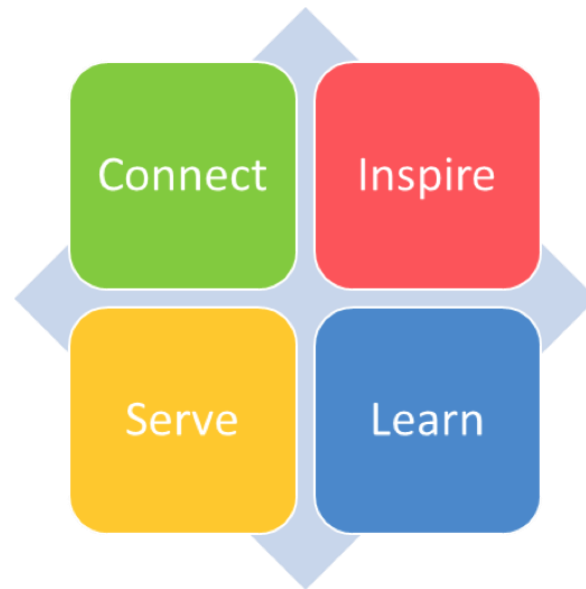




# First Unitarian Church

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

## Annual Report 2024–2025



### Board of Trustees (Terms)

Brian Junker, President (2023-2026)

Kyle Gracey, Treasurer (2023–2026)

Jim Pashek, Vice President (2024-2027)

Nick Izzo, Secretary (2022–2025)

Raeann Olander-Murray, Past President (2022- 2025)

Bob Mitchell (2021-2024)

Chris Milcarek (2022-2025)

Jean Schmidt (2023-2026)

Richard Dum (2024-2027)

Maria Lauro (2024-2027)

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

Arthur Notaro, Recording Secretaries

*Please note that this table of contents contains links to the various committee reports within this document. Additionally, [blue underlined text](#) throughout the document link to reports within this document or to pages on the internet.*

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# From the President of the 2024–2025 Board of Trustees

By Brian Junker May 18, 2025

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

The **Vision** of this church is to

- Build community: Strengthen and broaden our local Unitarian Universalist community.
- Nurture souls: Offer diversity in worship and religious education opportunities.
- Cultivate justice: Expand our collective, visible, effective acts on social justice issues.

## Introduction to the Board

First Unitarian's Board of Trustees works in partnership with our senior minister Rev. Dr. Kate Walker and the Ministry Teams in creating a culture that supports the mission, vision, and goals of the First Unitarian Church in accordance with its Bylaws and Governance Policies. The board is responsible for financial management, policy, discerning the needs and desires of the congregation, planning for the future, and assessing the health of our religious community. The board delegates the hands-on administrative work of the church to several board & independent committees, so that the board has time to take a wider view.

These administrative committees include Building and Grounds, Finance, Investment, Stewardship, Safety, Vision/Identity/Mission (VIM), the Committee on Shared Ministry (COSM), the Endowment Committees for Music / Campus Ministry / Religious Education / Social Justice, the Nominating Committee, and more.

A separate set of committees advances the mission of the church: Connect, Inspire, Serve, Learn. These committees are generally organized under the Council of Communities, rather than the board.

The board operates in a repeating, four-phase, evidence-based cycle:

- Discernment of the needs and aspirations of the congregation, mainly through the work of the VIM (Vision, Identity and Mission) committee
- Planning, organized through an annually updated three-year Strategic Plan
- Implementation, mainly through setting priorities for and giving guidance to the various administrative committees
- Assessment, mainly through the work of COSM (the Committee on Shared Ministry) and the board's self-assessment efforts.

The board generally does not do the hands-on tasks of the church, though individual board members may be involved in hands-on work separately from the board, as members of other committees or initiatives in the church.

There are several special roles on the board:

- President: Brian Junker, 2024-2025; Jim Pashek 2025-2026

- Vice President: Jim Pashek, 2024-2025
- Secretary: Nick Izzo
- Treasurer: Kyle Gracey
- Recording Secretary (not a board member but essential to the board): Arthur Notaro

In addition five more members (Chris Milcarek, Raeann Olander-Murray, Maria Lauro, Jean Schmidt, Richard Dum) serve at large. All members serve three year rotating terms.

Monthly board meetings involve all board members together with the Recording Secretary, Minister and Intern Minister. *I want to stop here to express my deep gratitude for the truly collegial and deeply committed work that every one of these individuals has contributed.* Board meetings are open to the congregation, and include guests who wish to observe or who can provide information on particular topics.

### **VIM, Strategic Plan, Board Priorities**

[Vision, Identity Mission Committee \(VIM\)](#) (click on link to go to VIM report)

The VIM committee assists the board in its discernment and planning functions. One of its most visible activities is the conduct of cottage meetings in support of those functions. This year the cottage meetings focused on our new/reworked set of values: *Justice, Generosity, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, & Interdependence - with LOVE at the center.* Members of the congregation shared how they have personally experienced one of these values at First Unitarian, what it means for LOVE to be at the center of these values, the role of the church in these fraught times, and what First Unitarian can do to make positive change. The results of these discussions, which are reported elsewhere, will inform next annual update of the church's strategic plan.

### **Strategic Plan**

The board maintains a rolling three-year strategic plan that is updated each year. The major priorities in the [2024-2025 update](#) of the plan were to:

- Diversify And Grow Our Membership
  - Expand the diversity of our membership, especially in the areas of age, more children and families, race, LGBTQ+ identities, class, and ability
  - Create a church full of activity and participation in order to grow our membership
- Create Long-Lasting And Meaningful First Unitarian / Community Partnerships
  - Partner with organizations, neighborhoods and other churches in our communities
  - Center our partnerships on advancing racial justice and environmental justice

Strategies for achieving these priorities over a three-year period are laid out in the 23-page strategic plan. The board does not directly engage in these efforts but, through the strategic plan and the board's guidance to other committees and entities in the church, it tries to ensure that we make good progress in these areas. In addition, board members who serve on or liaise with relevant committees and groups within the church do make direct contributions to these strategic plan priorities.

While membership growth is a slow process, we have observed an increase in attendance at Sunday celebrations, as well as families' sustained interest in the church and its RE program. Recently, [Lifespan Religious Education Director](#) (LRED) Erica Shadowsong has also been working with the RE (Religious Education) Council to ensure that families who are attending for the first time have adequate assistance to onboard their children into the RE program. We are

also seeing, through the much-appreciated efforts of intern minister Mac Perkins-High, Rev. Kate and Erica Shadowsong, growth and stability in our young adults population and in campus ministry. It is also great to see increasing activities in the church, including the now-recurring New Years' pancake breakfast and the new chili cookoff.

Another aspect of membership growth and maintenance is ensuring that our church is welcoming to all. Some of the goals of the current Capital Campaign (more on that below) are specifically targeted toward making the church physically more welcoming through improved lighting, improved audio-visual and streaming facilities, and by improving physical access to the building.

Finally the board is working directly to make a more diverse and inclusive pathway to leadership in the church. In particular it has worked with the Nominating Committee to develop an approach to identifying possible nominees for the Board and Nominating Committee by taking advantage of greater familiarity with members within each of the many communities in our church, following ideas that board member Jean Schmidt has brought to us from Paula Cole Jones' workshop "Shaping the Leading Edge".

The church is also continuing its partnerships with Bethel AME Church, the Afro-American Music Institute, East End Cooperative Ministry, Valley Clean Air Now (VCAN), and others, as well as, for example, increased social justice action efforts organizing postcards, letters, phone calls and legislative visits, and efforts to involve Tree Pittsburgh in multigenerational events. More on these and other partnerships and actions can be found in the reports of the [minister](#), the [music staff](#), the [Environmental Justice Task Force](#), the [Racial Justice Task Force](#), and the [Share the Plate](#) program.

### Board Priorities

Each year, the board also sets specific priorities for itself for the year. This year, board priorities included items such as improving the pipeline to leadership within the church, identifying recommendations from the spring 2024 COSM report and external board assessments, developing engagement activities to welcome new members, ensuring cohesion and community on the board, increasing board visibility and congregational awareness of the board, and launching the Capital Campaign, among others. All of these priorities are either completed or in progress; some necessarily take more than one year to complete. Highlights include updating the strategic plan and board priorities based on data gathered from VIM, COSM and other sources, engaging new members directly and through the Thanksgiving luncheon and other events, moving away from all-zoom board meetings to a hybrid zoom/in-person format every third meeting, board preparation and serving of an EECM Sunday dinner, board hosting of ingathering and the annual meeting, an Activities Day devoted to publicizing opportunities on the Board and on Board Committees, and of course the successful launch of the Capital Campaign, "[Warming our Welcome and Brightening Our Future](#)".

### **Assessment**

The [Committee on Shared Ministry \(COSM\)](#) performs annual assessments of ministry within the church, alternating between assessment of the minister(s) and assessment of one or more aspects of the congregation's shared ministry. These assessments may or may not include a congregational survey, focus groups, etc., but will always include a self-assessment of the body being assessed. In Spring 2024 COSM reported on its assessment of hospitality, inclusion and preparedness for growth in the congregation's shared ministry; this assessment has deeply influenced our strategic plan, as well as other aspects of the work of the board and of the church as a whole. In 2024-2025 COSM turned to an assessment of the minister; you may recall being

invited recently to complete a short survey on the minister as part of this effort. These assessments are not designed or intended to be performance evaluations, and they would be deeply misused for that purpose. Rather, they document the state of the church and provide material from which recommendations for further development of our shared ministry can be derived.

### Board Assessments

From time to time, the board also conducts assessments of itself. In the 2024-2025 church year, the board is doing two such assessments. You may recall being asked at the end of 2024 to complete a short survey focused on how visible and accessible the board is, how well or poorly the board is doing supporting the minister and the mission and vision of the church, managing finances and other business of the church. The board will also conduct an annual self-assessment in May, focused on how each board member sees their role within the board, community within the board, the board's role generally, the workload associated with being a board member, etc.

### Coordination of Future Assessment Activities

While the data collection activities of the VIM committee, COSM, and the board itself, are critical to the evidence-based cycle of discernment, planning, implementation and assessment followed by the board, they can also become burdensome to the congregation. An ad-hoc committee has been formed, with representatives from VIM, COSM and the board, to better coordinate and prioritize these activities, spacing them out over one or more church years, so that the board can get the information it needs to do its job well, without wearing out the congregation or the members of these committees.

### **Highlights of Board Activities and Initiatives**

The board was busy throughout the year, and an exhaustive list of its activities and accomplishments is beyond the scope of this report (or the patience of most readers!). Minutes of monthly board meetings are posted on the church website, and give a detailed account of all of these activities and accomplishments. Here I will list only a few highlights from the church year.

- **Welcoming our fantastic Intern Minister, Mac Perkins-High.** Through the initiative of our minister Rev. Dr. Kate Walker, and the resourcefulness of our treasurer Kyle Gracey, the board was able to welcome Mac as Intern Minister for the 2024-2025 church year. Mac has been an invaluable addition to our staff and leadership, in Sunday morning celebrations, in working with young adults, in restarting our Campus Ministry program, and in countless other ways. You will find much more about Mac's fantastic contributions elsewhere in the annual report.
- **Venture Crew 412.** The Boy Scouts of America organization, now rebranded as just "Scouting", has evolved a great deal, to the point where some of their programs can be quite consistent with UU values and principles. In particular, the Venturing program is open to all teens 14-20 years old. Like other scouting groups, a Venture Crew needs to operate in conjunction with a supporting organization, often a church. Church member Julie Downs approached the board about entering into a charter agreement with Scouting and Venture Crew 412, the venture crew she is representing. After considering the financial risks and values alignment, the board approved the charter agreement, to be renewed as appropriate annually.
- **Capital improvements thanks to the Fantasy Auction.** Proceeds from the Spring 2024 Fantasy Auction were used by the board in 2024-2025 to refurbish both sets of doors in the

Garden Lobby, to prune the Shoyer Oak to protect the adjacent stained glass windows, to prune additional trees in the church garden, to update and expand the hearing assist system in the sanctuary, to update the fire and security reporting system, and to replenish the church's emergency and operating cash funds for money spent on installing the ultra-high efficiency air filters in the Geothermal HVAC system that serves the Sanctuary building.

