

FORT WASHINGTON COLLEGIATE CHURCH

Annual
Report

2019
2020





Staff

Rev. Dr. Damaris D. Whittaker
Senior Minister
 Rev. Michael Vanacore
Associate Minister for Congregational Life
 Allison Dilyard
Associate for Children and Youth Ministries
 Chris Whittaker
Director of Music
 David Ford
Business Manager
 Dinean Davis
Communications and Ministry Coordinator
 Laurrinda Hatcher
Bookkeeper
 Lazaro Rodriguez
Sexton
 Wilfredo Serrano
Sexton
 James Admans
Ministerial Intern
 Jesse Ortiz
Ministerial Intern

Consistory

Beverley Sheares
 Elder, Chair of Consistory
 Victoria Dillard
 Elder
 Johanna Garcia
 Elder
 Brian Plane
 Elder
 Phil Callen
 Deacon
 Zenia Dacio-Mesina
 Deacon
 Delana Glenn
 Deacon
 Lisa Kline
 Deacon
 Andrew Lanctot
 Deacon
 Melissa Thomas-Baum
 Deacon
 Stacey Cameron
 Intersections Ministry Deacon
 LaVonne Reimer
 Intersections Ministry Deacon

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About FWCC

Fort Washington Collegiate Church is a place of diversity, hospitality and grace. As a church family, we celebrate our diversity and our connection to God. We open our doors to everyone regardless of race, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, social or economic status. As a faith community, we seek to follow Christ's example and exemplify the love of Christ; therefore, we value grace over judgment. We represent many cultures and points of view, which gives us the opportunity to be enriched by the gifts and leadership of all God's people. Together, by word and deed, we proclaim the good news that there is new life in Christ.

We are a church that focuses on creating community, not just neighbors. Our connection to God is what makes us one. In seeing the humanity in everyone, we seek to fulfill the call of God to love one another and meet the needs of those who have been marginalized, forgotten and vilified. As believers, we actively seek justice for all. Our commitment to the city goes beyond the borders of a town, state or country, but the City is wherever there is a need for love, hope and grace.

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. (Mark 4:35-36)

REV. DR. DAMARIS D. WHITTAKER SENIOR MINISTER



It seems like almost a century ago we were celebrating Homecoming Sunday in the garden, but it was September 2019. Our footprints are still indented in the ground, and the space is still vibrating from the energy of our dancing, children running and amazing, amazing food. It was then that we also received into our community Rev. Michael as our new Associate Minister for Congregational Life.

By the time October came around, the Children and Youth Ministries was continuing to grow expeditiously. We expanded our staff to welcome Allison Dillard as our Associate Director of Children and Youth Ministries, and shortly after, Jesse Ortiz as Seminary Intern to Children and Youth.

Our church retreat was inspiring, challenging, and empowered us to continue to find God in the Wilderness. It became an Interfaith and ecumenical retreat and it was transformational! Many thanks to an extraordinary retreat planning team. The Interfaith Thanksgiving meal was joyous with over 350 of God's children coming through the doors to serve, to be fed, and to be in community. By the time Christmas came around, we held not one, but two services—both extremely well attended. We knew that Fort Washington Collegiate Church was in a trajectory of sustainable growth.

In February we celebrate Black History Month. We opened the doors to the community to welcome the film makers of *Walking While Black*—we entered into courageous conversations on race. In response to earthquakes in Puerto Rico, we led a medical mission

in Puerto Rico with our FWCC team—a trip that was covered by [CNN](#).

