November began with an uplifting All Saints’ Day service that included a festive parade of our Sunday school pupils dressed up as their favorite heroes; the choir was particularly delighted that Yoda and R2-D2 made an appearance — staples, surely, of any fancy-dress pageant? The Harvard University Choir observed the Commemoration of All Souls that same afternoon with a performance of Mozart’s Requiem, given in the completion by Professor of Music Emeritus, Robert D. Levin. The choir was joined by the period instrument ensemble Grand Harmonie and a distinguished quartet of singers for a performance that filled the Memorial Church to capacity with an enthusiastic and attentive audience. The Requiem is so familiar and so beloved that it is easy to overlook the startling originality of what Mozart achieves therein: by fusing his research into earlier repertoires (from Gregorian chant onwards, including a thorough study of Bach and Handel in the late 1780s) with advances in his own musical language, he creates a veritable encyclopedia of compositional styles. Within the sober confines of church music, he packs the entire gamut of styles and textures he had developed in the opera house and on the concert stage, and I was delighted with the hard work of our singers and instrumentalists, who achieved moments of sheer terror alongside ones of exquisite beauty.

November’s annual cycle of remembrance and reflection continued the following week with the Commemoration of Benefactors and of the War Dead service, which featured Sir Hubert Parry’s ravishing Blest Pair of Sirens, a setting of John Milton’s Pindaric ode to the power of music, At a Solemn Music. The tolling of the Memorial Church’s solemn bell, inscribed with the dedication “In memory of voices that are hushed,” is one of the most moving moments in this already poignant service, particularly powerful this year as we continue to observe the centennial of World War One.

Earlier in the term, the Harvard University Choir returned to St. Paul’s School, Concord, New Hampshire on a beautiful Columbus Day weekend for its annual retreat of music-making and social-bonding.
The day ended with a meditative service of Compline in the school’s Old Chapel; once again the Director of Chapel Music, Nicholas White, and the school’s staff and pupils welcomed us most graciously, and it was a wonderful field trip for the group. The following afternoon, the choir presented Choral Evensong to a full Appleton Chapel (and a Sanctuary filled with enthusiastic tourists); the strains of Stanford’s majestic Evening Canticles in B-flat, beautifully sung by the choir, and expertly accompanied by Tom Sheehan on our wonderful Skinner organ, made for a splendid end to the weekend.

Sunday and daily services have presented music from a wide variety of styles, including Bach’s sixth motet, Lobet den Herrn, Kodaly’s haunting Missa brevis, and Giovanni Gabrieli’s Jubilate Deo. Throughout my time at the Memorial Church I’ve been deeply grateful for the support and encouragement of Sam and Barbara Hayes, and it was a joy and privilege to lead the Choral Fellows in a recital at Fox Hill Village, Westwood, MA at their invitation. The Choral Fellows work tirelessly on a daily basis in Appleton Chapel, and it was a nice opportunity for the group to perform outside of their regular morning duties; the evening ended with a grand feast in their honor.

Several other highlights of the term so far include performing in the Medal of Honor service, participation in the opening of Harvard Square’s Y2Y homeless shelter, and a wonderful organ recital by our own Composer in Residence Carson Cooman. On Friday, October 23, the Memorial Church co-sponsored a remarkable event: a benefit concert given by local musicians to support the victims of the Syrian-Iraqi refugee crisis. The concert was organized by Joel Cohen, director of Camerata Mediteranea and an important figure in the early music world, with whom the Harvard University Choir has collaborated on a number of occasions. The concert brought together musicians from a wide variety of traditions and cultures and included a poignant interpretation of Carson Cooman’s Faith and Love by the Choral Fellows. The evening ended with a powerful rendition of the Sacred Harp tune Weeping Pilgrim sung by audience and musicians, and the evening raised over $3,500 for charity.