- **Shoring up the church's Emergency Reserve funds.** For a variety of reasons, the church's emergency reserve has been depleted in recent years, to just under \$22K, while the Finance Committee recommends maintaining a level of approximately \$40K. Through transfers of various unused funds identified by our treasurer Kyle Gracey, the board has been able to improve the level of the Emergency Reserve to almost \$30K. There is still work to do, but this is a significant improvement in our Emergency Reserve.
- **Improving the efficiency of our solar panels.** Thanks to the initiative of board member Richard Dum, with help from board member Jim Pashek and other members of the Building and Grounds committee, it was discovered that our solar panels were operating at only approximately 76% efficiency, consistent with 16 of our 71 panels being offline. The installers agreed to replace a faulty connector, which brought those 16 panels back online, and improved the efficiency of the solar panels to roughly 84-96% depending on weather conditions, which is near maximum efficiency for this installation. In addition, Richard documented the calculations and methods of monitoring the solar panels, and provided several supporting documents in a project archive, for the board and the Building and Grounds committee in the future.
- **Resolution of problems with high-efficiency electrostatic air filters.** Following the re-opening of the church after the initial COVID pandemic, the church researched and installed electrostatic air filters on top of the MERV-8 air filters already in place in the Sanctuary building. This combined system was rated at MERV-13. Unfortunately the system was plagued with electrical problems that caused frequent shutdowns of one or more of the electrostatic filters on the six air handlers in the building; in addition, maintenance costs for the combined system were anticipated to increase several fold, due to changes in the market for high-efficiency air filtration systems as COVID fears receded. After years of good-faith efforts (spearheaded by Bob Mitchell and Nick Izzo) by the church and the three contractors involved failed to address the electrical problems, and in view of the increased maintenance costs, the board voted to replace the current unreliable system with a traditional MERV-11 system, which a recent engineering study showed our Geothermal HVAC system could support. Our HVAC company agreed to do the changeover at no cost to us, and the manufacturer of the electrostatic system agreed to take back the electrostatic units and provide a partial refund of the cost. The end result is that we have an air filtration system that is reliable, cheaper to maintain, and a big improvement over the MERV-8 system that we started with.
- **PCCD Security Grant.** Through the patient and persistent efforts of board member Chris Milcarek and controller Bob Baron, the church has received a Non-Profit Security Grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). These grants provide funding for physical and institutional safety improvements for nonprofit organizations that serve individuals, groups, or institutions targeted by single-bias hate crimes. Security improvements planned for our grant include locks for the Channing and Fuller classrooms,

CCTV and a 5 year service contract, improving windows in the minister's office and in the basement, and an upgrade to internet service.

## Capital Campaign!

The church launched its first capital campaign in decades this spring, with the quiet phase beginning March 9 and the public phase beginning April 6. The campaign, "*Warming our Welcome and Brightening our Future*", aims to fund several long-needed physical improvements to our church. These include replacing the lighting in the sanctuary with LED lighting that is brighter and more energy efficient, updating the AV and streaming facilities in the sanctuary to be more engaging and inclusive, and replacing the heating/cooling system in the religious education wing with an efficient, environmentally friendly system. If enough funds are available we can also consider relandscaping the church grounds to make them more useful and accessible for all.

But a capital campaign is not just about accumulating money. It is also about renewing our commitment to this religious community. That is why it is so important that every member attend one of the small group discussion sessions, and that every member pledge some amount, no matter how large or small, to the campaign.

- The small group discussions are not about convincing you of the need for capital improvements in the church. You can walk around the building and grounds and see that! Rather, the small group discussions are where to dream about what First Unitarian can be, and maybe what physical improvements could help it to become that. Even suggestions that don't seem like a high priority in this campaign are important to make – they will contribute to the desiderata for a future capital campaign or other fundraising effort.
- Pledging and contributing to the campaign is also important: it is a way of saying you have skin in the game, that you take ownership of what this church is and can be. No matter how large or how small – even a dollar! – your contribution shows your meaningful commitment to this religious community.



So sign up for a small group discussion session here: <https://tinyurl.com/CC2025-info>

And to make a meaningful commitment, pledge here: <https://tinyurl.com/CC2025-pledge>

## Final Thoughts

It is not fashionable to say that being on a board of trustees, let alone being president of the board, can be pleasurable or fun. But this is an unusual church, and an unusual board of trustees. As a former professor and associate dean, I have been on many committees and boards, and none have been more collegial, welcoming or hardworking than this board of trustees. Yes, there is hard work involved, not all the time, but when it is needed, it is needed. But there is also pleasure, and even fun, in working with this board and helping to create a culture and institution that supports the mission, vision, and goals of First Unitarian Church. For that I want to share my appreciation and gratitude to this board, and my hope that it continues in this fashion long after I have served my term as past-president.

# Minister's Report to the Congregation

18 May 2025

Minister's Annual Report

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

*"This is the central task of the worshipping community: to invite the Spiritual Presence; to unveil the connectedness of all humanity through the story of life; and thus to reveal this universal truth, which is only discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others. Once felt it inspires us to act for justice."* Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed, UU minister

Even those of us who identify as humanist can recognize Rev. Mark's words as he names the ineffable connection between us when we gather for singing, debating, listening, speaking, arguing, eating and working for justice side by side in a concentrated effort to make this world one worth living within. We balance the work of offering our best self, with authenticity, vulnerability and recognition that we yearn to learn. We also know that when we are not at our best self, we can seek repair through the courage of repentance and forgiveness.

This is the work of ministry that we pursue when we chose to become members of this religious community. The current high stress and fears in our nation is making our work even more important than ever. One song, one silent meditation, one vote, one meal, one rally at a time, one letter at a time, we are collectively countering the political oppressions tearing our country apart.

To do this work here with you, I have been shifting some of my professional commitments so I can emphasize my ministry with you and deepen my self-care. To this end, I eagerly celebrate my desire to feel the connectedness with you as your minister, and I hope you also yearn for this connectedness; the "Spiritual Presence" of our stories intermingling with love and celebration.

## Highlights of 2024-2025

- June: Annual Picnic and Participating in Pride Parade
- August: Intern Minister Mac Perkins-High arrives! Mac leaned into the work of ministry, and we have offered our best as a teaching congregation. I am sad to see Mac return to Massachusetts yet know that Mac will carry a piece of our community throughout his career.
- August: I was a speaker for the Free and Just bus tour, an advocacy group for women's right to choose reproductive health.
- September: UU Climate Justice Revival and UUTheVote with PIIN.
- September: my husband and I hosted four events for the church auction, all of which were a hoot.
- September and October: PIIN canvassing to connect with voters in the Mon Valley; attended Climate Justice Forum.
- October: Showed four documentaries on the rise of Christian nationalism.

- November: Led and organized successful Interfaith Thanksgiving Service for Shadyside congregations.
- November/December: Attended three trainings on safety and de-escalation.
- January: Launched organizing meeting for Capital Campaign.
- January: Co-led Healthy Boundaries class for members of the UU Ministers Association.
- February: Co-led Reimagining Environmental Justice Meeting.
- February: Attended PIIN annual fundraiser.
- March: Co-led training for liturgists.
- March: Supported the YA with preparing and serving dinner for EECM.
- March: With PIIN, spoke at Allegheny County Council on raising fees for air pollution violations.
- April: After three months of planning, launched our 2025 Capital Campaign. I am deeply grateful to co-chairs Al and Rob Schwartz and the dedicated team.
- April: After eight months of planning, attended and presented at Sparks, a UU Convocation on Theology at the UU Congregation in Oakton, VA. We are following this up with a program for congregations to host their own theological conversations.
- April-May: With Committee on Shared Ministry, finalizing my alternate year assessment.
- April: Co-led Sermon Writing workshop.
- April/May: I'm attempting to organize a networking event for Pittsburgh activists engaged in countering the massive harm coming from the White House and Congressional Republicans.
- May: Conducted annual assessments for staff.
- May: Preparing to co-lead Healthy Boundaries training for UU Ministers Association at annual meeting in June.

**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 (Limping along with two vacancies)
- Stephanie Pawlowski, CLM
- Staff (weekly, bi-weekly and monthly)
- Capital Campaign Committee
- Young Adults (with Mac and Erica)

**As able and/or needed I meet with:**

- Racial Justice Task Force
- Environmental Justice
- Khasi Hills
- Finance Committee
- Personnel Committee as needed
- Share the Plate

I continue to be deeply grateful to work with the outstanding staff: Erica Shadowsong, Kris Rust, Ellen Gozion, focusing on Programming with me. Cicely Moultrie, Rita Gates, and Dan Laity focus on administration, buildings and grounds with me.

On our security team, we've had the reliable Will Snavelly (stepped down in March), Nick Binfield and Manny Theiner.

**Larger Pittsburgh Community I support:**

- PIIN Spiritual Leaders Caucus (I was co facilitator until December), PIIN Board Exec, and PIIN Board. I now support the PIIN Environmental Justice Team.
- Anti-Racist Faith Leaders

**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 am stepping down from these roles this spring.

I'll be attending the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association's annual gathering in June in Baltimore. I am not attending the UUA's General Assembly this year.

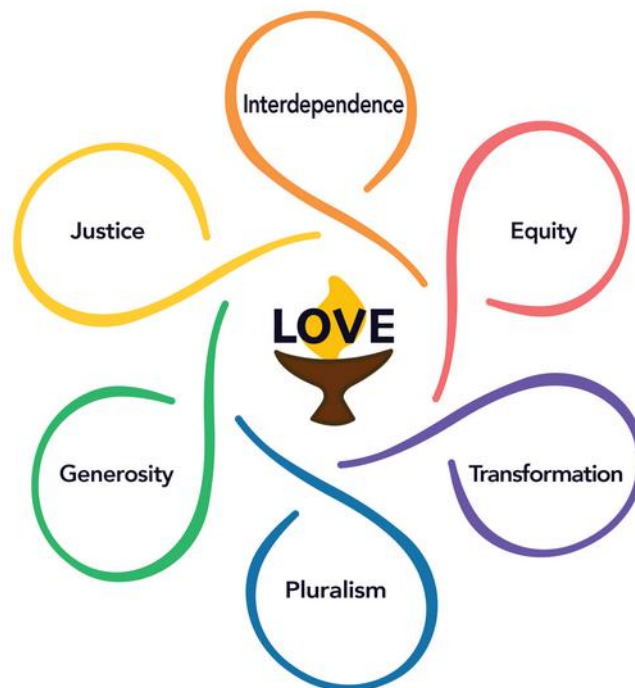
I was in two monthly support groups: one ended last fall. I still have a monthly study group that has an annual in-person retreat.

I have been serving as an Advocate on behalf of complainants to the UUA's Safe Congregations Office. I am now on sabbatical from that role for a few months. I also serve as a mentor for a new minister in Ohio, and supervise an off-site Intern in Kirtland, OH (not as time intensive as an onsite Intern), which ends in August.

