

METROPOLITAN UNITED CHURCH (TORONTO)

Annual Report 2020

PANDEMIC EDITION (YEAR 1)

(Hey! Hey!! You're on Mute.)

MINISTRIES, GOVERNANCE, PROGRAMS, AND FOUNDATIONS

The Downtown Church for a Diverse City
56 Queen Street East, Toronto, Ontario M5C 2Z3

WHEN THIS IS OVER

When this is over
I want to remember what was won,
private thoughts, private space,
an empty calendar free for the taking

I want to remember what I saw,
how, without instruction,
Spring did awaken,
nests were woven, babies made,
how the sun came early
and sometimes, hung around

And it all took place
with no intervention from me

When this is over
I want to stand close,
high-five a stranger,
touch-tag my grandson,
sing in a crowd and win back
the things that were lost

But mostly I want to begin again,
not where we left off,
but far in advance of our carelessness,
deserving, finally, our health and our home,
wiser, warmer, braver,
and forgiven

Patricia Orr
March 24, 2020

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The tagline on the cover is an *homage* to the sudden, forced migration of us all to a videoconferencing technology called Zoom. The poem on the inside front cover is by Patricia Orr and is used with her kind permission. The artwork by Vera Taylor, shown on page 14, is used with her kind permission.

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For financial information, see *Metropolitan United Church
Annual Report 2020: Finances*

About Metropolitan United Church

The congregation of Metropolitan United Church has its roots in the Methodist people of Little York, an early name for Toronto. They held their first service in a new (unfinished) chapel on the south side of King Street, one block west of Yonge, on Sunday, November 8, 1818.

The congregation expanded over the years, and in 1833 the churchgoers moved to a new brick church at the corner of Adelaide and Toronto Streets.

The present site was acquired by the Wesleyan Methodists in 1870. The new building, designed by architect Henry Langley, opened in 1872; ownership was subsequently transferred to the Trustees of Metropolitan, and the property was joined with the newly formed United Church of Canada in 1925. The Langley building was largely destroyed by fire in 1928. A new structure was built on the site; it opened in 1929. Worshippers have been attending services in the current building at 56 Queen Street East in downtown Toronto since then. In 2018, the congregation celebrated its 200th anniversary.

Metropolitan cathedral is a heritage building, and the congregation takes its care seriously. In 2005, the area under the sanctuary was excavated to create the Met Centre, a multipurpose area with offices, a community space, and a large kitchen. The floor of the sanctuary was replaced in 2013; the outside of the building was cleaned in 2018. In 2019, work began on an ambitious renovation of the north end of the building that will improve accessibility and give the congregation and the community more room to gather and better technology with which to work. In 2020, that work was largely completed.

Mission Statement

As believers in God and followers of Jesus Christ, we are committed to emulating His example by teaching, healing, serving, and inspiring in a diverse city and a changing world.

We do so by loving and valuing all and through effective stewardship of our resources and heritage so that our community may be a place of encounter with God's transforming presence.

Ministries

Intentional Interim Lead Minister

I write this report as we mark a full year of living, working, and worshipping with this coronavirus. This has been a year like no other, and that is no exaggeration!

*The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!*

One might imagine that these words of Rabbie Burns would be the definitive summing up of this time. Unable to be together for worship or for study or for prayer or for community support has been (and continues to be) very difficult. Unable to be together to celebrate and to mourn has been heart-breaking. It has been a time of increased isolation and increased desperation for so many.

Yet, 2020 was also a time of coping with and capitalizing on unforeseen opportunities:

Worship

In March, we went into full lockdown. From that date to this, we have made great strides in providing online worship: moving from audio recording of the sermon at the outset through recording component parts of the worship on our laptops at home and threading the component parts together for broadcasting on Sundays to a combination of limited in-person and livestreaming worship and, finally, to our present livestreaming from the sanctuary on Sunday mornings with a restricted number of liturgical participants. Children's time took a short hiatus and then began again with pre-recorded messages broadcast as part of the service on Sunday.

The decision has been made that, upon reopening, we will both livestream and worship in person, increasing both audience and participation—an unforeseen bonus in this strange time!

Faith Formation

Even before COVID, we had begun delivering Bible Study via ZOOM to great success. Following COVID and lockdown, we took all programming online, adding a number of programs for theological study, communion, and socializing. We are seeing greater and more consistent participation in programming. Our Children and Youth ministries are now delivering Zoom Sunday school and special events online. Following this time of COVID, we will be introducing hybrid forms of program participation.

Keeping in Touch

At the outset of the pandemic, efforts to stay in touch with the congregation were ramped up with the institution of a telephone tree check-in shared amongst the MET Care team and leadership

and utilization of the church e-newsletter MET Connect, which is now an expanded communications tool.

Great strides were made over the year to facilitate online giving, with increased avenues to contribute and the highlighting of various ways to give in our livestreamed worship.

MET Socials have been organized under the auspices of Congregational Care showing movies, documentaries, and holding discussion groups. A shout out to the *Vicar of Dibley*. God knows we needed the relief of laughter.

Deferred Gratification for McGill Square Plans

Various initiatives were postponed due to COVID, including our Farmer's Market, the revitalization of McGill Square, and the redevelopment of the land bordering on Shuter St. (including the Massey Parsonage), but work continued through 2020 and these exciting projects will go forward in 2021 thanks to generous donors, many volunteer hours, and solid leadership.

FaithHUB

The leaders of the three cathedral churches (Metropolitan, St. Michael's, and St. James), plus Fontbonne Ministries and St. Michael's Hospital, had previously joined forces to seek ways to work together on outreach and community events. With the onset of COVID, this work pivoted to exclusively concentrate on shared outreach coordination and support.

COVID Ministries

I am particularly chuffed at how this congregation has risen to the challenges posed by COVID in the immediate geographic community and in the membership. 2020 saw a huge uptick in need in both. Thanks to some very generous donations, we were able to institute a restaurant chit program to provide take-out meals to the hungry and a shelter program to provide short-term housing to those without, continue our community lunch program on a take-out basis with much reduced staffing at the front doors of the church, and increase the capacity of our community service workers to provide grocery, transportation, and healthcare support to community and congregation members.

Pandemic Response Team

One of our first responses to the COVID crisis was to draft and implement a Pandemic Response policy document establishing protocols and a Pandemic Response Team. This group met throughout 2020 to make decisions about permitted use of the building, PPE requirements, and worship, and to keep Official Board members abreast of current public health directives.

North-end Renovation

COVID took its toll on completion of our much-anticipated north-end renovation. Construction was curtailed and then shut down. The entire staff continued to be housed in offices in the MET Centre for 2020. This led to strict protocols to meet "social distancing" and PPE requirements.

Ministerial Job Descriptions

One of my assigned tasks as Intentional Interim Minister was to consult with the congregation and draft appropriate job descriptions for the next ministerial team. To this end, extensive

community consultations were undertaken, and the existing positions were reviewed to give due weight to the role of heritage, the structure of leadership, the articulation of mission, and the connections of the church in the community and wider world. Descriptions of two positions were delivered to and accepted by the Official Board in August 2020.

Much of what I report on here will be reported elsewhere in this report. Please forgive any duplication.

To end, 2020 was a year like no other. But it was also a year that saw the community come together, albeit not physically; the staff team cohere as everyone pitched in to “keep the home fires burning”; and worship continue—and even thrive—as we repeatedly, successfully, pivoted to pray, lament, and worship God together.

Much did go “awry” in the year 2020, and we should not minimize or detract from the impact of this virus: many died, many mourned, many were further isolated, many were without shelter, and supports were shuttered.

And through it all—and although pivoting so much we were executing full pirouettes by year end—this church community continued to carry out its mission to love and value all, effectively stewarding our resources so that Metropolitan United Church, even online, in 2020 was still and yet a place to encounter God’s transforming presence.

With apologies to the Scottish Bard:

*The best-laid schemes o' pew and seat
Go oft awry
And lead us through the grief and pain
Toward Your promis'd joy!*

Respectfully submitted,

Reverend Karen J. Bowles

Minister of Congregational Care

It’s funny the things you miss. In this pandemic year, we have been missing a lot: family gatherings and celebrations, drinks with friends at our favourite restaurant, travel to places familiar and new. For me, one of the surprising things I have been missing is the “handshake line” after worship services. I’ve always had a bit of a complicated relationship with the handshake line. Part of me is still in self-critique mode about how the service went and another part is thinking about the cookies on the tables at the back of the church (and doing the congregation-to-cookie arithmetic to gauge if there will be any left for me). And then Patricia

plays the last note on the Casavant, and the people start coming up. A handshake and a few moments of conversation. Some want to tell their life story, some want to debate theology, and others just want to make a break for the door. In those few moments, I'm part pastor and part cat herder.

It's funny the things you miss. And in the missing, it become clear how easy it is to take things for granted. Simple things like handshakes—the act of flesh touching flesh—feeling the warmth of physical connection—feeling the tactile hints you get about someone's personality by how tightly they grip your hand. Simple things like unmasked smiles and close-quartered conversations, however brief they might be. While, in time, we will get back to our normal ways, things will never be exactly the way they were. There are some of our dear ones who we will never see in the handshake line again because they have moved away, moved on, or moved into the glory of God. This is hard. But our faith tells us that it is in the hard times that we should be looking for the glimpses of renewal. It is precisely in the “missing” that we find out what is truly important.

We have learned a great deal about ourselves and the character of our community in the past year. From what I have observed, I believe we are seeing clearly what is important for us. Connection is important. Whether it be online or in-person, we want to feel connected with something meaningful and Spirit-filled and lifegiving. And when things get difficult, we are willing to rally around each other in profound ways. Creativity is important. We have been forced to break through the “we've never done it that way before” narrative, and in many real ways, we have thrived. We have pivoted, adapted, and changed—but not compromised on—our vision to honour tradition while also seeking a better tomorrow for all of God's children. Collaboration is important. None of us have all the answers, but the coming together in common service to tackle common challenges (and celebrate common successes) builds vitality and a sense of empowerment among us.

2020 was a year when we missed a lot, but we also found a lot. We found that we are strong and resilient. We found new tools and new ways to connect with each other. We found that the church is more than a building—it is a way of life with Jesus's commission to love one another at its centre. We found that we should never take the simple things for granted. In time, we will get back to our normal ways. We will be able to line up and shake hands after church services again. But when that happens, let us not forget everything we have learned this year. Let us always hold tight to what is truly important.

And please save some cookies for me.

Reverend Jason Meyers

Minister of Music

Last year, I began my report: “During this first year of transition at Metropolitan, staff and volunteers involved in the music programs continued to work creatively in worship and congregational life. The people involved in the music programs are talented and dedicated to our mission....”

This is the way the year 2020—our second year of transition—began; however, it took a drastic turn in March. We were rehearsing, singing, and playing in services, holding our first Music at Metropolitan Concert (*Sprezzatura*—with Benjamin Stein and others) at the beginning of March, rehearsing with the Festival Choir for our annual Good Friday concert, and anticipating the spring return of our carillon, when the world was shaken by the pandemic that continues to challenge us. Immediately, we began recording services from the sanctuary and from home, and several of us quickly put together an online Good Friday program. Although we hoped to return to “normal” by the fall, the closest we attained was returning to the sanctuary to record, resuming limited in-person worship, and then beginning livestreaming—first to a small congregation and then to an empty church. In the midst of this, we welcomed a new Junior Organ Scholar, Matthew Fraser, as he began organ studies at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music.

My phrase of the year is “amazing adaptation.” Thanks to the knowledge of Reverend Jason Meyers, the quick learning, creativity, and dedication of Charles Davidson, and the hard work of other staff including both Wayne C. Vance Organ Scholars Timothy Wisnicki and Matthew Fraser, Silver Band conductor Fran Harvey, Carillonneur Roy Lee, all the lead singers, Great Heart conductor Benjamin Stein, and Sparklers conductor Jennifer Martyn, we were able to keep music alive and thriving at Metropolitan during this time.

Fran Harvey and the Metropolitan Silver Band did a fabulous job of recording virtual band numbers, especially for our virtual “Deck the Halls.” Members of the choir learned how to listen and look on one device at a recorded track (with one ear and one eye!) while singing into another device while looking into its camera! This is much more difficult than it sounds, by the way. The Choristers and Sparklers (and their mothers) did the same, recording a couple of virtual anthems in the fall and for the family Christmas Eve service.

