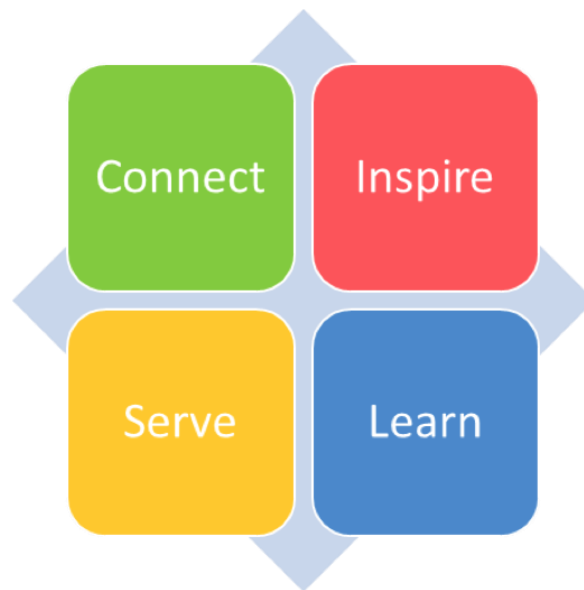




First Unitarian Church

OF PITTSBURGH **CONNECT • INSPIRE • SERVE • LEARN**

Annual Report 2023–2024



Board of Trustees

Raeann Olander-Murray, President (2022- 2025)

Brian Junker, Vice President (2023-2026)

Kyle Gracey, Treasurer (2023–2026)

Rob Schwartz, Past President (2021–2024)

Nick Izzo, Secretary (2022–2025)

Amy DeChicchis (2021-2024)

Bob Mitchell (2021-2024)

Chris Milcarek (2022-2025)

Jean Schmidt (2023-2026)

Rev. Dr. Kate R. Walker, Minister (ex-officio)

Kurt Summersgill, Arthur Notaro, Recording Secretaries

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First Unitarian Church
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From the President of the 2023–2024 Board of Trustees

By Raeann Olander-Murray

What an exciting time it is to be a part of the First Unitarian Church community!

We are back to doing time-honored activities that were interrupted by Covid, such as the Thanksgiving all-church luncheon, spearheaded by an amazing group of volunteers. And the Fantasy Auction scheduled for May 10th, again led by an inspired and dedicated group of volunteers. We also have established new traditions, like our 1st Annual New Year's Eve multi-generational Pancake Breakfast. It was wildly popular, pulled off by yet another group of motivated, pancake-loving volunteers who managed to stretch the batter to accommodate the hungry crowd! And finally, we're reimagining some activities, like our Annual Meeting, which this year includes an all-congregation, multi-generational potluck dinner and Table Talk.



There's a recurring theme here of volunteers doing wonderful work alongside our small but mighty, dedicated, and talented staff to create this beloved community of which we are all a part. You will see that reflected throughout this report, which touches on just some of the highlights from this past year. I encourage you to read the other individual reports collected in this Annual Report. You will be impressed and inspired.

To start, I must acknowledge my fellow Trustees: a wise and talented group of leaders sharing their time and expertise to meet our charge from the congregation to "Partner with the Minister and Ministry teams to create a culture that supports the mission, vision, and goals of First Unitarian Church in accordance with our Bylaws and governance policies." It is an honor to work and learn alongside the Trustees and Rev. Kate. Thank you to Kurt Summersgill for his years of service as the Board's Recording Secretary, and thank you to Arthur Notaro who has stepped in and is doing an excellent job of recording our meetings.

In June of 2023 the Board held its Annual Planning Retreat, attended by the then current and incoming Trustees. We reflected on last year and established priorities to guide our work for this year. These priorities include: Improving our leadership pipeline for Trustees and Board Officers; Completing an external assessment of the Board and how we function; Growing and diversifying our membership in alignment with our strategic plan; Capturing the experiences or

our delegates to General Assembly, which was held here in Pittsburgh last summer; Ensuring a positive Board experience for Trustees; Reviewing our pilot Share the Plate policy; Ensuring the Congregation is more aware of actions of the Board; Reviewing our financial policies; Ensuring Board engagement and visibility; and Updating the process for selecting Delegates/Representatives of the church. I will touch on some of these in this report along with other highlights of the year.

Staff and Structure

Over the course of the past year, we have experienced extended absences of several staff members for a variety of reasons. Fortunately, church members and friends have stepped in as volunteers to cover responsibilities and to keep things running smoothly so that the life of the church has not suffered.

Building on last year's work, the Council of Communities has been established and is meeting regularly, providing a structure of reporting and communication among the many non-Board church committees.

Financial Stewardship

While the Board is accountable for the financial stewardship of the church, we rely on the excellent financial management of our Treasurer, Finance Committee, Investment Committee, Controller, Assistant Controller, and Business Manager. Financial Stewardship is covered more fully in the [Treasurer's report](#); however, it should be noted that the Board initially approved a deficit budget this year based upon our desire to give our staff the full 2.8% cost of living adjustment that reflects the inflation rate in our region. That vote included a mandate that we go back to the congregation to ask those who could afford it to increase their giving to cover the deficit. While this effort was successful, it is not an ideal or sustainable practice.

Governance and Board Activities

At the end of the last church year the Board completed a self-evaluation. We are currently working with Rev. Sunshine Wolfe, our Central East Region Congregational Life Staff, on an external evaluation as well as a tool for the congregation to provide feedback to the Board. We are unique among UU congregations in taking on this self-evaluation; there are no off-the-shelf models of board self-evaluation at this time, so we are trailblazing.

Facilitated by Rev. Kate, many members of the 2023-2024 Board, along with some outgoing members of the 2022-2023 Board, undertook a five-week study of the book, "Transforming Conflict, The Blessings of Congregational Turmoil", by Rev. Dr. Terasa Cooley, in the fall. In addition to building leadership skills, it was a great opportunity for Trustees to get to know each other better.

An important and urgent area of focus has been working to create a leadership pipeline of board members and officers. The Board and Nominating Committee hosted a Leadership Smorgasbord in February to introduce members and friends to church leadership opportunities. While lightly attended, feedback was positive and we will continue to build on this effort and others. Be on the lookout for leadership training opportunities in the next church year.

This year the Board approved a statement, and an accompanying policy has been written, that supports ensuring that individuals and organizations using or renting our space align with our UU values and principles.

Annual Priorities of the Church, 2023-2024

A key responsibility of the Board is to identify and focus on strategic priorities. One of those priorities is to Diversify and Grow Our Membership:

- Expand the diversity of our membership, especially in the areas of age, more children and families, race, class, ability and LGBTQ+ identities.
- Create a church full of activity and participation in order to grow our membership.

While the work is on-going, there is promising news to report. [The VIM Committee](#) (Vision, Identity, Mission) recently initiated cottage meetings with young adults (18-35 years old). VIM reports that there are 24 young adults attending regularly. Of these 24, 12 are playing significant roles in the church, including providing tech support, serving as ushers and greeters, hosting coffee hour, participating on the Racial Justice Task Force, providing music for services, leading on the Council of Communities, serving as Recording Secretary for the Board, volunteering in children's RE, and serving as liturgist.

In September of 2023, forty-one individuals participated in at least one part of the two-part Building a Culture of Inclusion workshop with Paula Cole Jones. Also underway to support this strategic priority is the Committee on Shared Ministry's assessment of how we welcome our visitors.

Another one of the Strategic Priorities is to Create Long-Lasting and Meaningful First Unitarian / Community Partnerships Advancing Racial Justice and Environmental Justice.

In the spring of this year 12-15 members and friends, on varying days (3 days), read and participated in a book study of, "Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair", by Duke L. Kwon and Gregory Thompson, in preparation for a conversation with Bethel AME Church on March 17th, which was attended by approximately 65 people from both the congregation and the community. The Racial Justice Task Force work on building on the conversation is ongoing.

In September, the work of the Environmental Justice Task Force was highlighted in the article, Moving from Despair to Action, submitted by Bob Mitchell, in the UU Ministry for the Earth publication. <https://www.uumfe.org/2023/10/01/moving-from-despair-to-action/>

You can read more about these efforts and others in the [Racial Justice](#) and [Environmental Justice Task Force](#) reports.

Building and Grounds

We are the beneficiaries and stewards of the investments that our forebears made to establish and maintain our beautiful and historic building. As it continues to age, we are responsible for caring for it. Recently, spearheaded by Trustees Chris Milcarek and Nick Izzo, an update has been completed to our 2018 Vulnerability Audit by a team from the Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. The updated comprehensive audit provides us with a roadmap of recommendations and action steps to ensure the safety and security of our community, staff, and property. This will be used to make immediate and future improvements as well as to inform grant applications for funding to pay for some of the recommendations.

These are just some of the highlights of the Board and this community from the past year. For more information, you are encouraged to read the Annual Report and the minutes from the monthly Board meetings, which can be found on our church website. Also available is the Report of Motions Passed document that is included as part of the Annual Meeting documents.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to recognize and thank our outgoing Trustees for their years of service on the Board: Rob Schwartz, (Vice President, 2021-2022 and President 2022-2023), Amy de Chicchis, and Bob Mitchell; and to recognize our fabulous Minister and staff, Rev. Dr. Kate R. Walker, Erika Shadowsong, Rita Gates, Cicely Moultrie, Dan Laity, Kris Rust, and Ellen Gozion. We very much appreciate all you do.



First Unitarian Church
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Minister's Report to the Congregation

19 May 2024

First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh

Rev. Dr. Kate R. Walker

The mission of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh is to:

Connect deeply in community

Inspire reverence and spiritual growth

Serve one another and the world

Learn together

I continue to celebrate the day I was called to this loving community three years ago.

You have offered your smiles and commitment, as well as your joys and grief. You've shared your tender moments and you've asked to be challenged. You've shown up and apologized when you were not able to be present. You've questioned, been curious and spoken when truth needed to be shared. You've been courageous and shy. You've been incredibly generous with your money, your time and your talent. You've offered your vision and your critique. You have asked for time off and shown up at the last minute, breathless with excitement.

Together, we have mopped up floors, created worship, sang songs and marched for liberation.

Together we have continued the tradition of Unitarian Universalism in Pittsburgh.

Together we welcomed 4500 Unitarian Universalists either in person or virtually to our home city, as we shared our history and our faith in each other.

To do this work, each month I meet with:

- The Board of Trustees
- The Executive Committee
- The President of the Board
- Stewardship Committee
- Worship Team
- Pastoral Care Team
- Committee on Shared Ministry
- Council of Committees (brand new!)
- Stephanie Pawlowski, CLM
- Staff (weekly, bi-weekly and monthly)

As able and/or needed I meet with:

- Racial Justice Task Force
- Environmental Justice
- Personnel Committee as needed (major accomplishment this year was finishing a major rewrite of the Personnel Manual)
- Share the Plate
- Khasi Hills
- Finance Committee

There have been some wonderful highlights for me, each one may be covered in committee reports.

- June: Hosting General Assembly and having 40 of you serving as volunteers and delegates.

- August: Presenting at the Phipps Nature of Place Symposium.
- September: Workshop with Paula Cole Jones on Zoom; well attended and very well received. It took us to another level of being a counter oppressive community.
- October: Representing our Church in the Khasi Hills, India.
- December board meeting, the board passed the fully revised Personnel Manual.
- February/March: Attending Gamaliel training with other PIIN members in Nashville. Shout out to Bob Mitchell who also attended!
- March: Bethel AME Table Talk, well attended and well received.
- April: Hosting the Seminary on Estate Planning with the Pastoral Care Team, well attended and well appreciated.
- April: supporting the completion of the Congregational Assessment with the Committee on Shared Ministry.
- April: Seeing Jan Harrison's face on the cover of the Pittsburgh Tribune on behalf of this church and Valley Clean Air Now.
- All year: Enjoying the fabulous music program during worship!!

I want to highlight worship attendance. I presented an analysis to the Board in March, having reviewed attendance numbers in 2023 and some of 2024. This is what I came up with:

More people are attending in person than 2022. YouTube views are maintaining. It appears we're reaching on average almost 180 people every week, which is significant for a church membership of 250.

Regarding membership. While membership dropped a lot in the twelve years prior to my being called to serve this community, we have slowed the decline. As of April, we're at 243 members. I'd like to see us stop the decline completely and begin to rebuild. This will take a lot of effort from all of us to be welcoming to visitors and to reach out to friends and neighbors to invite them to explore our loving community.

I continue to be deeply grateful to work with the wonderful staff: Erica Shadowsong, Kris Rust, Ellen Gozion, focusing on Programming. Cicely Moultrie, Rita Gates, Dan Laity and I focus on administration, buildings and grounds. Erica and Kris are enjoying their well-earned time off this spring, but I do look forward to being fully staffed in the fall.

On our security team, we've had the ever reliable, Jesse Valore, Will Snavely and Manny Theiner.

Larger Pittsburgh Community I support:

- PIIN Spiritual Leaders Caucus (I'm co-facilitator), PIIN Board Exec, and PIIN Board
- Anti-Racist Faith Leaders

In order to stay healthy, I have good collegial support: I'm active in the regional minister's group (Ohio-Meadville Chapter), as assistant treasurer and helping with programming at our twice annual retreats. I'll be attending the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association's virtual annual gathering in June, followed by the UUA's General Assembly, also virtual, June 20-23.

I'm also in two support groups and a study group, each meet monthly. It is crucial for religious professionals to be connected with colleagues for emotional and spiritual support, as well as staying engaged in our professional association with important contemporary topics.

For professional development, I'm still serving as an Advocate on behalf of complainants to the UUA's Safe Congregations Office, and I serve as a mentor for a new minister in Ohio.

I'll be on study leave and vacation June 28-August 2, 2024

I am deeply grateful to serve as your minister, and celebrate our ministry.



Treasurer's Report – Fiscal Year 2023

Submitted by: Kyle Gracey, Treasurer

We ended the year in a reduced financial position from 2022, but still relatively healthy. Donations were slightly below budget, but plate collections significantly over performed. Likewise, our investments did better than expected, thanks to an improving market. Rental income is still noticeably lower than before the pandemic. We completed the installation of the solar panels, but much later than expected, leading to much higher electricity spending than budgeted. Overall, our available cash has tightened compared to last year, while our investments have grown.

Financial Position, Budget Variance, Investments

Asset balances added up to \$217,396, a decrease of \$130,334 over the course of the year. This did not include the money in our endowments and trusts. Total liabilities were \$199,068, a decrease of \$109,088 from the beginning of 2023. A significant portion of the decrease in our available cash and long-term liabilities was due to purchasing our solar array and air filters, and repairing our roof, as well as spending down some reserves. Overall, we had \$18,329 in net assets, a decrease of \$21,247 over the course of the year.

Our income came in at 99% of the budget, for a total income of \$527,110. Congregants donated 95% of what they had pledged. Expenses were 103% budgeted, for total costs of \$548,357. Overall, this left us with a net loss of \$21,247, more than the \$3,107 loss budgeted. This eroded some of the retained income that we earned in 2022.

Our endowments and other long-term investments remain strong, providing a modest source of income to our general budget, a source of funding for unexpected projects that fall outside our budget, and protection against catastrophic expenses. In most cases, we are substantially limited in how much of the balances we can access from these investments for day-to-day expenses. The appendix below provides the balance of each fund as of the end of the year, along with a brief description of how the funds can be used. The net total of our endowed and restricted funds was \$3,000,926, an increase of \$197,970 from the previous year.

Finance Committee

In addition to monitoring our finances over the past year, the Finance Committee has nearly completed an overhaul of our financial policies and procedures. We've also mostly finished a more comprehensive, consolidated emergency reserve.

Investment Committee

The Investment Committee completed the yearly rebalancing of our investments, and maintained our investments to take advantage of the growing market last year.

Your Financial Team

Thank you to the many staff and committee members who contributed their time and talents to these efforts, including: Claus Makowka (Controller & Investment Committee Chair), Margaret Noether (Assistant Controller), Robert Baron (Controller), Ward Kelsey (Investment Manager), Pat Schuetz (Finance Committee Secretary), Stuart Hastings, Rita Gates (Business Manager), Bob Mitchell, Gail Pesyna and Brian Rohleder.

Appendix: Investment Account Balances and Key Restrictions

Investment

Balance 12/31/2023

Income Restricted Funds

Core Endowment \$1,103,795
3.5% of 3-year average balance can be spent each year for unrestricted expenses. Generated \$39,850 in operating income.

Harkcom Fund \$62,579
Dividends can be spent on unrestricted expenses. Generated \$2,658 in operating income.

Memorial Trust \$57,273
Dividends can be spent on unrestricted expenses. Generated \$2,894 in operating income.

Mullins Memorial Endowment \$426,907
Dividends can be spent on unrestricted expenses. Generated \$15,215 in operating income.

Simon Income Fund \$175,757
Dividends can be spent on unrestricted expenses. Generated \$5,876 in operating income.

Goldsmith Concert Fund \$71,006
Dividends typically spent on music expenses. Generated \$3,860 in operating income.

Program Grant Funds – See reports from program endowment committees.

Campus Ministry Endowment \$193,640
3.5% of 3-year average balance per year can be spent as grants for campus ministry activities.

Music Endowment \$166,619
3.5% of 3-year average balance per year can be spent as grants for music-related expenses.

Social Justice Endowment \$297,391
3.5% of 3-year average balance per year can be spent as grants for justice-related activities.

Endowment for Ministry with Children and Youth \$40,027
3.5% of 3-year average balance per year can be spent as grants for children and youth activities

Capital-Restricted Funds

Goldsmith Targeted Fund \$125,412
Dividends support operating budget. Generated \$6,817 in operating income. Principal can be spent on capital projects.

Goldsmith Growth Fund \$178,602
Balance can be spent on capital projects. Generated \$5,387 in operating income.

Donaldson-Genszler Fund \$101,918
Dividends support operating budget. Generated \$9,130.78 in operating income. Principal can be spent unrestricted.

Note: This is only a summary of the key restrictions on each investment. It may not reflect the full range of situations where funds can and cannot be spent. For example, some investments can be spent in the case of a disaster affecting the church, with approval by the congregation.

Motions passed by the Board of Trustees

The following Motions have been passed by the Board of Trustees of First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh since the Annual Congregational Meeting of May, 2023

June 14, 2023. The Board voted to:

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- accept the new strategic plan.
- appoint Jim Reitz to fill a vacancy on the Nominating Committee

July 5, 2023

The following officers were elected for the Church year July 2023 through June 2024:

- Raeann Olander - President
- Brian Junker - Vice President
- Kyle Gracey - Treasurer
- Nick Izzo – Secretary

July 5, 2023. The Board voted to approve the minutes from the previous board meeting

August 16, 2023. The Board voted:

- to approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- to confirm the appointment of Bob Barron as Controller upon the resignation of Claus Makowka.
- to confirm the appointment of Annie Stunden to the Finance Committee.
- to amend Governance Policy in section 3.5 to conform with the rising costs over the years to read: “The Board will have no power to dispose of, sell, or mortgage the land, building, or physical assets valued at over \$50,000 and belonging to the congregation without the consent of the members obtained at a regular or special congregational meeting duly called according to the Bylaws], the number \$50,000 being raised from \$10,000.

September 20, 2023. The Board voted:

- to approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- to confirm the reappointment of Mary Denison as chair of the Committee on Shared Ministry, effective July 1, 2023.
- to approve a communication to the Congregation about the Board’s self-assessment.
- to accept the the “Report on Ministerial Assessment 2023” from the Committee on Shared Ministry.
- to accept the “Report to the Congregation” submitted by the Committee on Shared Ministry on the assessment of the Minister.

October 18, 2023. The Board voted to:

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- Appoint Mary Redford for one of the five delegate positions for First UU to the Pittsburgh Cluster meeting on November 11 at Sunnyhill UU.
- Approve an amendment to the Bylaws in the section on nominations to the Nominating Committee to refer to the correct section in the bylaws for the nominating procedures for the Board of Trustees. This is a technical correction which was missed when the Bylaws were last revised and will be voted on by the congregation at the 2024 Annual Congregational Meeting.
- Approve the consolidation of several reserve accounts which are no longer being used or the purpose of which is no longer relevant. This will make it easier for the church to fund ongoing programs and contingencies.