I'm serving as the Minister of the week at Chautauqua Institute, June 28-July 5.

I'll be on study leave and vacation July 6-August 16, 2025

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



# **Treasurer's Report – Fiscal Year 2024**

Submitted by: Kyle Gracey, Treasurer

The church ended its fiscal year in an OK financial position, a bit short of what we planned for. Pledge contributions were about \$16,000 short of budget, but investment income was about \$5,000 higher than budget. Rental income was about \$4,000 below budget. In December, the Board of Trustees passed a 2025 budget that makes small positive investments in new program funding and a cost-of-living increase for staff, while maintaining all existing programs. The budget also includes a projected surplus of \$1,500. All of this is due to the strength of the pledges received for 2025. Thank you to everyone who pledged!

## **Financial Position, Budget Variance, Investments**

Asset balances added up to \$213,288, very similar to the end of 2023. This did not include the money in our endowments and other investments. Total liabilities were \$210,310, an increase of \$11,762 from the beginning of 2024. Overall, we had \$2,978 in net assets, a decrease of \$16,896 over the course of the year.

Our income came in at 97% of the budget, for a total income of \$544,324. Congregants donated 96% of what they had pledged. Expenses were 101% budgeted, for total costs of \$561,219. Overall, this left us with a net loss of \$16,896, more than the \$2,976 income budgeted. This used up most of the remainder of the retained earnings we had from previous years.

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 \$3,123,132, an increase of \$122,206 from the previous year.

## **Finance Committee**

In addition to monitoring our finances over the past year, the Finance Committee has essentially completed a multi-year overhaul of our financial policies and procedures. We also made significant progress consolidating and funding a stronger 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 (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), Lee Carnes, Bob Mitchell, Gail Pesyna, Martin Schmidt and Brian Rohleder.

## Appendix: Investment Account Balances and Key Restrictions

### **Investment Balance 12/31/2024**

#### **Income Restricted Funds**

##### **Core Endowment \$1,168,693**

3.5% of 3-year average balance can be spent each year for unrestricted expenses. Generated \$37,862 in operating income and capital funds.

##### **Harkcom Fund \$62,029**

Dividends can be spent on unrestricted expenses. Generated \$3,006 in operating income.

##### **Memorial Trust \$57,239**

Dividends can be spent on unrestricted expenses. Generated \$2,994 in operating income.

##### **Mullins Memorial Endowment \$439,718**

Dividends can be spent on unrestricted expenses. Generated \$15,213 in operating income.

##### **Simon Income Fund \$181,189**

Dividends can be spent on unrestricted expenses. Generated \$5,869 in operating income.

##### **Goldsmith Concert Fund \$71,242**

Dividends typically spent on music expenses. Generated \$3,855 in operating income.

#### **Program Grant Funds** – See reports from program endowment committees.

##### **Campus Ministry Endowment \$200,240**

3.5% of 3-year average balance per year can be spent as grants for campus ministry activities.

##### **Music Endowment \$172,360**

3.5% of 3-year average balance per year can be spent as grants for music-related expenses.

##### **Social Justice Endowment \$310,334**

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 \$43,091**

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 \$125,828.35**

Dividends support operating budget. Generated \$6,810 in operating income. Principal can be spent on capital projects.

##### **Goldsmith Growth Fund \$188,660**

Balance can be spent on capital projects. Generated \$5,406 in operating income.

##### **Donaldson-Genzler Fund \$102,507**

Dividends support operating budget. Generated \$9,131 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, 2024

**June 12, 2024.** The Board voted to

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- approve the appointment of Katherine Hens-Greco and Jan Carlino to the Personnel Committee
- approve an Amendment to the church bylaws correcting wording to the section on eligibility and election to the Nominating Committee and agreed to put this Amendment to a vote at the 2025 Annual Congregational Meeting.

**July 12, 2024.** The Board voted to:

- Elect the following officers for the Board of Trustees for the Church year July 2024 through June 2025:
  - Brian Junker – President
  - Jim Pashek – Vice President
  - Kyle Gracey - Treasurer
  - Nick Izzo – Secretary

**August 21, 2024.** The Board voted to:

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting

**September 20, 2024.** The Board voted to:

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- amend minutes from the July Board meeting
- approve the appointment of Martin Schmidt to the Investment Committee
- approve the addition of Chris Milcarek, Nick Izzo and Jill Siegfried to the Safety Committee
- approve an updated Strategic Plan

**October 16, 2024.** The Board voted to

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- hold a Congregational Meeting on Sunday, December 8, at noon for presentation of the 2025 budget to the congregation and to answer questions. This will be by zoom and in person.
- approve using the proceeds from this past Spring's Fantasy Auction on the following:
  - \$4,800 to refurbish both sets of exterior doors to the Garden Lobby
  - \$3,500 for pruning the Schoyer Oak in order to protect the stained glass windows
  - \$700 to prune trees in the garden
  - \$3,235 for updating and expanding the hearing assist system in the sanctuary
  - \$874 for updating the fire and security reporting system.
  - \$7,040.13 to retire the remaining debt for installation of ultra high efficiency air filters to the Geothermal HVAC system.
- To approve a new process for selecting delegates to UUA General Assembly and to the Pittsburgh Area Cluster meetings.

**November 20, 2024.** The board voted to

- approve the minutes, with edits, from the previous board meeting
- approve the appointment of the following members to Endowment Committees
  - Social Justice: Laurie Lavine
  - Children and Youth: Helena Elko
  - Music: Ioulia Kornberg
  - Campus Ministry: Andy Norman
- approve adding Kurt Summersgil to the Nominating Committee to fill a vacant position expiring in June, 2027.
- approve adding Chas Murray to the Committee on Shared Ministry
- confirm an email vote on a budget of \$74,000 (with 1/3 match by church) for the state safety grant (PCCD)

**December 18, 2024.** The board voted to

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- approve a budget for 2025 presented by Treasurer, Kyle Gracey
- approve transfer of funds to Emergency Reserve from the following group accounts
  - \$5,000 from Art Committee
  - \$2,000 Monthly Charity Donations
  - \$660 from Committee on Justice in the Middle East
  - \$166 from Alternative Gifts International

**January 15, 2024.** The Board voted

- to approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- to adopt the Employer Participation Agreement for the UUA Retirement Plan

**February 19, 2024.** The Board voted to:

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- confirm email vote on entering into Annual Charter Agreement with the Boy Scouts of America and Venture Crew 412, with Julie Downs as the designated church member. A bank account will be set up by the Treasurer for funds associated with this Venture Crew with appropriate financial management policies.
- resolve that \$5000 be returned to the Art Committee Group Account (#240.200) and that the Board consult with the Art Committee on removing the \$5000 again to improve the church's Emergency Reserves. The board delegates to the Treasurer the transfer of funds back to the Emergency Reserve, if that is the result of the consultation.
- resolve that \$660.81 be returned to the Committee for Peace and Justice in the Middle East Group Account (#240.215), for its use consistent with the principles and values of First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh, and within relevant legal bounds.
- approve the elimination of the Ombuds position with explanation to congregation on to whom they can raise issues.
- Request that Sentry Mechanical remove the SecureAire filters from our HVAC system and to install the highest MERV filters possible.

**March 19, 2024.** The Board voted to:

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting

- approve the 2024 annual withdrawal of \$38,275.10 from the Endowment Fund (3.5% of rolling 3-year average of fund total) to be deposited into the following accounts was approved:
  - \$27,340 to the General Fund
  - \$1,400 to the Music Major Repair Reserve.
  - \$9,536.03 to the Extraordinary Building Repair and Maintenance reserve.
- approve the addition of Heather Frye as signatory on the Venture Crew checking account
- approve calling the Annual Congregational Meeting for May 18, 2025, at 5 PM
- approve appointment of Kate Snow to the Committee on Shared Ministry
- approve the following resolutions regarding “Group” associated financial accounts:
  - i. Before funds are transferred from a "Group:" account (either one time, or on a recurring basis) for a purpose other than that for which the account was created, the associated member(s) of the congregation as in (W3) be contacted to seek advice and perspective on the transfer, and/or other disposition of the account;
  - ii. If no such member(s) are identified, notice of the proposed transfer and/or change in disposition of the account appear in the church's weekly newsletter for at least two successive weeks, and any members of the congregation who during that time identify themselves as interested in the account be treated as in (i);
  - iii. The ultimate transfer and/or disposition of the account be at the discretion of the Board, consistent to the extent it deems appropriate with any advice or perspective that may have been obtained via (i) or (ii);
  - iv. The Board and/or its designee(s) are responsible for ensuring implementation of (i) & (ii), in each instance to which this policy applies.
  - v. This resolution will be added to the Governance Manual

**April 16, 2024.** The Board voted to

- approve the minutes from the previous board meeting
- provide a consensus on a priority list of projects for funds from the capital campaign
- appoint of Kyle Gracey as a delegate to the UU General Assembly
- allocate of \$650 for a replacement PC for a staff member with \$540. from the Landscaping reserve account
- authorize the use of secure online voting (Election Buddy), absentee ballots and proxy voting at the Annual Congregational Meeting, with proxy votes to be allowed to be cast in person or by electronic ballot
- Regarding accounts with a “Group” designation, The Treasurer shall, on an annual basis, notify the chair of the group associated with the funds of the balance in that fund and provide them with information on submitting reimbursements.

Respectfully submitted by

Nicholas Izzo

Secretary of the Board of Trustees

# Church Committees and Team Contacts

## Congregational Committees

Nominating Committee:

Lee Carnes

## Connect Council

Lay Council Lead:

Vacant

Membership Team:

Joan Harvey

Amy DeChicchis

Ushers and Greeters:

MR Kelsey

Pastoral Care Team:

Jim Cunningham

Kathy Miller

Minister's Discretionary

Fund/Marion's Purse:

Rev. Dr. Kate Walker

Covenant Groups Team:

Lynne Porterfield

Gathering of Men:

Jim Reitz

Sunday Social Hour

Jean Schmidt

Sarah Fields

Women's Alliance

Laura Wenneker, Denice Galpern

Marketing and Communications:

Mark Whitaker, Rob Schwartz

## 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

Worship Team:

Stephanie Pawlowski

Affiliate Minister:

Rev. Stephanie Gannon

Commissioned Lay Minister:

Stephanie Pawlowski

Committee on Shared Ministry:

Mary Denison

Instrumental Music:

Ellen Gozion

Vocal Music:

Kris Rust

Art Team:

Ali Masalehdan

Dance Choir:

Mary Pat Mengato

SongSpace:

Brian Junker

## Serve Council

Lay Council Leads

Vacant

Addictions Ministry:

Jim Pashek

Alternative Gift Market:

Karen Burns Rutigliano

EECM Homeless Shelter Meal Team:

Sam Hens-Greco

Medical Equipment Loan Program:

Ioulia Kornberg

Khasi Hills Partnership Team:

Karen Litzinger

Environmental Justice Action Team

Bob Mitchell, Becky Studer

PIIN Core Team:

Sandy Woolley

Racial Justice Task Force:

Denice Galpern, Maria Magone, Jean Schmidt

Share the Plate:

Karen Burns Rutigliano

UUs for Justice in the Middle East

Ali Masalehdan

UUJusticePA:

Becky Studer

### Learn Council

Staff: Erica Shadowsong, Lifespan Religious Education Director

Lay Council Lead: Carol Washburn

Humanist Group: Stuart Hastings

Sunday Morning Forum:

Book Store: Mary Schinhofen, Kirsti Adkins:

### Board Committees

Building & Grounds: Martin Schmidt

Program Endowments:

- Campus Ministry: Jennifer Adibi
- Ministry with Children and Youth: Julie Downs
- Music: Danny Rectenwald
- Social Justice: Sandra Woolley

Finance: Kyle Gracey

Investment: Kyle Gracey

Ombuds Officer: Ebe Emmons

Safety: Chris Milcarek

Stewardship: Heather Masterson, Maria Lauro

Vision, Identity, and Mission Team: Bob Mitchell, Schmidt

### Church Administrative Staff

Business Manager: Rita Gates

Communications Coordinator: Cicely Moultrie

Sexton: Dan Laity



# Nominating Committee Report

The Nominating Committee has consistently held meetings via Zoom on the first Wednesday of each month. In September 2024, at the direction of the Board of Trustees, we successfully implemented a new strategy by actively soliciting recommendations from key groups and committees, including the Worship Team, Women's Alliance, Pastoral Care, and Music Committee. The Nominating Committee must continue this practice by surveying groups for nominations in 2025.

