

State of Church Report, 2020

*You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you. Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal. (Isaiah 26: 3-4)*

*The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.
(Deuteronomy 31: 8)*

I. 35th Anniversary & COVID-19 Virus

When 2020 arrived, we were excited and ready to celebrate FEC's 35th birthday. The 35th Anniversary Planning Committee did a great job planning meaningful events and activities centered around the theme of "Blessed to Bless" to mark this milestone in our life as a church family. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only the Revival Meetings took place in January and February with Rev. Isaiah Tingson and Dr. Sean Ho, respectively. However, by God's arrangement, 2 of the 3 "Blessed to Bless" special projects were realized: canned food drive in January and Operation Christmas Child in November!

On behalf of FEC's Staff and Consistory, I extend our heart-felt gratitude to all our members and adherents for your continued love to the Lord, His people, and this local body of Christ called FEC, particularly during such times when "doing church" has changed completely. Your faithful support and sacrificial giving have made it possible for FEC's ministries to continue, and all church staff to continue working during these challenging and difficult months. This pandemic clearly shows that "church" is not just a building, but people saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, whose lives have been joined together by the Holy Spirit, and who love the Lord and His people.

This pandemic came upon us without a warning. It turned lives upside down. It created hardships, chaos and uncertainties. But ... COVID-19 also made us realize quickly what's really important in life, and made us readjust our values, priorities and purpose in life. As someone astutely commented, this is a wake-up call, a drill for our Lord's second coming. COVID-19 is a gracious call from the Lord to shift our focus and energy from the temporal and fading things of this world to the eternal and unfading glory of God's everlasting kingdom.

II. Significant events of 2020

35 th Anniversary Revival & Evangelistic Meetings – Doing Life Together; Carry Each Other's Burdens (共同生活 – 彼此承擔) with Rev. Isaiah Tingson (Jan. 9, 10, 11)
Joint 35 th Anniversary Thanksgiving Service – Message: Rev. Isaiah Tingson (Jan. 12) Ordination & Installation of Elder and Deacons Canned Food Drive (<i>Blessed to Bless</i>) during Anniversary Luncheon
"Surprise" Retirement Banquet for Pastor Susan Wang (Jan. 18)
Revival Weekend with Dr. Sean Ho Praise & Worship Night (Feb. 22) Sunday Worship Service (9 AM Service) and Youth Worship (10:45 AM) (Feb. 23)
Olive Fellowship's first meeting – to share the gospel with compatriots from mainland China (Feb. 29)
Online Worship Services - March 22 to Sept. 6
In-person worship available for English congregation (September 13)

College / University Sunday School kick-off (Sept. 20) On-site Youth (High School) Sunday School
Farewell Party (virtual) for Pastor Arlene Wu (Sept. 20)
Commissioning of Children and Youth Ministry Leaders/Volunteers (Sept. 27) Prayer for Pastor Arlene Wu as she concludes ministry at FEC
Thanksgiving Offering during month of October
Thanksgiving Worship Services (October 11) On-site Children Sunday School (Kindergarten to Gr. 7)
Hallelujah Night - Virtual (Oct. 31) Pumpkin carving & Pumpkin Prayer
In-person Worship and on-site Sunday School placed on hold due to 2 nd wave of COVID-19 (Nov. 8)
Both congregations donated, packed and sent 118 Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes (<i>Blessed to Bless</i>) to boys & girls in need (Nov. 21)
Christmas Sunday Worship Services; <i>A Reading of the Christmas Story</i> by the Children's Sunday School; music by Cherubim Virtual Choir (Dec. 20) *
Christmas Eve Virtual Service (Dec. 24) *

*Upcoming Events

III. The people of FEC

Pre-COVID-19 average attendance for Worship Services, Sunday School Ministry, and mid-week Prayer Meetings (January to March 15, 2020):

	English 9 AM	English 10:45 AM	Mandarin 9 AM	Minnanese 10:45 AM	Joint Service
2020	74	121	44	46	339 *
2019	69	134	50	53	309
2018	60	142	52	54	278

* Joint 35th Anniversary Thanksgiving Service on January 12, 2020: 339

	Sunday School (10:45 AM; P3 to Gr. 12)	Sunday School (9 AM; K- Gr. 7)	Youth Sunday School (Mandarin)	Prayer Meeting (Chinese)	Prayer Meeting (English)
2020	49	2		15	9
2019	47	4	4	14	7
2018	50	6	-	13	7

Estimates for Online Activities since mid-March:

	Online Worship Service (Chinese Congregation)	Online Worship Service (English Congregation)	Online Prayer Meeting (Chinese)	Online Prayer Meeting (English)	Online Sunday School (K – Gr. 7)
Mid-March -November	87	75-110	18-19	12-18	32 (since Sept.)