November 2023. The board voted:

- to approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- to confirm an email vote to make Nick Izzo a delegate to the Greater Pittsburgh UU Cluster meeting

December 2023. The board voted to:

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- approve a budget presented by Treasurer, Kyle Gracey with an amendment to include a mandate to the Board to report to the congregation and seek additional pledges to balance the budget.
- approve a revised Personnel Manual
- approve a revised charter for the Committee on Shared Ministry

January 17, 2024. The Board voted to approve the minutes from the previous board meeting

February 21, 2024. The Board voted to:

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- The 2024 annual withdrawal of \$39,214.58 from the Endowment Fund (3.5% of rolling 3-year average of fund total) to be deposited into the following accounts was approved:
- \$26,280 to the General Fund
 - \$650 to the Music Major Repair reserve
 - \$639.33 to the Office New Equipment reserve
 - \$11,645.25 to Extraordinary Building Repair and & Maintenance reserve
- New Job descriptions for the Treasurer and Controller positions were approved
- The following nominees to the various endowment committees were approved
 - Children and Youth RE Endowment: Sarah Hooper (3 year term)
 - Music Endowment: Danny Rectenwald (3 year term)
 - Social Justice Endowment: Sandy Woolley (2 year term, due to a resignation) and Joan Harvey (3 year term)
 - Campus Ministry Endowment: Michael Safran (3 year term)

March 20, 2024. The Board voted to:

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- Approve a revised budget for 2024

April 17, 2024. The Board voted to:

- to approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- approve the addition of Claus Makowka as an Administrator on all investment accounts
- approve a policy on aligning church activities with the values and principles of our church
- May 15, 2024. The Board voted to:
- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- affirm the email vote to appoint Michael Lotze to the Nominating Committee
- amend the 2024 budget to extend 50% spousal health insurance to LRED
- transfer funds from the dormant Habitat for Humanity reserve to the East End Cooperative Ministry reserve used to re-imburse costs to those purchasing food for shelter meals.
- reallocate money with the budget to support an intern minister for the coming church year.
- resolved to support the church continuing as a teaching congregation for ministerial interns
- approved Jean Schmidt and Kyle Gracey as delegates to the UUA General Assembly

Respectfully submitted,

Nicholas Izzo

Secretary of the Board of Trustees.

Church Committees and Team Contacts

Congregational Committee

Nominating Committee:

Sue Oerkvitz oerkvitz@verizon.net

Connect Council

Lay Council Lead:

Annie Stunden annie.stunden@gmail.com

Membership Team:

Joan Harvey joanhv@gmail.com

Amy DeChicchis amydech50@gmail.com

Ushers and Greeters:

MR Kelsey maryruthkelsey@gmail.com

Pastoral Care Team:

Jim Cunningham cunni@comcast.net

Kathy Miller kathymillerotter@gmail.com

Minister's Discretionary

Fund/Marion's Purse:

Rev. Dr. Kate Walker kwalker@first-unitarian-pgh.org

Covenant Groups Team:

Lynne Porterfield ljporterfield@yahoo.com

Gathering of Men:

Jim Reitz j5650r@comcast.net

Sunday Social Hour

Jean Schmidt jaschmidt.pgh@gmail.com

Sarah Fields s.benton.fields@gmail.com

WomanSpirit

(evening group):

Pat Schuetz patschuetz@verizon.net

Women's Alliance

Linda Fleming flemingmitchell@hotmail.com

(daytime group):

Denice Galpern dgalpern47@gmail.com

Marketing and

Mark Whitaker mwhit14@gmail.com

Communications:

Rob Schwartz rob.j.schwartz@gmail.com

Inspire Council

Staff:

Rev. Dr. Kate R. Walker, Minister

Ellen Gozion, Director of Instrumental Music

Kris Rust, Director of Vocal Music

Lay Council Lead:

Stephanie Pawlowski sbpawlowski@gmail.com

Worship Team:

Stephanie Pawlowski sbpawlowski@gmail.com

Affiliate Minister:

Rev. Stephanie Gannon communityminister@first-unitarian-pgh.org

pgh.org

Commissioned Lay

Stephanie Pawlowski sbpawlowski@gmail.com

Minister:

Committee on

Shared Ministry:

Mary Denison marydenison@gmail.com

Instrumental Music:

Ellen Gozion ellen@ellengozion.com

Vocal Music:

Kris Rust kdrust@aol.com

Art Team:

Ali Masalehdan ali@masimex.com

Dance Choir:

Mary Pat Mengato mpmengato@gmail.com

SongSpace:

Brian Junker junkerb@gmail.com

Serve Council

Lay Council Leads

Marley Magree marleymagee16@gmail.com

Surya Mahadevan suryamahadevan01@gmail.com

Addictions Ministry:

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Alternative Gift Market:

Karen Burns burnskaren00@gmail.com

EECM Homeless Shelter

Meal Team:

Sam Hens-Greco samhensgreco@gmail.com

Medical Equipment
 Loan Program: Ioulia Kornberg ioulia.k@verizon.net
 Khasi Hills Partnership
 Team: Karen Litzinger litzingerkaren@aol.com
 Environmental Justice Bob Mitchell rrmitchell350@gmail.com
 Action Team: Becky Studer rkstuder@gmail.com
 PIIN Core Team: Sandy Woolley sandy.woolley@gmail.com
 Karen Burns Rutigliano burnskaren00@gmail.com
 Racial Justice Task Force: Denice Galpern dgalpern47@gmail.com
 Maria Magone maria.magone@verizon.net
 Jean Schmidt jaschmidt.pgh@gmail.com
 Share the Plate: Karen Burns Rutigliano burnskaren00@gmail.com
 UUs for Justice in the
 Middle East: Ali Masalehdan ali@masimex.com
 UUJusticePA: Becky Studer rkstuder@gmail.com
 Learn Council
 Staff: Erica Shadowsong, Lifespan Religious Education Director
 Lay Council Lead: Carol Washburn carolawashburn@gmail.com
 LRED Sabbatical Team: Cathy Rohrer cathylanerohrer@gmail.com
 Humanist Group: Stuart Hastings sph@pitt.edu
 Sunday Morning Forum: Ali Masalehdan al.asgar@yahoo.com
 Book Store: Mary Schinhofen mary@schinhofen.net
 Kirsti Adkins: kirstiadkins323@gmail.com
 Board Committees
 Building & Grounds: Martin Schmidt mschmidt127@gmail.com
 Endowments:
 – Campus Ministry: Heather Cunningham heatherbcunningham@gmail.com
 – Ministry with Children and Youth:
 Julie Downs downs@andrew.cmu.edu
 – Music: Martin Schmidt mschmidt127@gmail.com
 – Social Justice: Jenn Layman jmeccalayman@gmail.com
 Finance: Kyle Gracey kgracey@first-unitarian-pgh.org
 Investment: Kyle Gracey kgracey@first-unitarian-pgh.org
 Ombuds Officer: Ebe Emmons ebeemmons@gmail.com
 Personnel: Mary Denison marydenison@gmail.com
 Safety: Kirk Steibich
 Stewardship: Al Schwartz alisons@andrew.cmu.edu
 Maria Lauro mariainpgh@gmail.com
 Vision, Identity, and
 Mission Committee (VIM): Bob Mitchell rrmitchell350@gmail.com

Church Administrative Staff

Business Manager: Rita Gates
 Communications Coordinator: Cicely Moultrie
 Sexton: Dan Laity

Nominating Committee Report

Nominating Committee Members:

Sue Oerkvitz, Co-Chair (2021-2024)
Stuart Hastings (2021-2024)
Jim Reitz (2021-2024)
Cathy Rohrer, Co-Chair (2022-2025)
Mary Pat Mengato (2022-2025)
Margaret Fuhrman (2022-2025)
Lee Carnes (2023-2026)
Nancy Latimer (2023-2026)
Karen Burns (2023-2024)
Michael Lotze (2024-2026)

Nominees to the **Board of Trustees** for 2024-2027 (For approval by Congregation):

- Jim Pashek
- Maria Lauro
- Richard Dum

Nominees to the **Nominating Committee** for 2024-2027(For approval by Congregation):

- Bill Schuetz
- Becky Studer
- Mary Weidner

Nominees to **Endowment Committees** for 2024-2027: For approval by Board of Trustees

- Danny Rectenwald (Music)
- Michael Safran (Campus Ministry)
- Sarah Hooper (Ministry with Children and Youth)
- Joan Harvey (Social Justice--2024-2026)
- Sandra Woolley (Social Justice--2024-2027)

Respectfully submitted,

Sue Oerkvitz and Cathy Rohrer

Council of Communities

Report by Rev. Kate Walker

This Council was established in January by me, to serve as a liaison between the non-board committees and the minister. It's organized under the four priorities of First Unitarian: Connect, Inspire, Serve and Learn

Current members: Annie Stunden (Connect), Stephanie Pawlowski (Inspire), Carol Washburn (Learn), Surya Mahadevan and Marley Rose Magee (Serve). A representative from Finance Committee also attends the monthly Council meetings.

The Council leaders have been reaching out to non-board committees to fulfill the Charter. It is abbreviated below.

Charter

Purpose

The Council of Communities:

- Is a liaison between the Minister and community committees, particularly facilitating communication;
- serves to facilitate formal and informal communication between community committees for church events, building use and financial resources;
- review the church calendar to minimize conflicts with programming and rentals;
- provide support and appreciation for volunteers;
- ensure committees are functioning well, need to be discontinued, or launch new ones;
- ensure committees have healthy leadership;
- keep staff informed of needs;
- educates committee chairs and volunteers on how to be reimbursed or provided finances to make a purchase on behalf of church events;

Roles & Responsibilities: Council Coordinators will

- Meet at least quarterly;
- Contact (in person, email or phone) each committee chair at a minimum of once a year;
- Send appreciation to committee leaders and members as appropriate;
- In the case of committee chair resignations, may help find new leadership;
- Work with Communications staff to ensure calendar is up to date;
- Promptly respond to questions from committee chairs and/or members, staff and board members.

The following reports are organized according to the new Council of Communities structure.

CONNECT COUNCIL

Hospitality Ministry Membership Team

Hospitality Ministry Membership Team Team Members: Amy De Chicchis, (co-chair), Joan Harvey (co-chair), Marjolijn Rietsema (temporarily inactive), Michael Saffron, with support from Rev. Kate Walker

Mission:

As part of the Connect Council, the Membership Team helps members and potential members connect with our church community and discover and pursue their own path to spiritual growth. The Membership Team supports the Welcome Table each Sunday, plans and attends the Introduction to UU and RUaUU? sessions throughout the year and participates in Membership Signing and Church Services where new members are welcomed. We have also followed up with the 100+ individuals who have visited and expressed interest in our church.

Our goal is to connect each visitor with a resource person or personal referral to a group of their interest, whether it be choir, adult or child RE, Young Adults, Women's Alliance and Womenspirit, Men's Gathering, Humanist Group, Social/ Environmental Justice, etc. Path to Membership series: • 'Introduction to UU' sessions are currently scheduled the fourth Sunday of each month following the church service. Any visitors can sign up ahead of time and attend our in-person sessions with our minister and 1–2 members of the Membership Team. • 'RU a UU?' orientation sessions have been held 3–4 times, now all in-person. Members of the various ministries of the church also attend these as well as a representative of the Stewardship Committee.

New Members: We welcomed the following 22 people as new church members during the past church year 2023-24 (continued to increase (by 4) compared with the number who joined in 2022-23!):

Alex Anderson	Neil Binstock	Dennis Thread
Diane Anderson	Kathryn Schmitz	Janet Pohl
Surya Mahadevan	Sara Sweeney	Louie Portella
Laura Campbell	Moiria Dunn	Laurie Lavine
Sarah Fields	Helena Elko	Maria Magone
Marley Magee	Kara Goodfellow	Clint Geller
Emily Sweeney	Lucille Jonason	Ben DiNardo
Andrew Papale	Paul Kropfl	
Karen Woodall	Brooke LaGrande	

We were happy to hold two in-person welcoming of new members at a church service, so our congregation had a chance to add their welcome and celebrate at coffee hour.

This Year's activities and new initiatives: 1) We have had a good number of Young Adult visitors this year and connected them with our YA coordinator. Those YAs have bonded well and formed an active and self-motivated group, which now meets together after church on Sundays! We are working with VIM to have one or more cottage meetings with them to discern their needs and priorities within the church. Several of our new Young Adults have taken on leadership roles in the church! 2) We have also worked with Erika to make sure the RE parents

are welcomed and are seeking similar feedback from them about their church experience. 3) Along with the addition of a significant group of Young Adults, several new church members have become active in Women's Alliance. 4) In addition, we have met with our Council of Communities coordinator and will continue to work with her, in particular to enhance our ability to connect visitors to specific activities (eg Sunday coffee hour, Covenant groups, Women's Alliance, choir, etc. 5) we have also discussed designating a special space during coffee hour where visitors could come to meet each other, be greeted by congregation members, and ask questions. We will be trying this out in 2024. 6) Finally, we plan to revise the Activity Trifold and the Web-site.

Volunteering with the Membership Team provides an opportunity to help others become more deeply connected to the church in a way that is meaningful to them. We welcome new members to join us! Many opportunities exist to contribute to the work of the Membership Team. Several tasks involve a small-time commitment but are very meaningful. Other tasks involve overseeing particular pieces of membership or joining the leadership team in monthly meetings. Volunteer opportunities include being at the Welcome Table on a Sunday morning; being at the visitor's corner at coffee hour; offering to take an interested visitor or new member to a ministry group you belong to or being a resource for a visitor interested in social justice, for example. If you feel that working with membership could be a good match for your interests and time, the Membership Team would gratefully welcome your participation in helping people to connect, be inspired, serve, and learn within our beloved community. – Joan Harvey, Amy de Chicchis (co-chairs)

Ushers and Greeters Team

Our Greeters and Ushers are very important because they are the first faces our members, friends and visitors see when attending our Sunday services. We have a dedicated crew of 17 friendly members who devote themselves to making everyone in our church feel as welcome and comfortable as possible. We cover all the entrances to greet people as they come in, and have people stationed in the Sanctuary distributing Orders of Service to all who enter. We take up the collection and count and deposit the money in the office. We also count and record the number of people in the Sanctuary for the service. This is a rewarding way of giving our time and energy to the church, and, as a bonus, making new friends. Anyone interested in joining us can talk to or email MR Kelsey (maryruthkelsey@gmail.com).

– MR Kelsey

Gathering of Men

The men's group at the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh is now in its 33rd year. Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., usually in the Priestly Room. After a couple of years of meeting by zoom, we have resumed meeting inperson in the Priestly room. We were able to schedule and conduct a limited number of field excursions during the summer this year.

At each meeting one attendee volunteers to lead a discussion. Volunteers also plan the program. Discussion topics are wide ranging and always very interesting. There is no pressure to be a discussion leader.

Occasionally men who are not church members or do not attend our church attend the men's group meetings. This is one way in which we reach out beyond our members.

Although not a “support group,” the men’s group is definitely supportive, which I believe is one of the reasons many men have attended regularly for years. Members also serve one meal a year at the East End Community Ministry homeless shelter.

The men’s group is exploring the possibility of alternating meetings this next church year with maybe half being on zoom to draw back in some men who “fell away” during the pandemic years when all meetings were on zoom. Details are not yet worked out.

Jim Reitz is the group’s contact person and coordinator, J5650R@Comcast.net.

– *Jim Reitz*

WomanSpirit

WomanSpirit is the evening women’s group at First Unitarian Church. Currently we have over 150 church members and friends on our email distribution list. We always welcome new members and friends of First Unitarian.

Our goal is to meet for a potluck dinner in a member’s home on the second Wednesday of every month. Dinner is often followed by a group discussion on a topic proposed by the host. In addition, we periodically engage as a group in a social service project and occasionally devote an evening to political action.

During the warmer months of 2023 we took advantage of a member’s spacious front porch and other outdoor venues, when available, to meet in person in small groups.

We have recently resumed meeting indoors in small groups when a member is kind enough to invite us into her home. As the warmer weather returns, we will resume meeting on porches and other outdoor venues when the weather cooperates.

A WomanSpirit dinner is an easy and entertaining way to meet other women of a range of ages and interests. If you have a porch, deck, back yard, or indoor space, please consider whether you would be willing to host a potluck for a group of 8-10 friendly women. We are judgment free and very appreciative of those who are willing to host us for an evening! Questions? Please reach out to Pat Schuetz (patschuetz@verizon.net).

- **Pat Schuetz**

Covenant Groups

The Covenant Groups of First Unitarian Church are alive, well and continuing to grow. As of the end of this church year there are:

- 104 members are active in 14 Covenant Groups, with 10 new requests, which will result in at least one more new covenant group.
- This equals approximately 42 % of our church members in a covenant group. A very healthy percentage.
- A measure of the degree to which covenant groups are valued by some members is represented by the fact that 11 members are in two CG’s and 4 are in three CG’s.

These covenant groups have a variety of schedules and procedures. These decisions are made and sometimes modified, by the individual groups.

- Some meet at our church, but more meet in the homes of their members on a rotating basis.
- Some meet twice a month, but most meet once a month.
- Most begin, or sometimes end, with a “Check-in.” This check-in provides a valuable function. It acquaints members of the group more deeply with the issues, joys, and concerns of their fellow members. It results in going beyond, well beyond, being acquainted - to Knowing each other.
- Most of each meeting is devoted to discussion of a pre-determined topic. Topics may be chosen from a book containing three years of potential topics, available to all groups, an on-line resource called – Soul Matters, or topics of interest to a particular member. Usually, group members take turns leading a discussion.
- Some groups have specific interest or membership qualifications, such as Spiritual seeking, an all-women’s group, a family group and a Christian perspective.
- Covenant Groups are a “covenantal relationship.” Each CG adopts a written agreement (covenant) for how to interact with each other, based on Unitarian Universalist principles. Covenant group members respect confidentiality, agree to listen without needing to judge or offer advice, speak from their hearts, and take what insights they gain into the world to live our faith.

The Covenant Group Team is currently reviewing other ways of making the covenant groups even more effective, more open, attractive and feasible to additional members.

The covenant groups are put together and monitored by the Covenant Group Team, which consists of: Alice Bright (Chair), Lynne Porterfield, MR Kelsey and Jim Reitz. Anyone interested in joining this team effort would be very welcome. Contact any present member.

Marketing & Communications Team

Committee members: Rob Schwartz, Michael Safran, Maria Lauro, Mark Whittaker, Dennis Thread, Kara Goodfellow.

Below are the key activities and accomplishments of the committee between April 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024:

- Clarified roles and responsibilities of committee members
- Updated the committee charter to reflect the fact that the committee transitioned from being a Board committee to a Program committee
- Upgraded our Mailchimp account from the free version to the Essentials version so that could have more monthly emails sends, more users, and ability to segment audiences for more targeted email messages
- Promoted Ingathering month with a series of Facebook posts, emails, and a flyer
- While Cicely was on family leave, Mark took assumed responsibility for website updates and Maria for the Email Newsletter
- Began work on an audit of our communications activities as compared to other churches
- Reorganized our YouTube channel to make it easier to find past recordings
- Added a link to the YouTube video of past services on the website
- In collaboration with Cicely, began sending a monthly calendar which has received very positive feedback

Key statistics April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024 (note that Google changed the way it pulls analytics so we can't compare with year ago results):

- Total user sessions (visits): 15,479
- Total new users: 9,548
- Average time on site: 3 minutes, 22 seconds
- Top 5 pages visited:
 - Home page
 - Calendar of events
 - Order of service
 - Upcoming worship services
 - New visitor
- Number of email subscribers: 646
- Total emails sent: 61,865
- Open rate: 53.6%
- Click rate: 2.25%

Women's Alliance

The Women's Alliance of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh was founded in 1891, funded by Bequests from Irene H. Haney and Mary Semple. Those and subsequent funds obtained by bequest are administered by the Bequests Committee of the Women's Alliance. Women's Alliance is a dues-paying organization, was granted 501(c)(3) status under the Internal Revenue Code and is thus entitled to the tax benefits available to charitable organizations, pursuant to the regulations of the Internal Revenue Service.