On October 15, 2024, Mary Weidner resigned from the Nominating Committee, and Kurt Summersgill agreed to complete her term.

Furthermore, Cathy Rohrer has proven to be an exceptional mentor, expertly guiding me through the processes and procedures of the Nominating Committee. I am committed to applying the knowledge and skills I've acquired from her to support the next Co-Leader starting in September 2025.

## **Members of the Nomination Committee 2024-2025**

Cathy Rohrer (Co Leader), Mary Pat Mengato, Margaret Fuhrman, Nancy Latimer, Lee Elliott Carnes (Co Leader), Mike Lotze, Bill Schuetz, Becky Studer, Kurt Summersgill

## **Board of Trustees (to be voted on at Annual Meeting)**

Candidates for the Board of Trustees – 2025-2028 term are Lucinda (Cinda) Beattie, Deborah McGuire, Casey Taylor

## **Nominating Committee (to be voted on at Annual Meeting)**

Candidates for the Nominating Committee– 2025-2028 term are Laura Gallagher, Kathleen J. Miller "Kathy", Hugh McGough

## **Endowment and Finance Committees (Approved by Board of Trustees)**

Campus Endowment – Andy Norman

Children and Youth Endowment - Helena Elko

Music Endowment - Ioulia Kornberg

Social Justice Endowment - Laurie Lavine

Investment Committee – Martin Schmidt

Submitted by Lee Elliott Carnes and Cathy Rohrer (Co-Leaders) on 4/14/2025

# CONNECT COUNCIL

## Hospitality Ministry Membership Team

### Hospitality Ministry Membership Team Report for the 2025 Annual Meeting

**Team Members:** Amy De Chicchis, (co-chair), Joan Harvey (co-chair), Michael Saffron, Reann Olander-Murray 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 which inspires them, whether it be choir, adult or child RE, Young Adults, Women's Alliance and Womenspirit, Men's Gathering, Humanist Group, Social/ Environmental Justice, Covenant Groups, etc.

**Path to Membership series:** • **Step 1:** '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. • **Step 2:** 'RU a UU?' orientation sessions are held every 6-8 weeks for 3 hours on a Saturday morning. 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 21 people as new church members during the past church year 2024-25: Greg Andrews, Janet Bednarz, Joann Flanagan, Todd Harvey, Sarah Holler, Matthew Howell, Alexander R. Jacob, Ioulia Kornberg, Minna Lunney, Tessa McCarthy, David McLaughlin, Andy Norman, Heather and Michael Powers, Rachel Rectenwald, Lee and Rose Saville-Iksic, Daniel and Elizabeth Servansky, Kurt Summersgill, and Abbey Vipperman. We were happy to hold two welcoming ceremonies during a service for new members, so our congregation had a chance to make covenant with our new members and celebrate at coffee hour.

**This Year's activities and new initiatives:** It is notable that several of our new members are already significantly involved with activities at the church, including leadership roles, with the Social Church Gatherings, our Music programs, our Endowment Committees, Women's Alliance, our RE program and our social justice groups. We have also initiated a connection with the Covenant Group team to coordinate that opportunity for our new members who are interested. We were pleased that several new members participated in the VIM Cottage Meetings and contributed in meaningful ways to our hopes and aspirations for our church moving forward. Finally, we have revised the First Unitarian Church Trifold to be available for visitors and new members to learn about our church and its many activities.

**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. In fact, we hope and consider that all our church members are part of our welcome team, as we see you greeting new visitors before church and at coffee hour. We welcome new members to join us more formally! 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 (cochairs)

## 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](mailto:maryruthkelsey@gmail.com)).

– MR Kelsey

## Gathering of Men

The men's group at the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh is now in its 34th year. Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. After a couple of years of meeting by zoom, we resumed meeting in-person in the Priestly room in September of 2024, however, we turned back to Zoom for January through May of 2025. We were able to schedule and conduct a limited number of field excursions during the summer of 2024 and plan to do the same for 2025.

At each meeting one of the men volunteers to lead a discussion. 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 the Men's Group does a small degree of outreach into the wider community.

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 – a few have been in the Men's Group since it began. Members also often serve one meal a year at the East End Community Ministry homeless shelter.

Jim Reitz is the group's contact person and coordinator.

– *Jim Reitz*

## Covenant Groups

An all-new Covenant Groups Team has been assembled and we are transitioning duties from the old team to the new. As part of this transition, we are assessing the current state of each covenant group to determine if all memberships are up to date and to make any changes and form new groups as appropriate. As of the end of this church year there are:

- 13 Covenant Groups ranging in size from 4 to 12 members
- 92 members attending covenant groups (some attending more than one group)

Groups meet at our church, in the homes of their members, on Zoom, or in parks. Most groups meet either once or twice 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 assessing the description, roster, and desires for changes or new membership of each existing group. We will then turn to reviewing efficient, systematic ways of growing the smaller groups and creating new groups to accommodate members wishing to join a group. The team is planning events and outreach to grow the covenant groups.

The covenant groups are put together and monitored by the Covenant Group Team: Rob Masterson (Chair), Julie Downs, Nancy Latimer and Corey Layman.

## Marketing & Communications Team

**Committee Members:** Rob Schwartz (Chair), Michael Safran, Maria Lauro, Mark Whittaker

In 2025, the Marketing & Communications Team continued to support the visibility and outreach efforts of the church, despite meeting infrequently due to competing responsibilities among team members.

### Highlights and Activities:

- **Website Improvements:** Mark Whittaker and Cicely executed regular updates to the church website, with particular attention to keeping the home page current. This ongoing maintenance is vital to ensuring visitors and members alike find timely and accurate information.
- **Website Engagement:** In response to feedback from the Committee on Shared Ministry's audit, we discussed the importance of featuring more photos of congregants and church events to enhance the warmth and appeal of our website. Progress in this area has been limited, and remains a priority for the coming year.
- **Social Media Presence:** Maria Lauro provided periodic posts to the church’s social media platforms, helping to maintain a basic level of engagement with followers and share timely updates.
- **Email Communication Policy:** The team established a policy to use MailChimp for general congregation-wide email communications. While the team has not yet completed the setup of its MailChimp account, this platform will be used moving forward for planned

messages. Breeze will be reserved for urgent communications and one-to-one emails from leadership.

- **Capital Campaign Support:** Mark created a landing page on the church website to support the Capital Campaign, helping to centralize information and provide a digital hub for campaign materials.
- **Service Video Clips:** Mark also began posting video excerpts from worship services to Facebook, expanding our digital reach and providing content that helps members stay connected, even when they can't attend in person.
- **Activities Fair Participation:** The team was present at the church's Activities Fair to raise awareness of our work and invite new participation. While no new members joined as a result, our presence contributed to broader visibility.

**Looking Ahead:** We recognize the need for stronger coordination and regular meetings to better support the church's communications goals. In the coming year, we hope to reinvigorate the team, complete the MailChimp transition, and make meaningful progress on showcasing more of our community life through photos and video.

## Women's Alliance

The Women's Alliance is a strong and long-standing community in our church. We are a social group, providing ways to learn and grow together. We support each other and our church, working to enact our UU values. Since our meetings are during the daytime, most, but not all, of us are retired. But if meeting on two Thursday mornings a month could fit in to your schedule, we would be very happy to have you join us. One way to learn more is to email us at [womensalliance@first-unitarian-pgh.org](mailto:womensalliance@first-unitarian-pgh.org)

"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."

The group was founded in 1890. It was funded by bequests from two early members, Irene H. Haney and Mary Semple. Their funds, and subsequent donations as bequests, are managed by the Bequests Committee of the Women's Alliance. We are a dues-paying organization. We have been granted 501(c)(3) status under the Internal Revenue Code, and so are entitled to the tax benefits available to charitable organizations, pursuant to the regulations of the IRS.

We currently have 66 members and about 30 friends. We meet, on the first and third Thursday mornings, from mid-September through May, in the sunny Schweitzer Room to avail ourselves of the television screen for dual-platform meetings, and for speakers' presentations. Using the combination of the moveable microphones and the Owl camera, generally gives us good coverage in the room and at home.

We always have fruit and sweets as snacks, and many members stay after the meeting to share lunch together. In September, December and May we have special lunches marking the beginning and end of our year, and the winter holidays. Through the summer we have been gathering monthly for pot-luck lunches, in the church garden, at a member's house, or sometimes, at Longwood, where a number of members live.

### Members of the Women's Alliance Board

- Denice Galpern - Chair
- Laura Wenneker - Co-chair

- Janet Bednarz - Secretary
- Linda Fleming - Treasurer
- MR Kelsey and Margaret Noether - Hospitality
- Mary Schinhofen - Membership
- Louise Jencik, Ebe Emmons, Jane MacLeod - Programs
- Jan Harrison, Marcia Bandes, Sue Oerkvitz (until she moved) - Social Responsibility
- Alice Carnes - Bequests
- Alice Carnes - Poet in Residence

### **Women's Alliance Programs: September 2024-April 2025**

Generally, we have a speaker once a month, after our half-hour business meeting. Those programs for this year are listed below. During the other meetings, we make time for general sharing and discussion, sometimes with a specific topic, but often just as the spirit

**October:** Maureen Porter spoke about her trip to the International Convocation of UU Women in Transylvania, where she was the keynote speaker

**November:** our intern, Mac Perkins-High gave a presentation on Massachusetts's Quabbin Reservoir. He discussed the Barnes History project and how a displaced community reconstructed homeland via the use of story.

**November:** Our speaker was Paul Klein, the Allegheny County Council Representative for District 11, which includes Shadyside, Squirrel Hill, Point Breeze, Greenfield, and Homestead, among others.

**January:** We had a book discussion on *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity*

in *The Natural World* by Robin Wall Kimmerer

**February:** Our speaker was soprano Julia Swan Laird, a professional opera singer who was recently a Resident Artist at the Pittsburgh Opera.

**March:** The program was a presentation by Laura Faessel and Deanna Mance from Penn Forest Natural Burial Park, the only exclusively green cemetery in Pennsylvania that is certified by the Green Council as a Natural Burial Ground.

**April:** Our program presenter was Patrick Hughes, who works for the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia at the University of Pittsburgh. He gave a Power Point presentation about the three- week study tour he led in the four countries of Central Asia : Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

**May:** Our speaker was Louis Mennel, who runs Carbon Compost, a small-scale compost collection service dedicated to making composting easy and accessible for homes, businesses, and events in the Pittsburgh area.

