Doing God’s Work In The World:
2016

A Year in the Common Life of Peace Church

Following the God made known in the life and teachings of Jesus, we at Peace United Church of Christ gather as an Open and Affirming community to worship, learn and serve.

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The Reverend Wendy Bruner, Pastor and Teacher

I am not sure what to say. Words cannot adequately convey what fills my heart, but I will give it a try.

Every morning I thank God that I have the opportunity to be a part of the Peace community. 2016 was an amazing year. The energy I felt when I first walked through those red church doors a little over a year ago has not waned. We became more engaged in the world around us with each day’s passing - Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools®, Our Whole Lives, boarding a bus to advocate for children, becoming more intentional in worship as we welcome our youngest ones into fuller participation in the life of the church, and actively thinking of other ways we could respond to God’s call on our lives in the wider community. As you read through the reports in the following pages I expect you will be as amazed as I am. Each person at Peace UCC had a role in making this work possible through their generous contributions of time, financial resources and unwavering prayer.

I walk joyfully out of 2016 and into 2017 - glad to be journeying with you - led by a Spirit that has a wonderful sense of humor a loving way and a challenging nature.

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Have compassion for everyone you meet
Even if they don’t want it. What seems conceit, bad manners, or cynicism is always a sign of things no ears have heard, no eyes have seen.
You don’t know what wars are going on
Down where the spirit meets the bone.

Miller Williams

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Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in.

Leonard Cohen
The Reverend Dr. Marilyn Stavenger, Volunteer Pastoral Associate

One of the greatest blessings at Peace Church for 2016 was the arrival of the Rev. Wendy Bruner. Her passion for the Gospel, her commitment to doing “God’s work in the world”, and her love for the Church has generated joy and enthusiasm, deep respect, and high energy among us. The work of justice is front and center – evident in her preaching and teaching, mission and ministry. Our staff team has been such a delight! How we will miss Al’s wit and wisdom, his compassion and commitment, and his administrative skill: always giving specific attention to details. Kelly and Darcy and Keith also work hard and keep us grounded and faithful in our planning and our praying. Wendy’s vision and leadership keeps us focused and energized.

It has been such fun for me to make visits with Wendy as she gets acquainted with homebound folks and those in retirement or institutional settings. While it is so evident that she deeply values the participation of children and youth in all aspects of worship and church life, I’ve also watched her be attentive and very loving with our shut-in members and friends – obviously deeply touched as she listens to their stories and learns about their life experiences. She honors their wisdom and delights in who they are.

My professional role at Peace is to be supportive and encouraging of sustaining ministries: Adult Education, Mary Martha Circle, home visits, program development and mission. I meet with the Finance Team and the Governing Body (voice without vote) and understand that part of my role is to keep our history, expenditures, and commitment clearly connected to the mission and values we honor as a local congregation of the United Church of Christ. To be your Volunteer Pastoral Associate in these retirement years has given my life clear purpose, deep meaning, and abundant joy. Thank you for letting me continue to live out my ordination vows through the ongoing practice of ministry with and among you.

The Reverend Al Schon, Associate Pastor

Staff reports on 2016 would not be complete without a mention of our recently retired Associate Pastor, Rev. Al Schon, who served the congregation until December 31st, 2016. In addition to participating on the pastoral team, Pastor Al provided leadership for our “Peace Talks” series for new members.
through the Fisher’s Circle, an evangelism circle under the Servant Team. Pastor Al also devoted much of his time in 2016 to the formation of Sprouts of Peace, an interfaith program for young children in collaboration with the Islamic Foundation of St. Louis, the Interfaith Partnership, and United Hebrew Congregation. Luckily for us, Pastor Al’s work with Sprouts of Peace will continue after his retirement.

Darcy Swanson, Music Coordinator

The music department has had a year full of bountiful blessings!

We welcomed Sue Clauss on staff in February as our Music Associate. What a blessing she has been to the music department as she directs the chancel choir and instrumental ensembles. She has also shared her musical talents on the Native America flute and recorder during our worship services.

The handchime choir, which started out last year as a multigenerational activity that was held once a month, is now a functioning ensemble that is on the music schedule to play in worship each month. This fall the Memorial Gift Circle purchased five octaves of Malmark Handchimes that were dedicated in worship on October 30th. It is such a blessing to see the children and youth building meaningful relationships with the adults as they rehearse and make music together.