We currently have 65 members and 30 friends. The church's Membership Team does an excellent job sending new visitors in our direction. Attendance has increased to the point that we routinely hold the meeting in the Undercroft Gallery, rather than the Schweitzer Room, where we have met for years.

Mission Statement: The Mission of the Women's Alliance is to enable Unitarian Universalist women and those who share our values to join together for **mutual support, personal growth, and spiritual enrichment**. Through our combined strength and vision, we work toward a future where all women will be empowered to live their lives with a sense of wholeness and integrity in a world of peace that recognizes the worth and dignity of each individual.

Members of the Board:

Denice Galpern - Chair Linda Fleming - Treasurer Margaret Fuhrman – Secretary
Mary Schinhofen and Margaret Noether - Membership
Louise Jencik and Jane MacLeod - Programming
Annie Stunden and MR Kelsey – Hospitality
Becky Studer and Sue Oerkvitz - Social Responsibility
Sandy Wooley and Alice Carnes - Bequests
Chris Michaels - Poet in Residence

Our Meetings: The calendar runs from July 1 to June 30. Regular meetings (October into May) are on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays from 10:30 am until noon, at church and on Zoom. The first 1/2 hour is the business meeting; from 11-12 noon, we have a program or informal sharing on some topic. Some members stay for a brown-bag lunch from noon to 1 pm. Members take turns filling a hostessing role, in pairs, preparing drinks, and providing snacks and table decorations to make everyone feel more homey. We begin and end the year with a larger Luncheon at church, in September and May. Another is held in December. Summer Porch Parties have been held at members' homes to keep our connections going.

Multi-platform meetings: We started the year in the Schweitzer Room using the television as well as the sound equipment purchased the previous year. (Both with funding from Women's Alliance via bequest grant.) As attendance increased, we moved to the Undercroft Gallery, utilizing the projector also purchased with our funds. A new development has been the difficulty of hearing each other well enough downstairs - so we plan to purchase a PA system with multiple microphones. This has been a real learning curve, spearheaded by Alliance member Linda Fleming (as well as church members Stuart Hastings and Annie Stunden) and in response to our growing attendance. The technology is available for use by other church groups, as well.

Meeting Programs- 2023-2024

We began the programs on October 5, by sharing memories of our grandmothers. A number of women shared that their own memories were stimulated by hearing about the grandmothers of others. It was all very enjoyable.

On October 19, Erica Shadowsong, our Religious Education Director, spoke and showed pictures of her month long trip to Kenya in the summer. She had received a Fulbright grant for the trip, the purpose of which was to send educators to Africa to learn, and then teach, about Africa.

On November 2, Mary Duquin presented a program entitled "Books Unite Us-Censorship Divides Us". This was all about book banning.

Also in November, Alliance member Becky Studer spoke to us about UUJusticePA-who is it, how does it work? She created a very extensive slide show for this program, prompting the new involvement of a number of members with UUJusticePA. We also discussed UUtheVote.

We started back in January with a lively and well-attended discussion of Billy Porter's book "Unprotected: A Memoir," led by Alliance member Sue Oerkvitz.

In February our program was entitled "Our Congregation and Us-Getting to Know Both". We shared church activities that we participate in currently or in the past.

The second meeting in February was wholly "Check-In," allowing members to share what was happening in their lives or was on their minds.

In March Alliance member Pat Ulbrich presented a program entitled "In Sisterhood: The Women's Movement in Pittsburgh", an oral history and multimedia project that documents the history of the women's movement in the Pittsburgh region during the period from 1968-1988. It was enriched by her Undercroft exhibition.

Also in March, church member Gordon Hargreaves presented a program on Britain After Brexit. He detailed how Brexit came about, the complexities of withdrawing from the EU, and the consequences of leaving so far.

In April Janis Ramey presented a program entitled "Who Will Inherit Your Passwords?" She discussed why this is important and gave us suggestions for being smart on this front.

Later in April we had Jessica Neiss, a physical therapist and founder of To Life! Therapy and Wellness, a facility and program which bridges the gap between outpatient physical therapy and attending a gym. She spoke about how to strengthen ourselves and to beat frailty, challenge our balance, and about fall-preparedness and vertigo. *This program had our highest attendance by far - 42 members in person, and 5 to 8 women watching from home.*

Our final meeting, in May, was again, member sharing on the topic of "My Favorite Teacher," as well as a chance to offer suggestions for next year's programs.

Social Responsibility Donations - total this year of \$2900 (Including \$500 as individuals)

Each year we make donations from our dues (\$50/year) to organizations that support our mission of serving women and girls, and, it has developed, on environmental and racial justice.

Donations:

- \$100 to the Westmoreland County Food Bank in honor of Muriel Weeks, upon her moving from Pittsburgh, in the summer, 2023, decided by the Board.
- Because the church's Social Justice Endowment Fund was already spent, the church's 'Matilda Theiss Ad-hoc Committee', requested funding from Women's Alliance. The Alliance granted \$500 for gift cards to the Matilda Theiss Center in December. Additionally, \$500 was donated to this Center by members at the Holiday Lunch.
- \$300 to the Women's Law Project for their annual fundraiser, in March.

These come to \$1400.

Those donations were made prior to our usual Social Responsibility donation process in the spring. Members make suggestions, our Social Responsibility co-chairs present fuller information and allocation suggestions, and a vote follows. (Learning about unfamiliar groups is a bonus of this process.) We had approved an additional \$1500 beyond the \$1400 given above. This year the following organizations were selected:

1] Allegheny Reproductive Health Center- has been providing women's health services since 1975. ARHC's mission is to deliver fearless, judgment-free healthcare that is imbued with empathy and respect. \$250. gift approved

2] ARYSE - began in 2013 as a grassroots effort led by local refugee leaders and University of Pittsburgh undergraduate students who realized that the refugee youth they were tutoring were experiencing unique challenges in an educational system that was not designed for them. Their efforts centered literacy development, community building, and storytelling through the arts. It has expanded to its current multiprogram format that serves youth in grades 6-12 who reside in Allegheny County, representing over 15 different countries of origin and speak 30+ different languages. \$250. gift approved

3] Bartko Foundation - is a private non-profit organization whose mission is to invest in the self-sufficiency of single minority mothers. \$250. gift approved

4] Gwen's Girls - offers holistic, gender-specific programs, education, and experiences for Allegheny County's at-risk children and young adults. More importantly, they offer a safe space where girls and young women can form relationships, build self-esteem and gain resiliency. \$250. gift approved

5] Jeremiah's Place - is Pittsburgh's only 24-hour crisis nursery providing emergency childcare for families in need. Available for free, up to age 6. \$250. gift approved

6] Women for a Healthy Environment - WHE is a local non-profit environmental health organization that educates residents about public health risks, addresses toxins in the built environment, and works on building coalitions among community members to create change. \$250. gift approved

Bequest Committee Donations - total this year of \$3423

1] Flowers - \$250.

2] Music

- Kris Rust - \$500.

- Ellen Gozion - \$173. (previously granted funds still available, making total of \$500)

3] Campus ministry - \$1,000.

4] Stained glass repair - \$500.

5] Garden - \$750.

6] Maureen Porter - \$250. (toward the airfare for Maureen's trip to Transylvania, Romania. Maureen was selected to be a keynote speaker at the International Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women.)

An additional \$200 was provided to Rev. Kate to assist with her travels to Khasi Hills for the Annie Margaret Barr School Anniversary celebration.

This year, our total expenditures as donations was \$6,523.

Other Projects

— Alliance member Annie Stunden led our response to a Pillowcase Project for Children's Hospital, which seeks to collect enough handmade pillowcases to give one to each patient. Five to ten Alliance members have worked on this, initially at church, and then at Annie's and Julie's studio over the last year. We have surpassed our initial goal of 100, and are now aiming for 115. This project has been attractive to some new members, and has been a good way to nurture connections. An Undercroft Gallery Exhibit of the pillowcases is planned for July.

—Late winter brought the beginning of Women's Alliance Postcard Parties, meeting monthly to write to PA legislators following suggestions of UUJusticePA. This started with one planned gathering. The response was strong, and attracted a few members who do not regularly attend the monthly meetings. And, since the response was strong, Alliance member Cinda Beattie suggested that we continue- and we have. As UUJusticePA liaison, member Becky Studer supplies the information. Approximately a dozen people attend, many hundreds of postcards have been generated, and we recently wrote cards co-ordinated with the End Gun Violence: PA Advocacy Day, May, 2024.

—As in previous years, Alliance members (16) volunteered to provide a homemade Christmas Eve dinner to the approximately 30 residents and staff at POWER in Swissvale. (Pa Organization for Women in Recovery) This year a number of first-timers and new members were involved.

—Though the First UU Church Refugee Team is not new this year, and is now an effort supported by the whole church, here is a bit of history, highlighting the role of Women's Alliance in this work, past and present.

It was 15-20 years ago when a number of church members, led by Liz Perkins and Laura Wenneker, worked to welcome and support the Somali-Bantu families who were moving to Pittsburgh then. It was very much both a communal and individual effort, leaving many of the people involved with fond memories and a sense of pride.

In subsequent years, led and inspired by members Betsy Martin and Angelika Aziz at different times, the Women's Alliance worked in partnership with the Jewish Family and Community Services (JFCS), donating needed items for refugee families. Just prior to Covid, via the Women 'Alliance, we reconnected with JFCS. Coordinated by members Pat Schuetz and Betty Duquesnoy, we collected donations every 1-2 months and delivered them to a central storage area. When that storage area was no longer available, we came up with the idea of the "Welcome Home" program. We now are assigned a soon-to-arrive family and a list of all the items they will need. We collect and deliver the suggested items donated by Alliance and other church members, and prepare the homes as the families arrive in Pittsburgh.

Over the past 1 1/2 years, the Refugee Team, composed of Women's Alliance members, plus one Friend, has settled welcoming homes for five families, from Syria, Burundi, the Republic of the Congo and Venezuela.

Looking Ahead

Women's Alliance will continue to be a warm and friendly group in which visitors and new members can settle comfortably. We have noticed that interesting program topics and speakers result in higher attendance, and already have a number of substantive ideas for next year's programs. We will attempt to attract younger, working women, and may consider some varying events to this end. We anticipate continuing to be an incubator for new efforts inspired by our shared values and interests, such as the refugee support work, pillowcases for Children's Hospital and the UUJusticePA directed postcards. Our 'combined strength and vision' is strong.

Respectfully submitted,

Denice Galpern, Chair

INSPIRE COUNCIL

Worship Team

Members: Stephanie Pawlowski, Commissioned Lay Minister (chair), Alice Carnes, Ward Kelsey and Robert Piemme

The Worship Team works with the minister to support Sunday worship services. We meet on the first Wednesday of the month to discuss ideas for future services. We work as a team to invite guests to the pulpit and assist guests with planning and presenting the remainder of the service. After consistent and reliable service, Brian Bandli left our team and moved on to other things. It was a pleasure to have Robert Piemme join us right around the same time.

This year we continued growing our list of volunteer liturgists to assist on Sundays who are not members of the Worship Team. This has allowed us to have greater numbers of voices in the pulpit without burdening volunteers with the commitment to monthly meetings and planning duties. We plan to continue to utilize volunteer liturgists and grow the number of volunteers. We are looking grow in both liturgist and Worship Team volunteers. Anyone with public speaking experience and/or a strong and clear speaking voice is welcome to reach out to the team.

Some changes were made to worship services this year with the support of the Worship Team, including speakers introducing themselves by describing their physical characteristics and clothing to assist people attending with visual differences; alternating reading our principles with reading a grounding statement; and adding a second Joys and Concerns table in the back half of the sanctuary. Since the second Joys and Sorrows table was added there has been a noticeable increase in usage of the tables.

Commissioned Lay Minister

I am First Unitarian Church's commissioned lay minister (CLM). CLMs undergo an intensive 2-4 year program run through the Central East Region of the UUA. It is a program that strengthens lay leadership so that individuals can serve their congregations in deeper ways. It is a volunteer position. My focus is on worship.

This past year I presented two sermons. On July 23rd, I presented a sermon entitled Finding Happiness Where You are and on February 18th, I presented a sermon entitled Love's the Thing. I assisted in presenting an informal Christmas Day service including stories, readings

and music. I also presented a sermon for Rev. Kate when she was out unexpectedly due to a family crisis.

I continued as chair of the worship committee and worked closely with Ellen Gozian to organize summer services when Rev. Kate was off. Managing summer services is the most demanding part of the work that I do. Even if I am not slated as the liturgist, historically, I would assist guests with planning services and creating the Orders of Services---or make final decisions and approval. The summer of 2023 was exceptionally challenging with two guest speakers backing out at the last minute. This year, I have worked to create a plan where I am not the only person planning services and am utilizing other Worship Team members to take specific summer dates in their entirety.

I continued to meet monthly with Rev. Kate and regularly with a group of other CLMs from Ohio. I volunteered with GA answering questions at the door for attendees. It was a slow wedding year, but I did officiate one wedding and continue to be the contact person at First Church for non-member weddings. Ginger Hill congregation asked me to lead a service at their church, where I presented my sermon entitled Amazing Grace, previously presented here at First Church. It was exciting in this instance to present a recycled sermon. Because Ginger Hill is such a small congregation, they do not have the copyright concerns about showing artists YouTube videos. We were able to stream several versions of Amazing Grace by drastically different and diverse artists.

I had hoped last year to explore the format of a Taizé Service and lead one at First Church. Time and other commitments did not allow that but I hope this upcoming year will allow me to explore this alternative service. Just recently, a member inquired about a healing service that I led several years ago and whether I would do another. I would like to explore this further.

It continues to be a joy and an honor to serve this congregation

Stephanie Pawlowski

Affiliated Community Minister

This was my third year of community ministry at First Church. I serve full-time as a clinical staff chaplain at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System in Oakland, where I am the main chaplain covering the ICU's and medical units. My specialization is in mental health and addictions, but I provide spiritual care to veterans coping with all sorts of medical conditions, including supporting end-of-life care. Up until the end of December, I served on the VA Pittsburgh Caregiver Support Steering Team, and then beginning in January I started participating in the VAPHS Whole Health Subcommittee, which has to do with promoting integrative health and wellness. Besides these things, I mentor Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) interns and residents. As a UU minister, I am proud to serve a vulnerable population with my liberal interfaith approach and seek to bring our UU values and principles into daily practice in my clinical work by honoring diversity and working for greater health equity.

After a lot of hard work, I received my certificate for the Mental Health Integration for Chaplain Services (MHICS) program through Vanderbilt University Divinity School in early December. The intensive program was created primarily for VA and Department of Defense chaplains to teach them how to incorporate skills and principles from three different evidence-based practices into their spiritual care and to help them collaborate more effectively with mental health providers.

Unfortunately, I was so busy working towards my MHICS certificate that I had little free time left over to be involved much at First Church this year. I continued to support the excellent work of the Environmental Justice (EJ) Team, but mostly in the form of providing moral support. My main contribution was assisting the EJ team by facilitating the worship service on October 8, 2023, in which we hosted two speakers—Tom Bailey and Qiyam Ansari—from Valley Clean Air Now (VCAN), a frontline-community organization based in Clairton with which our group at First Church has formed a strong partnership.

Right around the time I was finishing my MHICS certificate, I also experienced stressful staff changes in my workplace. As a result, I decided to prioritize self-care even more, particularly trying to keep a good work/life balance. In February, I attended a weekend women's grief retreat in nature. And in March, I went on a week-long yoga retreat in the beautiful, highly biodiverse Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica. Both retreats were restful and healing. Also, about six months ago I started strength training and discovered that I really enjoy the mental and physical challenge!

Finally, I was honored to be invited by Rev. Kate to be the guest presenter at the Ohio Meadville District UU Ministers Association spring retreat that was held at the end of April at the Methodist Theological Seminary of Ohio. I led a small group of ministerial colleagues through eco-Buddhist teacher Joanna Macy's Work That Reconnects workshop in order to help them process some of the eco-grief and anxiety they are carrying and to remind them of their own spiritual resources for coping in these uncertain times.

I am grateful to be your Affiliated Community Minister and look forward to our continuing to learn from each other and to my supporting your Environmental Justice ministry as much as possible.

In faith and with active hope,
Rev. Stephanie Gannon

Director of Instrumental Music

A main element and pleasure of my work as a music director at First Unitarian is inviting members and friends of all ages and abilities to join in music making during Sunday services. Bringing in many voices to collaborate on worship services both enriches the music and builds community. Below are included some high points, and a list (likely not exhaustive) of the members, friends and paid professionals who have shared their musical gifts over the past year.

Some Highlights:

- I presented Appalachian music, along with Erica Shadowsong and Mary Pratt from Sunnyhill, as part of the June 2023 GA Opening Wednesday Night Service
- Singer-songwriter Brad Yoder joined us for an inspiring lay-led service of music and poetry
- I supported Kris Rust in a World Music concert at First Unitarian, that he organized with headliner Mathew Tembo, and which helped raise money for music scholarships for students in Zambia
- The Hymn Band played for several services, accompanying the congregational singing as well as performing repertoire, including classic pop-rock tunes such as *Changes* by David Bowie
- Our current in-house old-time string band played for two services, featuring Sarah Benson on fiddle, with friends Alice Backer and Dave Glasser
- Oscar Atkinson accompanied hymns and played solo oboe and bassoon pieces for two services, including Easter Sunday
- *Les Aubergines* folk ensemble performed during Sunday worship: Martin Schmidt, Mary Denison, David McGlaughlin and David's wife Deb Byrum, and David Stone, piano
- Dr. James Johnson led two worship services (Fall 2023 and early 2024)
- Unity Brass Quintet performed during a Sunday morning service as well as a concert open to the public (Fall 2023)

- Cellists Nicole Myers and Simon Cummings from Cello Fury joined a Sunday service to perform music appropriate for Hannukah
- I supported Erica Shadowsong in a Kwanzaa service along with guest vocalist Michele Bankole
- Member Maddy Izzo several times prepared intricate and often challenging flute repertoire for Sunday worship services

The First Unitarian music program has continued to support the **Pittsburgh Community Gamelan**, offering them rehearsal space in the Harper Room where they can also keep their instruments. They had a small setback: founder and director Jay Arms has had to health issues this year, so for a while the group didn't meet, or met only for an hour without Jay. They briefly resumed regular rehearsals before taking their summer hiatus. They hope to return in August and as soon as possible participate in a Sunday service.

The Community Gamelan is open to anyone who has interest in attending – members or friends of First Unitarian, or friends of friends. All are welcome!

Musicians of the **hymn band** and **old-time string band** have included member Sarah Benson and friend Alice Backer (fiddles); Brian Junker (banjo, guitar, vocals); Danny Rectenwald (guitar, mandolin); Heather Cunningham (guitar, lead and backup vocals, harmonica); friend Dave Glasser (guitar); Paul Cunningham (upright bass, keys/synthesizer, electric bass, drums and backup vocals); Corey Layman (guitar, lead vocals, drums); Mike Shanley (electric bass) and new young adult regular Liam Lyons. Both Brian and Danny on various occasions have performed their own compositions, along with Kate Snow (voice and guitar). Other musicians from the congregation have included Maddy Izzo, Ebe Emmons (flutes), and Mary Denison (recorder and clarinet), Oscar Atkinson (oboe, bassoon) and Al Schwartz (piano).

I have also collaborated with the Dance Choir for several services, either with solo piano, voice and piano or with hymn leaders.

Our substitute accompanists (covering for my Sundays off) have included Nathália Kato-Giordano, Mark Micchelli, and Sun Chang. Other guest instrumentalists have included Denzel Chismar-Oliver (electric bass), Alex Perez (jazz trumpet), Michele Bankole (voice), and a wind and string ensemble for Christmas Eve: Sarah Steranka (flute), Roger Zahab (violin), Jorge Naranja (violin), Alex Perez (trumpet), and Efraín Vidal Cerda (bassoon). Vietnamese pop musician and activist Mai Khôi joined her partner and guest accompanist Mark Micchelli during my three-week hiatus in November. Our friend Hugo Cruz, percussionist extraordinaire, has been hired for many services, and I feel very lucky that he has been available to join us so regularly.