Roy Lee recorded his playing up in the tower, and people were able to see what a carillonneur does! Of course, our repaired bells are still in the U.S. and need to wait for the border to reopen.

The Metropolitan Handbells managed to rehearse and play in service while masked and socially distanced until the pre-Christmas lockdown stopped us. We livestreamed four Noon at Met concerts in November and December. The lead singers recorded *And He Shall Come: Music and Poetry for Advent* with poetry by Patricia Orr. Led by mastermind Charles Davidson, our tech team (Timothy Wisnicki, Benjamin Stein, and Matt Fraser) staged the production beautifully, and then Charlie wove it together for an unforgettable and moving Advent experience.

So what have we learned during this year? We learned about rehearsing on Zoom (difficult!), upload speed, Facebook Live, YouTube, Zoom microphones, EpocCam Pro (the app that

connects the iPhone at the organ to the camera—thanks Jason!), Final Cut Pro (thank goodness for Charles Davidson and his quickness to learn not only the recording technology, but the virtual choir technology) and other things that make my head spin. The first Sunday we resumed worship in the sanctuary at the end of August, Gisele Kulak and I were overcome with the experience of making music together again—not through the computer. At the end of the summer when the lead singers recorded some pieces, we remembered how magical it is to sing together. At the first rehearsal of the handbells in the fall, tears flowed as we were able to relate to each other personally and through our playing.

Beyond the technology, we learned that the experience of worshipping together and of making music together is precious and must not be taken for granted. We learned that we can adapt to changing circumstances to keep our work going—we can continue to sing and play to the glory of God even when we are apart. But it is so much better when we are together in person, and we all pray that day will come soon. Until then, thank you all for your encouragement and support—your musicians appreciate it sincerely. Please continue to sing to the glory of God (from your own homes!).

Dr. Patricia Wright

Governance

Official Board

Members: Dorcas Beaton (Outreach), Elspeth Bowler (Treasurer), Rev. Karen Bowles, Alan Cotterill (resigned, Trustees), Deborah Davis (Transition Team), Dennis Donovan (Faith Formation), Susan Girvan (Secretary), Helen Han (resigned, Resource Development), Lisa Hems (Visual and Creative Arts), Linn Holness (Worship), Jeff Ince (Region 10/Shining Waters Rep), Terry Kelly (Stewardship), Joe Landon (Ministry and Personnel), Greg McMaster (Property), Rev. Jason Meyers, Fran Parkin (Member at large), Ruth Peckover (resigned, M&P), Tex Perley (resigned, Property), Tracy Pratt (Music), Vera Taylor (Nominating), Jane Tuomi, Gunn Wongsuwan (Congregational Care), Dr. Patricia Wright, Kenneth Younie (Chair)

The world changed very quickly in 2020. It seems like much longer ago than March 13, 2020 (Friday the 13th) that I received a call at work from Reverend Karen Bowles about the COVID pandemic. Would we have to cancel the Sunday service that weekend? We quickly convened a conference call with Jane Tuomi, our director of administration, and Dr. Linn Holness, our chair of worship committee and a medical doctor. We made the difficult but necessary decision to cancel Sunday worship on March 16, 2020. I do not think any of us knew during that call what was coming.

The Official Board very quickly, over email, authorized the four of us on that original call to form the Pandemic Coordination Team (“PCT”), which has met at least weekly since March of 2020 to coordinate Met United’s response and create a COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Plan.

Together, we have made decisions about closing and reopening for worship and services, staffing issues, requests for use of Met's space, our outreach program, and many other issues. Although it has certainly required much time, serving on the PCT has been a pleasure, and we have all gotten to know each other very well and share much mutual respect.

Met went from having its last big in-person social event, the Shrove Tuesday pancake dinner, on February 25, 2020, to a full shutdown a few weeks later. In a very short time, the leadership of Met United adjusted. Instead of just cancelling meetings and programming, as much as possible these activities continued online. Everyone became an expert in using Zoom. The dedication and hard work of our staff and volunteers allowed the work of Metropolitan to continue.

Throughout the entire time, we continued our full slate of worship services, with very few exceptions. Our technological capabilities have grown such that we have gone from having a recorded sermon posted on Sunday at the beginning of the pandemic to full worship services livestreamed each Sunday from the sanctuary. Met's renowned music program has adjusted as well, having not only at least one of our lead choir members at each service, but also recording anthems involving many of the choir members. This task takes hours of time to piece together, and Met's efforts have attracted international attention.

Our Congregational Care pillar stepped up to the plate as well. While all in-person gatherings had to be cancelled, many social events switched to Zoom. In the early days of the Pandemic, the MetCare team and others in the Congregational Care pillar made efforts to reach every member of the congregation to check in and provide support. While of course everyone was sad to miss events like our annual Christmas Lunch, new traditions were started, like the MetSocial, where the Met community came together over Zoom to watch a TV show and have some laughs.

Met's Outreach pillar also stepped up, supporting the essential work done by our community service staff members, Stephanie and Meghan. This work has never been more important than during this pandemic, assisting the most vulnerable in the city with their housing and other needs. Outreach piloted a chit program, wherein the church partnered with local small restaurants to provide meals for people in need. This program was a success and was picked up by the City of Toronto. Met also ran a lunch program throughout the summer months and partnered with Yorkminster Baptist Church to have two days of hot meals each week during the cold months, instead of the usual one day.

Met's employees showed great dedication and courage by working throughout the pandemic and ensuring that the operations of Met continued. The Trustees and the Official Board members have handled the past year with great commitment and capability. It is an honour to serve in a leadership position at Met with this company.

We could not have asked for a better ministerial team to shepherd us through these times. Reverend Karen Bowles and Reverend Jason Meyers each supported the operations of the church while also continuing Met's cherished tradition of excellence in preaching and ministry. Dr. Patricia Wright has ensured that each Sunday's music continues to inspire.

2020 was Reverend Karen Bowles's last full year with Met. She has truly shone during her time at Met and will leave a lasting impression at the church. She brought a great energy to the pulpit and connected deeply with the Met community.

With an eye to the future, we all look forward to the pandemic days being behind us and a return to more normal operations. Some of the changes over the last year have been for the better and will stick around. We are greatly improving our livestreaming capabilities, thanks to a very generous donation, and will continue to livestream worship services in the future. Now that everyone is a Zoom expert, certain meetings will continue online when this aids efficiency.

Thank you to everyone in the Met community for ensuring that 2020 was a success despite the odds!

Kenneth Younie, Chair

Transition Team

Members: Rev. Karen Bowles (Intentional Interim Lead Minister), Deborah Davis, Linn Holness, Jim Nixon, Laird Orr *Shining Waters Representative:* Anne Hepburn

The transition team continued to meet virtually throughout 2020. The job descriptions for the two clergy positions were refined over the summer, in consultation with various committees, Metropolitan and Shining Waters staff, and a Zoom congregational meeting.

Following approval by appropriate Shining Waters committees, permission was given to form a Search Committee and commence staffing it. Two members of the Transition Team, Dr. Linn Holness and Jim Nixon, as well as our Shining Waters liaison rep, the Reverend Anne Hepburn, are providing continuity as members of the newly constituted Search Committee. Kathryn Moase was appointed as Shining Waters search advisor and met virtually with both the Transition Team and, after selection of its members, with the Search Committee, to provide appropriate training.

The Transition Team has now essentially completed our mandate, other than to be supportive to the Reverend Bowles as she finishes out her term at Met.

Deborah Davis

Search Team

Members: Dorcas Beaton, Melanie Gilbert, Rev. Anne Hepburn, Linn Holness, Jim Nixon, Ed Oikawa (resigned at end of 2020), Ruth Peckover, Wilbert Ward, Gunn Wongsuwan, Asha Woolrich

In July, the Official Board approved the declaration of two ministerial vacancies and the framework for recruitment to a Search Committee for the purpose of filling the ministerial

vacancies. The Nominations Committee recruited nine search committee members representing every facet of Met, including recent and lifelong members, board members, and members representing our four program pillars. As well, a retired United Church minister, Rev. Anne Hepburn, volunteered to assist us in a supportive and pastoral role.

The committee began its work in earnest in the fall with a compulsory online training session with Kathryn Moase, our United Church liaison for our search committee. We then created a comprehensive Community of Faith profile that was posted on ChurchHub, the United Church's website that lists communities of faith searching for a minister, as well as ministers searching for a call or appointment. Confidentiality agreements were signed by all committee members. We created the two job descriptions that accurately reflect what Met is searching for in a Minister of Worship and Faith Formation and a Minister of Congregational Care and Outreach. The job descriptions were sent to the M&P Committee for their review and comments, and to Kathryn Moase and the Shining Waters Regional Council for final approval.

An ad for *Broadview*, the magazine affiliated with the United Church of Canada, was written and submitted for publication, both electronically and in print.

A decision was made early on in our deliberations to focus first on hiring the Minister of Worship and Faith Formation, though it was critical to create the job descriptions for both ministers at the same time, in order to clarify their roles and responsibilities.

We are now preparing for review of applications and the interview process. Applications closed on March 31, 2021 and interviewing began in early April.

The challenges associated with finding ministers during a pandemic cannot be understated, and we ask the congregation to keep our committee prayerfully in mind as we continue our important work.

Ruth Peckover, Recording Secretary

Program Pillars

Congregational Care

Congregational Care Committee

Members: Vicki Butterfield, Meilana Dickenson, Ernie Forsyth (resigned), Leesa Kopansky, Maureen Maguire (resigned), Andrew McGee, Rev. Jason Meyers (Staff), Ruth Peckover, Sunderson Sundaraman, Jay Wagner (Secretary), Gunn Wongsuwan (Chair), Kenneth Younie

Maureen Maguire and Ernie Forsyth stepped down from this committee. I would like to acknowledge their valuable contributions to this committee and say that their presence will be

missed. Furthermore, William Wright stepped down as chair of Met Care and Ernie Forsyth stepped down as chair of Affirm. Ruth Peckover stood in as interim chair of Met Care from September to December 2020, before Denise Moore assumed chairwomanship of this committee. Ael Spence replaced Ernie Forsyth as chair of the Affirm committee. I would like to thank the outgoing, interim, and incoming committee chairs for all their work.

The coronavirus pandemic disrupted the work of the pillar in a myriad of ways, beginning in March 2020 through the end of the year and well into 2021. The Met Care team took on a number of initiatives to keep parishioners connected and combat social isolation. Please see the Met Care report for more details.

Met Social was started in December. This is a monthly event where parishioners get together on Zoom, watch a short film, chat, and have some laughs. I would like to thank Susan Girvan for coming up with this initiative, and Jason for carrying it through to fruition. Weekly sessions of centring prayers were held in Advent 2020 and Lent 2021. My gratitude goes to Tchawbaw Cabafi and Jason for their initiative and delivery.

The Member Engagement and Evangelism committee was formed to address the needs of engaging the people of Metropolitan more systematically. The committee held its first meeting in October 2020. Please see the committee's report for more information.

Gunn Wongsuwan, Chair

Affirming Life

Members: Ernie Forsyth (Chair), Felicity Johnson, Jeff Laitar, Rev. Jason Meyers (Staff), Jim Nixon, Amanda O'Halloran, Catherine (Ael) Spence, Jay Wagner, Linda Wright

Prior to the March 2020 cancellation of in-person events, two very successful Affirm Group brunches were hosted by Jim Nixon at the Duke of York Restaurant for all interested church community members.

Beginning March 12, 2020, the Affirming Life committee moved all programming online due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation. This meant that the Affirm committee's PIE Day Lunch 'N Learn with Rev. Carmen Llanos from Birchcliff Bluffs United Church had to be cancelled. The supplies that were purchased for this event were returned.

Metropolitan installed its first Pride flag on the front of the church in early June 2020. Though it blew down later in the summer, a new one was procured with plans to hang it in spring of 2021. The Pride worship service for 2020 was held on June 28th. The Affirm committee took part in the service via a virtual candle lighting of the differently colored pride candles. Felicity read scripture for the June 28 service, and she and Linda offered a testimonial as part of the service as well.

