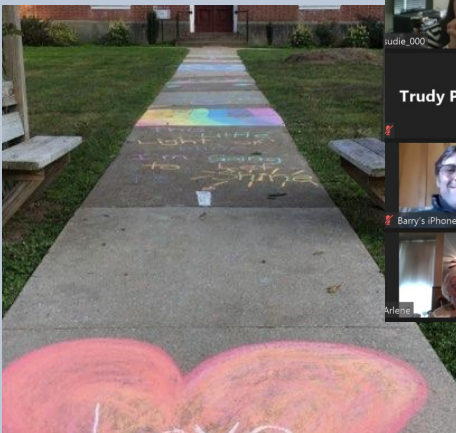


# THE VOICE

Yearbook Edition - 2020 at Falkner Swamp UCC

*(Reminding you what did happen in 2020)*



## Reflection on 2020 from Rev. Frances

Dear Falkner Swamp friends, family, “beloved”:

It has been a decade of a year! Recalling events from January 2020 feels like reaching back 10 years instead of a dozen months.

January began much like any year. On Sundays we met for worship, and Sundays at the S.W.A.M.P. gathered downstairs beforehand for rotational lessons and activities around a central Bible story or theme. The 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee was deep in planning for a celebration in October of our church’s 300 years gathering as a faith community. We held two community breakfasts in February and March. We gathered for a night of hilarity and food for the Fastnacht Social on Feb. 21, followed by Ash Wednesday worship on Feb. 26, then for a Congregational retreat on leap year, Feb. 29.

I look back on that trinity of gatherings so close together. What we took for granted.....that we would always have an opportunity to gather ... in person. The presence of COVID-19 changed that when it mushroomed in our geographic area, on Friday, March 13. How cliché to have “Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>” actually bring such bad news! But there it was. Schools and church closed. Everything stopped. Our final worship together in person was March 8, until we met outdoors in person on Sept 13. Planning for a 300<sup>th</sup> celebration came to a standstill. No more Community Breakfasts. The collection of underwear, toothbrushes, and toothpaste for the Mustard Seed School in Malawi gathered dust.

For the historical record, Falkner Swamp closed once before due to a pandemic. In 1918, Christmas Eve services were cancelled due to the outbreak of the “Spanish influenza.” Our 2020 closure marks the second such occurrence, similar to most churches across the nation.

And yet, we found ways to be church. The reports included here detail the ways our church pivoted to offer ministry to each other and our community. From learning new technologies to creating ear guards for health workers to establishing a unique Fund to help those in need, this church continued to be the bearers of love and hope in a time of need and distress.

I am grateful for each and every one of you, whether you took part in 3 committees or none, participated in nearly every worship service or one, or gave more than ever this year or couldn’t at all. Because I know if you are reading this report, you picked up the phone to check in with someone. You thought of who might be helped if you got their groceries. You wrote someone a note, or messaged them to see how they were doing. You prayed. You found time to wonder how God may be shaping you in this unusual moment in our collective lives.

The COVID 19 pandemic is met by other stressors this year. Marches and protests around the nation challenged the view that racism is a thing of the past, ignited by the death of a black man, George Floyd, in Minneapolis on May 25, at the hands of a white police officer. Many people and communities are asking, “how do we want to be policed?” and seeking greater understanding of racial disparities that plague us. Misrepresentations of events in some media outlets came to a head with claims of voter fraud in the Presidential election. As these claims persisted into the New Year, a mob broke into the Capitol on January 6, the Day of Epiphany. Reverberations from all stressors will continue to unfold.

Among these “powers and principalities” the church and its people look to the witness of Jesus and his disciples for guidance. We, the people of the church, Christians, are called now, to grow in wisdom. We are called to be a voice of reason amidst competing claims for truth. We are called to offer the hands and feet of Jesus, who healed and taught pointing not to himself but to God. We are called to allow the Spirit to work through us, to repent, to change our hearts and lives. We are called to be bearers of the kingdom of God, which offers faith in the face of fear, love as a bridge from disdain, and hope to the echo chambers of despair.