A classical concert by **Ensemble Vitelotte** (Kiyoe Matsuura, violin, and Sun Chang, keyboards) is scheduled for Saturday night May 25th. Supported by the music program, this concert will feature music by women composers. <https://ensemblevitelotte.com>

A collaboration with longtime friend and guest musician **Brad Yoder** is in the works, with the support of the Music & Arts Committee. Brad will be performing during Sunday morning services prior to his late summer 2024 concert and CD release.

I generally attend about three staff meetings (full staff and programming staff) each month; I collaborate on service planning with Kate, Erica, Kris, and others (Khasi Hills Team, Dance Choir, etc.). I was recently invited to compile a list of BIPOC musicians and composers that have been featured in our services since Rev. Kate's arrival, which information is being used to assess our congregation's progress in de-centering whiteness in our worship services. I continue to accompany services primarily at the piano, while occasionally using the pipe organ and performing traditional American music with clawhammer banjo and harmonium.

I have recently enjoyed collaborating with Lee Saville-Iksik who has taken on vocal music and choir directorship duties while Kris Rust (Director of Vocal Music) is taking an extended family leave.

A huge note of thanks from me to the technicians who have consistently and tirelessly worked to provide Sunday morning sound and streaming: Andrew Papale, Emily Sweeney and Will Snavelly. Thanks also to new members of the tech crew, Aspen Buchanan, and Liam Lyons.

I am grateful to the community of First Unitarian for its support. I am eager to continue finding new ways of bringing musicians into the program, to enrich the music and build relationships in this Beloved Community.

Respectfully submitted by
Ellen Gozion
Director of Instrumental Music

Vocal Music Program

Director of Vocal Music, Kris Rust, upholds a strong commitment to de-centering whiteness and in featuring underrepresented communities in the vocal music activities of First Unitarian Church. To this end, in addition to his hiring practices, he also works with volunteer BIPOC singers when collaborating with Coro Latinamericano, the Lemington Gospel Chorale, or other black choirs, and who frequently come to Community Singers rehearsals.

Kris took a lead role in supporting a world music concert featuring Mathew Tembo in September 2023, as well as in organizing and leading larger or multi-generational Sunday worship services including InGathering, Christmas Eve and the Vernal Equinox. In addition, when Ellen Gozion is away, Kris takes an active role in inviting instrumentalists from the congregation to supplement hymns as well as the choir.

Kris invests a great deal of energy, creativity and resources as the co-founder and producer of the city-wide, multi-racial, multi-denominational choral event, *Let Freedom Sing*, which takes place each January in celebration of Rev Martin Luther King, Jr. First Unitarian supports the event with its sponsorship, including rehearsal space and staff time; First UU Community Singers participate in rehearsals and in the performances. First Unitarian has made many friends and musical colleagues through this association; these relationships continue to enrich the community.

The Community Singers perform at services approximately once a month from September through June, as well as at outreach events including Pride Parade, regional UU gatherings, and in collaboration with Pittsburgh gospel choirs.

Kris has a regular roster of guest singers that support the community choir for Sunday mornings, serve as guests soloists for services and a variety of outreach events and collaborations. These singers and performers include: Zuly Inirio, Michele Bankole, Chantal Braziel, Kiara Lee, Candace, Peyton Blake, Morgan Hawkins, Anita Levels, Solomon Onyukwu, Emmanuel Berrido, Deryck Tines, Lourdes Santiesteban, Miguel Sague Jr, Miguel "Cha" Sague III.

The Community Singers perform music by an estimated 40-50 composers over the course of a year, including hymns where the Community Singers are prominently featured. Many of these works are composed are persons of color. The choir sings a substantial number of pieces by Black composers, some folks songs & spirituals where the individual composer is unknown, and we have also a number of pieces by Latin American Composers, thanks in part to the influence and collaboration with Coro Latinamericano.

Kris took family leave in late March 2024. Lee Saville-Iksic was hired for the interim for program staff administrative work, service planning and directing the Community Singers, along with guest director, Rev. Deryck Tines. Kris is expected to return to full-time Vocal Directorship at the end of Summer. This summary is submitted by Ellen Gozion in lieu of a formal Director of Vocal Music Report from Kris Rust and is drawn from an earlier report by Kris.

SongSpace

SongSpace at First Unitarian is a celebration of folk, Americana, singer-songwriter, old-time, acoustic blues, and world music, featuring local, regional and (inter-)national artists. We are dedicated to establishing a welcoming and meaningful space both for making and listening to quality music. Our shows are open to the public. A public-facing website for the series is here: <http://uusongspace.com/>.

The current SongSpace steering committee consists of Brian Junker (chair), Gary Crouth, Irma Tani, and rotating technical volunteers Andrew Papale, Aspen James, Will Snively and Paul Cunningham. We invite anyone who is interested to inquire about joining the steering committee.

Other volunteers for the series include Rob & Al Schwartz, Sue Oerkvitz, Kate Snow, Ebe Emmons, MR Kelsey, Bill Collinge, other church members, and friends of Irma Tani such as Jean Siegel.

During the period June 2023 – May 2024 the following concerts took place or were scheduled, representing a good deal of musical, gender, racial and age diversity:

- Saturday September 30: **Rachael Kilgour** (Minnesota-based folk singer and artist)
- Saturday November 4: **Christopher Mark Jones** (Pittsburgh-based singer-songwriter) with special guest **Alex Meleshenko** (Pittsburgh-based fingerstyle guitarist and luthier)
- Saturday January 27: **Bertha and the Belles** (Pittsburgh-based upbeat folk/old-time/tin-pan-alley quartet) with special guest **Gray Buchanan** (Morgantown-based traditional fiddler and singer-songwriter)
- Saturday March 23: Songwriters' Showcase with **Liz McBride, Lenni Green, Ol' Whitetail and Louie Castle** (four young and exciting Pittsburgh singer-songwriters)
- Saturday May 4 (scheduled): **Peter Mulvey** (Wisconsin and Boston based, internationally known performer)

Generally speaking, SongSpace books strong but not well-known performers who can afford to come to Pittsburgh for relatively small guarantees (typically \$600-\$1000). We book five shows a year, so that each show is special and so that we do not over-tax volunteers. While we do not tend to book Unitarian-centric or, more broadly, religious-centric performers, we do look for artists for whom aspects of social justice and/or our values and principles (<https://www.first-unitarian-pgh.org/about-us/our-beliefs/uu-principles-and-sources/>) are explicitly or implicitly evident in their identity.

SongSpace has developed a strong reputation among a core following of attendees (a mixture of church members and members of the general public). Particular performers also draw members of their own following to the church, increasing the church's exposure among the general public. We are lucky to be able to present most of our artists for interviews on Whiskey Before Breakfast (airing 11am-2pm Wednesdays on WRCT 88.3FM) and on the Saturday Light Brigade (airing 6am-Noon Saturdays on WRCT 88.3FM). We do not have the capital or the expertise for extensive advertising of shows, and so our attendance remains moderate (40-90 at most shows). It remains a challenge to maintain and grow our audiences for the future.

We are on more stable financial footing this year, thanks to a charitable contribution from the Whiskey Before Breakfast radio show, as well as better than average attendance at some of our shows.

We are currently booking for the 2024-2025 church year.

Brian Junker, April 2, 2024

Dance Choir

- June Some members collaborated with Jett Downey and band Earthtique in a Summer Solstice event at the First United Methodist Church on June 21, 2023.
- October Prepared service themes and elements for Winter Solstice Service as a team and began choreographing and rehearsing
- November Choreographed and rehearsed for Winter Solstice Service;
Collaborated with musician, Jett Downey, who created original arrangements and compositions;
Submitted and received a Music Endowment grant for Jett's compensation
- December Final rehearsals with Jett for Winter Solstice Service;
Coordinated with First U ministerial staff (Erica Shadowsong, and liturgist Alice Carnes), tech team, and office for service element readings, the creation of lighting/staging for live streaming, and printed Order of Service;
Led and performed in the Winter Solstice Service on December 21, 2023
Some members of Dance Choir collaborated and performed with Jett Downey and band Earthtique and a movement corps including members of a local dance group, Interplay, in a Winter Solstice event at the First United Methodist Church on December 16, 2023.
- March Some members collaborated and performed with Jett Downey and Earthtique in Spring Equinox event at First United Methodist Church on March 16, 2024
"Field trip" to see performance of Sacred Earth by the Ragamala Dance Co. at the Byham Theatre on March 21, 2024
- April Rehearsed and performed reprise last year's original Choreography for Earth Day Service, April 20, 2024
- Upcoming
- May-June Choreograph, rehearse, and perform for Flower Communion Service on June 2
- June Some members may collaborate and perform with Jett Downey and Earthtique for a Summer Solstice event
Hope to gather for Sacred Circle Dancing
- October- Winter Solstice 2024 prepare, lead service and perform
December

** Dance Choir is open to sharing movement for services upon request when possible and to collaborating with other groups in the church.

** We welcome new members at any time. No dance experience needed, just a desire to dance! There are opportunities at different levels of movement capability.

Current members: Tory Butterworth, Alice Carnes, Doris Hobbs, Linda Fleming, Jennifer Halperin, Karen Litzinger, Mary Pat Mengato, Julia Rippel, Cathy Rohrer, Sarah Sheard

First Unitarian Art Committee

The Art Committee organizes art shows for display in the Undercroft Gallery each month. The exhibits go beyond displaying art for sale, but also promote Member/Friend art and involve the congregation in our activities. We also promote social causes locally as well as internationally. Last Fall we had a show of art by children and youth of Bombay sponsored by Assema, a historical perspective on Women's Rights struggle and the Church's connection to it by Pat Ulbricht and currently an exhibit of illumination painting by an Iranian female artist that we interviewed by FaceTime from Iran last Sunday.

Art Team members include: Ali Masalehdan (Chair), Linda Kaufmann, Mary Weidner, Kirsti Adkins, Mary Schinhofen, Charlotte Toal, Joe Jencik, Annie Stunden, Madeline Izzo and Madeline Darnell.

We are excited about our work and also future prospects.

Undercroft Gallery Shows, 2023-2024

Month	Artist	Artist Contact Information	Medium	Coordinator	Coordinator Contact Information
Sept	First UU Members		Mixed	Linda Kauffman	LK01@andrew.cmu.edu
Oct	ASEEMA Indian Art	rbedeian@aol.com 412-979-5410	Paintings watercolor	Ali Masalehdan	al_asggar@yahoo.com
Nov.	ASEEMA Indian Art	rbedeian@aol.com 412-979-5410	Paintings watercolors	Ali Masalehdan	Al_asgar@yahoo.com
Dec	Quilts	Annie Stunden Al Schwartz/ Barb Gengler	Quilts	Annie Stunden	annie.stunden@gmail.com
Jan-Feb	Petra Fallaux, Paul Rosenblatt		Mixed	Annie Stunden	annie.stunden@gmail.com
Mar.	Patricia Ulbricht		ERA & UU history	Ali Masalehdan	annie.stunden@gmail.com
Apr.	Rahil Sahraee	Ali Masalehdan	Tazhib gouache	Ali Masalehdan	ali@masimex.com al_asgar@yahoo.com 412-805-5397
May	Rahil Sahraee	Ali Masalehdan	Tazhib gouach	Ali Masalehdan	ali@masimex.com al_asgar@yahoo.com 412-805-5397
June	Miguel Hovos	always hoyos@yahoo.com	Acrylic painting	Madeline Darnell	madeline.darnell@gmail.com

SERVE COUNCIL

Addictions and Recovery Ministry

Purpose: The Addictions and Recovery Ministry serves the needs of those in the congregation who have been touched by addiction. We understand “addiction” in its broadest sense to include both substance abuse and behavioral addictions. Addiction can be defined as a state of compulsion, obsession, or preoccupation that enslaves one’s will and desire.

This Ministry at First Unitarian Church has been serving the congregation for more than thirty years. It is not a twelve-step program but an opportunity for those impacted by addiction to share their experiences.

Group History:

The Ministry held meetings on the fourth Sunday of the month after church services from September to May of each year. A brochure was produced for placement in the pamphlet racks in the pews. The group has led two Sunday services on Addiction. Prior to Covid, attendance had dwindled to a core group of 4-6 people. During Covid, meetings were suspended. In October of 2023, meetings were resumed. The first meeting attracted about 12 people but since then, there have been only a few regulars attending the meeting. Jim Pashek has his name and contact information on the brochures and the church website. He gets 1-2 calls/emails a year from those asking questions about addiction. In a conversation with Reverend Kate Walker recently, she indicated a support for the Addictions and Recovery Ministry at First Unitarian Church.

Group Status:

Few people have attended the fourth Sunday meeting in the past few months. We discussed at the April 28, 2024, meeting various strategies moving forward.

1. Having some kind of support system for congregation members regarding addiction remains of value.
2. Meeting the fourth Sunday of each month during the church year after the service has not worked.
3. We would like to explore fewer meetings per year, trying alternative times and days, being part of a service (but not in the summer) and getting help with digital ways of communicating. We think that a more visible “stamp of approval” from Reverend Kate to the congregation would be beneficial, or
4. There may not be a need for this type of support group in the church given all the twelve step programs throughout the community.

Our current plan is to have a meeting/picnic this summer at Annie Stunden’s house to further discuss options for continuing the Addictions and Recovery Ministry at First Unitarian Church.

Submitted by Jim Pashek on April 30, 2024

Alternative Gift Market

First UU continued our beautiful tradition of hosting an Annual Alternative Gift Market on December 3 & 10, 2023. The concept is to give First UU members and friends the opportunity to give friends, loved ones, and themselves, an “alternative holiday gift” of conscience focusing on the needs of others, near and far.

Again, we partnered with Alternative Gifts International and offered displays focusing on 12 of their key domestic and international charities (which are fully vetted by AGI for their reliability and their capacity and promise to deliver our financial support in the ways promoted). We are deeply grateful for First UU's members' generosity of support for this market. We are thrilled that together we raised and sent \$ 5,980 to AGI for their disbursement.

In addition, our First UU's Annual Alternative Gift Market included three table displays and collections for "beloved/local causes": Reading Ready Pittsburgh (raising \$ 210); Khasi Hills (raising \$490) and Valley Clean Air Now's Replacement Home Filter Fund (raising \$325).

Altogether, for AGI & our three beloved/local funds, First UU raised \$ 7,005!

The AGI organization encourages gifts of conscience all year long. Their web address is: <https://alternativegifts.org> Their theme, "Gifts Inspiring Change" are unique and life-giving focused on: Hunger Relief, Quality Education, Environmental Support , Women's Empowerment, and Health and Well-Being.

These are gifts that are sustainable and build stability for people and their communities to help end their suffering. These alternative gifts multiply and grow, sometimes exponentially, and offer hope and new life to people and communities facing grave crisis and need. These gifts challenge the trivia of our modern culture of consumerism. These are authentic gifts that will change lives. They are always the perfect gift for any occasion. AGI was organized as a 501(c)3 nonprofit, tax exempt corporation. All donations are tax-deductible

Our first UU Alternative Holiday Gift Market team is co-chaired by Karen Burns Rutigliano and Margaret Noether. Our team also includes Nancy Latimer and Tony Rutigliano. We would welcome more volunteers to enjoy this annual project and help us to host, expand and promote this market in new ways. Join us!

Respectfully submitted: Karen Burns Rutigliano and Margaret Noether

Khasi Hills Partnership

Members: Karen Litzinger (chairperson), Moira Dunn, LeeAnne Haworth, Lois Hurt, Mary Pat Mengato, Eleanor Mayfield, Maureen Porter, Shelley Ross, Anne Van Cott, Carol Washburn

Highlights:

- UUA Faithify Rain Water Harvest Campaign – Our church accepted the request of our Khasi Hills Partners to lead this campaign so that students could have water all year round. We also collaborated with First Unitarian Church of Dallas that sponsors the Children's Village whose students attend the school and UUMAN (North Metro Atlanta) who sponsors the church that oversees our school. With multiple meetings and marketing efforts, the campaign modestly exceeded its goal of \$19,500.
- Rev. Kate Visit and Community Gift – We were pleased that Rev. Kate Walker could accept the invitation of our Khasi Hills partners to represent our church at the October Closing Ceremony honoring the 50th Death Anniversary of Rev. Annie Margaret Barr, the founder of the school we sponsor. Mary Weidner and Erica Shadowsong coordinated a community wall hanging gift that many congregation members participated in creating. Rev. Kate's trip was made possible in part through a major contribution from an anonymous donor. Unfortunately, Eleanor Mayfield was unable to attend due to a visa issue that occurred partly since there is no longer coordinated travel guidance from the UUA as in the past.
- School and Teacher Sponsorship – We have been sponsoring the school since 2003 in many forms. Since we helped expand the school in 2015-2016 to become a Higher Secondary School with grades 11 and 12, we have been funding the two teachers' salaries that were required for the expansion. As of the end of April we have raised \$8254 of the

\$9,600 goal of sponsoring the two teachers which we had done the last five years. Last year was the first year in a few that we raised the additional 10% fee (\$960) which is what the Unitarian Union of North East India (UUNEI, equivalent of UUA) reserves from contributions for repairs of churches throughout the Khasi Hills. In the last couple months of the church year, we hope to raise \$2306 to fully fund the teachers' salaries.

- New Classroom from Dallas – As a result of our Social Justice Endowment funding Rev. Nangroi Suting's visit to our church and the UUA General Assembly, he was able to visit other partners including First Unitarian Church of Dallas. During the Sunday service they raised \$15,000 which is funding the building of a new classroom, as part of the school expansion and capital campaign.
- School Recognition and Step Toward Accreditation - In March the school received official "permission status" to become affiliated with the State Education Department which is the next step toward accreditation. When we began this journey with them to expand the school to grades 11 and 12 (Higher Secondary), the hope was that accreditation could happen in 3-4 years and the government could start funding the 11 and 12 grade teachers as they mostly have for the earlier accredited Secondary School. However new government policies and the pandemic interfered. The next steps are quite significant, so we will likely be funding the two teachers for a while.
- September Anniversary Day Events– This was the fourth year of acknowledging Khasi Hills Anniversary Day, their most important holiday, which celebrates the founding of Unitarianism in the Khasi Hills. Our September 17 church service included a Time for All Ages message. In addition, we participated in a live video celebration of both countries partners, an event initiated by our church last year.
- New Donor Newsletter Outreach – Prompted from a donor comment of liking school news, we created a new September newsletter with sponsorship form which raised a successful \$3215 from 21 donors.
- Alternative Gift Market – We were one of the causes this year which brought in \$490.
- February Share the Plate Month – This raised \$1433, a few hundred dollars more than last year
- Khasi Hills Partnership Sunday and Social Hour Luncheon – The April 28 service featured the stories and photos of students and graduates of our school follow by cuisine of North East and Main Land India.

Coming year: We expect to continue most annual events plus some efforts to set guidelines for expectations regarding funding for church representatives wanting to travel to India.

Share the Plate

We are so happy to report back to you that our congregation has robustly embraced First UU's expanded concept of "Share the Plate – our program by which our Sunday collections are shared 50/50 between designated monthly charities and First UU's operating budget, unless otherwise designated. (Note: STP does not affect payments made in fulfillment of our annual pledges.)

We have now completed two full years of sharing our bounty monthly with 12 designated charities. You have responded now to two rounds of nominations of charities and two rounds for voting among the new nominees. There are several key charities First UU had a legacy of supporting denominationally and congregationally – and we have kept them. These charities are the UUA denomination's UU Service Committee (UUSC), UU Justice PA, The East End Cooperative Ministry (EECM), Khasi Hills, the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN), and Marion's Purse.

In 2023-2024, these are the AMOUNTS DISTRIBUTED to our annually nominated and longer term charity relationships via our monthly Share the Plate collections since our last Annual Report.

- Reading Ready Pittsburgh - \$ 2,240.03
- CeaseFire PA- \$ 1,398.24
- Tree Pittsburgh - \$1,147.57
- Marion's Purse - \$ 1,300.09
- TransYounited - \$1,024.49
- Planned Parenthood of Western Pennsylvania \$ 747.39
- Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN) - \$1,245.52
- Valley Clean Air Fund (fiscal sponsor: Clean Water Fund) - \$ 2,541.20
- UUA – UU Service Committee (UUSC) - \$1,512.93
- East End Cooperative Ministry - \$ 1,525.93
- UUJusticePA - \$1,233.53
- African American Music Institute - \$ \$1,233.53
- Khasi Hills - \$ 1,433.36

This represents a total of \$18,583.81 !!!