We thank and praise the Lord for 8 new members added to our church family in 2020: 3 by baptism; 5 through transfer of membership.

Chinese Congregation		English Congregation	
Baptism	Transfer	Baptism	Transfer
Liu Qiyang (6/21)			
	Qiu Jingxiang (8/9) Fung Kuo Shiong	Aaron Jay Antonio (8/9)	Wilson Lao (8/9) Carol Villanueva Stevenson Villanueva
Ellen Huang *(12/12)			

*Upcoming baptism

Josephine Kalea (born Jan. 30th, 2020), second child of Patrick Joseph & Kate Tan was baptized on July 10th.

IV. Chinese Congregation (based on Annual Report by Pastor Joseph Jou)

Pastor Joseph Jou, together with the Chinese consistory members, designated 2020 as “Small Group Year – Care, Bible Study and Evangelism”. The goal was to enhance care to those who attend FEC, encourage group Bible studies and grow the missional outreach ministry. Congregants were divided into 8 groups, each group led by 2 group leaders. Under the leadership of the Elders and Deacons responsible for Small Group Ministry, together with faithful group leaders, the Small Group structure turned out to be very effective in connecting and providing care to all the congregants, especially during this pandemic when all in-person Sunday Worship and events became online virtual meetings through the Zoom platform. May all praise and glory be to our God.

To share the gospel with friends from mainland China, a newly formed Olive Fellowship held its first meeting at the end of February.

Through baptisms and transfers, FEC’s Chinese congregation now have 92 members. Praise the Lord!

The vision for 2021 is: *Take root below and bear fruit above*. The hope is that brothers and sisters will grow more in grace and spirituality. The Small Group ministry plans to increase from the current 8 groups to 12 groups. This increase will allow more new people to be trained and enabled to participate in the ministry, strengthen the outreach (evangelism) ministry, and provide better care for group members.

V. English Congregation – Small Group Ministry; Kairos, Youth, College & UP Fellowship (based on Annual Report by Pastor Charlie Chun)

On March 15, our website only offered audio recordings of Sunday messages. With the lockdown we needed to quickly adapt to online worship. Many brothers and sisters not only stepped up, but also gave sacrificially of their time, skills and money to make this change possible. Over the next few months, through prayer, patience and persistence, we were able to iron out most of the technical difficulties associated with online Worship. We give thanks and praise the Lord for His wonderful provisions.

The majority of small groups have been meeting regularly throughout this pandemic. These virtual meetings have been the source of encouragement and comfort for many as we adjust to the dramatic changes and adapt to the new normal. Small Group members with young children were affected the most as they had the most difficult time adjusting their schedules to meet with one

another regularly; as a result, they were not able to continue meeting regularly. Let's pray for these families, that God would continue to protect and guide them during these challenging times.

We thank the Lord that Kairos (high schoolers) continued to meet, shifting between virtual and in-person gatherings in response to the changing provincial health orders and restrictions. Not only did this group keep some of their staple elements (Bible studies, movie nights, and special events) as they did before the lockdown, they have also incorporated new activities as meeting went virtual (online group games and even a murder mystery). In-person gatherings saw an average of about 15-20 people, while online gatherings had 15-18 people. Let's give thanks that despite the reduced frequency of meetings, these gatherings became a source of stability and encouragement for everyone.

College Ministry is continuously growing in faith and constantly evolving. During the early stages of the lockdown, the uncertainty from what was happening led to increasing anxiety and stress. During this time, the presence of a church community was sorely missed, and the soon to be graduating Class of 2020, as well as the teachers, longed for the weekly in-person interactions enjoyed before the pandemic. As a result, online summer Sunday School started in May. In August, summer Sunday School evolved into a tight knit Small Group consisting of college students. This group were instrumental in branching out into a larger hybrid (in-person and virtual) Sunday School class for post-secondary students in September. As our college ministry gained traction due to the support of incoming college students, Sunday School teachers, and parents, the FEC UP Fellowship was re-established. Now, with support coming from all quarters, our college ministry is going strong. By God's grace and mercy, the dreaded pandemic that disrupted individual and collective lives has turned out to be an opportunity for us to build college ministry and re-energize UP Fellowship.

