Dear Members of Council:

It still comes to me as something of a surprise that I have but 3 ½ weeks until I step down. I suppose after 1,170 worship services, dozens of baptisms, hundreds of memorial services, hundreds of new members, 24 personnel changes, and approximately 223 Council meetings, letting go of weekly routines would prove to be a little bit of a challenge. Since this report comes at the end of what I suspect will have been a long council meeting, I’ll keep it fairly brief.

South Church is fairly well known in the UCC, as was discovered in the search for pastor Tanya. We have been a place of spiritual renewal and place of creativity. We have been a church of service and social justice. I'm proud of our work becoming a Racial Justice Church, continuing to extend our Open and Affirming reach, our willingness to demonstrate against hatred, and the willingness to join First Church for a lengthy period of welcoming homeless people into our basement. I am proud that we called the Rev. Carlos Jauhola-Straight to be the first openly gay member of the clergy and that my successor, the Rev. Dr. Tanya Sadagopan, will be our first senior woman clergy person!

I have been blessed to be able to take a couple of sabbatical leaves in New Mexico and have shared that experience later with two groups of South Churchers. I was happy to help create a small interfaith support group and to volunteer my time with African boys at Concord high school for several years. One of the things that gave me great joy was the introduction of jazz into worship.

There are a couple of issues that we attempted to initiate but which never quite caught on. The need for a capital campaign was one of those. We began a discussion about the prospect of a very expensive organ restoration, but it never took off because people’s experiences of the organ were very different. We have made a little bit of progress on lifting the veil of secrecy around pledging. We have lived through a time when investing in full time program staff made sense but have since learned (with Peter, Mike, and others’ patient prodding) that with costs rising and membership declining slightly that a different approach was needed and we have taken steps to limit our spending. We have, in that process, become a one-pastor church. We have also realized, with Betsy Clardy’s presidency, that we are a very volunteer rich community!

We have, of course, passed through some harder times. Our ministry began in the shadow of 9/11. We have held more services of remembrance for mass shootings than I care to count. We have waded through the learnings and challenges of the COVID pandemic and moved into the age of streaming worship. Most significantly, we have recently lost much too early the dynamic, connective presence of Alison Nyhan.

And, of course, there is my Parkinson’s Disease, which I have been living with for five years (since my diagnosis). I want to thank those of you who’ve had the courage to point out when it was beginning to affect my ministry, and I want to thank all of you for wading through the uncertainty of it.

Overall, I believe that the church is in a good place. While many churches have shrunk considerably or even closed, we are in good place membership-wise and pledging-wise. We still have many young families. You have called a gifted woman as your next pastor.

Our staff is collaborative and talented.

Together we have shared 22 years of ministry. I feel that we have all striven, as the words from Micah 6:8 put it: “And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.” As I've often said during the welcome to worship, this is my favorite church in the whole world. Thank you for the privilege of being your pastor. I love you all.