This is an amazing gift of collective First UU member generosity. Thank you so very much for giving so much, every month, from your heart. We all have a monthly chance to get to know the charities we support in a much richer way through our special guest speakers from the charities or by STP team members representing them. The STP Committee appreciates your wholehearted adoption of this Share the Plate concept. Both First UU and the charities benefit from this program of kindness!

Come join our team, it's very gratifying to interface with the charities and their representatives! A special thanks to Kyle Gracey, Robert Baron, and Cicely Moultrie for their supportive work, and to our liturgists who introduce our guests. Reverend Kate has been so energetically facilitative of our adoption of this STP concept we are deeply grateful to her!

Respectfully submitted, Mary Denison, Ebe Emmons, Karen Burns Rutigliano and Kirsti Adkins

Minister's Discretionary Fund

The Minister's Discretionary Fund, also known as Marion's Purse, is used to help congregants and friends of the church who are experiencing temporary financial need, such as a utility bill or rent. The Minister maintains an overview of needs in the congregation in order to make an equitable distribution of funds.

The fund was formed with a significant gift from the Women's Alliance to honor the participation and financial contribution of longtime member Marion Schnurer. The fund continues to be supported by individual congregants and by periodic allocations from the Women's Alliance.

Donations may be made to the fund

- By writing a check to the church with "Marion's Purse" or "Minister's Discretionary Fund" in the memo line;
- On the church website at <https://www.first-unitarian-pgh.org/make-a-donation.html>; select "Marion's Purse/Minister's Discretionary Fund" from the dropdown list; or
- By texting "give" to 412-435-1050 with the designation "carefund."

As of March 29, 2024 the fund has a balance of \$3872.67.

East End Cooperative Ministry Shelter Meal

<https://www.first-unitarian-pgh.org/east-end-cooperative-ministry.html>

The First Unitarian Church's East End Cooperative Ministry Shelter Dinner Team provides a dinner for approximately 70 residents of the on the East End Cooperative Ministry Shelter on the first Sunday of every month.

Each month, a dinner coordinator is responsible for planning the menu and assigning the preparation of the different dishes with the various volunteers. Normally, about 5 or 6 volunteers help with each dinner.

Church groups are becoming more involved in preparing the monthly meals. The Board of Trustees, the Men's Group and several covenant groups sponsored a meal this past year. In addition, Tony Rutigliano, Karen Burns, Stephanie Sullivan and Danielle Staresinic provided assistance on multiple Sundays.

Church members have begun to serve the meals again, now that Covid restrictions have been lifted.

Church members are encouraged to join and help prepare and serve meals. Donations to provide reimbursement to church members who purchase the food are greatly appreciated.

The East End Cooperative Ministry is dedicated to helping vulnerable adults and at-risk children and youth throughout Pittsburgh. As an interfaith ministry, EECM seeks to make a difference in the lives of the individuals and families it serves by tending to their needs for today as well as their hopes for tomorrow.

Medical Equipment Loan Program

The Medical Equipment Loan Program has been in existence for 8 years and has helped a great many of our church members, friends, and family members.

Currently we have the following equipment available: 6 Walkers, 2 Rollators (Walkers with Seats), 6 Wheelchairs, 3 Canes, 6 sets of Crutches, 1 iWalk Knee Crutch, 2 Knee Scooters, 2 Potty Chairs with Rails, 4 Raised Toilet Seats, 2 Shower/Bath Chairs, 1 Shower Transfer Chair, and additional items (such as leg boots, air casts, knee ice compressors/chillers, sock aides, etc.) are added from time to time.

When someone is in need of a medical assistance item, they can contact Ioulia Kornberg (ioulia.k@verizon.net). They will be provided the name(s), telephone number(s) and email address(s) of the person or persons who have such items to loan. It is up to the person making the request to arrange to pick up the item(s) at the owner's home. The persons receiving the loaned item(s) are asked to report when they have returned the items to the owner, so the list can be kept current.

Several basic items are kept at church (a wheelchair, walker, cane, rollator, and crutches) in case of sudden need during a service or event. It's important that members know where these items are kept. They are located in a cabinet in the Schweitzer Room. The wheelchair is under the coat rack in the basement, near the restrooms.

From time to time when people have medical assistance items that they cannot keep at their homes, the items are brought to church and then taken and donated to Global Links, which distributes them to countries in need around the world.

Ioulia contacted all of the donors when she took over this task in Sept 2023 and updated the list. She has had only a few people contact her in these last 6 months. In order to "promote"

the availability of DME, she has been posting the following 2 announcements (alternating weeks) each month in the newsletter.

DID YOU KNOW that First Unitarian has a loan program for medical assist items? If you, a friend, or family member has short-term need for crutches, a wheelchair, walker, or other assist items, please contact Ioulia at ioulia.k@verizon.net

And

Medical Assist Equipment Loans:

Most of you know that First UU maintains a list of medical assist equipment (such as crutches, canes, walkers, wheelchairs, bedside items, and much more). These items are owned by and kept at the home of individual members and are loaned to members in need of them. Contact Ioulia at ioulia.k@verizon.net to request an item.

What you may NOT know is that we keep several basic items at church (a wheelchair, walker, cane, and crutches) in case of sudden need during a service or event. But it won't help to have them if no one knows where they are!

The walker, cane, and crutches are in a cabinet in the Schweitzer Room.

The wheelchair is under the coat rack in the basement, near the bathrooms.

We ask that each of you please take a few minutes some Sunday to find them so you know specifically where they are located. YOU may be the person who needs to secure an item for someone in emergent need!

Pastoral Care Team

Pastoral Care Team Members: Chris Beregi, Jan Carlino, Jim Cunningham (co-chair), Kathy Miller (co-chair), Bob Sullivan, Rev. Kate Walker

During the past year the Pastoral Care Team met in person at church and at times by Zoom if necessary. Team members share the concerns of members and the concerns we each have. We restarted our Caring Table and have it in the Undercroft Gallery, or outside the Schweitzer Room if social hour is there. We continue to send cards, make calls, send emails, and visit with members if possible.

The Pastoral Care Team sponsored a seminar on estate planning that was well attended on April 6, 2024. There were 27 attendees and 3 presenters who gave us information about legal, aging, and long-term care matters.

Rev. Kate sends out her weekly Pastoral Care and Connection letter and shares the monthly theme with examples of how we can apply it to our lives. We prepare a list of congregants who have passed away, and the names of family and friends of congregants to be able to share those names on All Soul's Sunday. To date we lost the following members:

Sally Ferguson, November 3, 2023

Marty Lieb, December 11, 2023

Kay Didycz, November 24, 2023

Paul Cox, March 10, 2024

Muriel Weeks, November 27, 2023

Elizabeth (Betsy) Bell Martin: April 13, 2024

Future projects:

We seek to welcome new members to our team.

Continue our mission: To assist the minister and congregation in providing a circle of confidential loving support to members and friends of First Unitarian Church.

- Jim Cunningham

Racial Justice Task Force (RJTF)

The Racial Justice Task Force is continuing to grow in impact both within the institution of our church and outside our walls in the community. As a group we continue to be strongly committed to and inspired by the work of racial justice and are grateful for the opportunity to engage in this work with each other in this UU congregation. We appreciate the full support of our minister, Reverend Kate Walker, who travels beside us with all her social justice training and insight, her warm spirit, and who shines light if we encounter darkness or uncertainty. We recognize that our fundamental interconnectedness with all people across racial divides calls us to this work for nothing less than to realize the fullness of our humanity.

Following our day long RJTF retreat in the spring of 2023, we collaborated in rewriting the Charter for our task force to help guide our work and more effectively focus our efforts.

Some key portions of our Charter are included here.

Purpose

The purpose of the RJTF is to examine and work to dismantle white supremacy within ourselves, our church, and our communities, as we build a strong congregational racial justice identity aligned with our UU values.

Roles and Responsibilities

- *Educate and inform ourselves on racism in ourselves, in our church, in our communities and in the world.*
- *Participate in the democratic process of choosing which 1-2 racial justice issue(s) we will focus on in a given year.*
- *Regularly attend and participate in our monthly meetings, which are intended as planning sessions as well as a venue for sharing information and experiences.*
- *Regularly engage in RJTF projects and actions around our selected issues.*
- *Work with the Minister(s) on assisting the congregation with education and skills-building to live into the 8th Principle of Unitarian Universalism and create a church culture of inclusion and Beloved Community.*

The Racial Justice Task Force has continued to meet monthly over the past year, with a break in May of 2023, during which time we processed the information gathered during our spring retreat and reconfigured our leadership from one primary lead to a steering committee model. During this past year we bid farewell to Sonia Wellington, founding leader of our RJTF. We are grateful for Sonia's years of faithful leadership, for her wonderful energy, for all that we have learned from her and still carry with us.

Our current task force efforts can be grouped into two primary categories: work within the institution of First Unitarian (Universalist) Church of Pittsburgh including educating ourselves as congregants, and outreach beyond our walls including the building of partnerships out in the community. We see both facets as key to the goal of dismantling white supremacy culture. Note that these are not mutually exclusive categories, for we have opened some of our congregational events to the wider community and some of our educational undertakings are leading directly to actions with outside partners or organizations in the wider community. Here are the highlights of our work over the past year:

Internal Congregational Efforts

Planned and implemented a 'Building a Culture of Inclusion' Workshop on September 29-30, 2023

Facilitated by Paula Cole Jones from All Souls UU Church in Washington, D.C., this inspiring congregation-wide online workshop drew close to 50 participants from our congregation for a

day and a half of learning and conversation about how to shift institutional culture to grow authentic multicultural Beloved Community. The workshop was an extension of the commitment we made as a congregation in October 2022, when we voted nearly unanimously to adopt the 8th Principle. We have continued to keep messages from the workshop alive in our congregational spaces whenever possible.

Publicized and promoted ‘Jubilee-3 Antiracism’ Training - ongoing throughout the year

Offered several times per year, this 2 and 1/2 day online experience provides an extraordinary, transformational opportunity for individuals to participate with UU’s from around the country in learning the truth of how race and ethnicity play out in our institutions and our daily lives.

Twelve members of our congregation to date are alumni of the Jubilee-3 training. We have been granted funds from the First U Social Justice Endowment to support as needed members of the congregation in attending Jubilee 3 anti-racism trainings, including support as needed for care-giving expenses.

Organized and implemented a 3-session Book Discussion Series on Reparations - February 25 to March 10, 2024

Members of the RJTF distributed copies of *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair* by Kwon and Thompson, at an informational table during Sunday coffee hour for the weeks leading up to the Bethel AME Table Talk event. This book was recommended by Pastor Dale Snyder of Bethel AME Church in the Hill District and our goal was to invite as many First U congregants to read and discuss the book as possible, to get everyone thinking about this tangible local opportunity for reparations. We also displayed a poster on the Bethel AME Church history that we borrowed as an educational tool for our congregation from the First United Methodist Church in Shadyside, a congregation that is also engaging in reparations work. RJTF members formed facilitation teams to lead book discussion sessions on 3 successive Sundays after service, providing lunch and engaging participants (12-15 per week) in learning and conversation.

Decided on Prison/Jail/Criminal System Reform as a focus for RJTF

Members of the RJTF, recognizing the many racial justice causes calling for action, collaboratively chose to focus on one area for at least 1-2 years to enhance the impact of our efforts. We necessarily have started with education of ourselves on prison/jail reform issues (including using published reports from the Abolitionist Law Center) and are poised to move into action and partnering out in the Community in one or more of the following contexts: Allegheny County Jail Oversight Board, Alliance for Police Accountability (APA), Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN), UU Justice PA subcommittee on Criminal Justice Reform, The New Pennsylvania Project, Court Watching through the Abolitionist Law Center.

Co-hosted with the First U Humanist Group a presentation by U. of Pittsburgh Professor, Dr. Jay Huguley, from the ‘Just Discipline Project’ on disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline on April 2, 2024

This hybrid event, which was open to the wider community, drew approximately 20 attendees in person and additional participants online, including some joining us from outside of the First U congregation. Dr. Huguley discussed the design and documented results from programs that work to change discipline practices in elementary school, providing an inspiring model for cutting out a big root of systemic criminal injustice based on race. The RJTF recognized that this first ever partnership between our task force and the humanist group is an example of exactly the kind of culture shift that we learned about in the ‘Building a Culture of Inclusion’ workshop described above, wherein we begin to see and act as a community of communities rather than thinking of church exclusively as a family of like-minded individuals. We are excited about this promising shift and what it can mean for building authentic Beloved Community here at First U.

Community Outreach and Building of Partnerships

Publicized and attended ‘*Rosedale Remembered*’ Observance on September 6, 2023

A group of RJTF members and other First U congregants participated in this centennial observance at Trinity AME Church in the Hill District to commemorate and mourn one of the worst racist incidents in the history of western PA. On 9/7/1923 2000 Black and Mexican Americans, including children and families, were spontaneously evicted at gunpoint from the city of Johnstown following a shooting by an African American man which left four police officers dead.

Hosted a ‘*Bethel AME Table Talk*’ Community Event on Reparations at First U on March 17, 2024

This hybrid event drew about 65 participants, made up of First U congregants as well as clergy and congregants from other area churches and synagogues. After breaking bread together over a lunch orchestrated by the RJTF, we witnessed Pastor Snyder and white ally clergy from neighboring churches present the compelling, inspiring, and heart-wrenching story of the oldest black church in Pittsburgh. It was a very successful start to what we envision as an ongoing partnership with the Bethel AME Church, as we work to repair the historical theft from Bethel of wealth, truth and power that underpins the need for reparations.

Ongoing engagement with Bethel AME Church

Following the inspiring Bethel AME Table Talk event, meetings on next steps are underway both within the RJTF and with our congregation. Our First U Share-the- Plate Program designated Bethel AME Church Reparations Project as the recipient for April 2024. We are beginning to think about our commitment to reparations as individuals and as the institution of First U. RJTF applied for a grant from the First U Social Justice Endowment and received funding for the Bethel AME Reparations Project as a starting point in considering possible institutional measures. Several RJTF members are attending regular meetings with Bethel leadership and representatives from their many church-affiliated allies so we can understand opportunities for service, support and interconnection. We are currently moving forward with Bethel on their request for help creating a written history of their church. An upcoming event that will allow us to build fellowship and further connection with clergy and congregants from Bethel and other churches that are also on this reparations path is a Juneteenth service and celebration at the Bethel AME Church on June 16, with multifaith services open to all at both 11AM and 2PM that day.

The Racial Justice Task Force is currently meeting on the third Monday of every month @7PM to 8:30PM on Zoom (with the occasional option to join the meeting in-person). We enthusiastically welcome any church member or friend to join us in this important and spiritually enriching work. If you have any questions or would like to receive a Zoom link for our monthly meeting, talk to us at church or email racialjustice@first-unitarian-pgh.com

The RJTF Steering Wheel (Denice Galpern, Maria Magone and Jean Schmidt)

UUJusticePA

The goal of UUJusticePA is to “Bring UU Voices to the Public Square in PA” and the Mission is “Pursuing justice by voting, advocating and making just public policies”. The organization represents ~ 6000 UUs across the commonwealth. It is ably led by Rev. Joan Sabatino who maintains an active presence at the Capital and critical recognition of our support of progressive values.

Ongoing 1st Unitarian participation includes 40+ individuals "Postcarding", that supports Lobby Day visits to Legislators to educate them on issues chosen by the various Justice Teams and support or oppose legislation as it relates to UU Values.

As of early '24 we have individuals who follow the Justice Teams. This includes **Caitlin Morris** with Criminal Justice Reform (as a link with our RJTF and PIIN interests); **Marcia Bandes** with Economic Justice; Bob Mitchell continuing with Environmental Justice; **Becky Studer** with Good Government; **Jan Harrison** with Gun Violence Prevention; and **Lee Fogarty** with Reproductive Justice. Many thanks to these activists. We still need someone to follow the forming LGBTQIA+ group. All are invited to these monthly meetings-go to www.uujustice.org for information.

Since last year's report, we

- Supported HB300-The Fairness Act guaranteeing statewide rights for LGBTQIA+ people.
- Written in support of HB1032, Solar Grants for Schools which has now made progress toward approval.
- Supported SB772 to Raise the Minimum wage in PA.
- Supported Gov. Shapiro's budget plan to increase and equalize support for public schools, to prevent expansion of school vouchers, and to hold cyber and other Charter Schools accountable for the funds they siphon from the public school systems.
- Encouraged Gov. Shapiro to appeal the Commonwealth court shut down of PA joining RGGI (he did and has proposed a specific plan for PA that will diminish our heat trapping emissions).

A request for a program for the Women's Alliance in November '23 resulted in preparation of a power point presentation to help familiarize us with the many facets of the work of UUJusticePA. It was followed in January by a request that the Alliance use the '5th Thursday' in Feb. '24 to Postcard as a group. The 1st session was so popular that we have continued to meet monthly to write. Some of the issues covered in February and March include:

- Increasing the minimum wage (again and again until they do it!).
- New regulations on hospital closings (HB1417).
- Supporting HB 78 to decrease Medical debt.
- Increases in state budget monies for Housing and Education.
- Prior to the PA Poor People's Campaign, i.e. March on Harrisburg, we urged our legislators to support the 'asks' of this group.
- We opposed SB 1058 that would prevent any attempt to decrease green house gas emissions.
- Applauded the formation of a Gun Violence Prevention group headed by Lt. Gov. Austin Davis.
- We sent messages to the leaders of the Senate committee holding up HB950, the right of workers to organize.
- We opposed any increase in the Education Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) and the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) that last year diverted \$479 million tax dollars directly into private and religious schools.
- Supported HB1422 that updates our Cyber Charter Schools to make them more responsible.
- Supported HB1567 'Temporary Access Certificate' that allows renters to remain in a property while property violations are being corrected.

All church members and friends are encouraged to attend, Postcard, and support our UU values to our state legislators. Watch the weekly emails for dates; time normally 10:30 am to noon.

Jan Harrison is currently recruiting 1st Unitarians and friends to attend the lobby day with Cease Fire PA (a collaborator of our Gun Violence Prevention Team) in Harrisburg on May 7 where we will proclaim 'Not One More Day' to demand the Senate Committees blocking the gun legislation passed in the House during the last year discuss and move into law these common sense measures.

The Annual Meeting was held all virtual on April 20 focusing on our UU the Vote efforts before the November '24 election. **Laura Wenniker** has stepped up to lead this work here at 1st Unitarian-contact her with your ideas and willingness to help.

1st Unitarian has generous members who supported UUJusticePA during their fall 'catch up' fund raiser, the annual drive in December, and our Share the Plate for them in January. More regular members/donors are always needed to continue the work to lift UU values up to the leaders in Harrisburg. Go to www.uujusticepa.org for more information about the work of all the Justice Teams, and join to support these efforts. To become part of the continuing Postcarding effort contact Becky Studer at rkstuder@gmail.com.

Becky Studer, UUJusticePA liaison for 1st UU

Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN)

PIIN is a faith-based organization focused on equity and social justice in the Pittsburgh region. It is a coalition of many congregations and organizations. The First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh was one of the founding members of PIIN over 23 years ago. **The PIIN Board meets monthly on zoom the 2nd Thursday, 7-8:30 p.m. Any interested First Church member or friend is encouraged to attend PIIN Board meetings.** For information about PIIN go to PIINPA.org or contact Karen Burns Rutigliano or Sandy Woolley. For a link to the monthly Board meeting ask Sandy Woolley.

1st Unitarian's PIIN Core Team includes Linda Fleming, Laura Gallagher, Joan Harvey, Bob Mitchell, Karen Burns Rutigliano, and Sandy Woolley. We'd love additional members. In spring 2023 we conducted 1-1 meetings with over thirty 1st UU members to discern what justice issues were important to 1st UU members. On April 30, 2023, PIIN held an Issues Assembly to choose PIIN's top priorities based on the listening campaigns of all the congregations. **The top issues selected are:**

1. Criminal Justice Reform, including a focus on the Allegheny County Jail,
2. Gun violence,
3. Environmental Justice, and Public Education Justice.