As I write, the choir is preparing for several exciting events. It was twenty years ago that my predecessor, Dr. Murray Forbes Somerville — alongside baroque violinist Robert Mealy and Professor of Music Tom Kelly — founded the Harvard Baroque Chamber Orchestra (HBCO) to perform the music of Henry Purcell. On Sunday, November 22 at 7 p.m. an anniversary concert will be held in the Memorial Church that also serves as a reunion, for Murray, Robert, and Tom will all be participating. I am particularly pleased that Murray will lead the Choral Fellows in Purcell’s 1683 Ode to St. Cecilia, “Welcome to All the Pleasures” on the feast day of music’s patron saint herself. It is always a pleasure to work with Phoebe Carrai, Sarah Darling, and the wonderful students of HBCO, and to have all the founding members back as well is a true delight. I am also excited about our collaboration with another wonderful colleague in the music department, Professor Kate van Orden: Kate’s class teaches its students to play the viola da gamba, and they will join the choir for Gibbons’s beautiful verse anthem “Great Lord of Lords.” And, of course, our annual Christmas Carol Services are just around the corner, this year featuring commissions by David Ashley White and Carson Cooman, alongside familiar carols. Once again, on Christmas Eve our 5 p.m. worship service will feature a choir of UChoir alumni and community members: if you would like to sing on that festive occasion please arrive at 3:30 p.m. for a brief rehearsal in the choir room.

Looking ahead, in late January the choir will tour Savannah, Columbia, and Charleston and then return to Cambridge to work with the distinguished choral director, Dr. Barry Rose (formerly Master of the Choir at St. Paul’s Cathedral, London) for a service of Evensong on Sunday, February 7 at 4 p.m. in Appleton Chapel. Our spring concert presents music of Johann Sebastian Bach — the Magnificat and Ascension Oratorio — with the Harvard Baroque Chamber Orchestra, and the choir will once again join forces with Harvard’s Bach Society Orchestra for an Arts First performance of Beethoven’s Choral Fantasy.

I am thrilled with the choir’s work this year and it continues to be a pleasure to make music with such talented and hard-working students. Tom Sheehan and Carson Cooman continue to dazzle and impress through their many talents, and I am blessed to work with such wonderful colleagues. Under the inspiring leadership of Professor Jonathan L. Walton and the Rev. Dr. Lucy Forster-Smith, the Memorial Church is thriving, and I eagerly await what the future brings.
I am thrilled with the choir’s work this year and it continues to be a pleasure to make music with such talented and hard-working students.

— Edward Jones
Our Mission Statement

The Memorial Church of Harvard University is a space of grace in the center of the Yard, rooted in the good news of Jesus Christ. Affectionately known as “MemChurch,” we pursue partnerships within and beyond Harvard, empowering community members to serve the world as well-informed, compassionate, moral citizens. Through worship and ministry outreach, MemChurch aims to promote justice and mercy by confronting life’s challenges, differences, and our own imperfections with courage, empathy, and an ethic of love. By doing so, the Memorial Church seeks to educate minds, expand hearts, and enrich lives.

At the beginning of Fall Term, the Memorial Church unveiled our mission statement. This statement was born of many months of deliberations about the distinct history and decisive future that this church holds. A university church in the 21st century carries in its purview a powerful charge, simply by its existence, to stand at the intersection of global citizen leadership, intellectual preparation and in the case of the Memorial Church, nurturing spiritually fortified Christian leaders for our world. As I have labored in my post as University Chaplain and Senior Minister of this church, I realize that our work arises at a time when so much on our planet that is done in the name of religion tears at our moral and global fabric. The second sentence of our mission statement carries with it a charge to address and redress engagement with the world. This aspect of our mission arises from humility, from our deep sense that the only way to mend the brokenness is to claim our own brokenness and anchor our action in the power of the Beloved Community.

There are several examples within our current programming that this portion of our mission statement is currently living out. One mandate is that we work in partnerships of common purpose as part of this great University. When tragedy strikes, the church holds its doors open and its caring presence to harbor hurt and heal, through God’s grace, the broken of spirit. We do this work in partnership with Harvard Health Services, offices such as the Freshman Dean’s Office, the Office of Student Life, the Graduate Commons, and Student Life Offices in our Graduate and Professional Schools. When grand celebrations are in order, the President’s Office, Harvard Alumni Affairs, a range of student associations and organizations, and many others draw our skill and joy in a liturgical sensibility that frames rituals and traditions. Or in the unfortunate reminders that come to the fore of our common university life such as the revelation of the prevalence of sexual assault or that our drive toward a racially inclusive and radically engaged campus have not been achieved, we partner with Harvard Chaplains and chaplain partners at other Ivy League and local colleges and universities, the Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, the Harvard Foundation, and many others, working together to make this campus safe. But we are just beginning this work! The call of our mission is heard each day, when a student group uses our building, when prayers are raised at Morning Prayers, and when a group gathers for compassionate conversation on contested issues. We thrive on partnerships!