During this cloistered year, I found verses from the Psalms especially meaningful. Psalm 62:5-8 in particular strengthens me. In a time when our foundations are shaken, we can take courage in the one Foundation in whom we find our belonging:

“For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.

He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.”

I end this report to shine a light on the people who helped make our church community flourish this year. Brenda Semach, whose term as Consistory President ended in December 2020, was a constant companion shepherding our church. When COVID hit, I was ever grateful for her patient ear and wise counsel, and our church benefitted from her deep love of each person in it as we navigated the tricky waters of returning to in-person worship. I am also thankful to the COVID 19 Task Force: Becky Comer, Sue Dickey and JoAnne Murray, who prepared our church for a return to in-person worship.

Our worship is able to move beyond Zoom because of the work of Kevin Brennan to wifi up our sanctuary, and to Bob Schnaars to committing to learn how to livestream and pre-record videos for worship. Each week since September, Bob and Sharon commit to showing up to make sure our services will reach our congregation and beyond.

Our monthly VOICE “morphed” into a weekly newsletter. Flocknotes are sent about worship and sign ups. Prerecorded videos were uploaded on Facebook and our website before livestreaming, and our website continues to be updated. All because Sharon Sgriccia, church secretary, was able to pivot and learn quickly how to navigate our new normal. Her precision to get the newsletters mailed out each week includes leaving the church office no later than 1:30 pm Wednesday in order to drop them at the post office, so that most are received by Friday. Fortunately most receive the newsletter via email, minimizing the need for paper mailed copies.

In addition, Sharon, who serves as Treasurer to the Women’s Ministries as well as Recording Secretary for Consistory, assisted with the Women’s Ministries’ birthday cards for 2021. COVID lent itself to a streamlined path for getting all financial records and bills to Vivian, church treasurer. Sharon now scans all things received by mail and the counter sheets and emails them to Vivian, who is able to process the paperwork quickly. Sharon also steps in to assist the weekly Counters, who come in Tuesday or Wednesday to count offerings.

She also continues to assist committees with copying, material procurement, and relaying information, and she checks voice and e-mails on a regular basis from home. Sharon is the “superglue” that holds all the many parts together, and I am deeply grateful for her can-do attitude, perseverance and good humor this year.

We head into 2021 with hope, because it’s what people of faith have for each other and the world, grounded in the One in whom we trust.

With you on the journey,

Rev. Frances

February Voice / Yearbook 2020 Edition

Ministry “by the numbers” for 2020:

Worship Services	47
With Communion	10
Pastoral Visits (in person)	15
Adult Education sessions	17
Children’s (Sundays at the SWAMP) sessions	5
Funerals/Memorial Services (in person & Zoom)	3
Graveside Internments	1
Baptisms	2
Weddings	1
Pastoral Care & Counseling (phone, Zoom, or in person)	22 (not inclusive of COVID-19 “check-in” calls/texts)
Consistory and Committee Meetings	36
Clergy Group Meetings (ie., Community of Practice, Pottstown Ministerium)	18
PSEC Conference & Covenant Association meetings	21
Boundary & Diversity Training (req’d by Covenant Assoc.)	2 (Diversity: LGBTQIA; Boundary: Political boundaries)
Education hours (req’d by Covenant Assoc.)	<b>Festival of Homiletics</b> 5/18-5/22, 10 hours; <b>Foundations of Gestalt Pastoral Care (GPC)*</b> , once per month, 23 hours; <b>Book study, <u>Waking up White</u>, Deb Irving author</b> , June-July, 7.5 hours.*
Other:	
Congregational Retreat	1 (Feb 29)
Recorded Videos uploaded to FB, website, not worship videos (i.e., “From the Socially Distanced Donut” or Advent Candle lighting)	9
Community Prayer Service (outdoor at First Presbyterian, Pottstown)	1 (June 10)

\***Festival of Homiletics** is a week-long conference for pastors who preach. “Homiletics” is the art of preaching and writing sermons. Typically held elsewhere in the country, this year it was all virtual, so I attended via webinar, Mon-Fri, jumping in where I could.