In the past year, **Criminal Justice Task Force actions** have included continuation of the EXPO program, a 12-week course for citizens returning from jail. The EXPO program is now advertised inside the Allegheny County Jail and sixty people have completed the course. Also, in collaboration with other organizations, PIIN has successfully lobbied the Jail Oversight Board of the Allegheny for important changes. **The Public Education Justice team includes 1st UU members Laura Gallagher, Laurie Lavine, Kirsti Adkins, Morgan Summa, and Sandy Woolley.** Collaborating with other organizations as a part of Great Public Schools (GPS), we have worked to improve the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) Community Schools, which are full-service schools that support students, families, and their neighborhoods. Nine community schools have been created to date. We have also lobbied PPS to stop issuing Summary Citations for non-violent misbehavior. Citations can be the first step in the school to prison pipeline.

The Environmental Justice (EJ) Team of 1st Unitarian under the leadership of Bob Mitchell is helping shape the work of PIIN's EJ Team chaired by Bob and Jim Highland.

The past and future work is focusing on the air quality in the Mon Valley. Throughout the summer and fall, PIIN's Integrated Voter Engagement work will focus on engaging voters in the Mon Valley. Two EXPO graduates will help volunteers canvas.

First Church's continued support of PIIN is critical. In August 2023, our 1st UU PIIN Core Team sponsored a fundraiser, "Pies for PIIN." We were gratified to have raised \$16,000. 1st UU volunteer leaders are critical to PIIN justice work. **Are you concerned about Justice in Pittsburgh area, but perhaps unable to volunteer, march in rallies or travel to Harrisburg? Please consider becoming a regular donor to PIIN. To donate, go to PIIN's website: PIINPA.org.**

Submitted by: Sandy Woolley

Environmental Justice Task Force

Background

At the 2022 Annual Meeting the congregation unanimously approved a churchwide Environmental Justice Initiative. The directive, based on the information gathered at cottage meetings held in early 2022 by the Vision Identity Mission (VIM) Committee, was "to commit to a year-long, church-wide focus on Environmental Justice, in order to take appropriate actions to address the issue."

The proposal envisioned "achieving Environmental Justice in three ways: direct action working with oppressed communities; public advocacy at the local, state and national levels; and changing our own social and environmental behavior. Last year's Environmental Justice annual report documented the accomplishments through early May of 2023.

Not surprisingly, it proved quite difficult to make the desired progress within a one-year timeframe. The Environmental Justice Action Team (EJAT) therefore proposed that the church extend its Environmental Justice commitment. Accordingly, the Board of Trustees authorized continuation under the auspices of the Serve Council of the newly formed Council of Communities

The EJ initiative was also incorporated into the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, specifically with respect to the ongoing church priority to "Create Long-Lasting and Meaningful First Unitarian / Community Partnerships Advancing Racial Justice and Environmental Justice".

This report documents accomplishments from May 2023 to date as well as ongoing plans.

The EJAT initially identified these areas of potential focus: Air, Land, Water, Greenspace and a Partnership with at least one organization that is already doing this vital work as well as minding our own sustainability and witness. We soon realized that meaningful progress requires more focus and decided to make that focus air quality, which was identified in the 2022 VIM cottage meetings.

Following the guidance of Breathe Project executive director and UU Church of the North Hills member Matt Mehalik, we engaged with Clairton-based Valley Clean Air Now (VCAN) in January of 2023 and are continuing in partnership with them.

Notably, the 2023 UUA General Assembly took place in Pittsburgh during June 2023. The UU Ministry for Earth had a booth at GA 2023, which EJAT member Bob Mitchell took the opportunity to visit. Bob described our church's EJ efforts to UUMFE co-director Rev. Daniel Lawlor was excited to hear about our EJ efforts and suggested that we submit an article describing them for publication on the UUMFE website.

The resulting article “Environmental Justice: Clearing the Air in Pittsburgh” appeared on October 1, 2023. It summarizes EJAT’s activities and plans through approximately June 2023. It provides a good reference point and context for the past year’s efforts and is included as an appendix to this report.

Continuing Partnership with Valley Clean Air Now (VCAN)

During the 2023-2024 church year, the First U Environmental Justice Action Team continued many activities with Valley Clean Air Now. Below is a photo from VCAN’s community picnic at Clairton Park in July 2023. EJAT member Bob Mitchell is standing between VCAN Secretary Tom Bailey and Ana Hoffman from CMU’s CREATE Lab.

Phipps Conservatory Presents Nature of Place Symposium: Faith and the Environment



Rev. Walker speaks August 28, 2023 during the Nature of Place Symposium: Faith and the Environment

This symposium passed the question: “What are the different belief systems, past and present, of our region, and what common ground can we find for climate action?” It invited participants to hear from local faith leaders and practitioners to explore what we can draw from these different beliefs to have authentic conversations with our neighbors about our place and responsibility as humans and fellow residents of Earth.



VCAN supporters at Clairton City Park BBQ last summer. Quench tower plumes visible in background.

Keynote speakers were educators Dr Evan Berry, associate professor of environmental humanities in the School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies at Arizona State University, and Dr. Laurel Kearns, professor of ecology, society, and religion at Drew Theological School.

Actions supporting Stronger EPA coke oven regulations

(Press CTL + click on underlined blue phrases to link to web sites)

Mon Valley residents suffer many health impacts due to Clairton Coke Works and other US Steel facilities. Allegheny County is in the top 1% of U.S. counties for cancer risk from point-source air pollution, according to the [Breathe Project](#). And with frequent temperature inversions overnight or in the early morning, pollutants can linger in the air, causing frequent dosing of pollutants.

Clairton Coke Works has been identified as the worst polluter due to its escalated discharge of hydrogen sulfide, [benzene](#) and hydrogen cyanide, which can cause respiratory irritation particularly for residents of the Mon Valley community.

According to a [study published in the Journal of Asthma](#), children in the city of Clairton have a 34% risk of developing asthma compared to the national rate of 8% and the state and county rates of 10-13%. In 2022, the Allegheny County Health Department fined the plant \$1.8 million for hydrogen sulfide leaks. [The plant was also fined \\$4.5 million for 831 emissions violations between 2020 and 2022.](#)

Members of Valley Clean Air Now (VCAN) have been working on a benzene monitoring project since early 2022 to show the harmful effects of these toxins on homes throughout the Mon Valley. They have sent 4 separate letters to the EPA urging action for US Steel to install Fence Line Monitoring around its facilities.

For the past several years, the Environmental Integrity Project has been spearheading efforts to collect, analyze and publish data about benzene emissions from coke ovens. Benzene is a well-known carcinogen that is toxic at very low concentrations. To help identify sources that leak benzene into the atmosphere – and in response to requests from EIP and other environmental groups, EPA required coke oven facilities in late 2022 to monitor concentrations of this pollutant at locations inside their plants.

The American Council of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH) recommends limiting occupational exposures to no more than 60 micrograms per cubic meter based on an 8-hour average. **All seven of the 24-hour benzene samples collected from US Steel's Clairton Coke Works in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, blew past the ACGIH recommendation, recording concentrations from 123 to 620 micrograms per cubic meter.**

The peak 8-hour benzene levels during these sampling events, which provide only the average concentration over 24 hours, may have been much higher.

Proposed New EPA Regulations on Coke Oven Emissions

On August 16, 2023, EPA proposed amendments to 20-year-old national emission standards for



FEDERAL REGISTER
The Daily Journal of the United States Government

 **Proposed Rule**

National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants for Coke Ovens: Pushing, Quenching, and Battery Stacks, and Coke Oven Batteries; Residual Risk and Technology Review, and Periodic Technology Review

A Proposed Rule by the Environmental Protection Agency on 08/16/2023

benzene and other hazardous air pollutants that weaken immune and nervous systems, make it harder to breathe, and contribute to lung and heart disease. While the EPA lacks authority to regulate

workplace safety, the proposed standard to identify and suppress emission leaks would protect both workers and communities alike.

This action by the EPA is the culmination of years of efforts by EIP and from grassroots organizations such as VCAN that are based in frontline communities. Both EIP and VCAN are pleased that EPA took this action – particularly the proposal for fence line monitoring of benzene.

The EPA proposal included the announcement of a virtual public hearing on the proposed amendments to the Coke Ovens Air Toxics Standards. The hearing was held on August 31, 2023. Those who spoke included ?? members of VCAN and many other local air quality activists. Prominent among the speakers was Lisa Graves-Marcucci of the Environmental Integrity Project (EIP). Lisa is a lifelong Mon Valley resident and is the Pittsburgh region representative of EIP, which played a major role in causing the EPA to propose the new standards.

Actions by Members of the First Church Environmental Justice Action Team

EJAT members took the following action in support of the proposed regulations, which specifically impact the Clairton Coke Works:

Attended EPA online public hearing on August 31, 2023

Submitted written comments in support of the new regulations, as well as suggesting ways to strengthen them.

Were signatories to detailed written technical comments developed by EIP and submitted to the EPA on October 2.

Hosted a presentation by Lisa Graves-Marcucci of EIP and Ana Hoffman from CMU's CREATE Lab. Their presentation was entitled "Clearing the Air in the Mon Valley: Expert Guidance on Strengthening Air Pollution Regulations". This was a special Forum event in the Undercroft on

Sunday, September 17, 2023 at noon. Lisa and Ana offered education about the proposed EPA coke oven regulations and detailed guidance on how to participate as citizens in the regulatory process. The flyer for the event offered an opportunity to "petition the Government for a redress of grievances." In this case, the grievance is hazardous air pollution in the Mon Valley which continues to dangerously compromise the health of many residents in several nearby townships. Approximately 30 people attended. A photograph of the event is shown below.



Ana Hoffman of CMU's CREATE Lab points to a map illustrating air pollution in the Mon Valley. Ana and Lisa Graves-Marcucci spoke in the Undercroft after the Sunday service on September 14, 2023.

Mark Dixon Presentation and Talk Back

"Exploring Air Pollution: Monitoring and Mitigation"

On September 14, 2023, members and supporters of the Environmental Justice Initiative of First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh joined in a conversation with award-winning filmmaker,

photographer and activist Mark Dixon in a multi-platform event. Mark shared his insights about living well in a region with notoriously poor air quality.



Environmental activist and award-winning filmmaker Mark Dixon speaks to both a live and online audience on September 14

Mark began work on air quality issues in 2016 via his documentary (still in production) entitled,

“Inversion: The Unfinished Business of Pittsburgh’s Air,” and in 2017 was named a

Champion for Healthy Air by the Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP). From

low-cost monitors to filtration to forecasting poor air days, his stories have something for everyone!

VCAN hosts Pennsylvania Action on Climate Bikers in Clairton on September 28



Michael Badges-Canning, in black hat and black shorts above, talks with other PAC Bikers and VCAN members and friends at the CEDCC last Saturday morning. Left to right are PAC Biker Betsy, Bob Mitchell, Michael, June Pence, Matt Nemeth and Johnie Perryman. Tom Bailey photo.

"We'll take what we have seen to Governor Shapiro!"

The PAC bikers arrived at the Montour Bike Trail parking lot on State Street in Clairton around 9:45am. They had four riders and one member driving a truck with trailer.

- Dave Meckel, VCAN Steering Committee member, spoke of the experience his family has endured with the excessive benzene readings at their home in Glassport.
- Next Johnie Perryman, VCAN Steering Committee member, spoke about his experience living in Clairton. Johnie explained his health challenges and how he recommends the PA Constitution's Environmental Rights Amendment could be used to help residents of the Five Boroughs.
- Fred Bickerton, VCAN Steering Committee treasurer, explained his experiences growing up and working in the Mon Valley with air pollution. Fred continued on to explain the science behind the current and future air monitoring systems in the Mon Valley.
- Tom Bailey, VCAN Steering Committee secretary, passed out his drawing of the Clairton Coke Works (CCW) facilities and VCAN contact info. He then explained how coal is baked in the CCW battery ovens, quenched in the towers and shipped out as coke. He also explained that VCAN asked to meet with Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis on August 18th to discuss the "pay to pollute" history of CCW. VCAN has not received a reply to this request to meet.

VCAN members then drove the PAC bikers up to Shaw Avenue to see the CCW and the US Steel Irvin Work, including the large, visible flare fire. Everyone then drove to the CEDCC building at 282 St. Clair Avenue in Clairton for a light brunch.

Michael Badges-Canning stated the PAC bikers will remember what they saw and smelled in Clairton during their visit. They will urge Governor Shapiro & Lieutenant Governor Davis to respond to VCAN's August 18 request to meet.

VCAN Sunday Service at First Unitarian Church



Sunday Service 10/8/2023 – We are courageous and angry air quality activists

102 views Streamed live on Oct 8, 2023 ([Link to Sermon](#))

US Steel's Clairton Coke Works is the largest coke making facility in North America. The air quality in Clairton and Glassport, along the Monongahela River in Allegheny County, is very poor. Two members of Valley Clean Air Now express the roles courage and anger play in their activism.

VCAN leaders Qiyam Ansari and Tom Bailey delivered the Sunday morning message on October 8, 2023. When they found out that one of our hymns was going to be "We are a gentle, angry people," they decided to title their sermon "We are courageous and angry air quality activists."

Their message was compelling and well received. Many congregants spoke to Qiyam and Tom afterwards in the Schweizer Room. EJAT hopes to facilitate similar services in other UU and PIIN churches in the area.

VCAN was the Share the Plate recipient for the month of October. The message Qiyam and Tom presented on October 8 contributed to raising approximately \$2500 to support VCAN's mission!

First Unitarian Members Participated in Second Walking Tour of Clairton Coke Works October 28, 2023



First Church congregants Joan Harvey, Eleanor Mayfield, Jan Harrison, Jordan Joseph, and Bob Mitchell participated in a walking tour guided by VCAN leaders Tom Bailey and Qiyam Ansari. The photograph shows the view of the Clairton Coke Works from a high vantage point near the home of environmental activist Melanie Meade.

Joan and Qiyam engaged in an extensive discussion about the health effects of hazardous air pollutants on residents of the Mon Valley, particularly children and those with respiratory diseases. The photograph of the leaf (left) illustrates the effect of pollutants on other forms of life.

EJAT Raises \$340 for Replacement Air Filters at Alternative Gift Market

EJAT member Karen Burns welcomes congregants to Alternative Gift Market table.

VCAN has distributed more than 300 air purifiers to residents of the Mon Valley. This allows residents to have inside spaces with clean air even if the outside air contains significant levels of hazardous pollutants. However, the filters inside the purifier units eventually become dirty and need to be replaced. The cost -- about \$30 -- is enough to discourage some residents from replacing the filters and assuring that their air purifiers remain effective.

Accordingly, EJAT set up a table at the Alternative Gift Market and collected \$339.96 for the purchase of replacement air filters

Rev. Kate Walker Featured at PA Interfaith Power & Light 2023 Annual Conference – Dec. 5, 2023

Rev. Walker spoke at Duquesne Univ on Sunday, Dec. 5. This was the second of two workshop sessions entitled, “Call to Protect”. She spoke specifically about the UU role in Environmental Justice.

Pittsburgh, PA - Called to Protect

Workshop #2 (3:30-4:30)

Learn how our various faith perspectives provide common ground for climate action. Learn how to craft a friendly conversation, based on your faith, to lead others to take action.

Speakers: Imam Chris Caras, Rev. Dr. Kate R. Walker & George Hoguet

Allegheny County Health Department Public Hearing on Title V Permit for Clairton Coke Works – January 10, 2024

The Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) issues a Title V Operating Permit to US Steel’s Clairton Coke Works (CCW) every five years. The current Title V Permit has been revised in a draft form in the process of being reissued.

ACHD is required by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to receive public comment about the wording of the draft Title V Permit. ACHD received statements from Allegheny County residents on Wednesday, January 10, 2024 at 6:00 pm at the Clairton Municipal Building. Comments were sought specifically on:



Jan Harrison, Karen Burns, Madeline Darnell and Bob Michell attended a public hearing held by the Allegheny County Health Department on January 10 in Clairton. VCAN members Qiyam Ansari, Germaine Patterson-Gooden, Dave Meckel, and Cindy Meckel are shown

- **Emission Limits and Types:** Pollutants can significantly impact air quality and may exacerbate asthma symptoms.
- **Operational Practices:** Operational malfunctions or non-compliance with these practices could lead to increased emissions.
- **Leak Detection and Repair:** Incomplete or delayed repair of leaks in equipment could lead to unintended emissions of VOCs and other hazardous air pollutants, which could be triggers for asthma.
- **Monitoring and Testing Protocols:** Inadequate monitoring could result in undetected or underreported emissions.
- **Record Keeping and Reporting:** Any lapses in these areas might obscure potential air quality issues.
- **Fugitive Dust and Vehicular Traffic:** Operations involving the handling of coal and coke, as well as vehicular traffic within the facility, can contribute to particulate matter in the air. Dust control measures are crucial in mitigating this risk.

32 county residents spoke in support of safeguarding community health and ensuring transparency on ACHD regulatory effectiveness. They specifically asked for the following items to be amended.

- A 60-minute requirement for CCW to notify ACHD when equipment breaks down. ACHD should maintain an office open 24 hours/365 days a year that will receive this breakdown notice, and create a “real-time network” to then inform the Borough Secretaries and Police Departments of the Five Boroughs (Clairton, Glassport, Port Vue, Liberty, and Lincoln).
- Fence line monitoring for PM10, PM2.5, and VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds) to ensure correct pollution levels with that data being shared publicly with the community.
- The current draft does not call for continuous emissions monitoring systems for particulate matter (PM) for all boilers other than boiler 1 and boiler 2. This means there is no way to ensure that Coke Works can comply with the hourly particle (PM) emissions limits.
- The permit should require continuous emissions monitoring systems (CEMS) on the coke batteries to monitor for Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), such as benzene because emissions can vary for several types of coal and coking procedures in the coking batteries. Without such monitors, Coke Works cannot be ensured that it complies with emissions standards and limits.

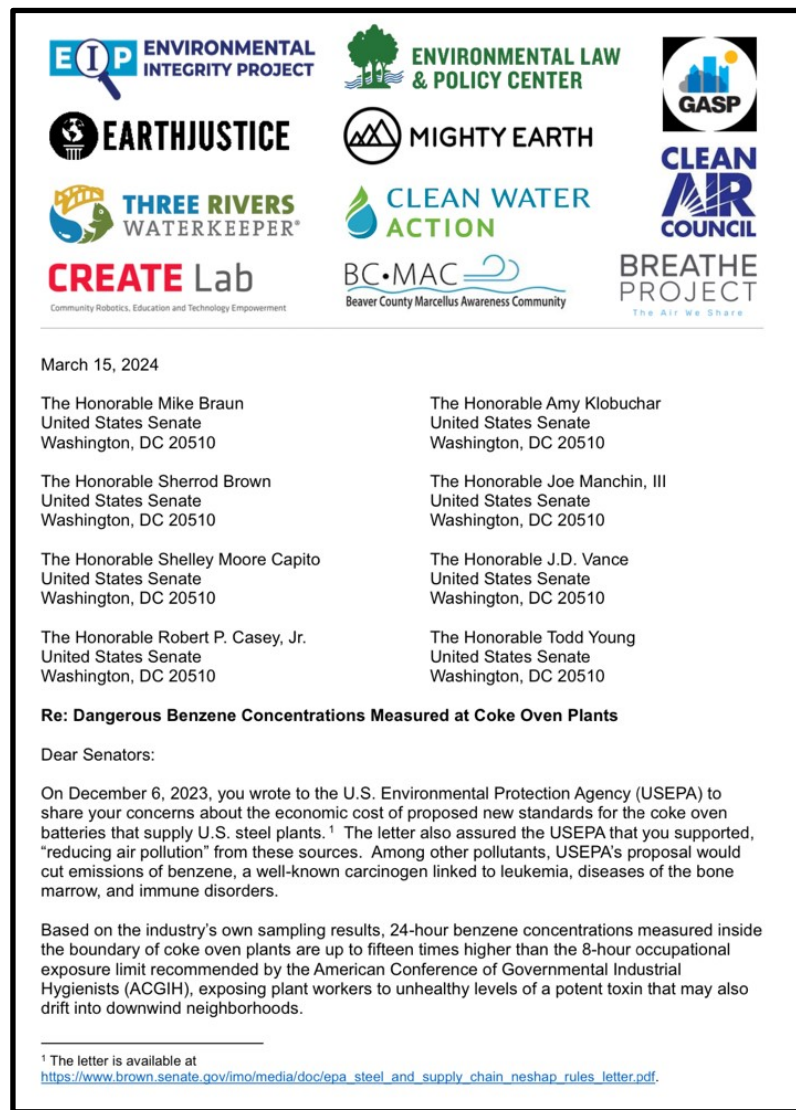
Letter to PA Senator Casey about Dangerous Benzene Concentrations at Clairton and Other Coke Oven Facilities -- First Unitarian and other PIIN Churches Collected 143 Signatories!