Also for the June 28th service, the members of the Affirm committee were invited to participate in the creation of Met's "Born This Way" virtual anthem. Many members participated, and it was received very well by the wider church community.

The Affirm Committee underwent a change in leadership from 2020 to 2021, with Ernie Forsyth stepping down as chair, and Catherine (Ael) Spence taking up the position starting in 2021.

Catherine (Ael) Spence, Chair (2021)

Hospitality Guild

Members: Jay Wagner, Gerald Mungham, Carolyn Pack, Rosana Gualagnone Walker, and Larry

In addition: Hospitality's go-to people for cake-cutting: Lenora Barbero, Sandra Hellyer and Meilana Dickenson. Finally, all the members of various committees who donated time and treats.

Due to the pandemic, Hospitality was only able to produce one event in 2020: Shrove Tuesday Dinner.

That said, it was amazing! This event was formerly held Sunday after service. There was often poor attendance due to poor weather. In 2020, the event was moved to the actual Tuesday evening. Then, with the blessing of the Official Board, the evening became an open table event. Hospitality worked with Out of the Cold volunteers to promote and staff this event. On loan from Out of the Cold, our cook was Sean Conway. Along with hundreds of pancakes, we served 400 sausages, 5 lbs of ice cream, and 5 litres of maple syrup, all of which was natural and locally sourced.

This was a joyous time with lots of music, laughing, and fellowship. Certainly, the best Metropolitan has to offer.

Jay Wagner, Convenor

Member Engagement and Evangelism

Members: Meilana Dickenson, Andrew McGee, Rev Jason Meyers (Staff), Ivan Simic (Secretary), Timothy Wisnicki (Student Minister), Gunn Wongsuwan, Kenneth Younie

The Member Engagement and Evangelism Committee was formed in October 2020 with the aim of engaging members, adherents, newcomers, and seekers at Metropolitan more systematically.

The committee assisted Jason in launching the Tithe.ly church app, oversee attendance tracking in a number of key church programmes (e.g., Bible studies, Big Questions course, centring

prayer, Met Social), conducted interviews with leaders from growing United Church of Canada congregations to learn about best practices in congregational development, and published a *New Here* page on Metropolitan's website to assist seekers and newcomers to the church.

A major ongoing project in 2021 for this committee is to assist with the rollout of the new Tithe.ly church database. The goal of this is to consolidate Metropolitan's members' and adherents' information into a single database equipped a wide range of functionalities. This will help to better track, deliver care, and engage the people of this congregation.

Gunn Wongsuwan, Interim Chair

Met Care Team/Prayer Covenant

Members: Fran Barton, Rev. Karen Bowles (Staff), Sarah Cotterill (moved during the year), Andrew Cruikshank, Carol Dilks (resigned), Marion Elliott, Ann Keller, Carol Kitney, Rev. Jason Meyers (Staff), Denise Moore, Ruth Peckover (Interim Chair), Kate Salter, Timothy Wisnicki (Staff), Gunn Wongsuwan (Pillar Chair), William Wright (Chair, resigned)

The Prayer Covenant

Members: Rev. Karen Bowles, Toba Bryant, Michael Connolly, Sarah Cotterill, Ann Edwards, Doug Flanders, Ernie Forsythe, Rev. Nancy Hardy, Sandra Hellyer, Dr. Linn Holness, Eleanor Kerfoot, Rev. Jason Meyers, Rev. Dr. Bruce Misener, Nancy Misener, Denise Moore, Amanda O'Halloran, Priscilla Sahayam, Karen Scott, Marc Tremblay, William Wright (Chair)

The Prayer Covenant is a group of approximately 19 people from the congregation who engage in daily prayer. They hold up before God people who have requested special prayers as a support in their daily lives because of illness, bereavement, or other life challenges. All information is confidential. William Wright (Chair) keeps in touch with the members through email.

Met Care Team

2020 was a year in which our in-person contact with members of the congregation was severely reduced because of the pandemic, but we found ways to keep in touch virtually, and this meant a great deal to so many of our people. The committee met monthly (except for July and August) and mostly online. At the beginning of each meeting, we enjoyed thoughtful discussion of the 4th and 5th books in the series, "Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton."

In addition, committee members accomplished the following:

- In February, we joined up with the Prayer Covenant Group to host coffee hour. That seems like a very long time ago now!
- During lockdowns, we reviewed the state of members on our Met Care Team list about whom we are concerned monthly and appropriate action was taken. Great attention was taken to keeping this list up to date.

- When Sarah Cotterill moved away from Toronto, her Bereavement Circle was discontinued, at least temporarily, and her commitment to sending birthday, special occasion, and sympathy cards was taken over by Fran Barton. Thank you to both Sarah and Fran!
- Normally, at Easter and Christmas, we delivered plants to our housebound members; this year, we cancelled delivery of tulips at Easter and made a very concerted effort to phone/email/send Easter cards instead. As well, we assisted congregation members in figuring out how to order groceries and essentials online; we picked up and delivered some groceries when restrictions allowed.
- In September, we had planned to have a Lunch 'N Learn with Margot McWhirter, presenting "Aging in Place: Growing Older, Staying at Home." Regrettably, this very topical presentation had to be postponed.
- Reverend Karen Bowles arranged to have approximately fifteen Thanksgiving turkey dinners delivered to many of our housebound members. While this was Reverend Karen Bowles's initiative, the Met Care Team was very happy to support her. This initiative was such a success that Karen repeated it again at Christmastime.
- At Christmas, Vera Taylor created a beautiful piece of art of the church. Prints were made, and approximately twenty of these prints were framed and delivered to those who would normally receive a poinsettia. This meaningful gesture on the part of Vera was very gratefully received by the recipients.



Most of 2020 was spent in targeted efforts to ensure our congregation knew that the church was very much alive and working, in spite of being physically closed for so much of the year. To this end, Reverend Jason Meyers helped organize the church's phone system so that people who do not have access to computers could call in to listen to the service. The important work of keeping the database of our congregation up to date is ongoing.

Artist: Vera Taylor

Our long-serving Chair, William Wright, retired from leading the Met Care Team in June. Thank you, William, for guiding us in such a wonderful and caring way for so many years and for hosting our committee's annual June potluck lunch in your beautiful home. We will miss you and your leadership but will carry on in ways in which we trust you'd approve.

Ruth Peckover, Interim Chair

NextGen

Members: Raymond Duong, Michael Fitzgerald, Sunderson Sundaraman, Joe Landon, Alistair McDonald, Gavin McDonald, Andrew McGee, Rev. Jason Meyers (Staff), Ivan Simic, Ael Spence, Tanner Steel, Gunn Wongsuwan, Thomas Yeung, Kenneth Younie

In January and February 2020, the Next Gen group met monthly at the Imperial Pub for fellowship and discussion. From March until September 2020, the Next Gen Group met virtually each month to watch and discuss a faith-related show or movie.

In between lockdowns, the group was able to meet in-person twice for a “physically distanced” coffee and discussion after church on Sunday. After the group virtually attended Met’s Halloween concert in October 2020, it was decided that the group would consolidate with the monthly online “Met Social” event. The group has continued to join the monthly online Met Social Event until it is safe to meet in-person again.

Andrew McGee, Chair

Ministry of Integrated Arts

Music and Performing Arts Committee

Members: Toba Bryant, Joe Krommenhoek (Metropolitan Silver Band), Roy Lee, Jim Nixon (Choir President), Ed Oikawa, Stephanie Parkin, Tracy Pratt (Chair and Secretary), Priscilla Sahayam (retired August 2020), Wilbert Ward, Dr. Patricia Wright (Staff)

Priscilla retired in 2020 after decades on the Music Committee. We thank her for her long-standing faithful service and contribution to Metropolitan.

2020 commenced like most years but, in mid-March, we were catapulted into an unknown world. For many congregational and community members, Metropolitan’s music provided joy, solace, tranquility, and hope in the face of uncertainty, loss, and unprecedented challenges.

Dr. Patricia Wright’s report describes well the details of the year’s momentous work, including the musical “gems” that regularly surprised us!

The Committee is immensely grateful for Patricia’s extraordinary musical leadership. We owe an enormous debt to her, the professional and volunteer musicians, conductors, producers, and technicians for their selfless dedication, perseverance, and commitment during the pandemic. These individuals showed a remarkable willingness, and ability, to adapt to new technologies, and pivot around ever-changing constraints.

Although 2021 remains difficult, we at Metropolitan share many blessings.

Tracy Pratt, Chair

Metropolitan Silver Band Executive

Members: Bill Davis (Secretary), Fran Harvey (Music Director), Howard Lee (Treasurer), Bill Martyn, (Special Efforts), Michele McCall (Manager), Marion Moore (Librarian), Debbie Silverthorne (Social Media)

The pandemic certainly played havoc with our season this year. Most of our rehearsals and engagements were cancelled. Planning for 2021 is also in limbo as it seems we will not be able to come together to rehearse again until at least September, if at all. The current thought is that members will need to be vaccinated for COVID -19 before returning to rehearsal, but we have not met as a committee around this issue yet.

The MSB was only able to perform at the Met for the service on Sunday January 19th and a concert at Kingsview United Church on Saturday, March 7th. Thirteen other engagements were cancelled.

In an effort to contribute to the church's musical worship we used technology to put together many virtual pieces offered for services at Met and for posting on social media. These pieces included "The Cross of Honour," "Bless This House," "Amazing Grace" with the "Last Post" and "Duke Street." Solo efforts in person at Met during this time included a September service by Debbie Silverthorne (cornet/trumpet) and Remembrance Day service by Michele McCall (trumpet). We also recorded many carols and feature pieces for the virtual "Deck the Halls" concert on Dec. 13, 2020 and several Christmas services. In an effort to offer some form of outreach, these virtual pieces were offered to churches where our engagements were cancelled and used for their services. These included Manor Road United Church and Mt. Zion United Church in Pickering.

A very special thank you to all of our members for taking the time to do these recordings at their homes but also especially to Fran Harvey for the many, many hours she spent putting all the recordings together on our behalf.

Membership at the start of the pandemic was 32 musicians, and our music director Fran Harvey. Sadly, we lost our long-time percussionist Paul Minnoch this year. His friendship and dedication to the band over the past 32 years will be sorely missed.

The band continues to maintain its profile on social media. Debbie Silverthorne maintains the band website and Facebook pages.

The band executive committee met twice via Zoom since March 2020.

Michele McCall, Manager

Outreach

Outreach Committee

Members: Dorcas Beaton (Chair), Vicki Butterfield, Stephanie Cunti (Staff), Constance Dilley, Elizabeth Fox (On Leave), Pamela Fraser, Nancy Hardy, Norah Jardine, Ade Israel Makindipe, Jennifer McDonald (Secretary), Marg McIntosh, Rev. Jason Meyers (Staff), Carole Payne, Walter Ridley, Andrée Vaillancourt

The Outreach pillar serves as an umbrella committee for the subcommittees of Narthex Greeters, Peace and Social Justice, Out of the Cold/Winter Meal Program, Refugee Support, and Community Services. Each have submitted their own reports following this one. The pillar committee includes representatives from each of these committees as well as additional members who can help direct our work and help with decision making.

The year began with an optimistic planning of activities for 2020, and it was not long after that we heard of the COVID-19 virus being found in the city and subsequently causing the suspension of public gatherings. Essential services were allowed to continue, and our community services were considered to be essential to the needs of our most vulnerable communities. Many of our activities pivoted to support community services.

The individual committees met by Zoom, with less need for the Outreach committee to meet, except to address ad hoc decisions (i.e., the encampment proposal). The Outreach efforts were directed to frequent meetings between the chair, ministers, and community services staff to identify needs and address them following rules and guidelines that changed almost daily. These meetings continued on a frequent basis throughout the year.

In the fall of 2020, the day before Toronto entered a second lockdown to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the following message was given to the congregation by the Outreach Pillar chair. It really sums up what 2020 was about for outreach.

The Outreach pillar is an umbrella for groups sharing the vision of putting our faith into action: Peace and Social Justice, Narthex Greeters, Refugee Sponsorship, Out of the Cold (our winter meal program), Community Services, and the FaithHUB network. And while Metropolitan United has a long history of outreach over its 200-year history in downtown Toronto, we need only look back to the last 8 months of the 2020 COVID pandemic, to find the reasons for why we do outreach and what we are doing.