The folk choir enriches our worship with spirited music each month. What a blessing it is to have a group always ready to try something new to enliven our worship services. You may have seen puppets and heard congregants names being included as they sang “The Good, Good Shepherd.” Then there were rhythm instruments and some dancing as they sang “Get Ready” during advent. Always lots of laughter and fun!

Children’s Choir has been using the Growing in Grace Curriculum during their rehearsals this year. This is a comprehensive, scripturally-based music curriculum engaging multiple learning styles. The love of God is growing in these children as they sing, move, and play instruments each week during rehearsal. There is no greater blessing than our children. They are full of joy, always eager to learn, and willing to share.

Youth Choir is busy working on part-singing and vocal technique as they prepare their anthems for worship. Our rehearsals are also a time for sharing, building community,
spiritual growth, and instilling in our youth the understanding they have valuable gifts to share in worship. In addition, during rehearsal the youth express their desire to share their gifts not just with the church, but with the wider community as well. It is such a blessing to have the opportunity to work with these young people who are so grounded and have such depth.

We also had the blessing of Richard Wappel’s String/Piano Trio, No Strings Attached, and The Galant Ensemble sharing their music with us during worship.

The formed ensembles are only a portion of the gifts and talents this community has to offer! The summer was filled with a wide variety of special music and the summer multigenerational choir each month. The winter was capped with congregational carolers singing and delivering holiday baskets to our homebound members made during a multigenerational event. There are so many blessings in the music department at Peace United Church of Christ!!

Sue Clauss, Music Associate
The Chancel Choir provided music for worship services generally for three Sundays a month, and for extra services, including Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas Eve. The choir rehearsed regularly on Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings prior to worship. Chief accomplishments for the Chancel Choir in 2016 were:

- Adjusting to the change in leadership in February
- Developing the choir’s ensemble and beginning to perform *a cappella*
- Expanding the choir’s repertoire to include forms and styles of music not previously sung by the choir, such as the early music sung during Christmas Eve worship
- Performing a significant portion of a major work (Hal Hopson’s collection of hymn settings)
- Offering inclusive fellowship, compassion, and caring for one another

The Chancel Choir looks forward to continuing to improve its musicianship and expand its repertoire in 2017.

The instrumental ensemble enhanced worship services at least one Sunday a month, playing prelude, postlude, a special selection during the service, and accompanying hymns. Instrumentation varied from month to month, but overall included: violin, flute, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, and trombone, with additional instrumentalists from time to time. The ensemble’s major accomplishments for 2016 included:
• Adjusting to the change in leadership in February
• Expanding their repertoire to include forms and styles not previously played by the group, such as Baroque and early music and early American music.
• Finding the errors in the director’s transcriptions and arrangements and skillfully correcting them on the fly during performance
• Playing a piece of new music written by the director

The instrumental ensemble will continue to enrich worship and expand their repertoire through the director’s transcriptions, arrangements, and, if possible, new music.

**Keith McDevitt, Student Pastor from Eden Theological Seminary**

As this Annual Report is being written, Keith McDevitt is away from Peace and indeed, the United States, as he is doing God's work in the world in Cuba. During his time at Peace in the fall semester, Keith preached twice, led learning hour, shared worship responsibilities for our Blue Christmas Service and Post-Election Gathering, and shared his gift of music in worship. We give thanks for Keith and look forward to his continued work at Peace during the spring semester.

**Kelly Archer, Administration and Communications Coordinator**

Greetings to you from the Church Office at Peace United Church of Christ! As I reflect upon the past year in the life of this church I am nearly overwhelmed with gratitude to serve in this position. With so many ministries in our midst, I am blessed to interact with so many of our members and friends on a regular basis. Supporting the Pastoral staff has been incredibly formative for me as a seminary student, and I give thanks for the gracious ways we all work together. And while there are always bulletins to make and emails to answers, there are also new ways to do God’s work in the world. For me, in 2016, that has meant attending the Proctor Conference last July to get a better understanding of the Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools® movement and how my role in the church can best support the efforts at Peace UCC. To that end, I have accepted the position of Site Coordinator for our 2017 Peace Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools® and look forward to working closely with the Servant Leader Interns to ensure a fabulous summer for our 50 young scholars.
Reverend Laurel Hayes, Campus Minister at Webster University