VI. RCA & FEC at crossroads

In June of 2018, during RCA's General Synod (RCA's broadest governing body), Don Poest (then interim General Secretary about to hand over the reins to Eddy Aleman, current General Secretary) spoke honestly about the deep divisions within the RCA, centered on differing views of human sexuality. He called for the formation of the Vision 2020 Team to research 3 "future scenarios" for RCA and make their recommendation on the best course of action at General Synod 2020. General Synod 2018 approved the formation of this team of 12 RCA leaders who represented diverse views and positions within our denomination.

Over the next two years, the Vision 2020 Team looked into these 3 scenarios:

- a) Staying Together
- b) Radical Restructure
- c) Grace-filled Separation

After thousands of hours of research, discernment, and feedback, the team arrived at a recommendation which is a combination of all three scenarios. Due to the pandemic and the cancellation of General Synod 2020, this Vision 2020 Final Report will be considered and voted at General Synod 2021. The outcome at General Synod 2021 will take another year or two to be finalized. Whatever that may be, the RCA as we know it will be drastically changed.

The Vision 2020 Report can be accessed through the link below.

<https://www.rca.org/synod/vision2020/reformed-church-in-america-vision-2020-team-final-report/>

In February 2018, at a special Classis Meeting, delegates from RCA churches in BC adopted the following Motion:

“Regarding our theological differences in the RCA on the topic of human sexuality and biblical hermeneutics, unless God moves the RCA to a radical reconstitution within the next 5 years, we see no other way forward than to withdraw from the RCA graciously.”

In March 2018, during Spring Classis Meeting, delegates consolidated the above plan and formed the *Five-Year Plan Ad Hoc Committee* to research possible “homes” for our churches if and when this motion is acted upon.

During the upcoming March 2021 Classis Meeting, churches will be asked about their specific plan with regards to the upcoming withdrawal of Classis from the RCA in 2023. Thus, FEC is also at a crossroad. Here are our options:

- a) Remain with Classis BC churches and together find a denomination or group to affiliate with
- b) Decide on our own and affiliate with a denomination that supports our view on human sexuality, and more importantly, that will allow FEC to fulfill its mission more effectively
- c) Become an independent church

Our Consistory has been following these developments and is currently discussing and discerning the best option for FEC. Before a decision is made, the consistory will need to dialogue with our members and adherents, to inform and address questions and concerns related to these changes in the RCA, and the changes coming to our Classis and FEC.

VII. Staff Changes & Staff Searches

In January, Pastor Susan Wang retired from part-time ministry at FEC to spend time with her mother and family in Taiwan, and to continue her studies toward a Doctor of Ministry at Logos Evangelical Seminary.

At the end of summer 2019, Pastor Arlene Wu discerned a change in ministry direction and decided to conclude her ministry at FEC within a year. Her ministry at FEC concluded in October.

Our consistory initiated 3 searches in 2020:

- 1) For a Senior Pastor, who will also be English Ministry Pastor
- 2) For an In-house Intern for Children Ministry (part-time)
- 3) For a Church Accountant (part-time)

A Pastoral Search Committee of 8 members (including Pastor David, Pastor Charlie and Pastor Joseph), started its work in January. Under the leadership of Elder-at-large Alfred Kwong, the team worked exceptionally hard, praying for guidance and discernment from the Lord. While the search did not proceed as originally planned, the Search Committee recently concluded its work by making a recommendation to the Consistory. The result of this search will be announced soon.

The search of an in-house intern for Children Ministry is still ongoing.

The search for a part-time Church Accountant has concluded successfully. We thank the 3 members of this Search Committee for their diligent work.

VIII. Personal Plans

During last year's Annual Membership Meeting, I shared about my decision to conclude ministry at FEC by the summer of 2021. June 2021 marks 31 years in full-time ministry for me and our family, with 18 years at FEC. This is all because of God's mercy and grace.

FEC will celebrate her 36th birthday in January. Putting both realities together, I believe it is a good time for our church to have new leadership, and more importantly, to find creative new ways of doing ministry. Over these 36 years, the Lord has indeed blessed, protected and provided for our church. While stability may be preferred over change and its associated challenges, staying the course for too long, especially during times of tremendous dramatic changes will result in a church that's stuck in the past, or even in its own present.

This year, I have worked diligently with the pastoral team, church staff, and consistory to prepare for a smooth transition into the next phase of FEC's life. I am confident that by God's grace, FEC can adapt, be energized and spiritually renewed to become the church God calls it to be today and into the future.

Let me conclude with the two Scriptural passages that began this Report. They remind us that we have nothing to fear if we continue to put our complete trust in the Lord, for He is the One going before us.

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because they trust in you. Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal. (Isaiah 26: 3-4)*

*The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you;
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Respectfully submitted,

Pastor David Tsai

December 6, 2020