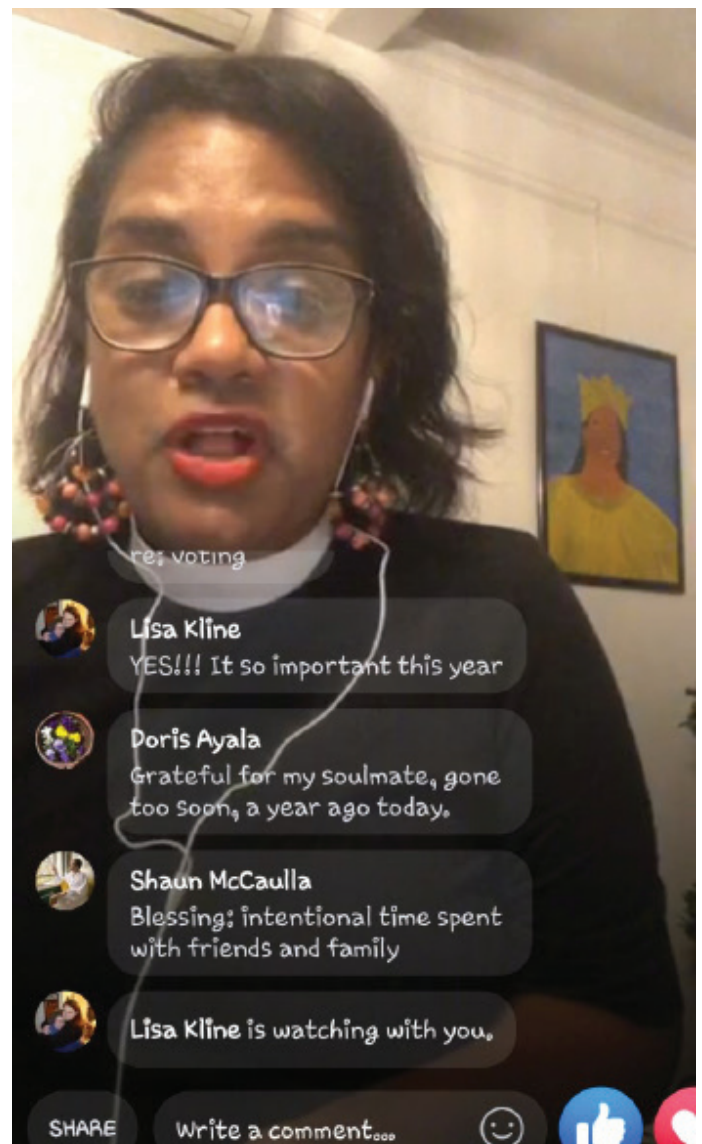
By the time March came around, we were in the middle of a pandemic. With little understanding of what was transpiring around us, our last act before we closed the doors was to lay our hands on Mia McClain and ordained her to be a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the United Church of Christ. Immediately after, we retreated to our homes and apartments but held our first digital worship on the next Sunday. We have not stopped working, creating, and serving.

Our staff needed to be equipped to work digitally—a task we are still working on today. We had to change our operational strategies and implement a new way of working. Change was upon us and it was imminent. Some FWCC staff moved away, and also many of our congregants. Some have endured unspeakable losses. We lost beloved members Jane, Gilda, Eric and others. But, as a community, we have remained connected regardless of all that has changed.

Through our brokenness, we continued to serve our community. We have not waived in our commitment to justice and peace. We are working hard on #CancelRent #BlackLivesMatter and racial justice initiatives. Our Policing and Black Lives digital forum was a success and the Social Justice Task Force is as active as ever. Through it all, we have not stopped being a church with #loveonthemove. We have continued to be a growing church. We accepted 34 new members, we celebrated 4 baptisms, and held 3 memorial services.



Friends, Jesus said to his disciples “Let us go to the other side” (Mark 4:35). In their journey to the other side, a storm ensued, and the disciples learned something about Jesus they did not know before. As your Senior Minister I invite you, “Let us go to the other side.” On our journey we will know God in a different way. Let us go together—broken, whole, uncertain, hopeful, expectant—but bound with love, and a commitment to be a church with #loveonthemove. I am asking you “[come with me] to the other side” God is with us every step of the way, and our love for one another will see us through. Amen.



REV. MICHAEL VANACORE ASSOCIATE MINISTER FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE



It has been nearly one year since I joined the staff as your Associate Minister for Congregational Life. While ten months seems short on paper, I feel that God has blessed us with the ability to accomplish much together and develop a profound pastoral bond.

Since my first worship with you on Homecoming Sunday last September, it has been clear to me that “welcome” is a primary value of this congregation. It has been my joy to work the New Member Task Force, and the church at large, to foster that welcome for all. In January, we hosted an in-person New Member Mixer for 20 people, and in May, after we had to close down all in-person activities due to the pandemic, we hosted another Mixer with over 25 people joining on Zoom. But more than any number, it is the intentionality, love, and dedication with which all—both new and veteran church members—have welcomed one another, that speaks to our growth—not just in numbers, but rather in Christ.

