

# Skyline Church of Oakland

*...progressive, spiritual, open & affirming, green*

## **Annual Report of Pastor Laurie 2021**

Last year at this time, we were already nearly three months into the pandemic that has changed all of our lives. In the past year, we have successfully navigated worship, meetings, prayer groups, book studies, and film discussions on Zoom. Our church and preschool have continued on, under some very difficult circumstances. Early in the process, our moderator Carolyn led the efforts to create a Site Protection Plan (SPP), based on evolving CDC and Alameda County guidelines. In addition, our preschool director, created a similar plan for the preschool protocols, based on evolving Community Care Licensing Guidelines to ensure safety for the staff, the children, and the parents. Our Preschool Advisory Board united the parents and staff together in maintaining safety as our highest priority. As a result, we stayed open through most of the pandemic, and without a single incident of infection.

In addition, Nancy Taylor, Catherine Kessler, Michael Armijo and Carolyn Noble, successfully secured two PPP loans. The loans were used to cover the additional staffing expenses that we incurred, to comply with the added safety protocols for operating the preschool. I am grateful to SCC for supporting the succulent sale which will provide significant financial support, to support families facing economic hardship.

Our staff and our church council have shown remarkable creativity and resolve through this turbulent year. Our well-loved office manager Nancy Montier retired in April, to resume her coaching business. We honored her with a ceremony of appreciation on zoom. I am grateful to our moderator Carolyn and executive recruiter Becky Taylor, who supported me in sourcing candidates, and to the council for voting to expand the scope and hours of this role, and in planning for a time of transition into this new role. Our new administrative coordinator, Jon, has just completed three months with us and is doing well.

I am grateful to our various groups and service teams. You will hear more from them at our Sunday July 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, but I'd like to highlight the following:

Our worship team, consisting of Tom Manley, our music director, Gabrielle Lochard, and Ken Medema, and I, learned to “fly while building the plane”, as we launched into zoom worship together. I want to extend my special thanks to Music Director Gabrielle Lochard, who joined our staff just 4 months before the pandemic, to Ken Medema, not only for blessing us each week during zoom worship, with his music, and also to our choir members, for leading the beautiful, innovative, and heartwarming music we have experienced throughout the year. Thank you to our zoom host team, led by Tom Manley, (including Anna, Karl, Shaun, & Becky), who have supported us each week in zoom worship, and now as we are migrating to “hybrid worship”.

Our Spiritual Life team, chaired by Jane Medema, with members Paula Byrens, Cheryl Coleman Jones and Ken Medema, initiated the thought provoking and well received study of Brian McLaren's Great Spiritual Migration, co led by Laurie, Tom, and Jane Medema. In addition, the group initiated well received outreach projects to members and friends, to unite them with us during the season of advent and during communion. The team also revised the time and talent survey which we will revisit in the fall.

In May, Alameda County relaxed the Covid guidelines. Our wedding coordinator, Melissa Vee is busy coordinating plans for long delayed weddings, memorials, and baptisms. Our gratitude for Nancy Taylor, who has agreed to supervise Melissa.

On Pentecost, the Spirit inspired us to begin hybrid worship (both zoom and in person). Now, as we have shifted to a blend of people coming to worship in person, and people joining us through their computers, we face new challenges and opportunities as more people are seeking hybrid forms of services for their weddings, memorials, and baptisms. I am grateful for the ongoing support as we learn to navigate together.

Our ministerial offerings have been transformed through zoom. I have enjoyed leading our weekly zoom bible study, worship, music, pastoral care, and staff meetings, our monthly service team, preschool advisory team, group meetings, our weekly worship and music meetings.

The Pastoral care team finds many ways to reach out to our members throughout the year, through phone calls, cards, poetry, emails and visits (Charlie Holmes, Philippa Pegram, and Carolyn Noble).

The Green team (Catherine Kessler, Michael Armijo, Becky Taylor, Shaun Bernhardt and Walter Jones) works on environmental issues in our congregation, in our homes, and in the wider political arena. (By the way, Catherine Kessler, chair of our Green team, was our district rep, who helped bring to fruition and unanimous vote Oakland's 2030 Equity Climate Action Plan).

