



Even Now

2021 Annual Report
Bethany United Church of Christ
open-minded, whole-hearted, hands-on faith

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ORDER OF ANNUAL MEETING

- Opening prayer
- Call to order
- Nominations from the floor
- Election of council members
- Pastor's report – Vince Amlin and Rebecca Anderson
- President's report – Ryan Andrews
- Financial report – Wyatt Steele
- Induction of new council members
- New business
- Adjournment
- Benediction



STAFF

2020-2021 CHURCH COUNCIL

Pastors

Rev. Vince Amlin
Rev. Rebecca Anderson

Sexton

Jurek Polanski

Music Director

Yasuko Oura

Office Manager

Mac Svolos

Financial Manager

Martese Barner

Sunday School

Sara Haas & Ann Ridge

Sunday Tech Coordinator

Rihannon Dawson

Church Council President

Ryan Andrews

Church Council Vice President

Owen Marsden

Secretary

Judy Beaupre

Financial Secretary

Wyatt Steele

Trustees

Leslie O'Donnell
Adam Franklin
Scott Baderstadt

Council Members

Gaby Alvarado (departing)
Rachael Huttner

COUNCIL NOMINATIONS

The nominating committee is proposing the following slate of people willing to serve on church council in the coming year:

Bud Longhauser

Additionally, the following individuals are being proposed for re-election to new terms:

Adam Franklin (4th term), Ryan Andrews (3rd term), Leslie O'Donnell (3rd term), Scott Beaderstadt (2nd term), Rachael Huttner (2nd term), Wyatt Steele (2nd term)

QUORUM -

20 MEMBERS OR 10% OF MEMBERSHIP PLUS 5 PROXIES

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REV. REBECCA ANDERSON, CO-PASTOR

This time last year, I had the ominous sense that “if this is gonna go on for a *year*, I don’t know how I’m gonna do it.”

That was true. I did not know how I would “do” this pandemic year. Personally, emotionally, professionally, relationally... I didn’t think I could wipe down groceries for a whole year. (And indeed I didn’t, after that first time.) I couldn’t imagine how it would be possible or what it would look like.

Here’s what it looked like: we recorded sermons in cozy, grounding recording sessions. Then we started preaching live. We said goodbye to student pastor Evan Stancil, remotely (and then with a small live pizza party, just Evan, Vince, and me). We welcomed Bethany Cooper (whose first sermon was so good someone new that day thought she was graduating). We cried to hear live music in the courtyard, in worship and thanks to Chamber Music at Bethany. I got to — thank you, thank you! — throw my head back and sing Indigo Girls songs. We held Zoom happy hours, and book groups, and everything else, including Council and congregational meetings. In one of those meetings, we approved a plan for how to give away the tithe from the sale of the Hermitage property.

During the summer of 2020 (which feels far more than 10 months ago), Council charged me with researching how we would give away several large portions of that tithe. We knew we wanted to set aside significant money for our continued work with Refugee One, to do some hands-on mission work locally and long-distance, and to give a large gift to a Chicago organization...but who? Our commitments included addressing housing needs (urgent ones if possible, in the face of the pandemic), in Chicago, and making a *significant* difference to the partner organization.

It turns out it’s harder to give money away to meet housing needs than you’d think. There’s housing *advocacy* — which is vital, but didn’t match our sense of urgency. There’s low-income housing, mostly provided by large organizations contracted with the city — our \$35,000 gift would be a drop in the bucket of their giant budgets. There are projects that would’ve had us largely supporting a developer’s project — and we knew *that* wasn’t for us.

At last, through several trusted activists and friends, we met the people behind Here to Stay, a new land trust committed to keeping long-term residents in gentrifying neighborhoods, like Hermosa, Avondale, and West Logan Square. This, voiced Council member Leslie O’Donnell, felt like the closest match to our values and hopes for the gift. We made that \$35,000 gift. Along with money committed from the City of Chicago and

another private donation, it's part of the foundation of this new work. *Here to Stay* is planning to purchase its first property this year. We helped make that happen!

This gift was approved by congregational vote in the fall of 2020, along with money to work with Habitat for Humanity and, an old partner, Back Bay Mission, in Biloxi, MS. The final chunk of money was set aside to be given in a series of mini-grants to be requested by you for people, projects, and organizations that you're passionate about. The hope was, by that giving, to tell a story of who we are — and what a story it's shaping up to be:

We are a church that has given to neighborhood places providing groceries, meals, transitional housing, school supplies, and more. We've given to national organizations researching ALS and MS, and supporting those living with those diagnoses. We've supported Special Olympics athletes and their families, protected natural spaces, welcomed refugees, advocated for justice and racial equity, and given to individuals who need the money for basic human needs. We've reached out to those in prison. We've supported the mental health and well-being for people in our own region, and nationally for LGBTQ+ youth. Thank you for making all these things true of us at Bethany!