**Gestalt Pastoral Care** is a form of care rooted in Jesus’s ministry of healing. It is a combination of Gestalt growth work, spiritual companioning, and prayer for healing. “Gestalt growth work” refers to a psychological theory that each person’s being is constantly stretching for healing and growth. The worker in Gestalt deals with what is present for the person seeking help, not in their past or future, but what is *right now*. This Foundations course is ideal for pastors. It combines theory and strategies for working with people in the course of ministry. I began the course in September 2019. It was to finish in May 2021. With COVID we lost pre-planned days of class. It’s still unclear when the course will finish.

**Book Study** was offered to both clergy and lay people by Rev. Susan Minasian of the PSEC.

## 2020 Report for Consistory

2020 What a year, I for one can't believe it's been almost a year that we have been wearing masks and social distancing and almost one year since we've been together in the sanctuary, however this past year I am grateful for our congregation and how we all have stepped up and supported not only Falkner Swamp, each other, but also our community.

We started and have maintained the Good Samaritan fund with the startup monies coming from the estate of Leon Borneman. This fund was used to give money to Boyertown Multi Service, to help them feed our community when their meals increased dramatically during this pandemic. The fund also helped a congregational member who struggled with their rent because of the pandemic, and also to a fund that was developed for the victims who lost their homes in the Ashland Apartment fire. We all learned how to Zoom for meetings and worship services. There has also been much hard work done this past year that I wish to address.

Many thanks to:

Bob and Sharon Schnaars : for getting the live stream and our music together and looking awesome.

Robin Zerr and the property committee : for keeping the building safe, secure and functional.

Laura Brown and the Faith Formation : for keeping our children connected.

The COVID task force : Sue Dickey, Becky Comer and Joanne Murray for helping guide us to keep us safe and healthy.

Women's ministries: for reaching out to all of us, our shut ins and our community.

Music and worship : for making the tough decisions for our worship services and keeping our music alive in very creative ways!

Rev Mary Etta Mest: for her visitation, hand written cards and her outreach and ministry to our members.

Sharon Sgriccia: for being the hub of our communication and keeping us organized.

Vivian Wentzel: for the wonderful job she does with our financial records.

And last but certainly not least Rev Frances....for keeping our spiritual connection to God and our faith strong. Frances has worked very hard finding new ways to reach us every Sunday. Of course a special thanks to all of you, the congregation, for all your prayers, support and hard work. We at Falkner Swamp make a great team and I know with God and our faith our future is bright!

In Christian Love,  
Brenda Semach

### **A Prayer for Hope:**

God, Thank you for helping us to make it through this **difficult year**. Thank you that you've carried us through the uncertainty of deep waters, through the flames of trials, and through the pain of **hard** losses. ... Thank you that you came to give new life, peace, **hope**, and joy.

As David prayed in Psalm 18:1: *"I love you, Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."*



## 2020 Yearbook Report of the Cemeteries of Falkner Swamp



The Falkner Swamp Cemetery Committee has been busy behind the scenes for most of 2020. The mowing of the upper cemetery (by the fire company) was done by Rob Erb, Jr. and the mowing of Hollowbush cemetery and the ‘yard’ around the church itself were done by Ted Reese. “Thank you” to Rob and Ted for jobs very well done! The weed-wacking of both areas was done by Ivy League Landscaping, a professional landscaping company near Fleetwood.

In closing this year’s report, I’d like to repeat part of a poster published by the 120-year-old Barre Granite Association in Barre, Vermont. “...A cemetery exists because every life is worth loving and remembering—always.”