On December 6, 2023, six US Senators wrote to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) to share their concerns about the economic cost of proposed new standards for the coke oven batteries that supply U.S. steel plants. The letter also assured the USEPA that those Senators supported “reducing air pollution” from these sources. **Among other pollutants, USEPA’s rule proposal would cut emissions of benzene**, a well-known carcinogen linked to leukemia, diseases of the bone marrow, and immune disorders. The USEPA is required under the Clean Air Act to suppress leaks and other “fugitive” emissions hazardous to the surrounding community, which would also reduce benzene exposures among those who work inside these plants. **The proposed rule would require coke oven plants to monitor and report benzene concentrations at their fence line and when those levels become unacceptably high, to identify and clean up the emission sources causing the problem.**

Based on the industry’s own sampling results, 24-hour benzene concentrations measured inside the boundary of coke oven plants are up to fifteen times higher than the 8-hour occupational exposure limits recommended by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH), exposing plant workers to unhealthy levels of a potent toxin that may also drift into downwind neighborhoods.

Lisa Graves-Marcucci of the Environmental Integrity Project contacted our Environmental Justice Action Team seeking signatories to the letter whose first page is shown the figure above. The letter details concerns about high levels of benzene documented within several coke oven plants as well as along the fence lines. She asked us and our fellow PIIN churches to join in urging these Senators to protect the workers inside these plants and those who live nearby deserve the protection this common-sense approach would provide.

The figure shows the PA version of the letter delivered to Senator Casey's office with 143 signatories provided by First Unitarian and other PIIN churches. Lisa wrote us, "Thank you for that amazing effort!" She received an email acknowledging their receipt of the document from Senator Casey's staff who indicated they will be back in touch.



Protest Demanding a "Seat at the Table" in front of US Steel Building -- April 12, 2024

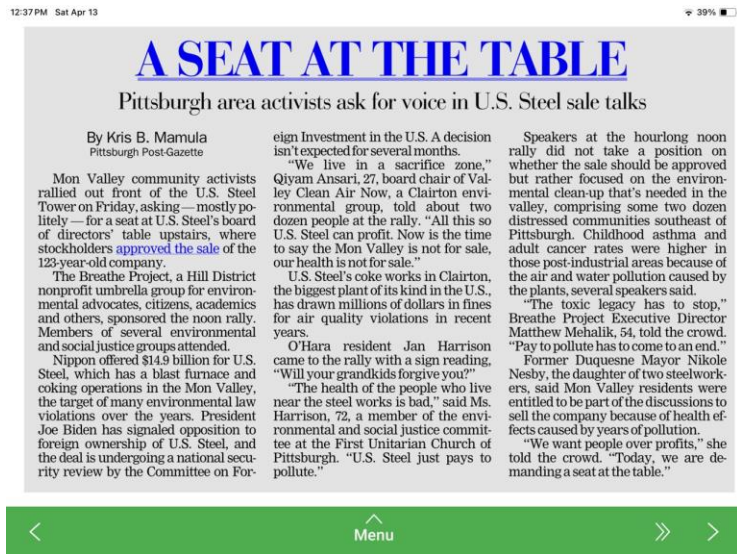


Community and Air Quality Environmental Justice groups/advocates are pictured in front of the US Steel Building on Grant Street on Friday April 12 during U.S. Steel Stockholder Meeting. On the left is our own Jan Harrison.

Community and Environmental Justice groups and advocates gathered in front of the US Steel Building, 600 Grant Street, Pittsburgh, on April 12. The rally coincided with the U.S. Steel Special Meeting of Stockholders to vote on the acquisition by Nippon Steel.

Mon Valley residents and Environmental Justice advocates demanded a seat at the table and a leadership commitment to a future that builds healthier communities in the Mon Valley that ensure clean air and water. Mon Valley residents and groups will spoke of their wish to ensure that any vote of company shareholders hears the voice of impacted communities and stops the ongoing legacy of pollution and harm they have suffered.

The story (left) appeared in the April 13, 2024 issue of the Post-Gazette. It includes comments from Jan Harrison as reported by the Post-Gazette.



Finding Our Path to Environmental Justice: Envisioning the Future

In May of 2022 congregants of First Unitarian unanimously approved a resolution to begin a church wide effort in Environmental Justice. Then in March 2023, Mary Schinhofen and Alice Carnes organized a workshop entitled “Envisioning the Future”. Eighteen participants created collages that captured their visions for a just and livable world.



Will Snavelly and Tony Rutigliano have created this YouTube video that captures the passion and creativity of workshop participants. UU Ministry for Earth [is featuring the video](#) on its website during Earth Month.

The image to the left is a live link to the video, “Finding Our Path to Environmental Justice: Envisioning the Future”.

Appendix

Environmental Justice: Clearing the Air in Pittsburgh Humble, Helpful Partnering

First Unitarian is located just two miles from the Monongahela River, which joins with the Allegheny in downtown Pittsburgh to form the Ohio. The “Mon” Valley has been a steel center for more than a century and three large facilities currently operate there. These facilities, unfortunately, do not incorporate available technologies to reduce emitted pollutants, opting instead to pay fines.

To support impacted Mon Valley communities, we are partnering with Valley Clean Air Now (VCAN), a grassroots justice organization. VCAN “seeks to fight for the residents of the Mon Valley who continue to suffer from severe health, economic, climate, and environmental injustice by galvanizing the community to take action through local politics, grassroots



organizing, community building, education, and community health initiatives.”

Six members of First Unitarian learned much about steelmaking and its environmental impacts during a recent tour of the Clairton Coke Works organized by Valley Clean Air Now Steering Committee Chair Qiyam Ansari (holding phone), Secretary Tom Bailey and Steering Committee member Germaine Gooden-Patterson.

Moving from Despair to Action

On January 8, 2022, members of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh engaged in a Congregational Conversation about the environment. It soon became apparent that many were in a state of paralysis — even despair. Participants understood very well the profound effects of environmental degradation and associated injustices. But the overwhelming scope of the challenges made action seem futile. And yet — after sharing their deepest fears and learning of realistic opportunities for action — some dedicated congregants stepped forward.



Caring for Ourselves and Others As we undertook this important work, we confronted our personal doubts and fears by defining what is most important to us, an essential step before effective action. First Unitarian is doing that in a number of ways. Early in 2023, members Mary Schinhofen and Alice Carnes led a workshop entitled “Envisioning the Future” where participants envisioned as collages their most precious things to preserve. Subsequently our

community minister, Rev. Stephanie Gannon, led a Climate-Healing retreat to nurture our spiritual selves as we seek to heal the world.

Our church also facilitated a series of “cottage meetings,” small group conversations where we articulate our visions for a better world, hear the hopes of others, and thereby comfort each other. Through intentional conversation we identified our highest shared priorities: racial justice and the environment.



“Blue Boat Home”. Collage by Ebe Emmons, one of 23 created by First Unitarian members during an “Envisioning the Future” workshop.

Intersectionality

Perhaps the most daunting aspect of environmental/climate injustice is its intersectionality—those who are already racially and economically oppressed also suffer the worst effects of environmental degradation and climate disruption. Intersectionality, however, also offers the best opportunity for action, so First Unitarian is focusing on Environmental Justice as an intersectional solution.

Again we turned to cottage meetings and discovered that our strongest EJ interest is in air quality, followed by food justice, green space, and water quality. We decided to complement and strengthen our efforts by partnering with a justice organization already doing the work in a frontline community.

Our Work Is Ongoing

First Unitarian is promoting public awareness by hosting an online/hybrid lecture on September 14 by Pittsburgh filmmaker and air quality activist Mark Dixon. On September 17 we will host VCAN collaborators from Carnegie Mellon and the Environmental Integrity Project who will explain how to promote new proposed EPA restrictions on coke oven emissions. On October

8th, VCAN Steering Committee Chair Qiyam Ansari will give the message at our Sunday morning service.

We are also working with fifteen partner churches in the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN). This year PIIN formed an EJ task force that is focusing on air quality: organizing meetings of pastors in frontline communities, raising community awareness, and facilitating public advocacy.

And we are “minding our own store” through air filtration and reducing our carbon footprint through a geothermal HVAC system, solar panels, and LED lighting. Using laser particle counters, we have found that DIY Corsi-Rosenthal filters built from furnace filters and a box fan are effective in removing pollution particles.



First Unitarian middle school RE students construct Corsi-Rosenthal filters of the type we plan to distribute in Mon Valley communities.

Our middle school RE students have built five of these filters, and this Fall we are going to build more to donate to homes and/or churches in the Mon Valley. We are also planning workshops with PIIN churches where interested congregants can learn how to build their own filters. We are excited about this ongoing work and hope to share more about it in future posts.

LEARN COUNCIL

Lifespan Religious Education

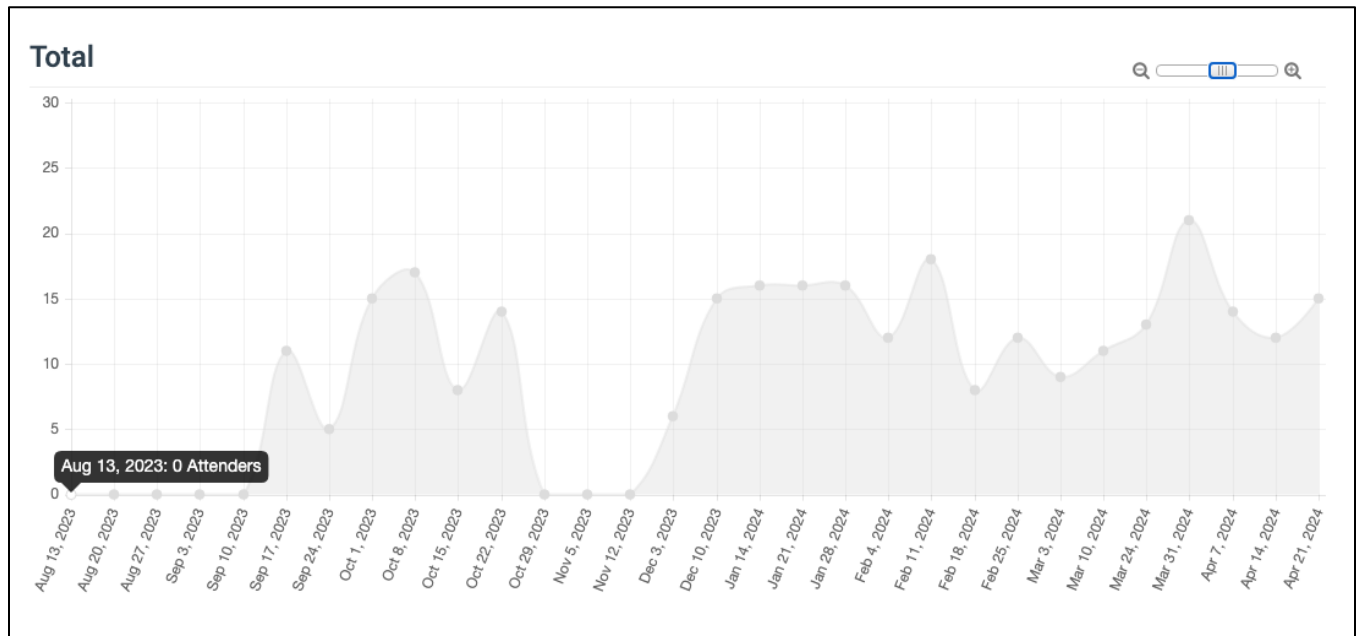
Annual Report 2023-2024

PART I. Children and Youth Program

Children and Youth Registration to date: 74 total

- preK, Kindergarten (12 registered)
- 1st-3rd grade (22 registered)
- 4th-8th grade (29 registered)
- 9th-10th grade (11 registered)

Sunday morning CYM Attendance:



September:

- CYM classes begin for children ages 3-15:
 - **Spirit Play I** (*Stories About God* by Maryanne Moore adapted to Spirit Play teaching model) - **preK, Kindergarten**
 - **Spirit Play II** (focus on UU sources and traditions) - **1st-3rd grade**
 - Building a Better World - 4th-8th grade
 - **Building Bridges - 9th-10th grade** (meets Sunday evenings) - run by Janine Jones and Dave Atkinson

October:

- Multigenerational pumpkin decorating event - facilitated by Brooke LaGrande and Helena Elko

December:

- Multigenerational holiday craft fair

- Special Pre-K through Grade 3 Evergreen Holiday Art Session led by Helena Elko; presented a folk legend from a picture book (*Why Evergreen Trees Keep Their Leaves*) followed by an art activity in which the children made unique evergreen tree ornaments using pre-cut chipboard tree shapes that they painted with colorful tempera sticks and strung with green yarn.
- Multigenerational spontaneous Christmas pageant
- Collection of gifts for Matilda Theiss Center

January:

- Erica's sabbatical begins. Sabbatical team temporarily takes the reins of CYM: Heather Cunningham, Ebe Emmons, Heather Masterson, Cathy Rohrer, Jean Schmidt

March:

- Middle School cohort pizza gathering - facilitated by LeeAnne Haworth
- Multigenerational spring crafts and Easter egg hunt - facilitated by Heather Masterson and Jean Schmidt and a team of support! (Note: Attendance was actually 10 children higher than shown above on March 31 due to one-time visiting children for Easter!)

June:

- Erica's sabbatical ends!
- Summer RE programming begins

Thank you to ALL the volunteer teachers! Jennifer Adibi, Dave Atkinson, Annie Bowyer, Chris DeCardy, Moira Dunn, Helena Elko, Janine Jones, Katy Lev, Brooke LaGrande, Maria Lauro, Amelia Leonard, Chris Milcarek, Nassau Peden, Marley Magee, Robert Piemme, Jean Schmidt, Chuck and Danielle Staresnic, Laura Wenneker. Thank you also to the many First UU parents, guardians, and members who served as substitute teachers when needed.

PART 2. Young Adult (YA) Program

Third Space is the Young Adult (ages 18-35) group that meets every Sunday after service with average participation of 8-12. They hold discussions and also go on outings and do activities together once per week. Some examples are visits to Rodef Shalom, Phipps, Round Hill Farm, hikes, birthday celebrations. There is a paid part-time YA coordinator, Kelly Reagan, who is supervised by Lifespan Religious Education Director (LRED), Erica Shadowsong.

Kelly is currently leading a Friday game night every other week that draws about 15 participants on average, some of whom are also part of Third Space. Alf Shadowsong occasionally helps to lead these sessions, and is expected to potentially return once Erica's sabbatical period ends, depending upon his availability.

Respectfully submitted by the Sabbatical Team

Humanist Group

The Humanist Group has had a rewarding third season. We offered 8 programs this year, instead of the 9 we had offered in each of our first two years, because in November, our efforts were directed towards organizing an all-church luncheon on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. This highly successful event was proposed and led by Humanist Steering Committee member Lucinda Beattie, and produced with the help of representatives from other church groups, including the Woman's Alliance, Lifelong Religious Education parents, Men's group, and Christian Group.

Here is a list of our programs:

September: Some Prominent Humanists of the 20th and 21st Centuries. This consisted of five short talks: Amy de Chicchis spoke on birth control advocate Margaret Sanger, John Hooper spoke on author Kurt Vonnegut, Claus Makowka spoke on physicist and humanist Murray Gell-Mann, Stuart Hastings spoke on philosopher and author Rebecca Goldstein, and Lucinda Beattie spoke on Paul Beattie, a leader in Unitarian humanism and her late husband and minister at our church in the 1980's.

October: Is there a Commons in Your Future - or in your Grandchildren's?

We watched a video presentation by a prominent activist in "Commoning", followed by a discussion facilitated by Claus Makowka.

December: Invisible no Longer. Politically Empowering the Humanist and Atheist Community. This online talk and discussion was organized by John Hooper. The lecture was by Ron Millar, the Political and PAC coordinator for the political arm of the American Humanist Association. He is working to achieve equality for the non-theist community by increasing the number of open humanists and atheists in public office at all levels of government.

January: What if Free Will is an Illusion? This program was organized by Claus Makowka. We watched a video discussion between Robert Sapolsky, a prominent neuroendocrinology researcher and primatologist at Stanford University and CMU graduate Scott Barry Kaufman, who challenged Sapolsky on his arguments against free will while also exploring their implications.

February: Four Black Humanists. John Hooper spoke on the author James Baldwin. Amy de Chicchis spoke on the playwright Lorraine Hansberry, Stuart Hastings spoke on civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, and Lucinda Beattie spoke on the Nigerian educator Tai Solarin.

March: Will You Commit Crimes in the Future? Pitt graduate student Justin Shin, in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science, described algorithms which attempt to predict the probability of individuals who have been convicted of a crime turning back to crime after their release from prison. We were surprised to learn that judges throughout the country have the results of such algorithms available to them as they determine sentences for the convicted individuals. Is this an appropriate and ethical tool in such determinations?

April: Just Discipline and Racial Justice in Schools. This was a talk by Professor James Hugeley from the School of Social Work at Pitt. He told us about the work of the Just Discipline Project, a school climate and discipline intervention now partnering with more than 20 schools serving 8,000 students in our region.

May: The Work of Art in the Age of Automated Production. Just as photography changed our notions of creativity, beauty, and meaning in art in the early 20th century, this talk explored how AI could have similar revolutionary and philosophical effects in how we approach art in the near future. The speaker was Nuhu Osman Attah, another grad student in Pitt's Department of the History and Philosophy of Science.

COMMITTEES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Stewardship Committee

The Stewardship Committee focuses on a number of areas of fundraising for our church, including the annual budget drive for operating expenses, grant submissions, planned giving, and fundraising events. By far the greatest focus, and largest impact, is with the annual budget drive.

As of April, the committee raised \$439,969 representing a 5% increase over last year's total. This year we continued to use the rollover pledging process, which seems to appeal to many members. We reviewed how last year's process unfolded and made some tweaks to make this an even more successful year. On a happy note, we are not seeing a dip in pledge fulfillment rates, which would imply that congregation members are indeed paying on rollover pledges.

We continued to do community outreach to build connections within the congregation. This outreach is done with approximately one third of the members and is performed by the stewardship committee and the Board of Trustees. Some of these meetings have been successful, but in general it appears that the congregation does not understand the purpose, or thinks it is still to ask for money. We will be reviewing our process as we head in to the next season.

This year the Fantasy Auction came back! This is the first fundraising event we have held since the reimagining of this committee to include more than just the annual budget drive. Although the event is being spear-headed by stewardship, we have engaged with additional congregation members on the subcommittee which is planning the auction.

First Unitarian Church has been awarded a grant of \$7,334 by the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation's Historic Religious Properties Grant Program, which awards grants to historically significant religious buildings in Allegheny County. This money must be matched by the congregation. It will be used for repairs and maintenance of the exterior of the original church building.

The committee continues to assist in welcoming new members, assist in grant-writing, and dabble in planned giving. However, a number of members are no longer part of the committee, so we are working with a skeleton crew. We will need to fill out our committee with new members to be able to pursue these areas of stewardship moving forward.