With the advent of the crisis, I was grateful to join forces with our Senior Minister, members of Consistory, Staff, and a cadre of volunteers, to systematically assess the damage being done to our parishioners, determine who was most impacted, and make sure that their most pressing needs were met. Through our network of Interfaith and community partners, as well as the newly emerging Mutual Aid network of Senator Jackson’s office, we strove to do the same with our surrounding community. With the leadership of our Social Justice Task Force, we came together to demand a just response to COVID-19. In times such as these, pastoral care can look as much like providing rent or grocery relief to

a family who has lost their jobs as it does prayer with someone bereft because they are unable to visit a loved one in the hospital.

As a worship leader, there is nothing I love more than preaching, praying, singing, celebrating Communion and Baptism, and fellowshiping together with you “in the great congregation.” As a pastor there is nothing more holy to me than sitting by your side in your moments of trouble. So, it has been one of my greatest tribulations, perhaps selfishly, to have to do all of these things at a distance. Yet we have found many ways to connect—through worship on Facebook and YouTube, Zoom Fellowship Hour, God Talk, and Social Justice meetings, check-in calls, text messages, and much more.

As your Minister of Congregational Life, one of my greatest joys has been tending to one of the most vital parts of our life together as a church—our children and youth. I have worked closely with Rev. Damaris, Mr. Zachary, and the CYM team to build volunteer capacity, implement new administrative systems, expand programming, and then with the advent of the pandemic, to transition fully into the digital realm.

Finally, it has been a privilege for me to join in the work of “love in action” that is this church’s signature commitment. Whether I was marching with our proud band of FWCC members in the NYC Climate March with Greta Thunberg last September, working with our church leadership and volunteers to host town hall forums on systemic racism and police reform, or supporting our brilliant Seminary Intern James Admans



in their leadership of our Beyond Labels ministries, it has been my honor to be part of a church that believes social justice to be the heart of the Gospel.

I am so grateful for this opportunity to serve God as your Associate Minister of Congregational Life, and I look forward to all that this year will bring.



CHRIS WHITTAKER MUSIC DIRECTOR



The 2019-20 season of music at Fort Washington Collegiate Church has been full of exciting new adventures, and the ministry continues to grow into a more vibrant and connected component of church life and life in the Washington Heights community.

We continued our new Vocal Scholars internship this year, bringing on a new third scholar, high school senior Melanie Castro. Mezzo-soprano Melanie Dubil and baritone Melvin Rodriguez continued for a second year. Sponsored by the J. Harold Raplinger educational fund, Vocal Scholars meet weekly for independent study with the music director, participate in service, and assist the Joyful Voices in learning and preparing music.

The fall brought increased participation in our Joyful Voices Choir and the Community Choir. We had a wonderful semester of concerts, including performances by our ensemble-in-residence, the Washington Heights Chamber Orchestra.

As you know, the church year was suddenly interrupted in mid-March by the global pandemic. All of our in-person programming came to a halt, and we made a quick transition to digital programming. As we've changed over our Sunday morning worship format to online streaming broadcasts, the music ministry has been instrumental in producing creative content that bring out the gifts of our congregation.

The Joyful Voices continue to participate remotely, and we produce an average of 1-4 virtual choir pieces per week featuring an ever-broadening membership. The pandemic has allowed more time for more musicians and artists in the congregation

to actively participate, and our online worship has featured a diverse array of congregant's artistic gifts. Dance, drama, and poetry have all played a central role in our worship in these past few months. The number of congregants participating in creating online worship has been impressive and inspiring.

Additionally, our other music ministry programming has been able to continue in digital format. The Community Choir finished its semester after I taught 8 weeks of live-streamed music classes. We've continued our regular jazz communion, collaborating with world-class special guest soloists and vocalists from around the city.

We look forward to the day where we can return to in-person services, rehearsals and concerts. Until then, our online services have provided a new creative outlet, one in which Fort Washington is lifting up unique artistry and compelling voices. Our hope is that we can use this time to strengthen our current membership's commitment to our ministry, as we expand to share the engaging arts-based worship at Fort Washington Collegiate Church with more of our community, the city, and beyond.



ALLISON DILYARD ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRIES



This past year has been one of unprecedented changes, to say the least, both for the Fort Washington community as a whole, as well as for our Children and Youth Ministry program. Zachary Stevens-Walter, our former Interim Director of Children's Ministry, welcomed me to the CYM team in the beginning of October, and we hit the ground running. As our program continued to grow, almost exponentially, we soon realized we needed to rethink the way we were serving our children and youth.