Respectfully submitted, Mary Ann Erb, Trustee

### Committee Members

Bob Schnaars, Lot Manager, President  
Bob Erb, Lot Manager  
Rob Erb, Lot Manager  
Ed Thierolf, Lot Manager  
Mary Ann Erb; Trustee, Secretary/Treasurer  
Sue Dickey, Trustee  
Kevin Brennan, Trustee  
Sharon Schnaars, Trustee

### Visitation

While the ongoing Coronavirus greatly affected visitation,  
Rev. Frances made 15 visits and Rev. Mary Etta Mest made 9 visits  
to members and friends of the church.

~ Barb Geary, Chairperson

## Music and Worship Report for 2020



Like so many other committees, this has been an unusual year for the Music and Worship Committee. We had our normal services, with our normal music, up until March 8, 2020. Then Covid came...

Through the remainder of Lent and for Easter, we worshipped with homemade videos, including Zoom gatherings for Communion and fellowship. After Easter we gathered around Zoom until the end of summer. The last week of July and first two weeks of August, Reverend Frances took a much needed and well-deserved vacation, and we were steered to worship with a pre-recorded video by the PSEC (Pennsylvania Southeast Conference) staff and to other church on-line services.

Beginning Sept 13, we began to have outside services at the playground behind the church. These were better attended than those of us on the committee had hoped. We were blessed that in most cases we had good weather on Sundays throughout the fall, and even though the choir was a little ragged because of social distancing, we “pressed on”. At the same time, we began to record the outside services for re-posting on the church’s Facebook and web pages.

On October 4, we re-opened the church to in-person services, though we had to implement the CDC requirements by limiting the number of people, wearing masks, and social distancing. We shared Communion in-person four times, (Oct 4, 15, Nov 1, and Dec 6) with individual, pre-packed Communion cups and wafers. Unfortunately, all the plans for the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary had to be scrapped, except for a message delivered by Reverend William Worley, our PSEC minister. We were able to continue in-person church services until December 6.

Throughout the remainder of Advent our services were pre-recorded. In an attempt to make the Christmas season a little bit brighter we were able to have various members of our congregation come into the church to record the parts of the services. A huge thank you to Reverend Frances, our lay-leaders, and our choir members for coming out at all hours of day and night, so we could put these recordings together. We also hosted a Sunday evening “Carol sing” on the front lawn, on Dec 20. As twilight came on we held up candles or our own lights and sang “Silent Night.” During these crazy times, these were ways for our congregation to come together to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus.

It has been a very challenging year, but we have learned so much in trying to keep our church family together, even if we are physically apart. When we look back on these times, we will see that we have been forced to learn of the many different ways we can get out the word of Christ, not just to our congregation, but to anyone with access to a device connecting to the internet – computer, tablet, or phone. I personally have been learning more than I ever thought I would about recording and streaming church services. I have made a LOT of mistakes, and I want to thank everyone for their patience and “hanging in there” with me while I figure this stuff out! Anyone who wants to learn about these processes from me, please call me!

In closing, I very much want to thank the members of the Music and Worship Committee for their time and dedication to the ideal of keeping our church alive and moving forward. The committee has been meeting via ZOOM on pretty much a weekly basis. Thank you, Reverend Frances, Karen Miller, Arlene Umstead, Brenda Becker, Jim Kooser, Fran Berkowitz, and Sharon Schnaars. U guys are da best!!

With and love and gratitude,  
Bob Schnaars, President, Music and Worship Committee  
Year ending 2020

Falkner Swamp Reformed Church of the United Church of Christ  
 Endowment Fund Committee  
 Yearly Report  
 February 11, 2020

Russell Miller – Chairman

Members	Appointed	3 year term	Expires
Lee Heffner	2020	1 <sup>st</sup>	2022
Donna Hoffman	2012	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2020
Russell Miller	2015	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2020
Ken Berkowitz	2018	1 <sup>st</sup>	2020

