DO I PLEDGE?

Anytime! However, our church's annual Stewardship time is in January. We hope that you will be open to the Spirit during the four weeks of our stewardship season as you hear from other members of the church. We ask that all church members and friends take time to discern their giving and make a commitment by the last Sunday in January.

## HOW DO I PLEDGE?

- Online at [www.firstcong.net](http://www.firstcong.net) in the GIVE menu.
- Complete the pledge card in this mailing and return to the church.
- Please do not use REALM to make your pledge.

## WHEN SHOULD I PAY MY PLEDGE?

- The church prefers quarterly or monthly since our expenses are ongoing throughout the year. Some pay weekly and appreciate the spiritual practice of putting a check in the offering plate each week.
- Annually – some prefer to pay their whole pledge at once. Because your pledge payments pay our bills, it is most helpful for our cash flow if this payment is made in the first quarter of the year.
- However it works for you – *we will make it work for the church!*

## HOW CAN I PAY MY PLEDGE?

- *Automatic payment:* You can automatically pay your pledge from your bank account each month. You set this up through your bank. It will help the church office if you make your payment due date between the 5th and the 10th of each month and indicate "2021 pledge" in the memo.
- *Personal check:* Place your check in the offering plate at church or mail to the church. Please write in the memo "2021 pledge."
- *Church Website:* On the home page of [www.firstcong.net](http://www.firstcong.net) click on Member Login to log into your personal Realm account. In your account, click on the "Giving" menu item to make a payment. You can set up recurring payments; be cautious that you are not setting up one lump sum payment!
- *Credit card:* Text 73256 with the message *joy2givefcc*. You will get a message back guiding you through the process. Please be aware that the church does pay a fee of 2.9% on any credit card charges.
- *Assets:* You can transfer assets to the church to pay your pledge. Appreciated assets are great for the potential tax benefits. For instructions, please email [frontdesk@firstcong.net](mailto:frontdesk@firstcong.net) with the words "instructions for asset transfer" in the subject line.