The addition of Jesse Ortiz, a student at Union Theological Seminary, to the team in the fall allowed us to have three fully functioning "safe church" Sunday School classrooms. The culmination of these efforts could be seen in our one-of-a-kind Christmas pageant, which was scripted by me, directed by Zachary and a handful of enthusiastic young stage managers. We continued the tradition, begun by Mia McClain, of having a monthly Youth Sunday.

As we moved into the new year, our program continued to expand, averaging 10-15 children per classroom each week, until early March, when the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic became a dangerous reality. Rev. Michael and I had just begun a Lenten confirmation journey with a group of 13 and 14-year-old youth when we were forced to close our doors and move to a virtual church environment.

Going virtual did not mean, however, that our programming was put on pause. In fact, in the spirit of change that we had already been embracing, we welcomed the opportunity to try something completely

different with open arms, hearts, and minds. Only one week after going online, we developed an entire intergenerational worship and learning experience parallel to the Sunday virtual church service. Some highlights from CYM-from-home have been a very silly but meaningful Easter Sunday, sock puppets, Jesse's weekly activities and songs (and jokes!), and a chance to complete confirmation class and "graduate" our two confirmands via Zoom.

Alas, Zachary's tenure as Interim Director came to a close at the end of June, and we were very sad to see him go. His passion and creativity laid the foundations for our Children's and Youth Ministries to grow into what they have become. Both despite and because of the challenges of migrating to virtual church, Zachary's ingenuity has been invaluable. We are infinitely grateful for all of the hard work he has put into the FWCC community. I for one have been emboldened by his guidance as I take up leadership of our innovative, adaptive virtual CYM programming.

As we look forward to the next year, we have plans to make our virtual CYM program even bigger and better, with themed units, more at-home resources, and more opportunities for families and children to participate. In times when so little is certain, we aim to be a positive, reassuring, connecting presence for the children and youth in our community and beyond.



"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;" - Romans 5: 3-4

DAVID FORD BUSINESS MANAGER



During the 2019-2020 year, we experienced expected and unexpected challenges that required flexibility, creativity, and perseverance.

As mentioned in last year's report, a major 2019-20 challenge was to generate a new long-term rental to replace FY2019's TEP Charter daily Gym rental (for Phys Ed classes). Our relationship with TEP continued but was reduced to a monthly use of Fellowship Hall. Since I arrived in April 2018, we have been building FWCC's reputation for providing well-maintained spaces and a "film-friendly" environment. Continuing the momentum of FY 2019, our efforts seemed to be paying off: in the eight-month period before COVID shut down all activity, we brought in \$55,100 from eight production company holdings & caterings and commercial renters, several of whom were repeat clients or who came to us based on word-of-mouth!

During 2019-20, we also expanded our agreements with youth-oriented programs--TennisWorld, and Young People's Chorus of NYC--and initiated new relationships with neighborhood organizations, such as the YM & YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood, Prelude Opera, and Heights Meditation & Yoga.

We also are very grateful for the loyalty and grace expressed by Beth Am, The People's Temple; our Tuesday Washington Heights AA group; and the Thursday Al-Anon group for continuing their rental payments to the church, even though our spaces have been unavailable.

The very short period marking public awareness of the COVID-19 virus and FWCC closing our facility was a whirlwind of keeping up with fast-breaking virus developments, trying to source disinfecting products, and making adjustments with renters and other constituents using our facility. Since then, we have worked closely with Collegiate's

Central Office developing HR and re-opening safety policies to accommodate operations in a pandemic environment.

During Fall 2019, with the generous help of Watson's Plumbing Heating & Building Services, we upgraded FWCC's poorly functioning bathroom fixtures, significantly reducing our water usage bills. Recommended by Deacon Lisa Kline and located in nearby Harlem, Watson's Plumbing's work was stellar, and they gave FWCC a great rate.

FWCC's façade renovation project was progressing fitfully, due to uncontrollable and unforeseeable circumstances, such as weather conditions, and unexpected conditions in our old building's materials. COVID shut down project work from late March thru late June, which would make it challenging to finish by the expected onset of 2020 Winter. (Recent renovation delays will unfortunately force the project to a Spring 2021 completion date.)