At the heart of all our shared life — even now, over Zoom, backlit and, whoops! still on mute — is worship. I don't believe in pandemic silver linings (this has been a devastating year) but a gift of being forced to worship like this has been Sunday after Sunday of being face-to-face. No longer do just those of us up front get to see all your faces. No longer do just we pastors hear your joys and concerns and offer a prayer on your behalf. Instead, we all see all of us. There is so much I cannot wait to get back to (mostly: singing together!) but I will miss this when this chapter closes.

Someone in recent days asked me how Bethany has “done” during the pandemic. Honestly, I think they were expecting to hear that this old neighborhood church was limping along, tired and slowing down. Instead, I described a healthy and growing church, taking new and expanded action in the world, out of love. “For some people,” I said, “the *miracle* that happened in their life this year was Bethany UCC.”

It turns out that for me too, Bethany is part of how I “did” this pandemic year. Personally, emotionally, professionally, relationally... Thank you for making this church a place for others, and for me. I believe that God will lead us into all that's next.

With gratitude, hope, and love,
Rev. Rebecca Anderson

REV. VINCE AMLIN, CO-PASTOR

We write these annual reports in part for the congregation in our own time to reflect on the year we have spent together and in part for the congregation of the future, who may want to look back and see how the church came to be what it is, the forces that shaped it and how we met those forces. This has been a year like no other for Bethany United Church of Christ, and to the congregation reading now and to the congregation reading over our shoulders at some distant point, I want to reflect back what I have learned about who we are as a church by pastoring this community from May 2020-April 2021.

Bethany is adaptable.

This year we were blessed to have a student pastor from Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary named Bethany Cooper. Within the first three months of her field education, she had already experienced leading worship in four different ways. Over the course of this strange year, we worshipped with pre-recorded videos and online prayer circles, with live services done entirely on Zoom, with outdoor services on the lawn, (with masks on and chalk circles drawn sprayed on the ground) and with a pop-up drive-in theater Christmas Eve service, to name just a few.

We shifted meetings and small groups online or into socially distanced outdoor spaces. We took walks for pastoral care appointments or signed up for spots with Calendly. We filmed the most incredible Christmas pageant one family at a time. We celebrated the last supper at our Maundy Thursday service from our kitchen tables at home with whatever food we had. And we enjoyed an Easter egg trail through our building while staying at safe distances.

Instead of a chili lunch fundraiser, we raised money for our refugee work with bowls and chili dogs from JT's Genuine Sandwich Shop. We made sack dinners for hungry folks at The Night Ministry out on our portico in driving rain.

We changed everything about how we were church together this year. Not all of it worked or went smoothly. None of it maybe was as good as just being together in the ordinary ways. But so much of it was still so good. Life placed so many obstacles in our way, and we still found ways to be church, to follow Jesus, to serve the God of love. We adapted.

Bethany is faithful.

We changed everything about how we were church together this year, AND we showed up. For worship, for meetings and groups, and for one another. In the moments when it was difficult and the ones when it may not have felt worth it. We made it worthwhile by showing up.

Our attendance is up in 2021. We exceeded our pledge goal (in the middle of a pandemic!) And not only did we pledge it, but people are working to fulfill those pledges! As is covered elsewhere in this report, we committed to giving away \$98,000 from the funds from our property sale. We also raised over \$3500 to fund our refugee resettlement work. You have been faithful.

Maybe most importantly, Bethany has been faithful to its kids. As Ann Ridge outlines in her report, Ann and Sara Haas have gotten creative and adapted to our present situation by creating beautiful boxes full of activities to keep our kids learning about their faith and make sure they know that their church cares for them. The monthly Zoom calls with them help give me hope and keep me going. On one recent Sunday we had 16 kids in Sunday school, and I asked Rebecca, "When did this happen?"

Bethany has something to offer.

Bethany has continued to grow slowly and steadily, and somehow, this year was no exception. Just a few weeks ago we welcomed 7 new members into our community. Most of them had never stepped inside Bethany a year ago. (Most of them have barely stepped *inside* still.) We met these wonderful new folks out on the lawn or on Zoom calls, and they have dived into the work of creating worship, feeding hungry people, and leading new initiatives.

They found something here, even when so much of what we thought we offered is not possible. But this year has taught me more about what we have to offer each other and what we do offer each other week by week and day by day. This community has sustained me through this incredibly challenging year.