First, there is value in all people. People who might find themselves in a very rough time in their lives, be it in the park or in a nearby condo. Because of this belief, we already had a team our Community Services staff of Megan Carver and Stephanie Cunti who quickly responded in COVID moving into the park and into the community to deliver groceries to those self-isolating or shut in, identify needs, move people into safer shelter, and find solutions that will work—like a new

hospitality tent offering food, connection, hygiene products, and a warm scarf. Or a novel restaurant chit program that pays restaurants ahead to offer a meal to a person presenting a Met United chit—supporting both the local restaurant and the autonomy of the recipient.

Second, the work needed to keep going. Committees like our Peace and Social Justice group nimbly reorganized on Zoom to plan services to keep issues like peace and social justice in our minds and hearts. Our Out of the Cold program volunteers started meeting in late summer to find a way to keep as much of the winter meal program running through a carefully planned takeaway meal version; their biggest disappointment—the inability to sit at table to talk with their guests.

Finally working together is often the best way to get things done. Our FaithHUB group and a network of downtown community-service-oriented faith organizations became natural partners during COVID in service and in advocacy. Resources were shared. Metropolitan has sponsored meals at other sites that were already set up to serve early in the pandemic, and we in turn have received support from other churches, the City, and the Toronto Drop-In Network to support our work. Faith in Action.

Outreach really was more of a verb this year—to out reach—to reach beyond anything we could have imagined would be our faith in action. We thank the congregation of Metropolitan for their support, especially the unprecedented donations that have come for COVID relief. The need was and is great. And tomorrow when the city locks down again to contain this virus, we will still be finding ways to OUT REACH on your behalf.

In last years' report, we quoted the words of St. Teresa of Avila, that "Christ has no body on earth now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which He looks with compassion on the world; yours are the feet with which He walks to do good; yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world." Little did we know at that time what we would be called on to do and to be in 2020.

I was moved beyond words at the actions and responses of our congregation, and the many faith communities that offered additional support for our work. Thank you to the staff, particularly our tremendously committed frontline workers Megan and Stephanie, our ministers who stepped up to help in so many ways, and the many volunteers who are the heart of outreach activities. We look forward to 2021 with the hope offered by the newly tested and approved vaccines, but aware that our COVID work will need to continue for many months to come before that vaccine can reach its goal of silencing this pandemic.

I commend to you the work of the Outreach pillar committees as described on the following pages.

Dorcas Beaton, Chair

Housing and Community Services

Metropolitan paused in-person Community Services programming on March 12, 2020 and closed doors to the public shortly thereafter as the pandemic hit Toronto. Like everyone else, we wondered, what is happening? And what are we going to do?

Taking note of open and operating spaces and partners in the community, we took a moment and identified what we needed to do and where we could immediately offer support. There were several ways to help. First, we could address the emergency food security needs of our community members buying them groceries or supplying grocery gift cards. We needed to get food to those partners and members in need quickly and sought out new and rapidly evolving resources. Next, we wanted to help ease the pressure on operating drop-ins and other agencies' take-away meal programs seeing an increased need. Finally, and perhaps most pivotally, we needed to show solidarity with our partners and community.

We moved quickly with what we had. Because of the generosity of the Met community, we've been able to donate funds, supplies and our time to various partner agencies in the Downtown core. Through partnerships with business and social enterprises, we've coordinated bottled water and healthy and hearty meals for others. While Metropolitan United looked for the best place to use our gifts of time, talent and treasure, others looked to Metropolitan as a place to direct theirs. Churches such as Rosedale United, Jubilee United and Yorkminster Park Baptist Church supported programming we were able to offer, bringing funds, coats, scarves and catered food to people through our doors and programs.

We've also created partnerships with some amazing and long-established businesses in our community, helping to feed community members through a restaurant Chit Meal Program. While this helps community members, it also supports local businesses hardest hit by closures. The system works kind of like a reverse tab, where we've paid our partner establishments up front, ensuring them business, in exchange for meals our members can access using a chit. The success of the Chit Meal Program was recognized by our community members and got the attention of the City councillor and the Toronto Drop-In Network. The Toronto Drop-In Network worked, with Met's input, to expand the program, which was funded by the City across more than 50 agencies. As we entered 2021, we saw the City extend funding for the program.

In the Community Services Program, with the support of all those keeping Metropolitan running, we've been able to stay active and vigilant in our commitment to community support and outreach. We maintain our housing support services such as intervening if there is an issue in the household so that our members can maintain their housing, assisting with applications and new moves, accessing funds for rent, and making a transitional or precarious situation more stable. We've also maintained service navigation support, such as assisting with emergency benefit applications for members on low and fixed incomes, communicating with trustees and other income supports, accessing physical and mental health services, and so on. We are also ensuring our members have the resources and necessities to stay informed and safe, including access to

electronic devices and grocery delivery. The congregation has responded to special appeals for things like computers, phones, and radios—vital connections to important information for those in the community. These have been challenges we will continue to work through as we move and adapt to these new times.

In the midst of this pandemic, networks we were involved with gelled into working groups. The Downtown East Faith community, the Toronto Drop-In Network, and the FaithHUB worked together in an unprecedented manner to share resources, infection control approaches, food access, and ideas to better address the needs of the populations we serve. Advocacy for the rights of the vulnerable was also part of Met's community service and outreach activities. Metropolitan was present in an interfaith group appeal for the City to step up and not over rely on faith organizations alone to provide the city's homeless, street involved, and vulnerable populations with access to housing, food, and water as well as advocated for other immediate needs. This appeal came in the form of a letter signed by our ministers along with over 100 leaders from across faith groups. Uniting for the rights of the vulnerable.

Over the summer, the community services staff established a hospitality tent in the park. It offered cold drinks, sandwiches, and healthy snacks as well as access to information, PPE, and hygiene products. As the fall approached, a decision was made that the tent provided necessary access to resources for community members—a place to keep in touch with their supports, build on rapport, and to engage in service provision themselves through volunteerism. The program continued into the fall with a generous donation of over 100 warm coats from Rosedale United's coat drive and delivery of scarves from a knitting club, ushering in colder weather. The decision was made to continue this program as long as possible into the winter. On a cold December day, the tent itself blew away and out of necessity the "hospitality tent" moved to the front entrance of the church. Near the same time, Yorkminster Park Baptist Church contacted us to say their meal program had been cancelled, but they knew we were still offering programs, could they fund a meal program through Met? We serendipitously received a cold call from "Lunch Lady," who caters meals to schools and delivers packed, hot, prepackaged meals—a process that would fit well with the hospitality tent. At the end of 2020, Met Community Services was all set up to add a hot meal to their hospitality tent with a huge thanks to Yorkminster Park Baptist Church.

Metropolitan itself struggled with issues along the way. With an absence of washroom facilities available to the people living on our streets, gardens were used. With fear of shelters during the pandemic, more people moved into the safer parks, including our own. The Official Board was faced with needing to decide on whether we could support encampments on the land around the church. Community Services, Outreach Committee, and the Board worked together to make a decision and came up with guidelines for an encampment approach that would address individual's needs in order to empower them to move to better shelter. We did so by first listening to the stories of persons encamped on the property. Stories from the woman who had repaid the church for the grocery cards that were provided, even after being told that was not necessary. Or the man waiting for admission to a rehabilitation program directly from his tent. We then made a decision and worked together on an approach that was individualized and compassionate, allowing for an appropriate response to the complex and unique needs of our community members. At the same time Metropolitan United was becoming a well-known voice by the City staff! We continuously advocated for water services from the City and washroom

trailers. Water sources were feared as it could be a vector of the COVID virus, later proving not to be the main vector in 2020. We were also concerned that while alcohol-based sanitizers were recommended, they worked best on clean hands. Soap and water were needed so we purchased a portable handwashing station for the park users.

Metropolitan had many hurdles in delineating its own stand on issues like washroom facilities, encampments, and handwashing stations, as well as navigating City-related policies on access to water, food, and shelter. Several hopeful initiatives came from the City during COVID, with the City taking over local pandemic-vacant hotels such as the Bond Street Hotel and converting them into supported homeless shelters. (We were offered a seat on the community advisory board for this shelter, a position taken by Jennifer MacDonald of the Outreach committee.) As winter approached, a housing program was announced that introduced mobile apartments and supportive housing on City-owned land, a program that perhaps will build a better foundation for proactively supporting the vulnerable citizens of Toronto on an ongoing basis.

In the fall, the Out of the Cold programs were cancelled by the City due to the second wave of the pandemic. Our own Winter Meal Program shifted their program so that essential staff could offer a hot take-away meal and conversation in the park. Our administrative, custodial, and ministerial staff stepped in to help as restrictions in the numbers of people allowed in the building prevented our volunteers from returning to help in the traditional sense. We were, however, able to keep one volunteer intact, our chef, without whom the program would not be able to function. Our volunteers are also still facilitating the bulk of the program from the outside, maintaining community contact with donors such as Loblaws and Cobbs Bread, delivering necessary product to our doors, and securing catering support via Carnicero's in the St. Lawrence Market. The front doors of Met were opened to allow for people to come and pick up a warm meal, a coffee, and a bit of company. Lost was the volunteer interactions with community members, and the comforts of a shared meal in the Met Centre. But those were impossible this year. At Christmas, the Winter Meal program delivered the full turkey dinner in its take-away meal. This was accompanied by a stocking; each of the 100 stockings was sponsored by a congregational member. The stockings included socks, handwarmers, snacks, hygiene products, gift cards, and a package or two of homemade Christmas cookies. The Met Centre was hopping with staff gathering supplies and stuffing stockings. We were also lucky enough to be supported by a community cookie baking group who dropped off an impressive dessert spread every Tuesday night for a month to be packed and distributed at the weekly meal programs.

Working with our partners, community members, and businesses has provided some relief to the crushing impact of the pandemic on the vulnerable and small businesses. The positive attitude and perseverance within our vulnerable populations and these establishments in the face of such uncertainty truly brightens some otherwise hard days. Our community services staff feel a stronger connection to the immediate community at different levels right now. It does feel like we are all in this together and that is a sentiment that we need to support long after the pandemic has ended.

This was an unprecedented year. Met Community Services kept going throughout the pandemic in an ever-changing environment full of physical, financial, and emotional challenges for the

community they serve. At the close of 2020 we are anticipating the burden of the second wave of the pandemic, anticipating more spread, new mutations, and increased numbers in the new year. We will continue to address the needs of our community and advocate for their rights. We are thankful for the support of our congregation, ministers, staff, and volunteers who showed their commitment to outreach as a core part of Metropolitan's mission during a pandemic.

Megan Carver, Outreach and Housing Worker
Stephanie Cunti, Outreach and Community Service Coordinator

Narthex Greeters

Members: Steve Abba, Connie Dilley (Occasional), Pamela Fraser (Coordinator), Charles Houston, David Hunter, Felicity Johnson (Retired Coordinator), Andrée Vaillancourt

We have a great group of volunteers in the Narthex. Our highlight is every day keeping the church open to the general public for viewing. Our visitors also enjoy the organ music by the students and sometimes sit down and listen for a while.

We received 637 visitors in 52 days to Metropolitan. We closed March 14th for Covid-19 are still closed. We took in \$80.15 CAD in donations. We also had \$21 in sales.

Pamela Fraser
Coordinator, Narthex Greeters

Out of the Cold Steering Committee

Members: Vicki Butterfield, Grant Curtis, Doug Flanders, Terry Graham, George Gregg, Dianne Howarth (Co-chair), Norah Jardine, Marg McIntosh, Barbara McLardy (Co-chair), Kathy Priestman, Walter Ridley

Our Thursday lunch program (OOTC) proceeded as usual in 2020 January into March when the committee decided to close two weeks early because of COVID-19 health concerns. Our guests and volunteers were in general agreement with this decision. In November, with guidance from The Pandemic Co-ordination Team, we embarked on a revised Thursday hot meal initiative.

Our Met outreach workers, Stephanie Cunti and Megan Carver, were pleased to be able to maintain their personal care for our guests. Their hard work and commitment are so valued by all

of us. Then we needed to find a caterer, and our intrepid chef, Sean, found one at a price we could afford. His continuing support each Wednesday and Thursday is invaluable.