### **Social Responsibility Donations**

With funds primarily collected from our dues (\$50/year, as possible), members nominate and then vote to make donations to local groups. We do this annually, with a focus on serving women, girls and children, and having an impact both on fighting racial oppression, and supporting environmental justice. This year we voted to give \$300. to each of the following organizations:

1. **Allegheny Reproductive Health Center**- provides fearless, judgement-free healthcare to women and the LGBTQ+ community.
2. **ARYSE** - local non-profit serving immigrant youth (grades 6-12) residing in Allegheny Co.
3. **Casa San Jose** – supports the local Latino community, especially regarding immigration recently made extremely difficult and traumatic.

4. **Footbridge for Families** – Rapid-response funding to local families in crisis, via payment to **third-party vendors**, thereby reducing the downward spiral into further crises.
5. **Global Switchboard** – non-profit providing critical support to **many other** local human-rights non-profits, so they can focus on accomplishing their mission.
6. **Gwen's Girls** - *"When given the opportunity, any girl can succeed"*. Serving Allegheny County (POC) girls with individual support and policy advocacy.
7. **Jeremiah's Place** - Pittsburgh's only 24-hour crisis nursery.
8. **JFCS, Refugee & Immigrant Services** – provides innovative and effective social services to immigrants and refugees.
9. **SisTers PGH**– Black and Trans-led, they provide safe spaces, services and **vetted** referrals to trans-competent service providers, for the Transgender community in SW PA.
10. **Women for a Healthy Environment** - educates residents in the Mon Valley about public-health risks and works on building coalitions among community members to create change.
11. **Women's Law Project** - nonprofit legal organization working "to defend and advance the rights of women, girls, and LGBTQ+ people in Pennsylvania and beyond." Reproductive freedom is the keystone to their work.

## Bequests

The Bequest Committee recommends contributions for congregational needs, from funds held in an investment account. Recent allocations (2023/2024) have been:

- Flowers, for Sundays - \$250. Women's Alliance members supply them weekly, sometimes from a store, and so are reimbursed.
- Music - both to Ellen Gozion and Kris Rust. \$500. each.
- Young Adults \$1000.
- Stained glass repair \$500.
- Garden \$750.

Not all of these funds have been spent yet.

For that reason, and because it has been recommended that we shift our giving schedule to be more in line with the various church entities that we usually support, the Bequests Committee is waiting to make the 2025 recommendations. Members will discuss, and vote approval of these.

## Ongoing projects of the Women's Alliance are:

1) The Pillowcase Sewing Circle, making bright pillowcases for patients at Children's Hospital. Annie Stunden spearheaded this project. The First Church Art Exhibit in July 2024 was of our pillowcases hung - a la clothesline- around the Undercroft Gallery. About a dozen members and friends work on this project, monthly. It's been an excellent way for some new members to have a smaller group to get to know. You are welcome to join in.

2) Monthly post card writing to local officials and PA government legislators on various issues in line with our UU values. Becky Studer initiated this project primarily with information supplied by UUJusticePA. We meet monthly, and multiple members now are sources of issues of concern. Your help would be very welcome.

3) The First UU Refugee Team Program. Though not solely a project of Women's Alliance, many of the active members of the Refugee Team are Women's Alliance members. The group has worked to support Jewish Family and Community Services (JFCS) Welcome Home program, (which we helped start three years ago), settling refugees brought to Pittsburgh through federal programs. This was paused by the government in January. Also, JFCS is no longer receiving federal funds to support refugee families for the first several months, which includes housing, food, mental health, medical care, employment etc. Here are the newest developments: As requested by our JFCS partners, we have signed up for a new kind of

support for the refugee families who are recently settled here. The JFCS will be sponsoring a series of cultural orientation sessions for Afghani women (and men) and have asked that we supply items for the sessions. Women's Alliance members will be supporting these and other proposals that JFCS requests. Stay tuned to be part of our efforts.

4) On Christmas Eve, for a number of years, now, Women's Alliance members prepared and delivered to POWER (Pennsylvania Organization for Women in Early Recovery) the fixings for Christmas dinner for POWER's residents and staff, with ample leftovers. Amy de Chicchis has coordinated this for the last 2 years. Many hands make light work, and this dinner is always greatly appreciated.

### **Looking Ahead**

At this point in time, camaraderie, community, learning and acting on the news, keeping abreast of ways to be of service, and being in a place to make and deepen friendships feels very important. Please come join our church's Women's Alliance if this sounds like a fit for you.

Respectfully submitted,

Denice Galpern and Laura Wenneker

## **INSPIRE COUNCIL**

### **Worship Team**

**Worship Team Members:** Stephanie Pawlowski, Commissioned Lay Minister (chair), Alice Carnes, Ward Kelsey and Carol Washburn

The Worship Team works with the minister to support Sunday worship services. We moved our meeting time this year to the third Monday of the month. During our monthly meetings, we discuss ideas for future services, potential changes to services, and liturgist assignments. We work as a team to invite guests to the pulpit and assist guests with planning and presenting the service. This year Robert Piemme left us when he moved to Colorado. Carol Washburn joined the committee this year.

Mac, in their role as intern, provided additional support to the committee and handled the liturgist role for the majority of Sundays this year. Mac's assistance gave long term volunteers a break. In a continued attempt to grow our list of volunteer liturgists (who are not required to be committee members) and strengthen the skills of current liturgists, we held a liturgist training in March 2025. We walked through the tasks of a liturgist and videotaped each participant presenting a reading.

Currently, we have a strong group of liturgists. The worship committee is still rather small and we are in need of individuals who can work closely and independently with guests in the pulpit to create and present full services, especially during the summer. Anyone with public speaking experience and/or a strong and clear speaking voice is welcome to reach out to the team.

### **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 and rites of passage.

This past year there were fewer opportunities for me to present sermons. In February 2025, I presented a sermon entitled "Who am I? Who are You?" This was to date, the most personal and vulnerable sermon that I have written. I believe it shows my growth since I began as a Commissioned Lay Minister.

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 continues to be the most demanding part of the work that I do. Even if I am not slated as the liturgist, historically, I assist guests with planning services and creating the Orders of Services---or make final decisions. Last summer, I did have assistance from two other members of the worship committee but this is an area for continued development.

I continued to meet monthly with Rev. Kate and regularly with a group of other CLMs from Ohio.

I handle weddings and baby dedications for non-members who contact the church. This year I was honored to officiate a child dedication for the second child of a family I worked with several years ago. I am also officiating a wedding in May 2025. The couple met me when I officiated the wedding of the bride's brother.

In last year's report, I expressed my desire to try leading some alternative services. With Mac's assistance and support, we attempted to lead monthly alternative services. Originally, we wanted to try out several ideas including a chanting service, a craft/arts based service, a movement/body-focused services, among others. Ultimately, we ended up just sticking with chanting. This attempt was not successful---with only one date having more than 2 participants. I did get feedback that the time and day of the week did not work for many. Prior to Mac leaving First Church, I plan to discuss ideas for other alternatives services. I am leaning towards offering them quarterly instead of monthly to gauge interest. I have not abandoned the idea and would love to collaborate with anyone who finds this concept speaks to them. To that end, I recently met with a church member about having a healing service or ceremony. I offered one many years ago and would like to put this back on my list for the upcoming year.

It continues to be a joy and an honor to serve this congregation. Thank you for giving me your support and encouragement.

Stephanie Pawlowski

## **Affiliated Community Minister**

This was my fourth 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. I serve on the VAPHS Whole Health Subcommittee, which has to do with promoting integrative health and wellness for both patients and staff. 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.

We continue to be short-staffed in the Chaplain Service at VA Pittsburgh. Our CPE educator left last November, which was a relief to me, but it meant that our students were without an educator for several weeks while a search was conducted for an interim educator. This month another chaplain resigned. I have continued to carry a large clinical caseload that includes my

participation in a pilot study involving a chaplain intervention for moral injury. Our research study should finally begin sometime later this spring, which is exciting. In addition, I have been working on my board certification specialty certificate in substance use disorders (SUD), which I hope to receive sometime in Summer 2025. Fingers crossed!

Unfortunately, the last few months have been incredibly stressful for federal employees across the board, but especially in the VA, given the proposed Reduction in Force (RIF) that is expected to begin later this spring. Chaplains are considered frontline clinical staff, but it remains to be seen if we will be spared from the major workforce cuts. Many of my co-workers are anxious and stressed, and I have been providing additional staff care, as my time permits. I have also been providing extra support to BIPOC and LGBTQ+ patients and staff who feel especially threatened in the current environment. During Chaplain Service staff meetings, I have led mindfulness practices for stress management and increased resilience. In my own life and ministry, I have prioritized my self-care practices, including attending weekly strength training classes, doing regular yoga and mindfulness practice, attending retreats, getting good rest, eating well, and being in community as often as possible with both UU and interfaith colleagues.

A somewhat surprising personal ministerial milestone was my officiating my first-ever LGBTQ+ wedding. A couple from Mt. Lebanon approached me last summer about marrying them in a private ceremony at the Sunnyhill congregation. While they had been together for many years, they were worried about their safety given the incoming administration. I felt very honored and touched to be their officiant.

As was the case last year, sadly I had little time left over to be involved much at First Church. I continued to support the excellent work of the Environmental Justice (EJ) Team, but mostly in the form of providing moral support. From October 2024-March 2025, I participated in a wonderful program for lay and ordained religious leaders called "Navigating Climate Spiritual Care" that was offered by the BTS Center in Portland, Maine. Last August, I preached a sermon called "Hot, Humid, and Yet Hopeful" on the theme of finding hope in the face of ongoing climate emergency. In mid-March, in Rev. Kate's absence, I officiated a memorial service in Heinz Chapel for Herb Barry, retired long-time Pitt professor of psychopharmacology and former First Church choir member, who died at age 94. I will be preaching at First Church again at the end of June.

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 EJ ministry as much as possible.

In faith and with active hope,

Rev. Stephanie

## Intern Minister

This year, I served as the full-time intern minister for the 40-week period between mid-August and mid-May. As intern minister, I held dual roles of serving the congregation and learning from the congregation, and I was thankfully able to do a great deal of both. I have placed my work this year into five broad categories with the hopes that that will make it a little easier to parse.

### 1. Worship

I participated in planning and running three worship services each month from September through May, including a number of multigenerational services. I gave five sermons: "*Staying Grounded, Staying Afloat*" on November 10, "*Gesundheit!*" on December 2, "*The Best of Times, The Worst of Times*" on March 23, "*Plate Tectonics 101*" on April 27, and "*Ordinary Devotion*" on May 18, all of which focused on practices of relationality and radical love within our current (overwhelming, frightening) cultural context. For the services I did not lead, I took over the duties normally done by the liturgist, and over the course of the year had the chance to run each

element of the service, including the Story for All Ages, Prayer, and Benediction. As part of preparing for services, I also participated in every Program Staff and Worship Committee meeting.

In addition to our standard Sunday Worship, we hosted a few additional worship events at the church this year: a Climate Revival Workshop, an Interfaith Thanksgiving Service and two Christmas Eve services. I assisted Reverend Kate in planning and hosting these worship events.

With Commissioned Lay Minister Stephanie Pawlowski, we held a monthly “alternate worship service” focusing on forms of worship that are easier accessed outside of Sunday mornings. We eventually decided to stop running these due to lack of interest, but I think the need remains and could be explored more in the future.

## **2. Campus and Young Adult Ministry**

Please see my separate report on this work (to be found elsewhere in this document.)

## **3. Governance & Connection**

In addition to Staff and Worship Committee meetings, I participated in all Board and Executive Committee meetings (ex officio), all Capital Campaign Meetings, and the majority of meetings for the Council of Communities. I also rotated through many of our major committees, including Finance, COSM, VIM, Stewardship, Buildings and Grounds, and the Racial Justice Taskforce.