Need 2 new members

Pastor Frances Chester – Pastor  
 Defacto Consistory President  
 Vivian Wenzel – defacto Treasurer of Falkner Swamp

*Russell Miller*

Category A

Account # 1 - \$60,000.00 CD @ Ambler (Bally) Savings Bank # 360556  
 Matured on February 13, 2020 and was moved to Citadel Bank  
 the new CD amount is \$63,408.65 with an interest rate of 2.130%  
 Balance 9/30/2020 - \$63,408.65  
 Signers – Lee Heffner and Ken Berkowitz

Account # 4 – Statement Savings Account # 20280 @ Ambler Savings Bank  
 Balance on 12/31/20 - \$41,591.62 (2.5% interest rate)

Total A - \$105,000.27 on 12/31/20

Category B

Account # 1 - \$28,501.47 - Ambler (Bally) Savings Bank CD #360506  
 Rate – 1.84% - matures September 21, 2022  
 Signers – Lee Heffner and Donna Hoffman  
 Interest to go to general fund annually.  
 Principal to be reinvested.

Category C

Account # 1 - \$2400.00 – Ambler Savings Bank CD #360505  
 Rate – 1.84% - matures September 21, 2022  
 Signers – Lee Heffner and Donna Hoffman

Category A – Weibel - \$103,999.98 Accounts # 1 and # 4 – Total A

Category B – Mildred Heinly - \$10,000.00

Arthur Landis - \$2,500.00

Robert Burns - \$3,656.47

Herbert Wagner - \$1,000.00

Ralph Geisler - \$2,000.00

Sarah Jane Boyer - \$845.00

Wallace Leidy - \$3,000.00

Washington Leidy - \$600.00

Living Memorial Fund - \$4,900.00

Total B - \$28,501.47

Category C – William Werner - \$1,000.00

Herbert Wagner - \$1,000.00

Washington Leidy - \$400.00

Total C - \$2,400.00

Distributions made since September 2020 meeting:

From Category A – none

From Category B –

From Category C -



**LIVING MEMORIAL FUND – 2020**

**Beginning Memorial Savings Balance 1/1/2020 = \$1,182.22**

**Interest Earned 2020 = .13**

**Total Deposits 2020 = \$905.00**

**Balance as of 12/31/2020 = \$2,087.35**

**Respectfully Submitted: Sharon K Schnaars**

From the Church Office: Falkner Swamp membership statistics for 2020 [2019 in brackets]

Total Additions: 0 [12]

Total Losses: 4 (3 deaths, 1 transfer) [2]

Total Membership as of 12/31/2020: 167 [171]

Total Baptisms: 2 [4]

Average Weekly Worship Attendance: 46 (23 in person worships in 2020) [63]

Warm Greetings and Warmest Blessings,

As you may be aware, Brenda Semach's term ended in December 2020. Her leadership and steady navigation through the previous years will help set the foundation for future Consistories and Falkner Swamp UCC. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude for all that she has done and continues to do for our church community.

I would also like to extend sincere gratitude and appreciation to Vicki Fronheiser, Barb Geary, Wayne Gruver, JoAnne Murray, and Robin Zerr; as all of their terms ended in December of 2020.

With these departures, it is my distinct honor and pleasure to introduce the members of the Falkner Swamp 2021 Consistory.

Ron Becker - Member (New)

Lee Comer – Vice President (Returning)

Stacey Brennan – Member (Returning)

Matt Brown – President (Returning)

Rob Krause – Member (Returning)

Rev. Frances Chester – Pastor (Non Voting Member)

Barb McDonough – Member (New)

Sharon Sgriccia – Secretary (Non Voting Member)

Karen Miller – Member (New)

Vivian Wentzel – Treasurer (Non Voting Member)

Kim Shaak – Member (Returning)

Service will be livestreamed at 10AM from the sanctuary.  
Go to [facebook.com/falknerswampucc/](https://facebook.com/falknerswampucc/)