Once our custodians were able to return to the building on a limited basis after Phase 1 of Reopening, we took the opportunity to complete much-needed facility maintenance and aesthetic improvements. When congregants finally return, they will see freshly painted spaces, patched and protected wall corners, and door kickplates that will prevent scuffing.

To continue providing worship and other services for our congregation while our physical facility was not readily available to staff, Ft Washington's small but mighty staff hung tough and adapted well. Specifically, in the administrative functions, Dinean Davis pivoted from one of her critical responsibilities producing weekly bulletins, to working closely with the CYM staff and Chris Whittaker to pull together and distribute creative, well-produced services online. Changes in our work locations, as well as in the types of work we do involved procuring additional technology tools and learning



new skills.

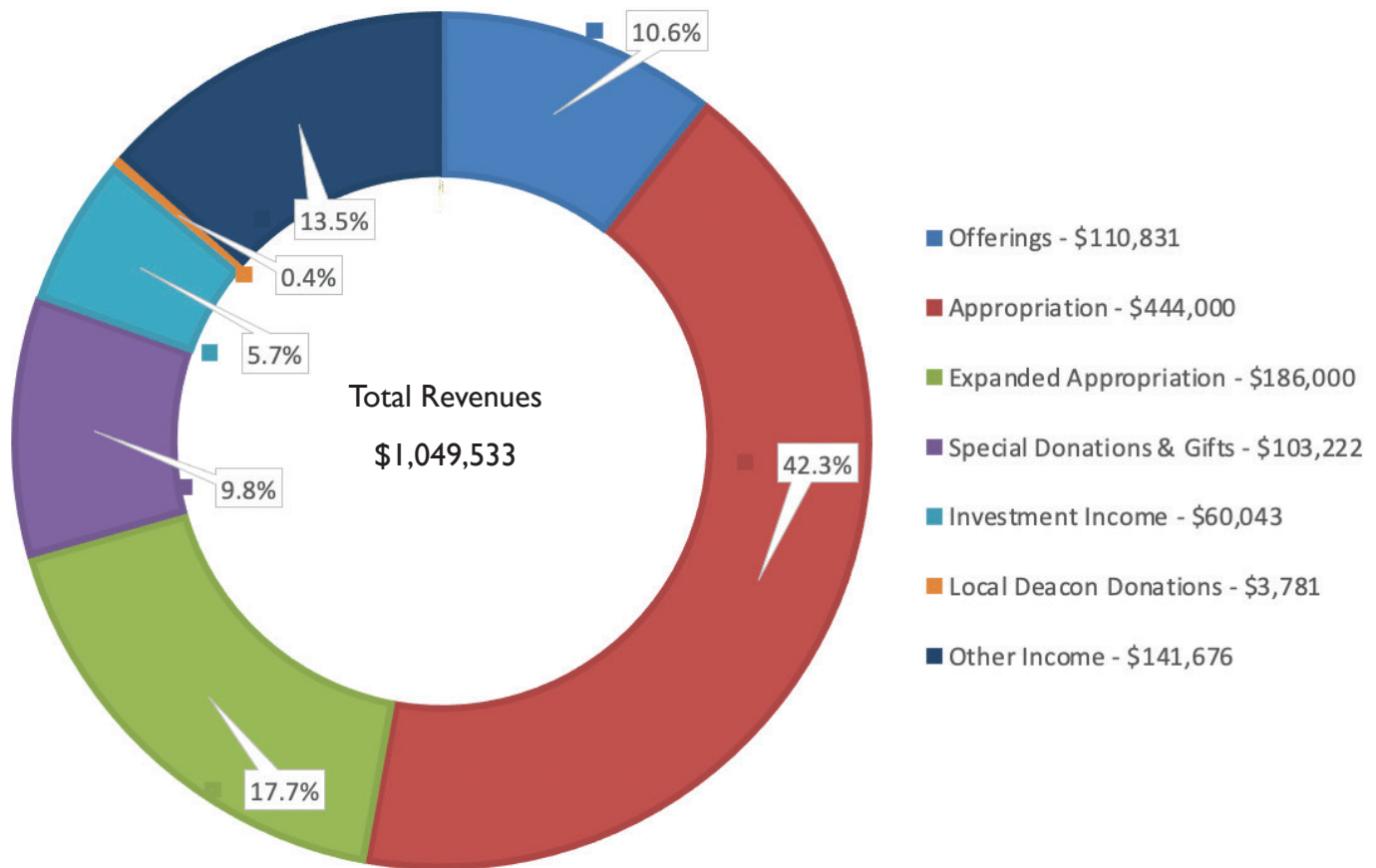
Finally, we are grateful to all congregants and new supporters for the fact that our giving and tithes have remained consistent with pre-COVID levels.