Thinking back to those early days on Zoom, just being together and praying for one another brought us closer as a community. It was the peaceful center through a very scary season. Later, the joy of seeing each other took on deeper meaning and urgency each time we were able to. The joy of singing Dolly Parton or the Indigo Girls out on the lawn was a bright spot of a summer that had too few.

While other colleagues wrestled with their congregations about reopening, we pulled together with plans to keep each other safe. Your willingness to let us try new things and fail, to be patient with us through all the tech issues, and to give us space to be human and to be hurting in this painful year, has made being your pastor this year a refuge rather than a burden.

And all of this, to my mind, is because we remained grounded in the God of Love this year. Because we kept asking how to follow Jesus in these strange circumstances. And we listened, as well as we could, to how the Holy Spirit was calling us to live together.

We've still got a long road ahead of us, but I am so grateful for this year as your pastor. It has been a challenging but rewarding gift to live it with you.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Vince Amlin



RYAN ANDREWS, COUNCIL PRESIDENT

2020 was a year of growth in ways that no one could have envisioned growing towards. It was no different for Bethany Council. While getting very familiar with Zoom and virtual meeting rooms, we tried our best to support the creative vision of our wonderful pastors, Vince and Rebecca, to maintain fulfilling, enriching, and engaging church for this congregation all while making sure we could pay the bills, continue ongoing repairs where necessary, and live into our responsibility to support our community and congregation with our blessings.

At last year's annual meeting we welcomed just one new member to council, Owen Marsden, who immediately took on a position as Council Vice President. He replaced Judy Beaupre in this role so that he can begin to learn the ropes and eventually take over for me as President if he so chooses. Judy was kind enough to accept the position of Secretary to make sure we keep diligent records of our meetings. Wyatt Steele also took on a new position as Treasurer/Financial Secretary. Our Trustees stayed on in their roles, Adam Franklin, Scott Beaderstadt, and Head Trustee Leslie O'Donnell. I would like to give special thanks to all of these individuals as they are integral pieces of council, as well as Rachael Huttner and Gaby Alvarado who serve on council. They all have significant contributions and I value their input immensely.

One of the most important tasks we accomplished as council this year was securing our federal PPP loan to make sure that we could continue to pay our employees during a pandemic in which rental income and charitable giving were able to be as large as we had budgeted for. This, along with some very generous gifts from our congregation, allowed us to pay our employees, pay our bills, and continue to give toward our benevolent responsibilities as a church.

Another, arguably more important, task we accomplished was formulating and voting on a plan to tithe ten percent of our income from selling the property on Hermitage. This is in large part thanks to Rebecca Anderson who did most, if not all, of the hard work on this! We are now getting to reap the rewards of giving to those who need it most and this will enrich our community for years to come. I won't harp on the details of this as I'm sure you've all seen it multiple times, and I believe Rebecca will include this in her pastor's report as well.

I would like to thank Gaby Alvarado for her time on council, as she will be stepping down. I am very grateful for her contributions to Bethany through her work on council and her unique perspective especially regarding emotional sensitivity of individuals and spiritual health of the congregation.

I look forward to our work this coming year as we begin to think about getting back to a new normal and what that looks like for Bethany. I have no doubt that we will all learn to grow into our future in wonderful, inconceivable ways.



FOOD JUSTICE TEAM

The Bethany Food Justice Team strengthened its efforts and organization even more over the last year. Over the past months, multiple Zoom calls were held to strategize about current and future goals for the team. Fresh faces and new ideas were welcomed and set a great foundation for growth in 2021.

As a group, the team decided to continue efforts with the Night Ministry Crib through donated meals on a monthly basis. John Buranosky has set up a formal sign up system to schedule, remind and thank our volunteers. The system has really assisted in advance scheduling to ensure adequate volunteer coverage.

In addition, the team is looking to enhance efforts by organizing a quarterly drive/volunteer event to assist other organizations who may need additional assistance. On Valentine's Day, we held our first annual Sarah's Circle Love Drive and donated various items to Sarah's Circle, a women's shelter in Uptown. On June 12, we plan to assist Lakeview Pantry as our second quarterly project. Future activities will include efforts with Common Pantry.

Jen Knobloch

REFUGEE ONE PARTNERSHIP

Although we had officially completed our co-sponsorship of the Mohammad Solim family, we continued to keep in touch with them throughout the year, ensuring that they are well and have enough food.