**Prelude**

*Please observe quiet during this time of centering for worship.*

**Welcome**

Rev. Frances

**Announcements**

Brenda

**Call to Worship**

Brenda

Speak, O Lord, into our ears, for we are ready to listen.  
Shine, O Lord, into our hearts, for we are ready to receive.  
Come, O Lord, into our worship, for we are ready to praise your name and learn from your word.  
In the name of Jesus, we gather, and in the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.  
~from Psalm 50

**A Hymn to Sing at Home**

*“Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” #59*

**Call to Reconciliation**

Rev. Frances

**Prayer of Confession (unison)**

Brenda

**Generous God, we confess that sometimes we can stand in your way. You wish for us to walk down a certain path, and we choose another. You wish for us to speak certain words of healing or hope to another person, and we stay silent. You wish for us to look at a challenging issue through your eyes, and we adamantly stay focused with our own gaze. Forgive us, O Lord, and change our hearts. Transform us into the people that you desire for us to be, in the name of Christ.**

**“And hear us in the silence, as we speak to you, of a way in which we have resisted a change you wish for us to make:**

*Silent Prayer*

**Assurance of God’s Grace**

Rev. Frances

**A Word to the Children**

Valentines From God

Susan Mercer

**The Scripture Readings**

**Prayer for Illumination**

**From the New Testament**

2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:3-6

The Gospel of Mark 9:2-9

Holy Word, Holy Wisdom, **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon

Rev. Frances

Pastoral Prayer, followed by Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

A Hymn to Sing at Home      *"He Leadeth Me"*      #499

**We Celebrate Holy Communion**

**Invitation**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

**Communion Prayer**

As we proclaim these truths:

**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

By the presence of your Holy Spirit may these gifts we offer

Be transformed from ordinary to holy things,

So that as we eat and drink of them at this table,

We may be fed and nourished with the body and blood of Christ,

And so be united with him until we shall feast face to face

At the glorious banquet table of heaven.

**Words of Institution**

**Sharing of Bread & Cup**

**Prayer of Thanksgiving (unison)**

**We thank you, Holy God, for these gifts given to share in your presence and with all the saints of heaven. Let now our servants depart in peace, according to your word, for our eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared in the sight of all people: a light to reveal you to the nations, and the glory of your people Israel. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.**

**Benediction**

**Postlude**

## **Scriptures for Transfiguration Sunday, Feb 14**

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

The gospel is veiled to those who are perishing. God says “Let light shine out of darkness,” and light shines from the hearts of those who have turned to Jesus Christ.

Have you ever felt like you were perishing spiritually? Physically? Emotionally? How did you find God’s light shining to guide your way? Give thanks for the ways God has brought you from shadows of death into new life.

Mark 9:2-9

Jesus is transfigured on a mountaintop with Peter, James & John in attendance. Much is going on in this short passage. Just notice who all is present here. Notice what gets said. Notice what you wonder about. Jesus is revealed in a unique way here, as God’s son, as divine. Have you ever been in the presence of someone who radiated, as if an inner light were glowing from within?

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### **Ash Wednesday, Feb 17, 7 pm, livestreaming in the sanctuary**

Ash Wednesday begins our 40-day journey of Lent. Our Lent Series is “Listen.” Our worship will change structure somewhat and invite more meditative reflection. You are invited into this season of growth by quieting down and listening for your own voice, and that still, small voice of God.

#### **Scripture for Ash Wednesday**

Mark 1:9-14

We heard part of this scripture on Baptism of Christ Sunday in January. We didn’t get to hear about the part where the Spirit, landing on Jesus as a dove, drives him into the wilderness. Sometimes, God takes us places we’d rather not go. Consider how Jesus’ wilderness journey shaped his next steps. When has a time of “wilderness” led to great growth in your life? How did God’s angels minister to you? What were you able to proclaim, do, or go, because of this wilderness time?

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### **Spiritual Practices 101 – Thursdays in Lent, 7-8 pm on Zoom, begins Feb 25**