A second mandate for our work is that we empower community members to serve the world. I daresay that all of our work as a university church is animated by this instruction. When the Memorial Church Student Advisory Board gathers over dinner and discusses how their service to the church awakens a connection with a vocation this end is served, or when they ask bigger questions of friends about the meaning and purpose of their life on campus or to connect their athletic commitments to their leadership and faith, the flow of faith and service courses through their lives. Student engagement through the Memorial Church is also what Professor Jonathan Walton names as “a teaching hospital.” Our students are here for a brief time and our work is to offer opportunities to experience the inspiring preaching, insightful teaching, pastoral care that holds their deepest longing and worthy dreams, and service to others that will engender a life-time of committed living.

The last statement ties to a dimension of the Memorial Church’s common life that is worth noting. For many, many years the church has gathered students, faculty, and congregational regulars to consider requests from
This Fall Term the Memorial Church has been exploring the ironies, tensions, and nuances of what it means to be a university church. Much of our character and mission is shaped by the fact that we reside at the intersection of paradoxical identities — we are a house of worship and a part of a university; we are a church and a memorial; we are deeply rooted in our Christian faith and radically open to people of different faiths; we want to create a culture of calm and to hold ourselves to high standards. Although at face value these identities appear to conflict, we aim to hold them in a creative tension with one another. These tensions demand our attentiveness and thoughtfulness as we discern our place and call in the Harvard community.

One tension I find to be particularly animating and pertinent for our students is between doubt and belief. Students come to college with deep faith, no faith, and searching for faith. For many of them, it is the first time they are away from the people who know them and the places that ground them. Anxiety arises when one’s understanding of the world becomes challenged and complicated by new experiences. No wonder young adulthood is steeped in questions that appear in many shapes and forms — and rarely are they insignificant ones: Who am I? Is there a God? Why is there evil in the world? What is the purpose of my life?

In matters of faith, questions and doubts often are portrayed as a threat to faith, but they have the power to serve the development of faith. In fact, doubts and questions mean that we take our faith seriously. Questions and doubts call our attention to actively examine our relationship with God. Our university environment so often emphasizes the importance of having the right answer. However, uncertainty is nothing to fear at the Memorial Church — doubts and questions are an important part of one’s faith.

Frederick Buechner says, “Whether your faith is that there is a God or that there is not a God, if you don’t have any doubts you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.” Communities that remain resilient in the face of both doubt and wonder can be profound in the development of faith for young adults. And that resilience is critical to our work in “empowering community members to serve the world as well-informed, compassionate, moral citizens” as our new mission statement charges us to do.

The Opening of Term BBQ welcomed the Class of 2019 (Photo: Justin Knight)
The Memorial Church is proud to support the work of non-profit charity organizations that serve the communities of the Greater Boston Area through our grants program. Funds for these awards come from the Sunday Offering and are distributed on the advice of the Memorial Church Grants Committee, comprised of church parishioners, Harvard students, faculty, and staff. This past year, the church donated a total of $49,000 to local organizations. We are proud to highlight a few of the organizations that received awards in the past year. Applications for next year’s awards are currently being accepted through January 15, 2016. For more information about the Grants Committee, applying for a grant, and the full list of organizations that received awards last year, please visit memorialchurch.harvard.edu/grants-committee.

A Sampling of 2014-15 Community Grant Awardees

CASANUEVAVIDA
Casa Nueva Vida’s mission is to help homeless families gain the education and skills needed to permanently pull themselves out of poverty and into stable affordable housing.

Award To provide an emergency relief fund for a homeless family living in Boston.