Outside of the walls of the church, I additionally participated in meetings of the Pittsburgh Cluster of UU Congregations, of the Ohio-Meadville Conference of the UUMA, the Spiritual Leader’s Caucus of the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (until it dissolved earlier this year), and of the Pittsburgh Antiracist Interfaith Leaders. I also represented our community at an Interfaith Forestry Conference that was hosted at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and at the Queer Resource Center of Millvale.

## **4. Miscellaneous Service**

While the categories above composed the majority of my time, I also participated in a number of smaller tasks throughout the year. These included helping Erica Shadowsong run the Coming-of-Age program, monthly writings for the pastoral newsletter, presentations to the Women’s Alliance and Men’s Group, adding pictures and statements of our values to the garden lobby, hosting a Sermon-Writing workshop with Reverend Kate, and helping to run the Intro to UU and RU a UU sessions.

## **5. Personal Formation**

Of course, I was also here in a learning capacity. In addition to learning that occurred while I was working, I took a number of courses this year. Through the UUA, I was trained and certified as an OWL facilitator, and separately took a class on leading sexually healthy congregations. Through the UUMA, I took “Professional Boundaries 101” and “Thriving as a Highly Sensitive Clergy person.” Through Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, I took two classes on Christian scriptures. Prior to the November Election, I took a class on conflict de-escalation, and in the Spring, I took a course on the UU pedagogical tradition of SpiritPlay.

In December, I had the chance to officiate a wedding, and in February, I led a worship service, “*No Wrong Notes*,” at my home congregation in Harvard, Massachusetts.

Throughout the internship, I was guided and supported by monthly meetings with my Internship Committee and my Spiritual Advisor, twice-monthly meetings with a small group of other UU interns, and weekly meetings with Reverend Kate and with my therapist. I was additionally supported and invited to growth by my friends and family members, both locally and elsewhere.

In October, I took a career assessment at Midwest Ministry Consultants in Columbus, OH — a rigorous, multi-day personal/psychological assessment that is part of the UU credentialing process. Following thus, I entered into “Candidacy” with the UUA, which is the final step before accreditation. In April, I met with our organization’s accrediting body, the MFC, and was invited to return to them after following up on a few specific tasks. It is my intention to continue my call to parish ministry. Plans are still evolving for the next year, but I leave this internship both significantly more prepared for ministerial work and much more certain that that is my path.

Thank you all,

Mac Perkins-High (Intern Minister)

## Director of Instrumental Music

My work for the congregation centers on creating a meaningful and engaging musical atmosphere for worship services—through my accompanying, coordinating instrumental music for worship services and developing congregational participation. I played and assisted in planning 44 services, about 3.5/services per month.

One of the main elements and pleasures of my work as a music director continues to be including musicians of all ages and abilities to join in music making.

Some highlights from the past year with amateurs and professionals:

- Designing the summer services with Stephanie Pawlowski, liturgists, and guest speakers, which includes a summer favorite *Service of Music and Poetry*.
- Coordinating for the Hymn Band/Rock Band to play for services. They accompanied hymns and performed music by The Cure, David Bowie, Jeff Tweedy (formerly of Wilco), and *Which Side Are You On?* a la Billy Bragg.
- Dr. James Johnson performing with his jazz trio.
- Collaborations with the Khasi Hills Partnership Team for worship services, which have sometimes included singing with small groups.
- Kiyoe Matsuura and Sun Chang (classical violin-piano duo *Ensemble Vitelotte*) led worship music and performed a classical concert, Spring 2024.
- Supporting Zuly Inirio’s homily about her founding of Instituto Cimarrón; I included solo piano pieces by female Latin composer Francisca Gonzaga.
- Singer-songwriter Brad Yoder joined us for three Sunday services since last summer, two of which were part of an exchange-for-services that supported his 2024 CD release concert. In addition to solo performing, Brad supports hymns on tenor and soprano sax, et al.
- Solo percussionist Hugo Cruz and soprano Zuly Inirio, MLK 2025.
- Multi-instrumentalist acoustic ensemble performing for Christmas Pageant.
- Debut of the First UU Acoustic Gathering Players, April 2025.
- Supporting Maddy Izzo, flute, on Sunday mornings. Maddy regularly includes work by female and BIPOC composers.

This February I began leading twice-monthly **1<sup>st</sup> UU Acoustic Gatherings**. Players of all ages and abilities are welcome: wind, string and other players. We meet to develop musicianship and build community, to have fun playing in a relaxed, casual atmosphere. Players from Acoustic Gathering will occasionally provide music for worship services, as folks are able and interested. Participants have included: Howard Cespedes, Ebe Emmons, Hugh McGough, Chris Milcarek, Nancy Lattimer, Mary Alice Drusbasky, Lois Hurt, Ward Kelsey, Mike Powers. Friend James Herbert attends on occasion. The Gathering is open to anyone in the community—whether they attend First Unitarian or not.

The First Unitarian music program continues to support the **Pittsburgh Community Gamelan**. Players include members of Pittsburgh's Indonesian community as well as graduates of the Pitt's student gamelan. PCG rehearses in the Harper Room. They performed for Sunday morning worship in December 2024. 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 Brian Junker (banjo, guitar, vocals); Danny Rectenwald (guitar, mandolin); Heather Cunningham (guitar, lead and backup vocals, harmonica); friend Alice Backer (fiddle); Paul Cunningham (upright bass, keys/synthesizer, electric bass, drums and backup vocals); Corey Layman (guitar, lead vocals, drums); Mike Shanley (electric bass); Liam Lyons (percussion). We have played for Labor Day, InGathering and other services.

**Individual musicians** include member and friends Maddy Izzo, Ebe Emmons (flutes), and Mary Denison (recorder and clarinet), Oscar Atkinson (oboe, bassoon) and Al Schwartz (piano), David McLaughlin (violin), Howard Cespedes (flute, clarinet, recorder), Mike Powers (saxophone), friend Susan Spangler (voice and mandolin); We have performed ad hoc throughout the year in various configurations to support hymns or to play folk music and other repertoire. Professional players in addition to those already mentioned were a brass trio for Christmas Eve that included Miranda Johnson (horn), Kyra Hulligan (trumpet) and Christa Barnes (trombone).

**Songwriters** Brian Junker and Danny Rectenwald have both performed original compositions and arrangements.

**Substitute accompanists** have included Sun Chang; composer and community music leader David Mahler; Dr. James Johnson; multi-talented member of First UU Lee Saville-Iksic, who performs original compositions for voice and/or piano, cover songs and piano repertoire.

I continue to accompany services primarily at the piano, while occasionally using the pipe organ. The organ worked very poorly throughout most of 2024! It's very expensive to maintain the instrument. Just before Easter this year I was able to schedule a short but crucial visit by the technicians; they repaired some major leaks, which work was immediately apparent, though in no way complete.

I occasionally performed solo vocal repertoire: traditional and original songs, accompanying myself on banjo, harmonium or piano. This year I invited member Paul Kropfl to join our list of hymn leaders, with whom I work to support congregational singing on Sunday mornings—in the absence of Kris and the UU Community Singers.

I generally attend about three staff meetings each month (except during Summer), two of which focus on worship planning.

I am grateful to the community for their support of my work. I look forward to working to bring community musicians together; the input of multiple voices enriches the music and strengthens the interwoven fabric of First Unitarian.

Respectfully submitted by

Ellen Gozion, *Director of Instrumental Music*

## Vocal Music Program

During the 2024-25 church year, the **First Unitarian vocal music program** has continued to be an active part of community and congregational life. I have administered and led the vocal music program with help from colleagues and associates Ellen Gozion, Rev. Deryck Tines, and Lee Saville-Iksic, as well as several supportive lay leaders and church staff.

The **UU Pittsburgh Community Singers** is a choir made up of First Unitarian members and friends, community members at large, and professional section leaders. The choir has sung throughout the year in Pittsburgh, with partners, at the following **community events**:

**3 Rivers Arts Festival** in Downtown

**Pittsburgh LGBT+ Pride festival** in Bloomfield

**Pittsburgh Juneteenth Festival** in Hill District

**Holiday Concert** with Pittsburghs Coro Latinamericano at First Unitarian

**Holiday Caroling** at Cornerstone skilled nursing facility in East Liberty

**Let Freedom Sing Concert** at Kelly Strayhorn Theater

**Community Easter Concert** on Northside

This year First Unitarian and Rev Walker hosted the annual **Interfaith Thanksgiving Service**, for which we organized a special **Interfaith Choir**, led by directors Kris Rust, Deryck Tines, Cantor David Reinwald (Temple Sinai) and Sean Cloonan (Edgewood Presbyterian Church)

In addition, we **promoted Unitarian Universalism in the Pittsburgh area** through the following events:

**Pittsburgh UU Cluster Choir** – organized by Mary Pratt, Deryck Tines and Kris Rust, bringing singers from the Cluster churches and the Afro American Music Institute together for the annual Cluster meeting (this year at the UU Church of the North Hills) and for a Sunday morning performance at one of the Cluster Churches (this year at Allegheny Unitarian Church).

The Community Singers and AAMI singers are performing at the **Allegheny Unitarian Church** on two additional Sundays this church year. Our presence in these services supports the ministry of Rev Deryck Tines at Allegheny Unitarian and supports a Unitarian presence on Pittsburgh's Northside.

**Community performances** by the UU Community Singers **are supported** by the Music Endowment, the Social Justice Endowment of First Unitarian Church, the operating funds of First Unitarian Church, and individual donors.

For **Sunday mornings at First UU**, I have worked closely with the rest of the program staff to plan worship that includes **robust congregational singing** led by music staff, professional artists, UU Community Singers, and lay song leaders. I continue to advocate for more equitable **representation of BIPOC voices** on Sunday mornings at First Unitarian. In addition, the Community Singers and I **perform about once per month** in Sunday services at First UU and sing each year for the First UU Christmas Eve service.

Our **community partner arts organizations and individual professional artists** have included Coro Latinamericano, the Lemington Chorale, Reverend Deryck Tines, Let Freedom Sing & the Afro American Music Institute, Dr. Herbert Jones, Mary Caldwell Dawson Branch of the National Association of Negro Musicians, Nikki Porter, Eastminster Presbyterian Church Choir, Temple Sinai Choir & Cantor David Reinwald, Sean Cloonan, Edgewood Presbyterian Church, Chantal Braziel, Morgan Hawkins, Zuly Inirio, Payten Blake, Graham Fandrei, Julianna Byerly, Solomon Onyukwu, Mel Holley and Lourdes Santiesteban. Our community partners and professional artists have added **musical excellence and diversity** to our music program and have brought the voices and faces of young adults, people of color and gender non-conforming individuals into community with First Unitarian.

Respectfully and gratefully submitted,  
Kris Rust, Director of Vocal Music

# 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. A public-facing website for the series is here: <http://uusongspace.com/>.

The SongSpace committee consists of Brian Junker (chair), Gary Crouth, Irma Tani, and rotating technical volunteers Andrew Papale, and Will Snavelly. Danny Rectenwald has agreed to join the committee and help with curation and booking. If you are interested, please inquire about joining us!

Other volunteers for the series include Rob & Al Schwartz, AK Molteni, Kate Snow, MR Kelsey, other church members, and friends of Irma Tani such as Jean Siegel.

During the period June 2024 – May 2025 the following concerts took place:

- **Saturday September 28**: **Grace Pettis** (folk, country and soul) with special guest **Tai Chirovsky** (inspiring Pittsburgh singer-songwriter).
- **Saturday November 8**: **Alice Howe and Freebo** (standout national singer-songwriter with a grandmaster of bass guitar).
- **Saturday January 25**: **Chrissy Strong and Morgan Erina** (singer-songwriters from Ohio and Pittsburgh singing about addiction and recovery).
- **Saturday March 22**: **Nylon String Summit: Buxton, Rectenwald & Meleshenko** (three excellent nylon string guitarists from Western Pennsylvania).
- **Saturday May 10**: **Crys Matthews** (leading black LGBTQ+ social justice music-maker) with special guest **Brad Yoder** (well-known Pittsburgh musician).

