Annual Meeting 2020
Repair, Restore,…Re-new
Keynote Speaker: Rev. Michael Caine

Michael Caine grew up at First Congregational in St. Louis. He started to recognize a calling to ministry in college, and a few years later, he ended up at Union Seminary in New York City. He was ordained at the Riverside Church in Manhattan in 1990. He served congregations in East Harlem and Brooklyn, and then he joined the staff of the NY Conference of the UCC. He’s been at Old First in Philly now for almost 11 years.

Michael learned his basics about church growing up at First Congregational. When his family fell apart and fell out of the church habit, Michael kept going by himself. And that congregation figured out how to find him a place as a young teenager at church on his own.

Living Hope, the first congregation he served, defined its faith as "service Christianity." They meant: 'more important than what you say or do in church is how your faith translates into leading your daily life.' His ministry there was defined most by the summer day camp he ran for the church, providing safe space and bigger horizons for 60 neighborhood kids during the summer.

His second church, Flatbush-Tompkins, had been the largest congregational church in the U.S. in the early 50's. By the 1990s, with dramatic demographic and cultural changes -- and some pretty nasty church fights -- it was a big, old, empty barn, an underpopulated shadow of its former self. It was even less clear of its mission, how to be church effectively in what had become the heart of Caribbean Brooklyn. Michael's vocational sense changed there as he recognized -- "the specifics are different, but all church today is more or less in a similar situation.' What does 'doing church' look like today?

Michael then became the Southeastern Regional Conference Minister for the New York Conference, UCC. The blessing of getting to know and work with so many different and diverse congregations was a rare gift in ministry. As well as his general duties helping congregations with search and call and conflict, his portfolio included the Conference's youth work, social justice work and a revitalization program he created.

At Old First, Michael's various experiences have come together. It's a strong congregation with a proud tradition of social ministries, mostly these days found in our Men's Shelter, Saturday Breakfast and Cupboard, and Service Camps. We had a 24 / 7 Shelter for 35 men and women during the COVID lockdown. We are redeveloping our property in the historic district, constructing a new building to offer 34 chronically homeless people permanent, supportive housing, as well as to provide the church with new, accessible administrative and program space.

It's often said that 80% of what happens to a church is beyond its control. Old First has taught Michael that it's the church's responsibility (and privilege) to look for opportunities in what's happening around us. God placed us here and now with a purpose.

Michael is thankful for the chance to step out of the day to day pressure-cooker of keeping church going with some good folks from New Hampshire. He's looking forward to imagining with you about the ways our changed and quickly changing world calls the church and our individual congregations to different responses.