Along with our partner church, Pilgrim Lutheran, we have begun to prepare for sponsoring our third family, whom we hope to welcome into the country later this summer. We have held two fundraisers to ensure that we have the necessary co-sponsorship funds. A chili sales event through JT's Genuine Sandwich Shop—which we undertook to continue the tradition of our annual Chili Cookoff, which the pandemic has prevented us from doing the last two years—raised \$1,000, including a generous donation from JT's owners Chris and Kellie Cunningham. A May 1 Zoom fundraiser featured the screening of Hannah Rumsey's one-woman show, *42 Days of Summer*; music videos provided by Ann Ridge and Greg Bower; and a poetry reading of "Refugees," read by two young members of the Bethany-Pilgrim Partnership.

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, located in Shaumburg, has let us know that they will partner with us to welcome our next family. With this church's contribution, funds raised through several fundraisers and a \$2,000 contribution from Bethany through the sale of its Hermitage property, we have raised the \$8,000 necessary to sponsor our next family.

Judy Beaupre

STUDENT PASTOR BETHANY COOPER

In case you lost count, Bethany has delivered three sermons this year and the committee believes her writing is one of her strengths. Keying in to combine areas of significance to the congregation, she has also started a book group with the specific focus of discussing justice. Bethany made concerted efforts to get to know members of the congregation despite the pandemic, including her own efforts and joining church happy hours. She also got engaged during her tenure here and we are so glad that they shared that with us and wish them well!

[Melissa Andrews](#)

SUNDAY SCHOOL

A Year of Sunday School Via Zoom

Among the many challenges Bethany faced this year, continuing Sunday school virtually has presented new ways of engaging our children. We decided to continue our classes by distributing boxes (or other similar containers) to each family with lessons and projects for each child. Sunday school would be taught once a month via Zoom, rotating teachers—Sara Haas, Ann Ridge, and Pastor Vince Amlin. It has been fun finding new and creative ways to teach and rewarding to hear and see the children respond to each lesson.

This year the curriculum followed the themes of nurturing the Earth, environmental justice, Epiphany, and “the fruits of the spirit” with the hope that with each month families would engage in these topics and together become more aware, share, and consider in light of the gift of God’s love in our lives. We will continue our lessons via Zoom with the hope that we will be able to have classes together in person as the weather improves and families feel comfortable.

[Ann Ridge](#)

MUSIC

Even though the year 2020-21 was challenging, we did our best to continue providing music for the congregation. When we went into lockdown, we quickly shifted to individually recording music parts, then having Nick Photinos learn how to edit the videos to share virtually over Zoom services. Once it was safer to make in-person music, we shifted to recording at church, just the soloist and myself, for more variety of music that was possible with in-person music making. I continued to incorporate various musicians to provide a wide variety of music, from singers, flutist, cellist, french horn player, to violinists. I also strive to include a broad range of music genre, from musical theater, pop, folk, gospel, jazz, to classical music. For Easter, we hired a string quartet, French hornist, and our own Emily Birsan to bring gorgeous music to our outdoor service.

In August of 2020, we began offering the "Lawn Lounge" series, which Chamber Music at Bethany and Bethany UCC hosted together to provide outdoor concert series for the community. Every Friday night at 6pm, we offered a variety of concerts to the community for freewill donation. This was a huge success, and drew an audience size of 50 to sometimes 100 people who were hungry for live music during the pandemic. We were able to safely provide music with social distancing and requiring mask-wearing, and we were also able to raise money for the musicians who had lost many gigs during the pandemic.

We continue to provide a wide range of quality music safely to the congregation and we hope to continue to share our passion.

Yasuko Oura



TRUSTEES

At our last report, we stated our goal for the upcoming year was to waterproof the church. We are pleased to report that we have made great strides toward this ambitious and worthy goal.

We contracted a team to grind and tuckpoint the north and south faces of the sanctuary. This has resolved the active leaks with weather in the sanctuary.

We hired a landscaper to improve water drainage at the north side of the sanctuary with paving stone and a berm. This, combined with the window and well replacement reported in 2020, has resolved our water issues in the music room.

We had an unexpected water leak from an air conditioning line in the attic of the parsonage. We fixed the leak and replaced a large portion of the ceiling that collapsed from the damage.

We replaced a few appliances that were no longer working in the parsonage kitchen. We recently serviced the boiler to fix a leak.

We will continue our waterproofing goal of 2020. We are waiting for estimates for roofing and more masonry work to ensure the long-term integrity of our beautiful church.

Leslie O'Donnell





**july worship
at bethany is...**

**NOT
CANCELED**

celebrating what can still happen

socially-
distanced
outdoor
worship
beginning
7/12 @ 10

bethany
united church of christ