HARVARD SQUARE CHURCHES MEAL PROGRAM
The Harvard Square Churches Meal Program provides a nutritious meal in a hospital-like environment to anyone who needs a meal. A project of ten churches in Harvard Square, volunteers come from the churches, local schools (including Harvard) and the neighborhood.

Award To purchase books for the Read-a-Thon after school program for low-income students in Cambridge.

EPIPHANY SCHOOL
Epiphany School is an independent, tuition-free middle school for children of economically-disadvantaged families from Boston neighborhoods.

Award To purchase a new dishwasher.

CAMBRIDGE AFTER SCHOOL ENRICHMENT
Phillips Brooks House Association’s Cambridge After School Enrichment focuses on providing affordable and accessible after school programming for low-income Cambridge youth and provides tutoring and academic enrichment activities.

Award Purchase books for the Read-a-Thon after school program for low-income students in Cambridge.

EPIPHANY SCHOOL
Epiphany School is an independent, tuition-free middle school for children of economically-disadvantaged families from Boston neighborhoods.

Award To provide stipends for Junior Counselors at the after school program for children of Mission Hill.

VICTORY PROGRAMS
Victory Programs is a Boston-based nonprofit organization dedicated to helping individuals and families who are homeless and may have substance use disorders, often accompanied by chronic health issues like HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C and mental illness.

Award To purchase a refrigerator for their Revision Urban Farm which provides free, organically grown produce to shelters and at low costs to their neighbors.
Expanding Hearts

Glimpses from MemChurch’s Fall Term

Top: The Choral Fellows, Ed Jones, and Tom Sheehan at Fox Hill Village in Westwood, MA with longtime MemChurch music supporter Professor Samuel L. Hayes. Middle from left: Katie Wu ’17 enjoying the Opening of Term BBQ; Students, faculty, and staff at Professor Jonathan L. Walton’s popular Sparks House Football Tailgates; Rev. Dr. Lucy Forster-Smith chats with students during the Opening of Term BBQ (Photos: Justin Knight). Bottom: The Harvard University Choir on a beautiful autumn day during their retreat at St. Paul’s School, Concord, New Hampshire (Photo: Arturo R. Rolla).
UChoir Tour
An hour-long recital including works by Bach, Parry, and Hampton

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20, 7:00 PM
St. John's Church, Savannah, GA

THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 7:30 PM
Trinity Cathedral, Columbia, SC

FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 7:00 PM
Grace Episcopal Church, Charleston, SC

Organ Recitals
Recitals begin at 7:30 p.m. in the Memorial Church Sanctuary.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2
Mark Dwyer, Church of the Advent, Boston, MA

TUESDAY, MARCH 1
Jonathan Wessler, St. Paul's Church and Choir School, Cambridge, MA

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23
Thomas Sheehan, The Memorial Church

TUESDAY, APRIL 5
Stephen Buzard, St. Thomas Fifth Avenue, New York City

The 106th Annual Christmas Carol Services
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 5:00 PM
MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 8:00 PM
These services feature seasonal music performed by the Harvard University Choir. Doors open one hour before the services. An offering for charity is collected.

Christmas Eve Service
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24, 5:00 PM
A service will be held to celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord with hymns and Holy Communion. Professor Jonathan L. Walton will preach. Singers are welcome to join in the community choir for the Christmas Eve service; rehearsal is before the service at 3:30 p.m.

Evensong
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 4:00 PM
Under the direction of Dr. Barry Rose. In Appleton Chapel.

Holy Week Musical Meditation
TUESDAY, MARCH 22, 8:00 PM
Featuring the Harvard University Choir. In Appleton Chapel.

Spring Concert
SUNDAY, APRIL 17, 4:00 PM
Bach's Magnificat and Ascension Oratorio. Featuring the Harvard University Choir and the Harvard Baroque Chamber Orchestra. In the Memorial Church Sanctuary.

Harvard University Choir ARTS FIRST Performances
FRIDAY, APRIL 29, 7:30 PM
In collaboration with the Bach Society Orchestra. In John Knowles Paine Concert Hall.

SATURDAY, APRIL 30, 1:00 PM
Choral Fellows sing Bach's Jesu, meine Freude, BWV 227. In the Memorial Church Sanctuary.

All events are free and open to the public.