Other support systems include Vicki Butterfield, who writes a monthly newsletter to our large cohort of home-sequestered volunteers; it keeps them engaged for the future. Met's ministerial team of Karen, Jason, and Timothy have been available to help with the giveaways, and we thank them for the additional workload that they so generously took on.

We thank everyone who contributed to the success of this challenging year.

Barbara McLardy, Dianne Howarth, Co-chairs

Peace and Social Justice Committee

Members: Dorcas Beaton, Leah Darke, Melanie Gilbert (Co-chair), Sandra Hellyer, Lance Kuyst, Joe Landon (Treasurer), Carol Payne, Walter Ridley (Co-chair), Karen Scott, Ivan Simic, Sunderson Sundaraman, Rev. Jason Meyers (Staff)

Peace and Social Justice was meeting on the third Thursday at 6.00 p.m. in the Library, but, starting in March as the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown banned face-to-face meetings, we met by Zoom. During January and February, we had been discussing Peace and Social Justice input on future plans for McGill Square, a Good Friday walk for justice, Green Team ideas, and a book club, possibly including *From the Ashes* by Jesse Thistle. COVID-19 shutdown began in March, so no progress on the above items was made.

As we continued, we began planning for Indigenous Sunday on June 21. For our guest speaker, we chose Rev. Leigh Kern, the new Anglican Priest at the Toronto Urban Native Ministry (TUNM), who works with Sandra Campbell and Rev. Evan Smith of the United Church staff. They had recently moved to 6 Trinity Square, near the Eaton Centre. Rev. Kern's sermon was well received, outlining Christian work among Indigenous people in the city. Members of the committee also participated in this Zoom worship service, offering prayers and land acknowledgements from our various parks and homes.

In the fall, we began planning for our Peace and Social Justice service on November 22. We originally chose Bri-anne Swan, but as a staff member of the Shining Waters Regional Council and due to pandemic restrictions, it was not possible. So, we invited Rev. Dr. Allison Falby, priest at All Saints Anglican Church (corner of Dundas and Sherbourne), to partner with Metropolitan in inner-city work. Again, very well received as she talked about her work in the midst of poverty and homeless people. (You can download these 2 sermons from the Metropolitan website.)

With our larger membership, we are making new ideas as we plan our future as part of the Outreach Committee.

Walter Ridley, Co-chair

Refugee Sponsorship Committee

Members: Janice Andrews, Dorcas Beaton, Elspeth Bowler, Vicki Butterfield (Chair), Stephanie Cunti (Staff), Paul Hellyer, Rev. Jason Meyers (Staff), Gitanjali Verma, Bob Vernon, Sylvia Xie

2020 was meant to be a year that would start with the revitalizing of the Refugee Committee with keen new members (KNMs). Sylvia Xie, a KNM and I, no longer keen, were all set to start this off by attending a workshop held by the Etobicoke Refugee Network (now called Private Refugee Sponsor Network (Ontario)) at Islington Church at the end of February. But it was postponed, which almost seems like a foreshadowing of how the world was going to go for the rest of the year. But it wasn't COVID that caused the postponement—Islington needed the space to hold a large funeral, another sort of event that would soon become a thing of the past.

Well, of course, no revitalizing happened at all after that. It is fortunate that we were in a fallow period, both of our earlier sponsorships having formally ended, although ties continue between the Bakours, the Shamashas, and various committee members; the committee continued to contribute to RESPs for the children.

The Shamashas even made it to one of the church services held over the summer and committee members who'd managed to get to the same service were delighted to see them. In spite of being in lockdown at Christie Gardens, former member Ellen Frei continued to assist in English practice with the Shamashas and thus also kept up with how their lives were going.

Without any sponsorships underway, we have not met in a year now, and we do need to have a discussion soon about how or whether we wish to continue since we've certainly lost what little momentum we had at the beginning of 2020.

This committee, in the person of Elspeth Bowler, sure provided me with a bright moment during the first lockdown. In early May, the weather had finally warmed up and so I went for a longer neighbourhood walk than usual. And heading home along King near Sherbourne someone said my name! It was Elspeth who was out for a run and heading along King in the opposite direction. We must have stood there, socially distanced (but most people didn't have masks yet) and talked for ages. She was the first actual person I had encountered in nearly two months, and it was exhilarating. I have no idea at all what we talked about, but we did include some refugee content.

Vicki Butterfield, Chair

Toronto FaithHUB

Metropolitan United Reps: Dorcas Beaton, Rev Karen Bowles, Stephanie Cunti

The FaithHUB is a collaboration of four faith-based organizations (Metropolitan United, St Michael's Cathedral Basilica, Fontbonne Ministries, and the Cathedral Church of St James) in

partnership with St. Michael's Hospital. Committed to working together to address issues that we can do better together than apart, 2020 saw the fruits of our planning and commitment.

Partners in the FaithHUB became natural partners in the mitigation of the impact of COVID. We knew each other and could share resources and information. And as COVID began, we were wrapping up our second set of Circles of support for vulnerable persons, with several volunteers from Met involved. The next step was discernment of our next project together, and the front line workers in each organization, called the "field team," were tasked with identifying the greatest need for those we serve and work with.

In the fall of 2020, the field team returned to the full steering committee with the need for foot care services. Foot care is challenging for the homeless, with wet feet, poorly fitting footwear, and poorer general health compounded by foot problems: blisters, pain, ulcers, resulting in decreased mobility. The field team further developed a well-thought through program for offering this service in consultation with Street Health and with care provided by a specialized registered nurse at different sites in the downtown core. The field team was congratulated on their work in identifying a priority need and organizing a program that could deliver it.

At year end, the proposal was being prepared to come to the Official Board at Metropolitan's January meeting, and funding sources for a one-year pilot of this program were being sought. We look forward to seeing how this initiative unfolds.

Dorcas Beaton, Chair, Outreach

Spiritual Learning for Life

Worship Committee

Members: Rev. Karen Bowles (Intentional Interim Lead Minister), Charles Davidson (Communications Specialist), Dennis Donovan, Linn Holness (Chair), Margaret Metcalfe, Rev. Jason Meyers (Minister of Congregational Care), Patricia Orr, Timothy Wisnicki (Emmanuel College Context-in-Ministry student), Dr. Patricia Wright (Minister of Music)

Keeping Pace with the Pandemic

From a design perspective, the number 2020 is perfect: balanced, open, even. And the year 2020 did begin that way. But by March our world was tilting, knocked sideways by the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the year, despite changing guidelines, lockdowns, semi-lockdowns, minimal mixed media experience, and inadequate technical equipment our committee was determined to provide meaningful worship services without interruption (internet willing), something reassuring and familiar when life as we knew it was falling apart.

Our first nod to the new guidelines was the decision to use sugar tongs to distribute the bread during the March 1st rail communion. Physical distancing had not yet been prioritized!

On March 11th we arrived for our regular monthly meeting to find our chairs neatly positioned two metres apart. In fact, that would be our last in-person meeting to date.

Here is a compilation of the dizzying adjustments that followed, beginning with the immediate trashing of all our Lenten and Easter plans.

March 15 (Lent 3, aka First Sunday of lockdown) The eight choir leads gathered at the church and were recorded on audio only. The service was released by podcast and added to the sermons page of the Met website later in the day. Charles Davidson (now our chief videographer) remembers sitting in the Annex eatery the “Puck and Wings” assembling the service and finding the whole situation quite surreal. It was the last day that indoor dining in such a setting would be possible.

From March 22nd on, soloists and instrumentalists gathered at Met to be recorded on personal iPhones, laptops, and a Zoom mic while the ministers and scripture readers recorded themselves off-site. Everything was then compiled and edited, and the resulting service made available on Sunday at 11:00 over Facebook and YouTube. Our Interim Lead Minister, Reverend Karen Bowles describes the intricacies of this pivotal time:

Transitioning to online worship during the lockdown period involved teaching ourselves the “tech” and figuring out how to preach from home to a camera, in a computer, attached to a microphone perched precariously on 10 books on top of a table! Given the challenges, we managed admirably as a team, creating liturgy, and producing worship each week that progressively evolved in both creativity and delivery.

Our programs pivoted almost immediately online and continued without a break. We learned quickly the ins and outs of zoom and “You’re on mute” became a familiar refrain. This was a time of learning patience with the technology and with one another as we all learned to adjust to “the new normal.” Sunday School went on hiatus for awhile, and we eventually reinstated Sunday School and weekly children’s time during worship.

In April, the Worship Committee began meeting biweekly to plan for a lengthy lockdown and to facilitate improvement of audio-video offerings. Meanwhile, musicians were continuing to record responses and solos at the church, and Dr Linn Holness and Dr Patricia Wright took care to ensure that the visuals (candles, paraments, etc.) were appropriate and pleasing for each individual service.

April 5, Palm Sunday: Instead of a palm parade, congregation members pitched in by sending photos of themselves with greenery from their gardens. The choristers offered an anthem by Zoom. The Zoom learning curve had begun!

April 10, Good Friday morning service, though shot off-site, included the traditional tolling of the bell thirty-three times. It seemed particularly poignant this time. That evening the Good Friday concert was reimagined with a variety of offerings including a choir CD recording and virtual solos, hymns, and poetry all recorded at separate venues.

April 12, On Easter Sunday, an exterior shot of Metropolitan was chosen as the opening image for the CBC National News and various clips of the service were featured. Of course, despite the symbolism of the church, strong in adversity, the true church had already transitioned from one large historic building to hundreds of homes across the city, and eventually across the country and beyond.

From Easter Sunday and all through the summer, the recordings continued and became ever more varied, integrated with film clips and original videos. All anthems were now “virtual anthems,” and “Born This Way,” produced for Pride Week, was a highlight. Charles Davidson subsequently posted an online tutorial on the complexities of assembling a virtual anthem. Our admiration for his technical prowess and patience doubled! Another addition to our media offerings was the delightful video scriptural interpretations of Reverend Meyers’ young sons “The Lockdown Brothers.” And through the Go Project, under the continuing leadership of Alana Martin, we were able to offer online children’s Sunday School at 10:15 a.m., scheduled to allow the children to worship with their parents or guardians at 11:00. Alana also provides a welcome children’s time during the service.

Although churches were allowed to open to 30% capacity in July, we decided to wait until the end of August in order to sort out process and ensure that numbers stayed low. Detailed instructions regarding masks, social distancing, singing (don’t), and socializing (don’t) were emphasized by signage and online instruction. Registration in advance was required, and the pews were taped to ensure distance compliance. Attendees were screened on Sunday and required to sign in. For those who were eager to worship in person and for the ministers and the musicians on site, the return to the sanctuary was a welcome and moving transition.

In the making of service music, the great outdoors also played a role from time to time. In the summer, the choir leads met outside Dr Wright’s apartment building to record anthems and responses to be used online. And after Gathering Sunday in September, the first in-person congregants were treated to anthems in the park. Later that Sunday, more anthems were recorded in the aesthetically challenged parking lot when the surrounding city noise allowed!

For a brief period in the Fall, we experimented with recording a Sunday evening edition of worship, filming music, readings, sermon, et. al. independently through the week for a 7:00 p.m. service, but the additional work and reduced number of viewers did not warrant continuation of this effort. Thankfully, with a new and improved camera in hand, we were able to make the transition to livestreaming just in time for Thanksgiving on October 11th, delivering a worship service to both in-person and at-home congregants. Now those who were watching from home were able to see familiar faces in the congregation for the first time in months. This was comforting and encouraging. Hope was high. Even the handbell choir had begun rehearsing and actually played for two Sundays. And in the spirit of growth and innovation Reverend Meyers was prepared to launch an exciting new outdoor worship venture called Taddle Creek Wild Church.

Meanwhile, Charles and the production team were refining their technique and offering an even more professional-looking product. It was clear that post-pandemic, we would have to offer online services for our increasingly wider audience.

Unfortunately, whatever hopes we had for in-person Christmas celebrations were dashed by rising numbers of COVID-19 infections in Toronto. By November 29th we were back in lockdown, livestreaming from an empty church. All services—including Advent, Carol, and two Christmas Eve services—went virtual with the overarching mystery being “How do the soloists sing so beautifully behind those masks?” With enhanced lighting, improved sound, and festive décor, our Christmas presentations were stunning. They will remain a rich and lasting treasure in the archives of Metropolitan and on the worldwide web.

