

**PASTOR'S REPORT 2023**  
United Presbyterian Church, East Guildford  
First Presbyterian Church, Bainbridge

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Blessings be to you from the one who was, is now, and will be forever!

In this first full year with you, I have seen signs of both stability and risk-taking (or, thinking creatively). More on that theme later.

Our sessions have worked together like a pair of synchronized ice-skating dancers at the Olympics: complementary, communicating, and good natured as the work of ministry is serious business and can be fraught with challenges rendering one stressed. As I am apt to say, I have never been in a congregational situation where humor is the social lubrication of our time together. A little Holy Spirit activity I suspect. The Clerks of Session have kept the congregations informed, connected leadership in some very thorough ways, and interpreted polity so that your pastor felt secure in denominational specifics.

During 2023, our congregations worshiped indoors and out on the lawn, kept the traditions that have brought us comfort through the years, and introduced new ways of worship which enrich and stimulate. What is rarely seen but always felt are the actions of talented, artistic, and tasteful Altar Guild members who make sure we are all set on any given Sunday or weekday as needed inside or out. My thanks to Cheryl Nages and Al Clune for diligently preparing to deliver sermons and lead worship. Those who relocated East Guilford's organ downstairs and rewired it, rearranged the chancel area, and in both congregations, kept us electronically connected with the Internet and able to hear each other in both buildings- huge words of thanks. The resource and property committee volunteers keep our facilities in good repair and attractive.

The congregational social ministry programs serve many thousands of people with food (Blessing Box at East Guilford), clothing, home goods, and funds (Bainbridge Thrift Store) as well as our monthly turn at the Soup Kitchen where needs in our communities have increased. Our congregational reach has helped missions far from our area by collecting shoes, filling comfort boxes, and posting them, and more ways (helping needy families) as the year progressed. No lack of activity here!

Educational programming includes Lenten Midweek meals, discussion, and worship. Sunday morning Bible Study is in-person and on the Internet and we have a confirmand preparing for adult membership. East Guilford, as a longtime Earth Care congregation, shares helpful tips on becoming more aware of our role as caretakers of God's good creation. (Thank you Kathy Schmidt)

Churches have always been the communal switchboard and Bainbridge and East Guilford are in the thick of it. Our churches host community groups, exercise meetings, square dances, rehearsal space, cancer survivor's support group, WIC, school district meetings- the list goes on

and on. When measuring congregational vitality, these are the metrics which are telling; it is not all about size. If in any of these paragraphs I omit your name, please forgive me, and know that you are appreciated and needed in your area of critical work. When I write pages of text, I try not to do it “by the pound,” so some details are edited out for brevity.

In this year, I have become more active in Presbyterian and ecumenical circles on your behalf, attending Presbytery meetings, participating in the Thanksgiving and Good Friday service and walk, attended the Christmas Parade in Bainbridge, as well as the newly reinvigorated Susquehanna Valley Presbyterian Cluster Meetings with the new Lead Presbyter, Rev. Dr. Greg Garis. In their Bicentennial year, I also visited Unadilla Presbyterian and met their folks as they had a relationship with East Guilford some years ago. Since I am a person of many hats, I also continue in my role as Dean of the Foothills Conference of the Upstate NY Synod of the ELCA. From my monthly reports to the Joint Session, you can see I let no moss grow under me!

Highlighting a newly reimagined Joint Mission Committee, both congregation’s representatives came together to vision, plan, organize, and attend the September 23, 2023 Health Fair on Bainbridge Green. It was a risk (see paragraph two above). We have never done that before. And a momentous success when you think it was only a dream 10 months earlier. All vendors were so pleased and enthusiastic, including St. Peter’s Episcopal Church next door, that they want to do it again in 2024 and, in their own words, bring other organizations too. Our lead Presbyter, Rev. Dr. Greg Garis, attended and shot some video, interviewed a few committee members, and is using our congregations in a video for the Susquehanna Valley Presbytery on how small congregations can make an outsized impact on the community good. You made it happen as God’s militant children (not a bad thing).

In the fall, the East Guilford session met with the Lead Presbyter and Rev. Doug Horne, Co-Chair of the Committee on Mission to discuss the future of that congregation as it meets the realities many congregations face. Both denominational leaders promised to accompany us through the process of discernment in 2024. Serious matters, yes, but we never confront them alone as Jesus said the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, would lead us and guide us if we but asked. We’re asking...

Finally, I wish to let you know my appreciation to you for celebrating my 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ordination in October, a big personal milestone. You made it special, memorable, and emotional for me. I was full-to-overflowing and at times, speechless (a rarity for me). There has been no congregation I have pastored where I have felt so welcomed and cared for as Bainbridge and East Guilford. Period, full stop. Your Christmas gifts to me, cards and letters, phone calls, and gently letting me know when I overexert myself or take risks driving to you. That says caring to me, a mutuality I finally get to experience at “this end of all the ages.” Thank you, and God bless you.

I hope to see you at worship soon.

Pastor Ken