We pray that through the challenges of this pandemic, we will find new ways to do God's work and have the wisdom to find the meaning in these challenges.



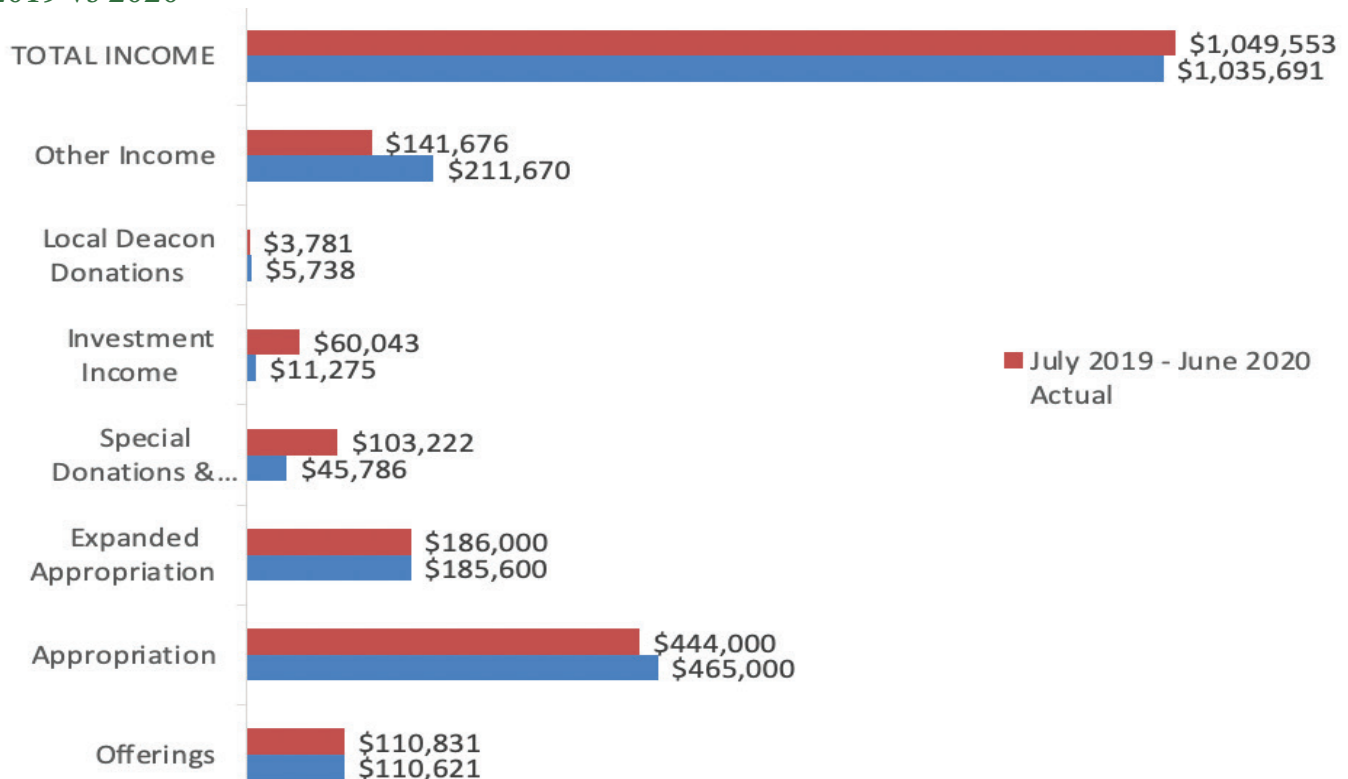
REVENUE SOURCES

2019-2020 Operating Income



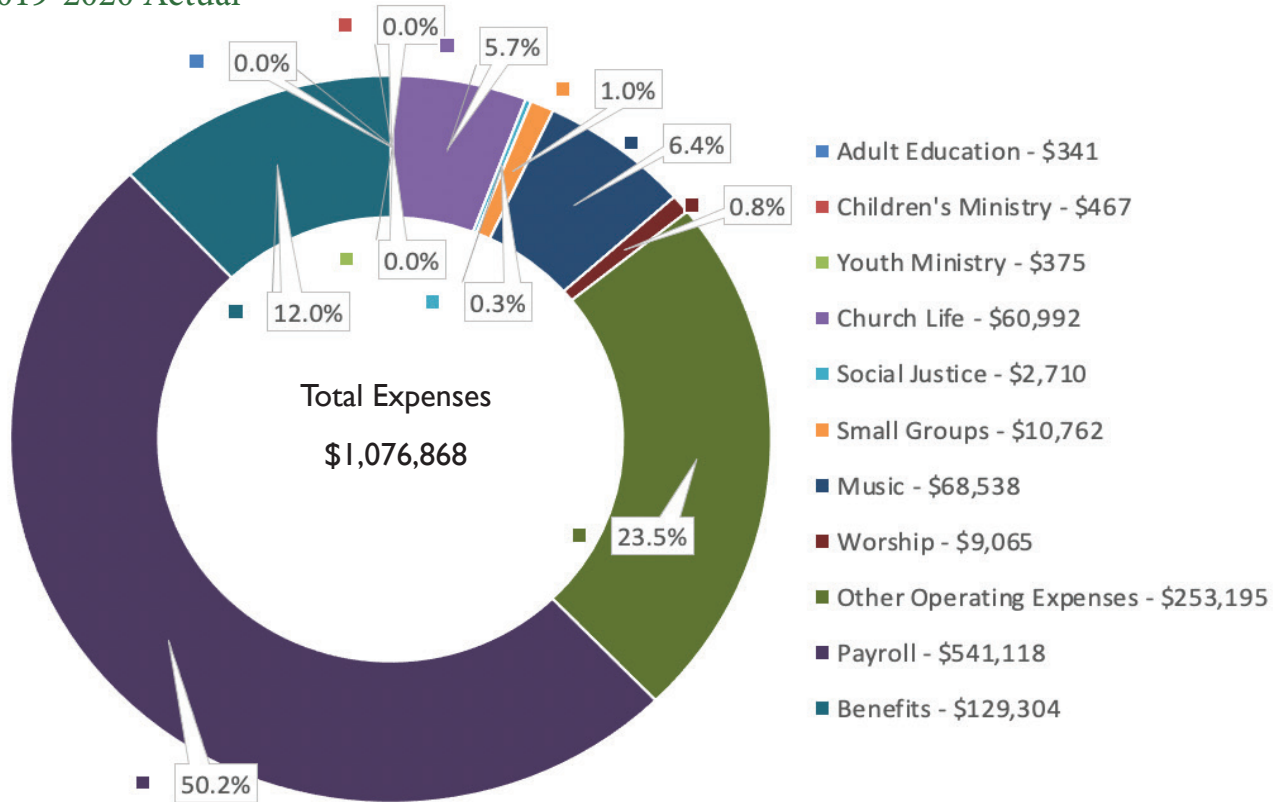
REVENUE SOURCES COMPARISON

2019 vs 2020



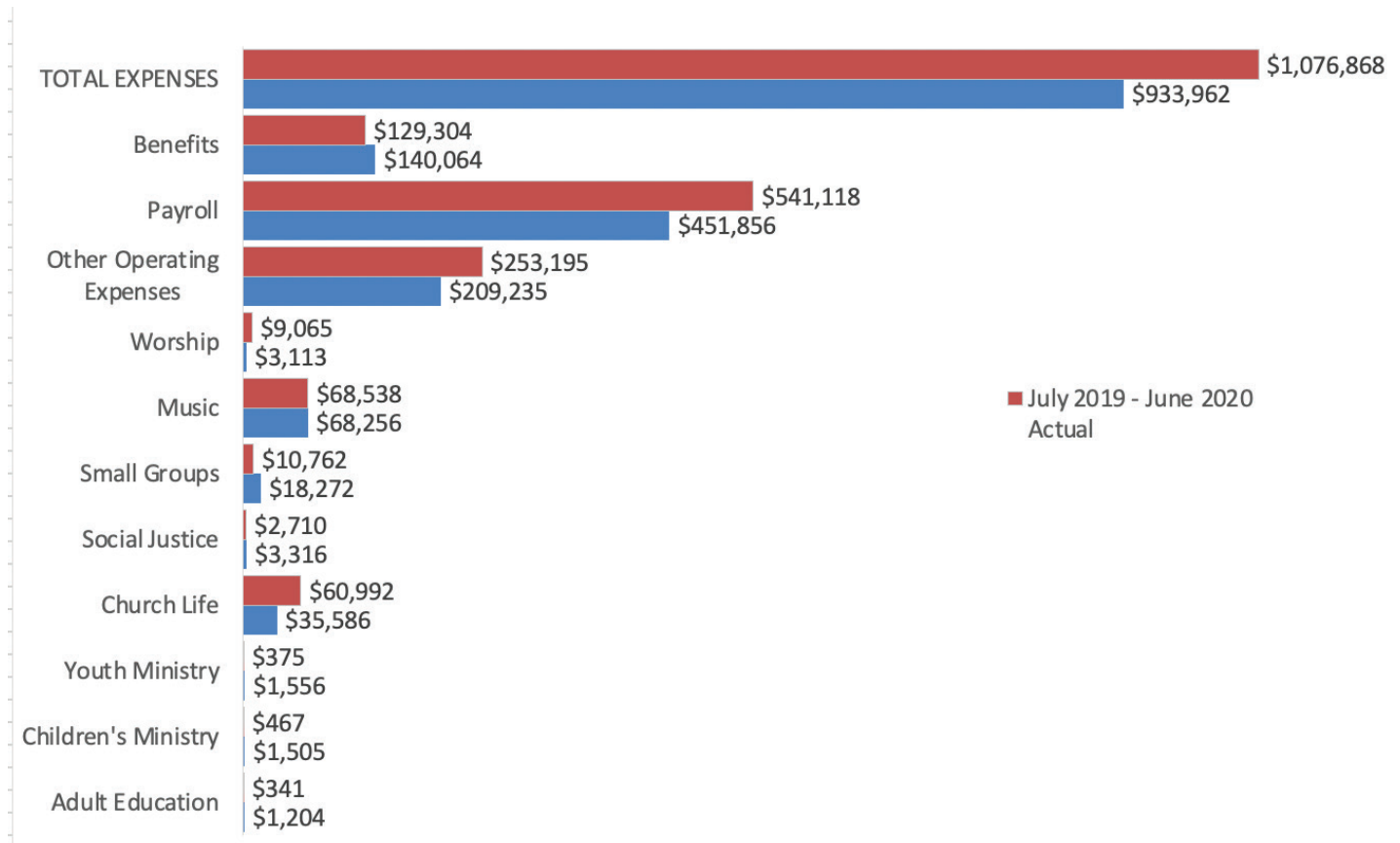
EXPENSES

2019-2020 Actual



EXPENSES COMPARISON

2019 vs 2020



EXPENSES

2019-2020

Summary

Income:	\$1,049,553
Expenses:	\$1,076,868
Total:	(\$27,315)

Investments

Putnam	63,437
Raplinger (Wilmington)	188,991
Raplinger Cash (Wilmington)	9,734
Savings Bond	15,000
Wilmington	223,289
Total Investments (Market Value)	\$500,451



*"I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—
plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to