Composing an annual report is an exercise in looking back. But now, in 2021, there is no looking back. For decades, the topic of recording our services as worship outreach was regularly discussed and just as regularly set aside. We had neither the equipment nor the budget nor the skill set. Now everything has changed. A generous donation from a member of the congregation will allow us to purchase more sophisticated equipment with which we hope to capture both the grandeur of the building and the intimacy of the worship service. We have the budget, soon we will have professional livestreaming capability, and after months of fearlessly climbing a steep and exhausting learning curve, our production team has acquired the necessary skills to make Metropolitan a dynamic player in the high-tech world of worship beyond all walls. To our videographers Charles Davidson, Benjamin Stein, Timothy Wisnicki, and Matthew Fraser, a thousand blessings upon your heads!

Throughout the year the congregation has been endlessly supportive and understanding. Our ministers, Reverend Karen Bowles, Reverend Jason Meyers, and Dr. Patricia Wright were courageous and inspiring during even the most challenging circumstances. Staff, choir, band, scripture readers, sanctuary volunteers, and superior production team were, and continue to be, creative, flexible and apparently untiring! In the midst of a global pandemic, fear and grief have been mitigated by the determination of this community to make miracles out of mayhem. We are truly blessed and deeply grateful to all of you for your loyalty, your strength, and your prayers. Great is your faithfulness!

Thank you.

Patricia Orr

With Gratitude

In marking the passing of the year 2020, the Worship Committee extends its thanks to

- Our ministers: Reverend Karen Bowles, Rev. Jason Meyers, and Dr Patricia Wright, who rallied brilliantly and did not miss a beat in adapting to constantly changing directives
- Timothy Wisnicki, who developed not only his liturgy, preaching, and music skills but also his technical skills
- Our musicians, who found themselves either recording off-site or wearing masks to sing when in the church
- Bailey Fleming and Alana Martin from the GO Project who engaged with our youth
- Our technical team—which didn’t exist at the beginning of the year. As we lurched into online worship, Reverend Jason Meyers took the lead, while Charles Davidson quickly

developed the skills to assume leadership of a team that included Ben Stein, Timothy Wisnicki, Matthew Fraser, and Nishaanth Sivanantharajah

- Our lay worship folk:
 - The readers, the ushers and greeters
 - Jeff Laitar and Jim Nixon, who prepared the sanctuary for in-person worship in the fall
 - A new addition to team—the screeners

And a very special thank you to the Communion Guild, whose report follows. Many members of the Communion Guild had been planning on retiring in 2020 after many years of faithful service. We were saddened that we could not acknowledge their contribution in person but will hope to do so when we are all back in the sanctuary.

Linn Holness, Chair

Communion Guild

Members: Marion Elliott and Ann Keller (Coordinators), Muriel and Karl Griffith, Karlos Griffith, Jim Harper, Carol Kitney, Angela Lopez, Kenneth Younie

Associate Members: Alan Cotterill, Sarah Cotterill, Greg McMaster, and Shari McMaster were available to help the Guild as needed.

2020 was indeed a year of many changes:

Firstly, our Guild, which usually prepares communion six times during the year, prepared and set up communion only once, on March 1, the first Sunday in Lent, and served 126 people at the rail. Because of the pandemic state of emergency declared in mid-March and the ensuing public health restrictions, no further public serving of the communion elements was allowed.

Secondly, there was a substantial change to the personnel structure of the Guild. Several of us have been members of this committee for many years (thirty-five in the case of the Griffiths) serving with Dr. Kathleen Harris when she was Chair of the Guild from the 1980s to her death in 2008. So, this year of 2020 seemed like the best time for some of us to retire, namely, **Muriel and Karl Griffith, Ann Keller, Jim Harper, Carol Kitney**, and myself, **Marion Elliott**. **Angela Lopez**, our other long-time member, was willing to remain on the committee should her help be required in the future.

I do want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank my wonderful colleagues on this committee for their dedication, loyalty, congeniality, and steadfastness over the years. It has been a privilege to work together with you all in this important task as part of the worship service.

From time to time, we did require some extra help, especially in the last year or two, and we are extremely grateful for the kind and caring people who stepped into the breach. **Karlos Griffith** was always available to help on each Communion Sunday. **Ken Younie**, in spite of being newly appointed as Board Chair, agreed to help us with early set-up on Sunday morning. **Shari and**

Greg McMaster helped wherever needed, while **Sarah and Alan Cotterill** were available over the years to lend a hand. We could not have done it without you. Thank you all so much.

Marion Elliott, Coordinator

Flanders Library Committee

Members: Pam Fraser (Secretary), Christopher Hoover (Treasurer), Marion Lick (Co-chair), Maureen Maguire (Co-chair), Vlad Orlov, Ron Ruck

In Memoriam: Ruth Brown passed away early in 2020. We will miss her calm and cheerful presence, her informed advice on library purchases, and her extensive knowledge of library management from her many years at the *Toronto Star* Library. Ruth lived her life to the fullest, never letting her health issues stop her from participating in Met activities. We will miss her smile as we settle in for meetings once again.

The Library Committee did not meet online during 2020, but the members are in touch and Chris Hoover continued with collection development. Purchases have been catalogued and await processing when the Library opens post-pandemic. We are poised to get back to the business of making our Library resources and beautiful space available to all our Met community!

Marion Lick, Maureen Maguire, Co-chairs

Broadview (formerly *The United Church Observer*)

Broadview continues to be a magazine of high caliber for United Church people and beyond.

The magazine's recent changes in approach and style to reach a broader market have been well received. *Broadview's* content focuses on current topical issues related to spirituality, ethical living, and social justice along with a section specifically devoted to United Church stories and news.

Metropolitan United Church encourages all its households to subscribe to this excellent, well-written magazine. It helps to bind us together as a congregation and as a part of our denomination, The United Church of Canada. Currently, Metropolitan has about 100 subscribers on its group subscription plan. Thanks to over-and-above gifts from subscribers, we are better able to provide the magazine to shut-ins who wish to receive it. In addition, each household that formally affiliates with the congregation receives a complimentary subscription for one year to introduce them to this interesting and informative publication. Our group plan's subscriptions come due in May/June of each year, but anyone may take out a subscription at any time.

Check out *Broadview's* website at www.broadview.org. Copies are also available in our congregation's library.

You may easily subscribe by joining Metropolitan's group subscription plan, which enables subscribers to receive the magazine at a special discounted rate of \$25 for 8 print issues annually. Simply contact our congregation's *Broadview* representative, the church office, or, when we return to on-site worship, place your request for a subscription on the Sunday offering plate in an envelope indicating your gift is for *Broadview*. Cheques should be made out to Metropolitan United Church.

If you've not tried *Broadview* yet, please do so. It's a good read. Just ask any one of our current subscribers.

Doug Flanders
Metropolitan's *Broadview* Representative

Foundations

Support and Services

Director of Administration

It was an extraordinary year at Metropolitan. Many projects were already in motion as we entered 2020 and, within 11 weeks, we had to do a complete pivot on how we conducted the business of the church. Change happened in such a rapid fashion that it is wonderful to now look back and see how we not only survived but thrived. In a way, it brought out the depth of people's love for the church and the willingness and trust of people to think "outside the box" to accomplish so much at such a challenging time. The loss of personal contact did take a toll on everyone, but the commitment to work did not waiver. I am heartened by all the work and support and goodwill of the entire Metropolitan community.

While we all tried to keep positive, it must be noted that the loss of meeting in person was also very difficult. Even harder was the loss of congregational members during this time with the inability to honour them in person with a memorial.

The year began with the expectation of a quick completion of the north-end reno, the farmers market was coming to fruition, the new tower window was being designed, and we were anticipating our carillon bells to arrive for Easter. However, the north-end construction was slow to begin in January and while the other business of the church continued, news of the imminent threat of a pandemic grew.

In March, the Metropolitan COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Plan was drafted and then approved by the board (starting with a review of the Metropolitan emergency plan from the time of SARS). The Pandemic Coordinating Team (Board Chair Kenneth Younie, Worship Chair Dr.

Linn Holness, Reverend Karen Bowles, and Jane Tuomi) began to meet twice a week on a call to discuss updated information from the government, Toronto Public Health, and the United Church, as well as reviewing best practices from a number of resources.

As information and guidelines were ever changing, there were ongoing discussions about whether we could be open, who could access the building, how to best keep staff safe, best practices for Health and Safety, communication, and challenges in the park, all with the goal to continue our work safely without putting staff, volunteers, or the congregation in harm's way. The United Church set up webinars offering updates on everything pandemic. In fact, I attended many webinars and zoom meetings from a number of organizations on topics from Human Resources (work from home) to Health and Safety (cleaning protocols, air quality), managing financial challenges (keeping donations up and encouraging on-line giving). Even conferences and trade shows went virtual. The amount of resource material available was staggering as information changed from month to month.

So, after a wonderful evening on Shrove Tuesday in March in the Met Centre through to the last OOTC meal, we headed to shut down. Staff were sent home March 16 with work plans in order and printers and laptops as needed. Care staff continued to come to check the building and new cleaning protocols were initiated. The biggest initial challenge was how to continue Sunday service with or without opening the doors to the congregation; we moved to prerecording segments and then continuing worship utilizing our new livestream option. Our first on-line service was March 22nd, and, with the use of technology, Charles Davidson produced and edited Sunday services with a great supporting team using a good new camera and laptop for production. In-person meetings and programs also ended, and the building was closed to everyone except staff, a few key volunteers, and the construction workers. Zoom, out of necessity, became the communication vehicle of choice.

From a financial standpoint, the operating budget was tight and anticipated to end the year with a small deficit. There were concerns about parking revenue generation, loss of regular giving, and the end of rentals, especially weddings and concerts already booked. However, the congregation continued to generously donate and were responsive to appeals regarding COVID-19. Ministers, volunteers, and staff put extra efforts into connecting to our congregation and communicating the continuing work we were doing.

We adopted Tithe.ly, a church management software system (ChMs) to manage donations, membership, and volunteers. Tithe.ly had purchased Ascend, our website provider and that opened doors to many more opportunities we will continue to develop for the church in 2021.

Staff worked mostly from home, coming in as needed, banking each week and dealing with construction meetings on the north end. Puvi consistently came in every weekday and Siva on the weekends to keep the building safe and clean. During this year, Nadan Kandiah, our longest serving care staff decided to retire at the end of the year after 25 years of service. As well, Frank Cairns, our property manager, decided to retire in the fall after a decade at Metropolitan. We reviewed and updated the property manager job description and posted for his replacement. We were very fortunate to hire Frank Cormier, who arrived at Metropolitan in December with a wealth of church and property experience.

Charles Davidson, communications specialist, stepped in for several months when Vinoth Thanganadan was on leave in the spring to support Elena in addition to his communications work with the website and Met Connect. The new WIFI system allowed the livestream to work as a fiber line (allowing a speed of 100 Mbps), replacing the old copper line. The goal for the WIFI upgrade will enable staff, volunteers, and rental clients more opportunities to be connected. We even brought the WIFI up into the tower for the carillonneur to access.

From the administrative end, Sheela Taylor carried on with important office work. Financial Manager Elena Pejcinovska and volunteer treasurer Elspeth Bowler worked closely to handle a myriad of financial work. Government support was a tremendous help but also consumed a lot of time applying for it and tracking income. Elena set up the e-transfer process. Many people moved their pledges online. In the early days of the pandemic, the weekly trip to the bank was an experience not to be forgotten. Queen and Bay streets were virtually empty. The PATH system was mostly closed, and we were advised by our bank branch that it was not safe. We could walk on the streets without traffic.

The shutdown of the church provided an opportunity to begin work on space use, reevaluating every inch of the building, storage areas, program areas, and rental opportunities. Susan Girven, Jane Tuomi and Frank Cormier evaluated input of need from all sectors of the church with the view to re-open to a better storage layout, an updated housekeeping plan, and new opportunities for rentals in all our spaces for 2021.