Stillpoint Multi-Faith Campus Ministry Report: The two halves of 2016 were quite different for Stillpoint Multi-Faith Campus Ministry. The spring term continued the work of an active fall 2015 term. The Listening Post (a table with a red-checked tablecloth, a bowl of peanuts, a sign, and a bowl of Guatemalan worry dolls) ran during lunchtime on many Mondays. Students, faculty, administrators, and staff all stopped by, some for conversations that lasted most of the session, though there were no regular visitors to the table this term. “Pause for (No) Thought: Meditation for Everyone” met most Thursdays. One staff member and one student came regularly. Seven other staff members and five other students attended once or twice. All but one of those staff members have participated occasionally in “Pause” during other terms.

I was on medical leave during the first half of the fall term. Thus, I was not able to staff tables at the Involvement or Wellness Fairs, which is the main way I build my e-mail list. I moved the Listening Post to a different location on campus because foot traffic had dropped off in the lounge where I had set it up in the past. (In fact, the university closed the food stand that had been located there.) Some of the business faculty, who had moved from my last location to the current one several years before I did, welcomed me back to their space. I smiled at many people, but few stopped. This was also the case when I started Listening Post: People had to get used to seeing me. I knew the faculty who stopped by (one had been a frequent visitor in my prior space). I didn’t know the four students who settled in together to study for their final exam, using me to quiz them. Three were graduating, but one signed up for my e-mail list. “Pause,” too, had fewer people: three staff, two of whom came fairly regularly (one of them new), and a student who stopped by during the last session. During that session, we meditatively colored mandalas and wrote supportive messages on them as a way of participating in the Community Solidarity Art Project. The art project arose after an incident of hate speech on campus. I offered a similar opportunity to those at Peace UCC. I took all the mandalas from both sites and sent them to the Multicultural Center and International Student Association, the sponsor of the project.

As always, I thank all of you at Peace UCC for your support of this ministry, and I ask your prayers for it and for me.
**Finance Team, Harry Wilson**
As of December 31, 2016, the PUCC General Fund had a positive balance of $24,667, which was carried forward into the budget for 2017. Income exceeded the 2016 budget by 5 percent. Pledge income was down but other income contributions were strong. As Ken Ulmer noted, this financial position is rare. PUCC is one of only 20 churches of the 140 churches in the Missouri Mid-South Association that are considered growing.

**Facilities Team, Gary Boehnke**
We are charged with planning for all of Peace’s facilities and property so that it meets the needs of our ministry and programing. In addition, we have responsibility for the maintenance of that same grounds and buildings. We prioritize repairs, replacements and upgrades based on need and availability of funds.

We are able to accomplish our work through the efforts of individuals, circles and the Team members. Our Circles (made up of Peacers and others) take on responsibility for particular gardens, projects and maintenance items. Your volunteer time and funds that you give allow us to take care of and improve our facilities.

One Circle that the Facilities Team and Peace is very dependent on is the Job Jar; they meet twice a month for fellowship (drink, snacks & conversation) and then do a variety of tasks and jobs in our buildings and on the grounds. Like: small maintenance items, putting back chairs & tables when fellow Peacers and other users forget to do so, projects, and they are the go to group of other Teams and Staff for needed tasks. This is done under the coordination of Paul Kachulis.

Paul also coordinates the activities of Job Jar, but he also meets contractors, closes windows, shuts off lights, closes & locks doors, schedules air-conditioning, schedules lawn and snow removal services, schedules carpet & floor special cleaning/maintenance, does or schedules light bulb replacement, keeps the maintenance room organized, and makes sure there is salt at our entries in the winter. He is the
first person a Team, staff or group thinks of when they need something and the person that current and past Facilities Chairs depend on. We are sure this list could be longer but you get the idea. We want to share our appreciation and thanks for Paul’s work on behalf of Facilities.

This past year Facilities was able to address some of our larger needed maintenance and replacement items: Maintenance of a third of the trees on our grounds, clean, caulk and seal the east patio, replace the bell tower roof, paint a lower level class room, and plan for 2017 and future projects.