Over this past year, we have had a rich array of programs and actions including education ranging from composing, planting, recycling best practices, not only among members, but within the preschool and among our visitors on campus.

Actions include:

- Letter writing campaigns -No Coal, Richmond refinery, Plastics ban for Costco
- Support for UCC resolutions, through our Climate Action team, (Susan Junfish, Maureen Caldwell, Catherine Kessler and Pastor Laurie

Invited Guest speakers included:

\*Jim Antal, Special advisor to UCC President on Climate Justice advocacy

\* Corrina Gould is the tribal spokesperson for the Confederated Villages of Lisjan/Ohlone.

Co-Director, Sogorea Te' Land Trust Co-Founder and Lead Organizer (unfortunately, needed to cancel)

Facilities enhancements:

\* We're in the process of adding solar panels to our roof.

Soon, we will launch additional capital improvements including converting restrooms to be ADA compliant, and improved air circulation in the sanctuary.

Justice & witness (Chaired by Nancy Taylor) mission is to educate and to engage in our commitment as a Sanctuary Congregation, and to dismantle the triplets of Racism (including environmental racism), Militarism, and Materialism. Here are some highlights from this year:

- Minimizing voter in swing states before the presidential election.

Continued faith based community organizing efforts to advocate for greater protections and funding for safe affordable housing and shelter for the unhoused:

- In partnership with the preschool, continued donations for Alameda County Community Food bank, The Matilda Cleveland Shelter for unhoused families, and the Nueva Esperanza program to accompany immigrants, among other community organizations.
- Sponsorship support for East Bay Housing Organizations, Faith in Action East Bay, Jubilee, the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity, and Youth Spirit Artworks' Tiny House Project,
- Interfaith Council for Alameda County: working to advocate for greater protections, and funding for safe affordable housing and shelter for the unhoused

- Ongoing Criminal Justice Reform work focused on Santa Rita Jail: partnering with the Interfaith Coalition for Justice in the Jails (ICJJ), working to ensure that inmates are Medi-Cal coverage upon release, if eligible; working to ameliorate the egregious conditions in Santa Rita Jail, as well as to accelerate decarceration (especially in light of Covid-19) and for safe and healthy reentry for released inmates. The group campaigned to decrease the reliance on Santa Rita Jail for inmates' mental health needs and to transfer funds to community based mental health care organizations.
- A major commitment outside-SCC but within the UCC, for me is serving on the Executive Committee for the Interfaith Council of Alameda County (ICAC), & two National UCC boards: 1) Climate Justice and 2) The Church Building and Loan fund. CB&LF's mission is to repurpose church assets for God's mission. I've been directly involved in two local efforts: partnering with CB&LF & ICAC, we orchestrated a \$3 million UCC loan, repurposing the fellowship hall of a downtown Oakland church into 12 units of affordable housing: <https://cblfund.org/genesis>. The local impact to our NCNCUCC conference is CB&LF input and analysis used in deciding the best use of Camp Caz. By selling, our conference has gained stronger oversight, \$4 million in funds, and continued benefit from camping <https://ncncucc.org/annual-gathering/>

Last but not least, I am most grateful to our finance and personnel teams, (Tom Manley, Treasurer, Carolyn Noble Moderator, with some assistance from Nancy Taylor) for rising to meet the many challenges presented to us during the pandemic

I am grateful that we have been able to stay connected to one another, even with members and friends spread across Sierra Leone, Germany, and all over the United States. As we transition into a new way of worshipping together, we will work hard to maintain a vibrant online ministry in addition to the ministries that happen on campus. One of the ways we will do that is through enhancing the audio and video capabilities in our sanctuary.

As we look to the coming year, I am excited for the return of some of our cherished traditions, as well as introducing new and innovative ones. I look forward to our visioning sessions, inspired by the still speaking God, as we discern together, our calling for this particular time and place.

It is still difficult to know exactly how things will progress. We will need to be flexible, but I am confident that amazing things lie ahead for us and for this wonderful church community.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laurie". The script is cursive and fluid, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Pastor Laurie