give you the future you hope for."*
Jeremiah 29:11 (The Message)



Three Priorities for this Year

GROWTH

Continue to grow our ministry.

- a. Expand our virtual footprint to spread the message of love, inclusion and progressive Christianity by providing new and engaging opportunities for connection and belonging, including but not limited to, vibrant worship, small groups, bereavement group, webinars, town halls, bible studies, social justice forums, education and more. We continue to accept new members during this time and that is a wonderful testament that our virtual ministry is being effective.
- b. Strengthen our stewardship by creating opportunities to give, grant writing, and space rentals.
- c. Continue to care for our congregation and neighbors.

OUTREACH

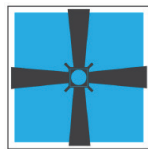
Expand our outreach.

Provide rental assistance to families and individuals facing eviction during the Pandemic, and create partnerships with local organizations to maximize our impact on #CancelRent initiative. Leveraging our anti-racism work to address issues of white privilege and internalized oppression through education and community organizing.

- a. Establish a 501(c) 3. FWCC seeks to formalize its justice and peace work in New York, Puerto Rico and beyond.

COMMITMENT

Expand our commitment and support to our children, youth and families ministries. Particularly during this transitional time of home education and uncertainty.



FORT WASHINGTON
COLLEGIATE CHURCH
GRACE. DIVERSITY. COMMUNITY.

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