Our community service team felt the shut-down impact on the most vulnerable. Housing opportunities, already in short supply, evaporated. Housing Worker Megan Carver and Community Service Worker Stephanie Cunti scrambled to prioritize service to their client base. Food security came to the top of the list, and they were able to provide meals, grocery gift cards, and partnered with local restaurants to give meal chits to the neediest. It was a collaborative team working closely with the ministers, Outreach chair Dorcas Beaton, and myself meeting bi-weekly to prioritize the work and brainstorm for opportunities.

At end of 2020, occupancy permits from the north end construction were still not issued, our carillon bells were still in Ohio with Meeks Watson awaiting the border to reopen, staff were mostly back in the church for regular office hours, and we dug in under another shut down for the long haul into 2021.

Jane Tuomi

Communications

Pivot and Turn: The 2020 Ride

Just as we launched into Lent and began marketing the Good Friday concert, our plans took a rather dramatic hard right. Saying farewell to the choir leads following our audio recording of the March 15th service, we were confident we would meet again in a couple of weeks, maximum a

month. Communications priorities shifted to messaging around COVID, updating our membership as news developed, and supporting new programs and resources online and through MET Connect (Daily Lent Meditations, Zoom Yoga, Zoom Bible Study, Coffee Time...).

It's amazing how quickly one grows accustomed to successive new normals within the grander "new normal," a practice we encountered consistently through 2020. Above all, what I will always remember and be proud of is the consistently great teamwork that took place amongst the worship team and staff in pushing forward, going over the mountains, and "making it happen."

Easter–Summer Service Production

It was a steep learning curve, learning Final Cut Pro (video software) on our new laptop in order to knit together services, as our ministers ably recorded from home and away, including Dr. Wright creating piano tracks for lead singers. Thanks to Director of Administration Jane Tuomi for implementing new tech, and Reverend Jason Meyers for assisting in this transition.

Weekly services were edited and uploaded as Facebook Premiere events (this involved nervously checking the laptop during the middle of the night, as uploading is notoriously a slow process). It was quite something to see Reverend Karen Bowles with the beautiful backdrop of her backyard or out in the Blue Mountains, congregants reading in their gardens and parks, and leads singing responses outdoors around Toronto. Here we brought worship *to* our people and sought to incorporate all parts of the tapestry that is Met worship, while creating connection.

We researched what other churches were up to—not just in Canada—and pushed forward with "virtual anthems" as time allowed, realizing the sky was the limit imagination-wise, while acknowledging the technical limits of remote music-making (you can't sing together in time over Zoom!), and that musical blend is a totally different, even more mysterious, construct away from the sanctuary.

- People visited from around the world during these first broadcast services and events:
 - *I just wanted to say thank you for sharing the Good Friday video. It brought me great comfort today. I hope you will let Patricia Orr know that her poetry spoke deeply to me, and I hope it's alright that I transposed some of it so that I can revisit it in the future. I hope once the concert is rescheduled, that I will be able to make it.*
—Jeye Daye
 - *Greetings from Johnson City, Tennessee, USA. One positive by-product of much of the world being shut down is getting to see other churches' services online. I visited Metropolitan on a Sunday morning during my first trip to Toronto and enjoyed it so much that I like to check back online occasionally. I hope to join you in person again some Sunday morning in the future.*
—Daryl Stephens
- We launched a [YouTube channel](#) that has grown to +250 subscribers and now offers a trove of Met content, including worship and music playlists.
- A [Community Services video](#) highlighted outstanding work in the community during COVID: +1,000 views

- “Born This Way,” Met’s first de facto music video, proudly showcasing our Affirming status: +5,500 views (This was produced overnight in June at Met with Ben Stein after tech issues occurred!)

Early Fall–Transition to In-person Worship/Livestreaming

We briefly filmed a separate version of Sunday worship upon reopening, edited, and uploaded for online viewers for 7 pm. This was often down to the wire. With additional tech, we were soon able to pivot to livestream worship, an altogether new and exciting challenge!

- Our reopening video (guide to in-person worship) was shared 85 times on Facebook, including by church communities across Canada: +8,900 views
- We added a phone-in version of the service on Twilio, uploading mp3 files each week.
- Recording sessions for choir leads took place outside at Dr. Wright’s building, and also in the north end of the Met parking lot
- We created an in-person registration system using tithe.ly, connected to the Met site
- With a new lockdown, there was a shift to “television studio” operating mode, fusing pre-recorded pieces with live worship.
- Nishaanth Sivanantharajah joined us as “in-house” sound operator, also coordinating with livestream technicians during services and recording sessions.

Special Events Fall–December

With our new SONY® camera and church iPhone, we were able to livestream and film future events with added flexibility. An expanded tech team of Benjamin Stein, Timothy Wisnicki, and Matthew Fraser aided me greatly in filming our special Christmas concert and livestreaming week-to-week during Advent. Our audience became equally divided among YouTube and Facebook.

- Four livestream Noon at Met concerts, featuring organ, and voice: +3,300 views
- And He Shall Come: Music & Poetry for Advent: 132 live viewers; +4,300 views
- Silver Band Carols: 111 live viewers; +2,100 views
- Livestream Lessons and Carols: 143 live viewers; +1,850 views
 - A unique service, we used the empty sanctuary to vary positions for singers
- Christmas Services: Up to 150 live viewers, +3000 views

As I mentioned in an article on creating virtual anthems, I felt a huge responsibility putting together music and worship, previewing the magic occurring between the touch of “start” and “stop” record. Whether putting together photo collages for special occasions, assembling Met’s musical ensembles piece by piece, or hearing prayers being brought to the community, it was a spiritually therapeutic practice in production, a welcome side-effect given the time constraints and stress involved—and for that I am grateful.

Thanks to everyone for their support and for so gamely jumping into the fray—from recording readings to registering online for worship, to sending in photos and making general merriment when called upon. Met is indeed a strong and caring community! Onward we go in 2021.

Charles Davidson, Communications Specialist

Ministry and Personnel Committee

Members: Michael Connolly; Joe Landon (Chair); Ron Taylor; Wilbert Ward

The Ministry and Personnel (M&P) Committee meets quarterly and communicates regularly to provide support to our ministers and staff (the team). M&P is represented on the Official Board by Joe Landon and advocates for minister and staff needs. M&P is available to the congregation to address any needs in relation to the team.

The last year has been particularly challenging given the pandemic restrictions. M&P has been exceedingly impressed with the work of the church throughout the ever-changing circumstances.

The excellent work accomplished is too extensive to fully catalog. It is important however to highlight the innovative and collaborative accomplishments of our professional staff. Sudden transition from in-person worship to fully online services (both recorded and livestreamed) displayed the profound dedication our team delivers regularly. Countless hours of effort were put in and are recognized by M&P. Our church brought many other groups and services online to continue to support our congregation and are innovating to reach out further to those in our community and beyond.

The challenges of those in our park and surrounding areas were also approached with caring, compassionate and adaptive vigor, deserving recognition. Innovations including our meal chit program and encampment policy are testament to the team's willingness to face the extreme challenges of our time with true representation of our faith and mission. The team continues to reach out to and work with many community partners to ensure we are maximizing the effect of our efforts.

These new approaches have been achieved while also maintaining the ongoing support to the pillars of our church. The team has risen to the challenge and met every expectation of excellence we had in keeping them working throughout the pandemic. M&P (and the broader church I'm sure) will continue to strive to meet the needs of the team as they continue with their challenging work and upcoming changes.

The absence of specific names of the team in this letter is as intentional as it is conspicuous. Our ministers and staff truly function as a team and each deserves credit for the collective success of all. It has been a pleasure starting my journey as chair of the M&P committee and I look forward to continuing to support the team in any way I can.

God Bless Metropolitan United Church

Joe Landon, Chair

Sustainability

Financial Advisory Committee

Members: Voting: Peter Johnson (resigned), Andrew McGee, Bob Vernon, Linda Wright (resigned), Sylvia Xie

Non-Voting: Elspeth Bowler (Treasurer), Elena Pejcinovska (Staff), Kenneth Younie (Official Board)

The Financial Advisory Committee (FAC) is a non-voting subset of the Trustees that provides recommendations to the Official Board and Trustees. The committee members have a standing invitation to all Official Board and Trustees meetings. In addition to the monthly Official Board and Trustees meetings, the FAC itself meets on an ad hoc basis, and FAC's members individually assist other Met committees per the members' expertise and interests.

In 2020, FAC:

- Met with the auditors Grant Thornton before the 2020 Annual General Meeting to review and accept the 2019 Auditors' Report and Financial Statements.
- Reviewed the 2019 Registered Charity Information Return in June 2020.
- Reviewed and provided commentary for the 2021 Capital and Operating Budgets.
- In addition to the FAC's collective work, its members individually performed the following:
 - Bob Vernon consulted with the Shuter Street Development Project
 - Sylvia Xie joined the Investment Committee, which performed a portfolio review and provided recommendations to the Official Board
 - Andrew McGee worked with the Treasurer to discuss accounting treatment of Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) and other matters

During the year, two of the FAC's members, Peter Johnston and Linda Wright, resigned from the FAC to join the Trustees. We thank them for their service within the FAC and look forward to their contributions in their new roles as Trustees.

Bob Vernon on behalf of the Voting Members

Green Team

Members: Dorcas Beaton, Hazel Gorley, Tim Gorley, Nancy Hardy, Carol Kitney, Rev. Jason Meyers (Staff), Karen Scott, Andrée Vaillancourt

The Green Team met for two meetings in 2020 before going on hiatus due to pandemic restrictions.

Priorities for future initiatives:

- Purchase of porcelain coffee cups to end the use of disposable coffee cups during after church coffee hour

- Participation in Earth Day worship services
- Drafting an eco-friendly procurement policy
- Making/selling reusable fruit/veggie bags (for sale at church and at Farmers' Market)
- Getting an energy audit of the church building once north-end renovation completed
- Hosting a Lunch 'N Learn on Recycling
- Research granting programs through the United Church and the Trillium Foundation to fund some building improvements (e.g., sanctuary lighting, insulating entrance doors)

Leah Darke, Chair (2021)

Nominating Committee

Members: Dorcas Beaton (Chair of Outreach), Linn Holness (Chair of Spiritual Learning for Life), Tracy Pratt (Chair of Ministry of Integrated Arts), Vera Taylor (Past Board Chair and Chair of Nominations), Gunn Wongsuwan (Chair of Congregational Care)

Pandemic Year 2020 - Nominating Committee Saga

The Nominating Committee was anticipating a quiet 2020, with all leadership positions filled but, of course, there has been nothing quiet about this pandemic year!

In February, the Official Board supported moving forward to develop a new stewardship model. The Nominating Committee was commissioned to find a suitable candidate who could lead the development and finalization of the model and serve as the Chair. Candidates were approached and interviewed over the next months.

Tex Perley had indicated in 2019 that he would like to step down after 16 years of service as Property Chair. The Nominating Committee approached Greg McMaster, who had done a masterful job of coordinating the North-end renovation, viewing him as an ideal candidate. Greg agreed to serve for a one-year term and was installed as the new Chair of Property at the April Board meeting.

On behalf of the Congregation and Board, we want to pay special tribute to our talented and dedicated Tex who applied his engineering know-how to serve Met from 2004–2020 and brought us through many building improvements, maintenance crises/floods, new park and tower lighting, redecorating projects, the North-end Renovation, and, most recently, the glorious facelift of our building facade to the gleaming golden of the original brick (complete with drone videos of the sensational results!) Tex's dedication and expertise in maintaining our historical property deserves special recognition and our heartfelt thanks.

Throughout 2020, the Nominating Committee has worked with new incoming Board Chairs to write and refine Terms of Reference documents for Board approval. Greg McMaster presented the Property document for approval in May and established a standard of excellence for future documents and revisions.

In June, the Nominating Committee provided support for the Transition Team by developing a blueprint for ensuring that MET's congregational constituencies are represented on the Ministerial Search Team, including a broad range of considerations, (such as age groups, cultural diversity, singles and young families, sexual orientation). In July, the proposed framework was approved by the Board.