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). Performers also draw members of their own following to the church, increasing the church's exposure among the general public. Most of our artists get interviews on Whiskey Before Breakfast (11am-2pm Wednesdays, WRCT 88.3FM) and the Saturday Light Brigade (6am-Noon Saturdays, WRCT 88.3FM). Our attendance remains moderate (40-90 at most shows); it remains a challenge to maintain and grow our audiences for the future.

Our financial footing has improved again this year (in part once again due to a charitable contribution from WRCT radio) so we are seeking some artists for 2025-2026 with higher required guarantees (e.g., **Hiroya Tsukomoto** [excellent instrumental guitar and storytelling] and **Larry and Joe** [blended Venezuelan and North American folk musics]).

Brian Junker, May 8, 2025

# Dance Choir

## Current Members

Tory Butterworth, Alice Cranes, Linda Fleming, Jennifer Halperin, Ioulia Kornberg, Karen Litzinger, Mary Pat Mengato, Cathy Rohrer, Sarah Sheard

Supporting - Nancy Latimer, Jan Harrison

Guest dancer - Alicyn Simpson

## August

- Met and viewed a large collection of costumes and videos gifted to us from Skyloom, a liturgical dance group in MA that was disbanding

## October

- Planning meeting for the year
- Start creating service themes and choreographing and rehearsing for Winter Solstice
- Applied for and received Music Endowment grant for paying guest musician Jett Downey (with her Earthtique band) for Solstice

## November

- Continued service planning, choreographing, and rehearsing for Solstice
- Collaborated with Jett Downey on original music and arrangements
- Reset a dance piece from Skyloom for beginning of Solstice service

## December

- Final rehearsals for Solstice
- Coordinated with liturgist, tech team, and First U staff for OOS, lighting/staging for livestream
- Coordinated with supporting Dance Choir member for reception after the service
- Led and performed in the Winter Solstice Service on Dec 21

## February/March

- Planning meeting for Easter/Earth Day service and future project
- Created choreography for "Fire of Commitment" hymn project

## April

- rehearse and perform E Malama piece with grade 1-3 RE class
- For Easter/Earth Day Service on April 20

## Summer

- informal gathering to dance together for Summer Solstice

## Looking ahead - October - December

- Winter Solstice 2025 - prepare service and dances and perform
- 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 commitment, movement capabilities, and supporting tasks

## News

We welcomed a new dancing and singing member Ioulia Kornberg, two supporting members, and a guest dancer from Earthtique

# 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, Janet Bednarz and Madeline Darnell.

We are excited about our work and also future prospects.

#### **Undercroft Gallery Shows, 2024-2025**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Artist</b>	<b>Artist Contact Information</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Coordinator</b>
Sept 2024	Members Art Show	Linda Kauffman	Mixed	Linda Kauffman
Oct	Members Art Show	Linda Kaufman	Mixed	Linda Kauffman
Nov.	Julius Schwartz	Rob Schwartz	Paintings watercolors	Annie Stunden
Dec	Quilts	Annie Stunden Al Schwartz/ Barb Gengler	Quilts	Annie Stunden
Jan 2025	Member Phone/Photo Exhibit		Paintings	Joe Jencik/ Kirsti Adkins
February	Bethel Church Art Exhibit		Photographs	Kirsti Adkins Mary Schinhofen
March	Cheryl Kelley	Cheryl@willowandwhiskers.com	Photographs	Madeline Darnell
April	Cheryl Kelley	Cheryl@willowandwhiskers.com	Photographs	Madeline Darnell
May	Mary Weidner	weidner@andrew.cmu.edu	Paintings and drawings	Ali Masalehdan
June	Mary Weidner	weidner@andrew.cmu.edu	Painting and drawings	Ali Masalehdan

# 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 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 resumed. The first meeting attracted about 12 people but since then, there have been only a few regulars attending the meeting. Jim Pashek has volunteered to have 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.

**Group Status:** We have decided to suspend the monthly meeting for the 2024-2025 church year. Our group was represented at the activities fair at the church and two people stopped to ask questions. We will maintain our contact information on the church website and the pew brochure in case someone is seeking more information about addiction.

Submitted by Jim Pashek on April 2, 2025

## Alternative Gift Market

First UU continued our beautiful tradition of hosting an Alternative Holiday Gift Market on December 1<sup>st</sup> and Dec. 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024. 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.

We partnered with Alternative Gifts International (AGI) and offered an expanded display focusing on all 24 of their worthy domestic and international charity partnerships (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 thrilled that together we raised and sent **\$5,230** to AGI for their disbursement.

In addition, our First UU’s Annual Alternative Gift Market included two table displays and collections for “beloved” causes”: Khasi Hills (raising \$780) and Valley Clean Air Now’s Replacement Home Filter Fund ( raising \$412). **Altogether, for AGI & our two beloved causes, First UU raised \$ 6,422!**

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 us to focus on 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 Stevens. Our team also includes Nancy Latimer, Sandy Wooley,

Karen Woodall, Heather Powers, Julie Downs and her daughter Simone, Madeline Darnell, Jan Carlino and Tony Rutigliano. And a big thank you to Dan, Cicely, and Rita for their help, too! 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!

We are all deeply grateful for First UU's members' generosity and support for this incredibly special market!

Respectfully submitted: Karen Burns Rutigliano and Margaret Stevens

## Khasi Hills Partnership

**Members:** Karen Litzinger (chairperson), Moira Dunn, LeeAnn Haworth, Lois Hurt, Mary Pat Mengato, Eleanor Mayfield, Maureen Porter, Shelley Ross, David Usher, Anne Van Cott.

### Highlights:

- 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 annual report writing, we have raised the \$9,600 goal of sponsoring the two teachers which we had done the last six years. This year was the earliest that we reached our church-year goal. This year as last year we have also 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.
- Leadership Restructuring – In order to have a sustainable and manageable committee, we initiated a structure where most members served as a point person for a project or task. We also began organizing files to a Google Drive to be more accessible now and in the future.
- September Anniversary Day Events– This was the fifth year of acknowledging Khasi Hills Anniversary Day, their most important holiday, which celebrates the founding of Unitarianism in the Khasi Hills. Our September 18 church service included a brief address and recognition.
- Alternative Gift Market – We were one of the causes this year which brought in \$780 from 13 donors.
- February Share the Plate Month – This raised \$688, In addition, we raised \$2356. from donors contributing directly to the Khasi Hills throughout the Share The Plate month. The total March, 2025 contributions were, therefore, \$3044

- Khasi Hills Partnership Sunday and Social Hour Luncheon/Focus on Women – The March 2 service featured the theme of Women of the Khasi Hills, partly inspired by member Maureen Porter being the invited Keynote for the 4<sup>th</sup> International Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women in Romania. Continuing on Maureen's keynote theme of weaving, our church service featured stories and photos of Khasi Hills women who have been woven into our church history with the school. It was followed by a celebratory Social Hour featuring cuisine of North East and Main Land India.
- UUA Faithify Rain Water Harvest Campaign Progress – All year our school provided photos of the major progress of this project that we headed up in Fall 2023 in collaboration with First Unitarian Church of Dallas and UUMAN (North Metro Atlanta). The fundraising was through a UUA Faithify Campaign and raised its goal of \$19,500.
- UUA International Office Connections – Multiple members attended the roughly quarterly meetings of USA India Partners to receive updates, including about the major transition of international partnerships from the 2020 restructuring.
- International Travel – Related to the UUA restructuring, there have not been any UUA affiliated pilgrimages since 2020, rather UUA encouraging the local country Unitarians to take the lead, which has been a hardship for many. The Unitarian Union of North East India (UUNEI, equivalent of UUA), started collaborating with past trip leader of the now defunct Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council (UUPCC) to offer such pilgrimages. The Spring 2025 first pilgrimage was canceled due to lack of sign-ups. We are hopeful that one or two from our church can participate in the Fall 2025 Pilgrimage. A funding request for annual or every other year budget line was submitted, but not feasible. The team has completed the Visitor Guideline both to assist pilgrims personally and to set expectations of serving as a church ambassador to our partners.
- Donor Newsletter Outreach – This was the second year of a September newsletter with sponsorship form which raised a successful \$5980 from 40 donors. After the Fall campaign, we received an additional \$760 from donors.

**Coming year:** We expect to continue most annual events, continue to refine leadership restructuring and transition, and hopefully host special events around church travelers to India.

## UUs for Justice in the Middle East

After a long hiatus, we have activated our group which is currently composed of Joan Adibi, Margaret Fuhrman, Kirsti Adkins and myself.

The group donated \$400 to four charities active in the West Bank of Palestine and Gaza;

We have also purchased 3 cases of Palestinian olive oil that have been for sale during Sundays at the Undercroft Galley. Reception has been great and we have had to order additional 3 cases of olive oil.

## Share the Plate

We are very gratified to report back to you that our congregation continues to strongly embrace First UU's Share the Plate (STP) program by which our Sunday collections are shared 50/50 between designated monthly charities and First UU's operating budget. If a congregant explicitly designates that the donation is for the charity rather than for the plate, 100% goes to the charity (Note: STP does not affect payments made in fulfillment of our annual pledges.)

We will have completed three years of sharing our bounty monthly with 12 designated charities this August. Our STP schedule starts each September and continues through the following August.

In 2024-2025, thus far, these are the amounts of the STP checks that have been distributed to our congregationally nominated charities/causes:

- September – Valley Clean Air - \$ 1,260.09
- October - Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN) - \$2,148.68
- November – Pittsburgh Community Food Bank - \$ 1,771.22
- December – East End Cooperative Ministry (EECM) -\$1,776.75
- January – A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI) Pittsburgh Chapter - \$1,744.36
- February – Bethel AME - \$1,639.05

(Note: Additional gifts were combined with this STP amount for a total gift to Bethel AME of \$12,500 – one added gift was a Social Justice Endowment donation of \$1,500 and another was a private donation. This combined gift was presented in a service for Juneteenth at Bethel AME with First UU members present in co-celebration.)

- March – Khasi Hills - \$3,590.24
- April – Afro American Music Institute – \$1,602.50
- May – Reading Ready Pittsburgh
- June – Ceasefire PA
- July – Tree Pittsburgh
- August- UU Justice PA

This represents a total of **\$15,532.89 (!)** given in the past eight months to charities by our congregation through your monthly Share the Plate donations – with four more months to go within our STP annual cycle for 2024-2025.

This is a remarkable gift of collective First UU member generosity. We believe that the short special guest testimonies about the work of the charities that we have selected together familiarize all of us with the current work of these great agencies. The STP Committee appreciates your continued caring support of our Share the Plate program.

Come join our team! It's very gratifying to interface with the charities and their representatives! Special thanks to Reverend Kate for her partnership with our team and to Kyle Gracey, Robert Baron, Rita Gates, and Cicely Moultrie for their support.

Respectfully submitted: Mary Denison, Ebe Emmons, Karen Burns Rutigliano,

Kirsti Adkins, Cinda Beattie, Margaret Noether – The First UU Share the Plate Team.

## **Minister's Discretionary Fund: Marion's Purse**

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 31, 2025 the fund has a balance of \$2876.50.