**Servant Team, Sandy Bowe**

The mission of the Servant Team is three-fold: Philanthropy, Outreach and Social Justice. Peace is a “5 for 5” Church – a designation of which we are very proud in that it signifies that Peace supports all of the denominational UCC offerings. These “5” are: One Great Hour of Sharing; Strengthen the Church; OCWM (UCC Basic Support); Christmas Fund; and Neighbors in Need. These “5” drive much of the work done by the servant team at Peace UCC. The year started in a flurry of activity for our team as we worked diligently to fulfill this mission, continued traditional projects, started new ones and continued our focus on social justice as unrest in our communities continue.

The pie chart displayed on our bulletin board in the narthex highlights our Philanthropy. The General Fund provides the Servant Team with 10% of actual income each year and the pie chart shows the gifts made on the church’s behalf using these funds.

Two new circles have been added to the Servant Team: 1) the Fishers Circle whose activities help the Servant Team fulfill its mission of evangelism and outreach. Their activities include meeting and partnering with STL Muslim. Jewish, Christian and other faiths to encourage inclusion among our faith communities and 2) the Prophetic Justice Circle, whose activities help Servant Team fulfill its mission of social justice. The PJC has been active this year with Black Lives Matter and the planning for and fund raising through grants and donations for the Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools®.

We have added line items to our budget that include sustained financial support for: Habitat for Humanity, Empowering Young Women of Uganda, and the Prophetic Justice Circle.
Showing our support of refugees, we are sponsoring a Webster University student, Wafa’a with insurance and incidentals. A circle led by Therese Cristiani is coordinating this support with other Webster Groves churches for 3 years. Laurel Hayes continues to lead letter writing campaigns for Amnesty International.

Peace is an Open and Affirming congregation and the Servant Team continues to be aware, engaged, and supportive. Many members led, attended and helped with Pridefest held in June.

Attending to our environmental justice mission, another e-cycle event was held in late summer. The response was twice that of last year e-cycling a total of 4355 lbs. of computers, TVs, monitors, cell phones and printers. Peace also continues its subscription to Green America.

An addition collection of household furniture and furnishings was held on the same day in the lower parking lot for Home Sweet Home, a 501C agency started by Peace member and former Servant Team leader, Betsy Reznicek. The response was excellent and will be repeated in 2017. Servant Team collects small household goods for Home Sweet Home throughout the year.

The Webster-Rock Hill ministries finished its expansion and remodel, adding a radio station and more physical space. Wynn Miller, as president, led the W-RH Jubilee Campaign. Many Peace folks attended the open house and the Servant Team continues to support their on-going mission. Our Yellow Bag ministry has been more intentional to encourage food contributions. On the last Sunday of each month, we hand out bags to church members collecting them on Communion Sunday of the next month.

Elaine Alexander led an 8-member work crew from Peace to help build a UCC Habitat for Humanity house. This work day helps to provide a safe, warm place to live for a family while at the same time giving members a chance to use new skills and build community with other church families.

Other rewarding outreach activities we had the opportunity to be involved with included Lydia’s House, Crop Walk, Pride Fest and Sandwich Sunday for Gateway 180. We also collected school supplies and delivered to Every Child’s Hope (ECH). We collected and prepared personal care bags to use on site and delivered others to W/RH. These activities, offered by the
Servant Team, gave members of Peace UCC the opportunity to get involved by comforting and supporting the local and global community.

Learning Team, Debbie Gregg

Our learning at Peace UCC is always evolving, as it should! Our community has embraced the concept of faith formation in its flowing, growing complexity (For example, how do we serve communion with so many children helping? Is the table for children at the front of the sanctuary a Worship Team thing or a Learning Team thing? Quick question – it’s both and it’s faith formation!). Changes have been taking place over the past few years, and 2016 carried on that tradition. Some of the highlights:

- Thanks to Carla Eilering for leading the church school program and for assisting me with general planning and leadership!
- Our Whole Lives (OWL) together with Sexuality and Our Faith. We had an amazing outpouring of interest in this program and in leading it! The people who signed up to be leaders have offered a level of commitment and engagement to which I offer heartfelt thanks! So far, we’ve offered a program for older elementary, middle school and adult. We are assessing and planning for future years. We plan to open the opportunity up to non-Peace people in the future. Some other church communities have expressed interest this year but nothing came of it yet. We always need more people certified to be leaders! Let me know if you are interested! Please! OWL leaders: Laurel Koepef-Taylor, Karen Driskill, Colleen Gilmore, Carla Grundy, Katie Huffman, Debbie Kelly, Keith McDevitt, Amy O’Brien, Elizabeth Schlaeger, Brad Schnell, Jeanne Smith.
- Sprouts of Peace. The program is sprouting! In the fall, it expanded to include fourth graders and to provide programming for the parents/caregivers during the first hour of the program. The topics of these presentations vary but are focused on parenting skills across religious, cultural and ethnic boundaries. In September, Kris Lewis led a discussion on how to talk with children about tragic events such as mass shootings. About 11 Peace children are participating this program year and the overall program has 40+.
- Good Questions. Great offerings, as always! They included: a 9 week study on covenant, an Advent study
on the UCC Statement of Faith. Welcomed guests included: Katie Huffman, Sharon Love, Dr. D. Niles.

- Church School. Thanks to the 2016-17 leaders: Carla Eilering, Sarah Goettemoeller, Loretta Haggard, Linda Kolley, Janet Rundquist and Melissa Sullivan. Pastor Wendy has identified stories for each month and the group has planned activities, culminating in children’s participation in worship on the first Sunday of each month.

- Youth. Doing many things in the life of the church: youth choir, hand chimes, musical ensemble, liturgists, oral history project, helping with Sprouts of Peace, helping Servant Team projects, entire worship service! David Faulkner and I meet with youth Sunday morning during the learning hour and other times as possible.

- Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools® program. Plans are well underway for the first Peace and first St. Louis program summer 2017! Lots of fund-raising, grant-writing and planning took place in 2016. The congregation unanimously voted to support this program at the July congregational meeting.

- I know that I have missed some names and some good programs we’ve done. On behalf of the entire congregation, I thank everyone who has participated in some way in our community growth!

Worship Team, on behalf of Sarah Webster

In 2016 the Worship team continued to give attention to worship experience. Along with the Learning team, we created space for the children. This included a table at the front of the sanctuary where the children could work on a project that reflected the scripture passage being shared that morning. Once a month the children are liturgists and either read scripture or act it out. They also take their place at the table that is central to our life together and serve communion.

It is important for our young people to be encouraged to participate in worship. It is essential that their voices are heard. It is crucial that we let them know that their presence is valued; that their words and opinions are valued; that their lives are valued. We are still learning and figuring things out and will continue to do so in the coming year.

We have also begun a new tradition with the Christ Candle. The children and youth take the prayer candles from the side
tables that have been burned down and make a Christ candle from the remnants – literally creating the Christ Candle out of the prayers of the people.

We spent time looking at our sanctuary space. We had discussion about accessibility. Rev. Dr. Christopher Grundy spoke with us about the history of worship space and the elements used in worship and as a result, we have begun to experiment with different seating arrangements in the sanctuary.

Our worship time in 2016 was filled with beautiful music from our many choirs and ensembles. We incorporated prayers from the community through our prayer wall during Lent, waved palms as we marched into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, worshiped together with our sisters and brothers at First Congregational UCC throughout Lent and with our brothers and sisters at Sts. Clare and Francis on Good Friday. Our Christmas Eve services were once again, a wonderful expression of love as we celebrated the birth of Jesus.

We look forward to the work we will do together in 2017. Please join us.

**Community Team, Jenny Davis**

Did you know: **Circle of Care** (we bring food to someone who has had surgery, illness, new baby), **Coffee Fellowship** (the coffee and snacks shared in the fireside room between services), **Mom’s Group** (a group of multigenerational moms who like to study, or just talk, one Friday morning a month in the fireside room), **Men’s Fellowship** (the monthly breakfast attended by men at different neighborhood restaurants), **Peace Quilters and Artists** (a group of women who make blankets for our quilt ministry and craft projects which are service based) and **Hospitality** (any in house meal, for example, Memorial day and Labor day picnics, Harvest “thank you” meal and other special events) all fall under the **Community Team** ministry? Well, they do!

Every one of those groups is full of generous, thoughtful, fun people. If you would like to be a part, we would love to have you.

If you need more information, contact Jenny Davis at jennydavis810@gmail.com or 314-420-5815.