Committee on Shared Ministry (COSM)

The purpose of the Committee is to provide advice and counsel to the Minister, the Board of Trustees ("BOT"), and the congregation so as to strengthen the quality of shared ministry within the congregation. For this purpose, "ministry" is defined as any effort that supports the spiritual and emotional health of the community in holding to its vision. Ministry refers to all aspects of running a church including, but not limited to, worship preparation and presentation, pastoral care, religious education, buildings and grounds management, administration, supervision of staff, supporting stewardship and finance, and attending committee meetings.

Recognizing the congregation as a whole system, rather than fragmented parts, we strive to support the overall health and well-being of the community and its members. In addition to the professional minister(s), we honor ministry as an ethic of care for which all members bear some responsibility. To that end, we intentionally use "shared" and we empower this committee to

help all members and staff achieve the Mission and Vision of First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh.

As part of its duties, COSM has been working to assess the Hospitality and Inclusivity of First Unitarian Church. The report is the COSM's "first step" in assessing the ministry of our congregation. How do you assess the ministry of an entire congregation? You do it step by step, mission by mission, focus by focus. This year the focus is upon the Hospitality and Inclusivity of First Unitarian Church. The assessment used several approaches.

- Reviewing the church website, social media, and signage of First Church to assess how they comply with the questions offered in the UUA's "Assessing Your Hospitality" tool, which we drew upon for our assessment.
- Interviewing members of the church committees most directly involved with providing inclusivity/hospitality to assess if they are working to address the related questions in the "Assessing Your Hospitality" tool, and if so, how they are doing that.
- Compiling and sending out a survey to our full Mailchimp and Breeze mailing lists providing an opportunity for individuals in the congregation to express their impressions regarding the items in the "Assessing your Hospitality" tool.

Mary Denison

Building and Grounds Committee

Members: Jim Pashek, Brian Rohleder, Bob Mitchell, Sara Sweeney, Martin Schmidt (chair)
Nick Izzo (Board Liaison)

Our Mission:

- Plan and oversee the repairs and improvements to the building and grounds of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh.
- Respond to maintenance and repair issues that are brought to the Building Committee.

Completed Projects for 2023 – 2024


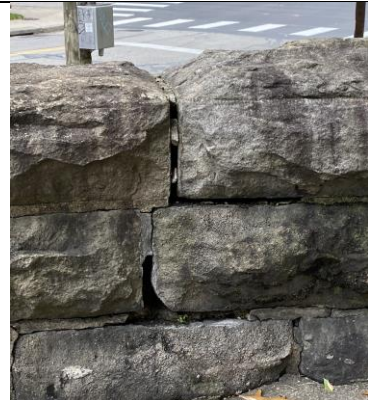



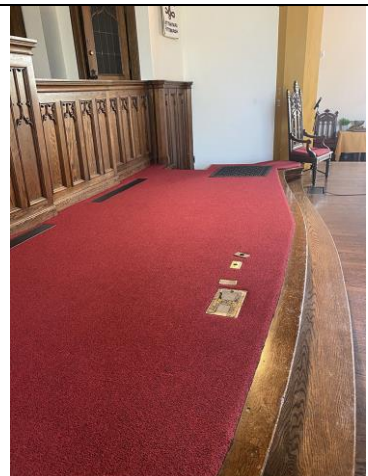
1. Schinhofen Solar Array. In the summer of 2023, the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh completed the installation of its 37 kW solar array on the roof of the Mason Wing (aka RE Wing). The array is named for long-time member and dedicated environmentalist, Ray Schinhofen. The power generated by the array in the months of January, February and March 2024 was 481 kWh, 1,911 kWh and 2,529 kWh. We expect even greater power production as we experience longer days of summer.
2. Keys and Locks. The Safety committee re-keyed the exterior locks to enhance building security.
3. Roof repair. The flat roof above the Mason Wing and Garden Lobby continues to be a problem. We have repaired leaks above Schweitzer room (caused by a small puncture) and the Fahs room (caused by a raccoon!!!). Water damage to the Fahs room was repaired and new carpet installed. The current leak we are working on is over the Welcome Desk in the Garden Lobby.
4. Window trim paint. The exterior trim of the minister's office windows was scraped and repainted.
5. Carpet: the torn carpet on the sanctuary stage was replaced.
6. Air filters: electrostatic air filters have been installed to enhance congregant safety and minimize airborne viral spread.

On-Going and Future Projects

1. Morewood steps restoration: the decayed mortar on the Morewood entrance steps and “wings” will be repaired in May. Eleanor Mayfield led the way in securing a grant of matching funds from the Pittsburgh Historic Landmarks Foundation. You may have noticed their sign on the church lawn.
2. Stained glass: the stained glass separating the Schweitzer room and the Garden Lobby has been damaged by people sitting on the ledge and leaning against the window. To prevent further damage, barriers were installed. We hope to repair the damaged panes in the near future.

Respectfully submitted,

Martin Schmidt, Chair, Building Committee and Grounds Committee

 <p>Rev. Kate up on the roof inspecting the new solar array</p>	 <p>Example of decayed mortar to be repaired</p>
 <p>Before After</p> <p>Exterior of Minister's Office windows</p>	 <p>Schweitzer room stained glass showing new barrier and damaged pane in lower right</p>
 <p>New carpet in Fahs room replaces carpet damaged by water leak</p>	 <p>New carpet for the sanctuary stage</p>

Ombuds Officer

The number of inquiries to me as Ombudsman has been much reduced over the past year.

Methods of written communication and word of mouth within the community I would guess are functioning well, so as to leave most people with someone to ask about things. I do communicate a lot with people about issues and help keep channels open, but only twice in the past year (and both of these in last six months) have I had people call or speak to me explicitly as Ombudsman about concerns they wanted to bring to the attention of the Minister and/or the Board.

One was an expressed concern by a Finance Committee member about the need for a Board Level decision to include explicit consideration by the Board about cost-of-living raise for staff.

This I communicated to the Board President (Raeann Olander) and to Rev. Kate. The issue was addressed.

The other was a query from a newish (past six months) member about what First Unitarian Church has or is doing about the war in Gaza. I shared this person's concern (with her permission) with Rev. Kate, who provided a careful letter to this person, answering her question fully and satisfactorily.

I do fairly often get greetings or gratitude from people, eg "Oh, you're the Ombudsman)" or "thank you for being the Ombudsman", so maybe its' meaningful to have someone's name published regularly in the weekly email, as a sign of the system's openness.

I suspect the role could be played by any Board member, but It's not an imposition on me.

It's a joy to see how well communication is working in the congregation as a whole!

Respectfully Submitted,

Ebe Emmons

Endowment Commitees

Music Endowment

Committee Members for 2023

Corey Layman

Martin Schmidt

Christine Michaels

Committee Members for 2024

Martin Schmidt

Christine Michaels

Danny Rectenwald

The Music Endowment is approximately \$160,000 (depending on market conditions). Funds available from the endowment (3.5%) are on the order to \$5600 per year.

Requests Funded in 2023

Evening of Afro-Pop, Jazz, Gospel and Soul	Sept. 21, 2023	****	\$1,500
PGH UU Cluster Choir Event	Oct. 21, 2023		\$2,630
Dance Choir	Dec. 20, 2023		\$ 350
Total	2023		\$4,480

Requests Funded in 2024

Easter Gospel Concert	March 30, 2024	\$1,486
Dance Choir	Dec. 20, 2024	\$ 350
Total (so far)	as of April, 2024	\$ 1,836

Respectfully submitted,
Martin Schmidt

Social Justice Endowment

Social Justice Committee members in 2024:

Jenn Layman, chair (term expires 12/2024)

Sandy Wooley (term expires 12/2025)

Joan Harvey (term expires 12/2026)

Ex officio members:

Kyle Gracey (Treasurer)

Kate R. Walker (Minister)

Mission: The Social Justice Endowment Committee considers requests for grants that will enable an individual or group to pursue a project that serves a social justice purpose of broad effect. Grants from this fund are ideally not given to pay for a one-time benefit, but rather to fund an effort that will have a longer-term beneficial impact.

Method: The committee members carefully consider the suitability of each application to the guidelines of the Endowment. We weigh the purposes as described in each application, the intent of each applicant, and the expected impacts of the effort proposed.

Social Justice Endowment awards in 2024 so far:

1. March 17, 2024: \$400 to Kyle Gracey to support payment of our congregation's dues to PIIN.
2. April 7, 2024: \$2,500 to Maria Magone/First Unitarian's Racial Justice Task Force to support Bethel A.M.E. Church's Reparations Project in the Hill District.

Summary of funds awarded in 2024

Annual Draw available to this committee: **\$\$10,474.23** on 1/1/2024.

Total funds awarded as of 4/30/24: **\$2,900**

Total funds returned as unspent: **\$0.00**

The remaining balance in 2024 after all approved awards are paid: **\$7,574.23**

Social Justice Endowment awards in 2023:

- 02/10/2023: \$400 to Kyle Gracey for 2023 PIIN Membership dues for First Unitarian Church
- 02/24/2023: \$2500 to Denice Galpern of the Racial Justice Task Force for a virtual 2-part congregational racial justice workshop in 2023 to be led by Paula Cole Jones
- 03/10/2023: \$2500 to Karen Litzinger of the Khasi Hills Committee for travel support for a Khasi Hills Unitarian representative to visit Pittsburgh in June of 2023

- 04/15/2023: \$750 to Rebecca Studer for The Work that Reconnects Retreat (Climate Justice) in May 2023 to be facilitated by the Rev. Stephanie Gannon and Kirsi Jansa (\$450 was turned back as unspent by notice from Becky Studer)
- 05/08/2023: \$350 to Erica Shadowsong for The Singing Tree mural project training/certification and supplies
- 05/09/2023: \$650 to Kris Rust for Pittsburgh Pride festival performance– for hiring BIPOC singer section leads (Kris requested \$1275; SJE awarded \$650 and suggested application to Music Endowment for remainder, as that endowment fund currently has a greater balance.)
- 06/09/2023: \$750 to Kris Rust for two Pittsburgh Juneteenth performances at Allegheny UU Church and at Point State Park- for hiring BIPOC musicians and singers (Kris requested \$1500; SJE awarded \$750 and suggested application to Music Endowment for the remainder)
- 07/22/2023: \$500 to Clementine Hooper for Cycle Beads Reproductive Health Project. (Request was for \$1200; \$500 was awarded as seed money with a suggestion that Clementine, who is a high school student who grew up in our church, work with an ad-hoc advisory team at church to guide her as she gets this project off the ground and collects early survey results.)
- 07/24/2023: \$250 to Rob Schwartz for the Sanctuary Art + Honors Sponsorship.
- 08/21/2023: \$500 to Karen Litzinger for travel support for First Unitarian representatives to visit the Khasi Hills.
- 11/07/2023: \$1650 to Kris Rust to help defray the cost of producing and performing the 2024 Let Freedom Sing Concert, which has the mission to bring together diverse groups of people from various choirs in the city and to convey Dr. King's message of love in song and spirit to audiences across the lines of race, religion, class and culture. The \$1650 will be paid out when the event is completed.

Summary of funds awarded in 2023

Annual Draw available to this committee: \$10,352.09 on 1/1/2023

Total funds awarded as of 09/30/2023 (end of third quarter): \$9150.00

Total funds returned as unspent (09/19/23 notice from Becky Studer/ Climate Justice Retreat): \$450.00

Total funds awarded as of 12/31/23 (\$10,800.00) less turned back monies (\$450): \$10,350.00

The remaining balance after all approved awards are paid: \$2.09

Campus Ministry Endowment

The Campus Ministry Endowment extends the ministry of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh to local universities and colleges. We have had a very active church year and have seen a wonderful invigoration of young adults in our community. We have used the funds entrusted to us to develop and extend our young adult community.

Here is a description of our committee's activity in the 2023-24 church year to date:

- September 2023: Grant #1 approved to support Young Adult programming

Beginning balance: \$6,593.95

Grant #1: \$900.00

Ending balance: \$5,693.95

Grant #1 was a \$900 request by Erica Shadowsong to fund eight Young Adult monthly board games night at First UU. Of the \$900, \$480 was budgeted for pizza/entrée, \$100 for drinks/cutlery/snacks, \$210 for 3 new board games, and \$60 for campus ministry dues.

- January 2024: Grant #2 approved to continue Young Adult programming

Our beginning balance from the endowment fund for the 2024 fiscal year was \$6734.95.

Beginning balance:	\$6734.95
Grant #2:	\$4500.00
Ending balance:	\$2234.95

Grant #2 was a request from Erica Shadowsong for \$4500 to continue Young Adult programming. Breakdown of expenses include:

- \$2,000 to fund YA Coordinator 10 hours/week, for 12 months, @ \$15.50/hour, which includes an increase to match the increase all other staff members received this year
- \$2500 to fund food, refreshments, and games for the weekly social events for 12 months

Beginning balance:	\$6734.95
Approved request:	\$4500.00
Ending balance:	\$2234.95

- April 2024: Grant #3 approved to attract an Aspirant Intern to First UU

Grant #3 was a recently approved \$2000 grant to Rev. Dr. Kate Walker. We have the opportunity to bring in a full-time, nine-month Intern Minister (known in the UUA as an Aspirant). The Aspirant will spend part of their time working with our current Youth Coordinator to reach out to the area campuses. The goal is to establish stronger relationships with the Religious Offices at CMU, Pitt, Chatham and possibly Point Park and Duquesne. First UU leadership would like the Religious Offices/Chaplains to know who and where we are. We want to create a stronger religious/spiritual program for our emerging young adults in the area.

Beginning balance:	\$2234.95
Approved request:	\$2000.00
Ending balance:	\$ 234.95

It has been a wonderful year in the Campus Ministry Endowment committee! Thank you to former members Nick Izzo and Maureen Porter for their kind service. Thank you also to current members Jennifer Adibi and our most recent addition, Michael Saffran.



Respectfully submitted,

Heather Cunningham / convener

Vision-Identity-Mission (VIM) Committee

VIM is a committee of your Board of Trustees charged with regularly taking the pulse of the congregation, discerning its needs and aspirations, to inform the annually updated Strategic Plan which guides the life of our church community. VIM discernment is based on an appreciative inquiry process that utilizes methods from congregational surveys to small group or “cottage” meetings, wherein members and friends share their thoughts and ideas and listen to the thoughts and ideas of fellow congregants. The centerpiece of our Strategic Plan is the priorities that emerge from this discernment process. The home page of our church website contains a link to the full Strategic Plan for the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh. <https://www.first-unitarian-pgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2023-2026-Strategic-Plan-9be8c0837d31356bbbc539618950a881.pdf>

In May of 2023, the VIM Committee, in consultation with the Board and Rev. Walker, identified the following two priorities as a focus for the year ahead:

1. Diversify and Grow Our Membership

- Expand the diversity of our membership, especially in the areas of age, more children and families, race, class, ability, and LGBTQ+ identities.
- Create a church full of activity and participation in order to grow our membership.

2. Create Long-Lasting and Meaningful First Unitarian / Community Partnerships Advancing Racial Justice and Environmental Justice

- Partner with organizations, neighborhoods, and other churches in our communities.
- Center our partnerships on advancing racial justice and environmental justice.

In addition, we identified the following two essential **Supporting Activities**:

- a. Improve communication, organization, and coordination within the church.
- b. Organize more church events, both internal and external. Internal events foster a sense of being in community. Outward-facing events attract like-minded people who might become partners or members.

A. VIM Activity related to Strategic Plan Priority 1: Diversify & Grow Our Membership

The diversity priority highlights “the areas of age, more children and families, race, class, ability and LGBTQ+ identities”. All of these areas are important to a healthy community. We are currently working to understand and support the first two — age and children/families.

Snapshot of Young Adults (age 18-35)

We have worked with the Membership Team to develop a snapshot of the Young Adult cohort in our congregation, keeping in mind that there are new visitors coming each week, so this exciting picture is evolving. The Young Adults have already been contributing their wonderful energy and substantial gifts in very meaningful ways to our community. This phenomenon has been growing post-Pandemic and is most welcome.

- Overall, we have 24 YA’s who are attending church service regularly, and who are NOT RE Parents.
- Of these 24, 12 are playing significant roles in the congregation (beyond participating in Third Space, the new Young Adult community at church) including tech support, ushers & greeters, coffee hour host, Racial Justice Task Force, providing music in services, leading on the Council of Communities, serving as Recording Secretary for the Board, volunteering in children’s RE, serving as liturgist.
- AND of these 24, 10 have taken the step to become members of the church.
- As of this month, there are 8-10 YA’s regularly attending Third Space.

Highlights of March 2024 VIM Cottage Meeting with Young Adults

Question #2 What first led you to visit the First U. Church of Pittsburgh?

What are you looking for here?

Answers:

- Friends you can talk about deep tough topics with
- Authentic community
- Multi-faith community
- Deep connection with friends
- Something bigger than myself to be a part of
- Community with people who want to do something about what's happening in the world and who are aware of issues

Question #4 Do you feel welcome in general and in church services in particular?

a. Do you find it easy to participate in the life of the church?

b. What factors have led to your answer?

Answers:

- Everyone has been welcoming
- Seeing a woman give a sermon is welcoming!
- I value that people are open and friendly
- The Article II changes on UU sources are good to see
- Meeting people of different faith backgrounds
- The Music draws me in and is welcoming

VIM Cottage Meeting with parents of children in our Religious Education Program are upcoming.

We are delighted that families with school age children are a growing demographic in our church community. We look forward to learning more about this group and hearing their hopes and ideas as an integral part of our congregation.

B. VIM Goals for Summer 2024

The overriding goal of the VIM Committee each year is to produce an updated draft Strategic Plan by the end of May for Board and Minister input. This year we have not met that goal, as we have required more time to carry out cottage meeting discernment with the two specific demographic groups we wish to target currently within the congregation, work that we expect to complete in early summer. We anticipate holding another Young Adult cottage meeting with congregants we have not yet heard from. We anticipate holding two cottage meetings for RE parents as well to draw on as many perspectives from this demographic as possible. If necessary, discernment may extend into Fall for this group. We will analyze and aggregate the responses from all of the 2024 Cottage Meetings and will share with the Board, Erica Shadowsong, other RE stakeholders, and the entire congregation.

We do expect to update the Strategic Plan in June of 2024, using results from cottage meetings as well as the results of a hospitality survey implemented by COSM (Committee on Shared Ministry) during their first-ever assessment of the ministry of our congregation this spring. In fact, the coordination between VIM and COSM this year has been a new and highly beneficial development, aligning what we can learn from discernment efforts with the congregational assessment performed by COSM, using the annual priorities in the Strategic Plan as a foundation.

We will also include in the updated Strategic Plan, narrative results from the multi-pronged efforts this past year by the Environmental Justice Initiative and Racial Justice Task Force leaders to build partnerships with organizations and other communities outside the walls of First U(U). Some examples:

- Strengthened partnership with grassroots Environmental Justice organization Valley Clean Air Now (VCAN) by: attending public hearings and submitting comments to EPA and Allegheny County Health Department; collecting over 200 signatures for letters to EPA and Senator Casey; raising approximately \$2500 through Share the Plate; raising \$340 for air filter replacements; hosting VCAN leaders Qiyam Ansari and Tom Bailey for October 8 Sunday service; hosting presentations by local air quality activists including filmmaker Mark Dixon, Lisa Graves-Marcucci of the Environmental Integrity Project and Ana Hoffman from CMU's CREATE Lab.
- Began a partnership between First U(U) and Bethel AME, the oldest Black Church in Pittsburgh, in support of reconciliation and reparations.

Advances in 2023-24 related to the 'Supporting Activities' section of the Strategic Plan Priorities ("Improve communication, organization and coordination within the church" AND "Organize more church events, both internal and external.") have been identified as well and will inform the updated draft Strategic Plan. A couple highlights of these developments are:

- The September 2024 all-church workshop 'Building a Culture of Inclusion' prepared a critical mass of individuals in our congregation to address our identified annual priority of promoting growth and diversity. This is essentially the Eighth Principle in action, calling us to build authentic Beloved Community right here in our church.
- Launch of the new 'Community of Communities' organizational structure, with lay leaders or lay leader teams managing and supporting church groups that fall under the four different branches of the First U(U) Mission: Connect, Inspire, Serve, Learn
- Multigenerational game nights that have helped to bring our community members and guests together for fun social interaction.

Bob Mitchell and Jean Schmidt, VIM Committee Leads