When Alan and Sarah Cotterill decided to move to small town Ontario, a vacancy for Chair of Trustees was created, with Alan stepping down at the September Board meeting. His departure also created a vacancy for the Chair of the Shuter Street Development Team (a subset of Trustees). Alan has served as a trustee since 2017 and as Chair since 2018. He was instrumental in shaping MET's property development initiatives. Thanks to both Alan and Sarah for their years of active engagement and leadership while at MET.

In July, Terry Kelly agreed to assume the role of Chair of the newly created Stewardship Committee. Terry brings a passionate commitment to this area along with specific training in lay leadership from course work at Emanuel College. The Stewardship area is essential to MET's spiritual development and long-term viability, so we are blessed to have Terry's leadership in this critical area.

In anticipation of Alan vacating his role as Chair of Trustees, additional support for the ongoing work of the trustees was invited. Peter Johnson and Linda Wright from the Financial Advisory Committee (FAC) were proposed as new trustees and were confirmed at the August Congregational Meeting. Peter agreed to lead the Shuter Street Development, and Linda agreed to provide support for the Chair position to be determined. Two FAC vacancies will be filled in 2021, as volunteers become available.

This pandemic year, with very limited face-to face, in-person contact, has made leadership recruitment very challenging, but we have been blessed by the willingness, talent, and commitment of those who have stepped forward to serve.

My deep thanks to the faithful members of the Nominating Committee, our hardworking Pillar Chairs: Dorcas Beaton (Outreach), Linn Holness (Spiritual Learning for Life), Tracy Pratt (Ministry Through the Arts), and Gunn Wongsuwan (Congregational Care).

Vera Taylor, Chair

Property Committee

Members: Frank Cairns (Staff, retired), Frank Cormier (Staff), Jeff Laitar, Greg McMaster (Chair), Jim Nixon, Elena Pejcinovska (Staff), Tex Perley (Ex Officio), Jane Tuomi (Staff), Heather Walsh

2020 was a watershed year for the Property Committee that saw sweeping personnel changes and a multi-year project mark important completion milestones.

Long-time Property Committee Chair Tex Perley stepped down after 16 years of dedicated service. The position was filled by Greg McMaster, adding to his responsibilities as Chair of Reno Groups (responsible for furniture and technology) and Chair of the North-end Renovation. This seemed a natural progression as his familiarity with the building had grown during his time working with the renovation.

The first task was to re-invigorate the Property Committee with a “*100-year vision*” respecting both the history and future of our venerable building. Recruiting members from the success of the Reno Group and with renewed enthusiasm, the Property Committee embarked on an ambitious plan to 1) guide the renovation to its best possible conclusion, 2) make the renewed spaces user-friendly and adaptable for rentals with updated technology and furniture, and, 3) incorporate new and existing physical plant components and enhance building maintenance protocols. Modernizing Metropolitan, while keeping an eye on its past, will best suit its needs and programs.

Early into the new mandate, long-serving Property Manager Frank Cairns announced his retirement effective at year’s end. There was a well-deserved public acknowledgement of Frank’s contributions on Sunday, November 1st, and we wished him well in his future endeavors. And after 25 years of loyal service, care staffer Nadan Thanganadan retired in December.

Assisting the Director of Administration Jane Tuomi, a new property manager was found and hired. The Property Committee welcomed Frank Cormier to the Property Manager position. (New) Frank also comes to the job with a wealth of knowledge and a roll-up-your-sleeves “get it done” attitude.

The month of April saw the repair of the west-side pinnacles. A pinnacle is an architectural ornament forming a cap or crown (like a small spire) and can be seen along the edge of the roof. As well, renovation of five exterior stone staircases was completed, including railings and tactile warning studs required by the building code. Maintaining aging stonework is not only a good historic-building management practice, but also reduces the risk of catastrophic injury from falling debris or tripping hazards.

Work completed this year involved restoration of stained-glass windows around the north section of the building, including frame painting and the addition of protective glazing. Accessibility Act compliance and improved access was achieved by installation of automatic door operators in the universal washroom and north-east entrance, passenger lifts, signage, and ramps. Commissioning of the HVAC system means that air-conditioning, efficient heating, and greatly improved air quality will exist where once these did not. The east-side exterior construction compound was cleared of debris in preparation for its renewal. A survey of all deficiencies in the building resulted in “The Big List,” a giant “to-do” list documenting all things needing to be completed in the church building.

Sanctuary lighting was made more cost-efficient with consistent warmer colour-temperature and even illumination. New LED bulbs in the hanging pendants now enhance the appearance of the upper portion stained-glass displaying deep, rich colours. Lighting work was performed at a fraction of originally quoted costs.

Autumn saw the installation of desks in offices, colourful furnishings and equipment (television and 4'x8' whiteboard) in the new Sunday School room, audio infrastructure, and new chairs in the Chancel Room, appliances for the two new kitchenettes, and industrial laundry machines in the new laundry room. Updated security cameras and monitors were installed by the north-east administration entrance, as well as re-keying of new north-end doors. All of the above was procured under budget.

However, it was the North-End Renovation project that presented most of the year's challenges. Although "Substantial Completion" was reached in September and saw the end to major construction activity, the project's closing-out has been delayed by the pandemic (37 days), a complicated steam-heating system integration, contractor deficiencies and delays, and numerous building inspections. The Property Chair worked closely with the architect to bring resolution to the project in as cost-conscious a manner as possible despite situations beyond our control. The North End has been deeply cleaned in the post-construction period. Cleaning woodwork throughout the north-end continues.

The plans for the coming year are to make the church a cleaner, healthier, and better place for work, devotion, and celebration. We will continue checking off "The Big List" tasks; move staff into their new offices; prepare the church for rentals; modernize management of church assets via asset management software; and administer the day-to-day tasks of keeping the building warm in winter, cool in summer, and secure always.

We will continue to work hard to be good stewards of the funds allotted to our committee's activities and are grateful for the support of the congregation, Board, Trustees, staff, and ministers.

Greg McMaster, Chair

Stewardship Committee

Members: Doug Flanders, Helen Han, Terry Kelly, Ed Oikawa, Jay Wagner, Shawn Winsor

The new Stewardship Committee of Metropolitan United Church was formed in the autumn of 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. Our purpose is "discipleship through stewardship," and our goal is to inspire the members of Metropolitan to "use their time, talent and treasure" to support the church.

With in-person worship severely cut back or online, limited opportunities for programming, no collection plates, and an unstable economy, what could possibly go wrong? Or the question might be: “What could possibly go right?”

Turns out, a lot could go right, and did. The members of Metropolitan found new opportunities to be of service and unexpected resources to help one another and the community and were overwhelmingly generous in sharing their financial resources.

So, for me, 2020 showed that the members of Met are profoundly committed to our church, both in good times and challenging ones. We whole-heartedly embraced our new reality and continued to support the church and each other. We recognized the critical importance of checking in with each other. We understood that everyone was under stress, with unprecedented demands for their time and financial resources. All of this was top of mind for every one of us on the Stewardship Committee as we began to meet and plan for the future.

Most importantly, the Stewardship committee found that nothing can replace the pastoral care found in one member talking to another. The first word in the affirmation of faith is ‘We.’ What can this pandemic teach us about the ways we have been doing church and what can we take with us into the future?

Terry Kelly, Chair

Trustees

Members: Elspeth Bowler (Treasurer), Rev. Karen Bowles (Staff), Alan Cotterill (resigned), Susan Girvan, Linn Holness, Peter Johnston, Terry Kelly (resigned), Greg McMaster (Property), Fran Parkin, Elena Pejcinovska (Staff), Tex Perley, Jane Tuomi (Staff), Kenneth Younie (Chair of the Official Board, Ex Officio), Lynn Watson, Linda Wright

During 2020, Alan Cotterill (Chair) and Terry Kelly left the committee, with Linda Wright and Peter Johnston joining the group.

The Trustees continued to monitor the relationship and financial transactions with Target Park in coordination with the Official Board. In early 2020, the senior management of the Target Park relationship was transferred from Alan Cotterill to Board Chair Ken Younie, and Target Park identified a single point of contact from their side for the Church. Ken Younie and Reverend Karen Bowles worked with this dedicated contact to address payment and daily parking report delays. The COVID-19 outbreak impacted the parking revenues starting in March, with the revenues largely returning to normal by September.

The Trustees provided financial oversight of the north-end renovation project, reviewing and approving several change-order requests over the year. Financial projects and actuals were tracked by the Treasurer, following the certification of change orders and invoices of

construction work completed by the architect. Monthly status updates were provided to both board members and trustees on construction progress.

The Massey Parsonage building development initiative planning activities continued throughout 2020 with the Trustees providing input on important themes for the development, reviewing the Colliers contract, and providing approvals for a planning report and a phase I and phase II environmental report. The Trustees and Board jointly delivered a presentation to the congregation in October 2020, obtaining approval for Colliers to present a long-term land lease opportunity to the market.

The opportunity is for Metropolitan to enter into a land lease with an experienced, creditworthy developer for up to 99 years at set land-lease payments that grow over time to allow for development of a multi-residential development project and re-development of the parsonage building. The prospective development is a two-tower, market-based rental housing project of approximately 600 suites with an affordable housing component of 5% to 15% and ancillary commercial use. Marketing materials have been prepared with Colliers and the land lease is under review. The projected marketing of the land lease has been delayed from initial projections, but the Shuter Street Development Committee expects to have outstanding matters addressed to allow for marketing in the 3rd quarter. of 2021.

The Trustees identified funding and/or led various smaller-sized property initiatives throughout the year. For example, we identified funding to repair the Church pinnacles. We continue to manage a “Tower Window” project to build a custom stained-glass window for the bell tower above the front doors overlooking the park and Queen Street.

In 2020, there were meetings of Trustees and FAC committees with Metropolitan’s investment advisory team at Scotia Wealth Management to present and review Metropolitan’s investment performance and identify investment policy changes aimed at generating higher returns. The church’s investment portfolios held up well in this year of high market volatility caused by the COVID pandemic, with returns on par with 10 year-annualized return. Please see the Investment Working Group section below for more details.

Lynn Watson, Secretary

Investment Working Group (IWG)

Members: Jim Beatty, Elspeth Bowler, Priscilla Chong, Dennis Donovan, Sylvia Xie (Lead)

The IWG was formed in February 2020 and initially led by the former Chair of Trustees, Alan Cotterill. The group originally had two tasks in 2020: (1) review and update MET Investment Policy Statement (IPS); (2) after the IPS update, conduct search for a potential Investment Manager (existing IM would be invited to compete) to manage Metropolitan’s investment portfolios. Because of the pandemic and the unexpected departure of Alan Cotterill, the IWG

was only able to produce a new version of IPS. The new IPS is currently being reviewed and discussed with the IM and the Trustees.

During IWG's Q3 meeting held on December 1, 2020, the mandate was established and approved by all members.

Sylvia Xie, Lead

Vital Statistics 2020

New Members

Tina Conlon

Infant Baptisms

- Janyah Carmela Sobrepena, child of Yoradyl Advincula and Mark Gregory Sobrepena
- Marco Javen Balolong, child of Xandra Maye Cabauatan and Christopher Balolong

Marriages

- Maureen Doherty and Andrew Tiffin
- Miranda Keyes and Cameron Tymstra

In Memoriam

Paula Bashford, Ruth Brown, Ian Carman, Kay Goodwin, Paul Minnoch, Mary Stockdale
Vernon, Douglas Taylor

Comparative Statistics

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of Households under Pastoral Care	461	452	446	454	450
Total Membership (Resident and Non-resident)	452	443	438	448	442
Average Weekly Attendance at Sunday Worship*	245	255	220	210	200–250

*Based on weekly attendance records; 2020 attendance reflects viewing both livestream and later

Received By

Transfer of Membership	3	5	0	3	1
Profession of Faith	15	13	5	12	0
Confirmation	0	0	0	0	0

Removed By

Transfer or other	2	20	1	0	0
Death	11	7	8	5	5
Member's Request	0	0	1	0	0

Ceremonies

Infant Baptism	5	7	5	5	2
Adult Baptism	3	2	0	0	0
Blessings	2	2	1	0	0
Marriages	35	22	21	15	2
Burials	11	10	8	2	0



COVID **LOCKDOWN**

PIVOT!!

Zoom **LIVESTREAM**

Courageously Connected
GRATITUDE
RESILIENCE