## **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 9 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), 7 Wheelchairs, 2 Canes, 4 sets of Crutches, 1 set of Crutches with Forearm Support, 1 iWalk Knee Crutch, 2 Knee Scooters, 2 Potty Chairs with Rails, 4 Raised Toilet Seats, 2 Shower/Bath Chairs, 1 Shower Transfer Chair. Additional items (such as leg boots, air casts, knee ice compressors/chillers, sock aides, and reachers, etc.) are added from time to time.

When someone is in need of a medical assistance item, they can email [medicalequipment@first-unitarian-pgh.org](mailto:medicalequipment@first-unitarian-pgh.org). Ioulia Kornberg will provide 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.

Besides the equipment available to loan from our members to other members, 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.

When Ioulia Kornberg took over the task in Sept 2023, she contacted the people on the list and ensured that it was updated. She has had only a few people contact her during this past year, but has kept the list up-to-date.

In order to “promote” the availability of DME, she has been posting the following 2 announcements (alternating weeks) each month in the newsletter.

*Requested on the 1<sup>st</sup> of every month:*

#### **Medical Equipment Loan Program:**

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 send an email to [medicalequipment@first-unitarian-pgh.org](mailto:medicalequipment@first-unitarian-pgh.org).

*Requested on the 15<sup>th</sup> of every month:*

#### **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. Send an email to [medicalequipment@first-unitarian-pgh.org](mailto:medicalequipment@first-unitarian-pgh.org) 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, Karen Woodall, Rev. Kate Walker, Intern Minister Mac Perkins-High attended meetings this year.

During the past year the Pastoral Care Team met in person at church and on Zoom if necessary. Team members share the concerns of church members and our personal concerns. We respect confidentiality and only share information with permission. Our Caring Table is up most Sundays in the Undercroft or another location if needed. Cards can be signed there for joys and sorrows. Some team members make calls, send emails, and visit with those members who are home bound.

Rev. Kate continues sending out the weekly Pastoral Care and Connection letter and shares a monthly theme. At times she relates a personal experience with the theme. She shares joys and sorrows at the bottom of the letter. We prepare a list of congregants who have passed away, and the names of family and friends of congregants to share their names on All Soul's Sunday. To date we have lost the following members:

Ann Margaret de Klerk, November 8, 2024

Herbert Barry, January 9, 2025  
Alice Run Lanntair, March 15, 2025

#### Future Projects:

An important upcoming program will be support groups for caregiving and grief. Planning is in progress and we hope to begin groups in the near future to be held at church after service at Noon.

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 strongly committed to and inspired by the work of racial justice. We are grateful for the opportunity to engage in this work with each other in this UU congregation, and we appreciate the full support of our minister, Reverend Kate Walker.

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. **Join us!**

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**

- a) Educate and inform ourselves on racism in ourselves, in our church, in our communities and in the world.*
- b) Participate in the democratic process of choosing which 1-2 racial justice issue(s) we will focus on in a given year.*
- c) Regularly attend and participate in our monthly meetings, which are intended as planning sessions as well as a venue for sharing information and experiences.*
- d) Regularly engage in RJTF projects and actions around our selected issues.*
- e) Work with the Minister(s) on assisting the congregation with education and skills-building to live into the 8<sup>th</sup> 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, except for July of 2024, led by a revolving, collaborative steering committee currently comprised of Denice Galpern, Maria Magone and Jean Schmidt. We have a distribution list of approximately 30 individuals, with an average monthly meeting participation of 10-12 congregants.

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. What follows are the highlights of our work over the past year.

#### Internal Congregational Projects

- **Community of Communities (CoC): Shaping the Leading Edge – ongoing since June 2024**  
Seven RJTF members began a year-long training program (Shaping the Leading Edge) in June 2024 with nationally renowned UU leader, Paula Cole Jones and racial justice representatives from UU congregations around the country, centered on using the Community of Communities model to understand and implement congregational culture change towards building diverse, multicultural beloved communities that are non-hierarchical, radically welcoming, and inclusive. This is an extension of the commitment we made as a congregation in October 2022, when we voted nearly unanimously to adopt the 8<sup>th</sup> Principle, laying the foundation for us to be effective partners AND to diversify and grow our congregation.
- **Racial Justice Film Series – July through November 2024**  
Under the leadership of Denice Galpern, RJTF members put on a monthly RJ film series that ran from July through November, 2024, featuring documentaries such as *Torchbearers: The Story of Pittsburgh's Freedom Fighters* and *The Barber of Little Rock*. Viewings were followed by discussions to engage participants and educate on racial justice topics, with an average participation of 20.
- **Workshop Series on Isabelle Wilkerson's '8 Pillars of Caste' – Winter 2025**  
Designed and facilitated by Liz Hrenda, this 4-part interactive workshop series ran from Jan. to March, 2025, and was aimed at understanding systemic racism and developing pro-active anti-racist strategies. RJTF members provided lunch for 20-24 participants on average for each session.
- **Co-hosted with the First U Humanist Group a presentation by DeWitt Walton and Sierra Parm, of *Breaking the Chains of Poverty*, a program of the A. Philip Randolph Institute – April 1, 2025**  
For the second year in a row, the RJTF joined forces with the Humanist Group in cosponsoring a speaker. In fact, this collaboration involved the Environmental Justice Team as well as the Share-the-Plate Community at First U, in a true illustration of the Community of Communities approach to church life. This event drew approximately 30 people, including First U congregants and others from outside our congregation.
- **Partnership with First U Sunday Forum Speaker Series**  
The Forum restarted this year with RJTF member Clint Geller a part of the leadership circle. Clint represents racial and social justice interests in programming for this series. Talks included topics such as Critical Race Theory, with Professor Jay Huguley from the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work.

#### Community Outreach and Building of Partnerships

- **Second Year of Partnership with Bethel AME Church – strengthening and deepening relationship, centering the repair of truth, wealth and power**
  - RJTF members Clint Geller and Maria Magone served on the Bethel History Subcommittee, supporting the documenting of Bethel's history through grant writing, historical preservation of Bethel materials, and book and documentary film projects

- Several RJTF members participated in Bethel's October 2024 Halloween service event: Trunk or Treat
- Several RJTF members participated in Bethel's Fall 2024 'Get Out the Vote' effort: Souls to the Polls
- Several Bethel members participated in RJTF film events hosted at First U
- This was our second year of securing a Social Justice Endowment award towards financial reparations, combined with February 2025 Share-the-Plate to benefit Bethel: total amount ~\$12.5K
- multiple RJTF members and other UU congregants participated in Bethel's Juneteenth celebration in June 2024

An upcoming event that will allow us to further build fellowship and 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 22, 2025, with multifaith services open to all at both 11AM and 2PM that day.

- **Exploring Partnership with Abolitionist Law Center (ALC)**

RJTF has started to explore partnership with the Abolitionist Law Center (ALC), learning about their Court Watch Program through an invited speaker (Autumn Redcross) at our December 2024 RJTF meeting. Our first step was participating in an end-of-year letter writing campaign to young people who were originally incarcerated as minors and who are still in jail or prison.

### **Goals for the Year Ahead**

1. Develop partnership with Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP. We will explore hosting an 'NAACP Sunday' with the programming for that day collaboratively developed by First U RJTF (with our Minister's support) and representatives from NAACP Pittsburgh.
2. Grow partnership with ALC, continuing holiday letter writing and sponsoring RJTF members to train and serve as Court Watch volunteers.
3. Enhance social connection with members and clergy from Bethel AME.
4. Restart RJ film/discussion series for summer 2025.
5. Apply for funding to extend our participation in the 'Shaping the Leading Edge' initiative into the 2025-26 church year with a reconfigured working group that incorporates at least 3 new First U participants, based on interest and ability to commit and prioritizing young adult engagement.
  - a. Institutionalize the CoC model – fully integrate into First U's culture
6. Expand congregation-wide engagement in RJ work by better communication of our activities and opportunities.

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](mailto:racialjustice@first-unitarian-pgh.com)

Submitted by Jean Schmidt for the RJTF Steering Wheel (with Denice Galpern and Maria Magone)

# UUJusticePA - Write Here/Write Now

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". We are one of ~30 state based advocacy organizations. The PA group represents ~ 6000 UUs across the commonwealth. Our 24-25 season was challenged by the illness of our Executive Director, Rev. Joan Sabatino. She had to step down from her responsibilities and passed in October, 2024.

**The organization recovered with Clara Jenkins** becoming our new, very able director who maintains an active presence and critical recognition of our support of progressive values in Harrisburg. Clara has been joined by **Legislative Associate, Arly Henninger-Voss**. Arly tracks the progress of pertinent legislation through the Pennsylvania House and Senate and collaborates with UUJusticePA's justice teams, partner organizations, and PA UUs to advocate for positive change.

Together they have initiated several new education and support activities with the Justice Teams. These include a series of **Did UU Know?** infographics designed by Jesi Butler, our freelance writer, editor, and designer. They are routinely posted on the Bulletin Boards at church and Cicely has begun posting them on our social media sites as well. Another initiative is the **Zoom Action Hour** at noon on the 1st Monday of each month. All are encouraged to attend and sign up for notifications at UUJusticePA.

**Ongoing 1st Unitarian participation includes "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. We meet on the 4th Thursday of the month at 10:30 am in the Schweitzer Room. If you would like to participate but are not available at that time, contact rkstuder@gmail.com to obtain materials to use as your time allows. Our congregation also generously provides financial support via the annual UUJusticePA fundraisers and gives donations from a Share the Plate month.

**As of early '25 we have individuals who follow six of the seven Justice Teams.** This includes Deborah McGuire 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 newly active LGBTQIA+ group; if you or someone you know would be interested, please refer them to Clara at cjenkins@uujusticepa.org. All are invited to these monthly meetings-go to [www.uujustice.net](http://www.uujustice.net) for information. We recently had several members (ably recruited by Jan Harrison) attend the Cease Fire advocacy day in Harrisburg in support of Gun Violence Prevention legislation.

**Laura Wenneker has taken over our UU the Vote** activities, registering new voters and encouraging all to make their voices heard at the ballot box. Contact her with your ideas and willingness to help.

The UUJustice **Annual Meeting** was held on Zoom, April 26 from 9-11 AM. The Keynote speaker was Paul Takac, a fellow UU who is a member of the PA House of Representatives for the 82nd District (Centre County and surrounding area) since 2023. He discussed the current

state of legislating with the tiny Dem majority in the House and their wider minority status in the Senate.

**Two long range issues** UUJusticePA is emphasizing are: 1) the importance of the **elections for Judges** as we find our defense against autocratic and harmful policies now depend on a fair and impartial Judiciary. The retention of 3 supreme court judges in the November election is critical for defense of our UU Values in PA. **2) Legislation (HB31 and SB 131) to establish a non-partisan commission for redistricting** to establish fairly drawn districts. We are working with Fair Districts on this and you will hear more during the next few months.

Since last year's report, we have Postcarded on multiple issues, including:

- Supporting HB2338 to Bring Federal \$ To create PA energy jobs 'PEDA'
- Supporting HB2277 to update our Alternative Energy Portfolio
- Supported HB1608 Medicaid coverage for Doulas
- Supported HB2127 Postpartum Depression, education, Screening, & care
- Supported HB2344 on transparency in hospital acquisitions and closures
- Supported HB1032 Solar for Schools
- Supported HB2433 Stopping foreign influence in elections
- Supported SB131 Independent redistricting Commission in PA
- Opposed SB1867 that would block RGGI in PA
- Supported SB262 Extreme Risk Protection orders
- Supported HB 79 PA Medical Debt Relief Program

Go to <http://www.uujusticepa.net> 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](mailto:rkstuder@gmail.com).

## **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. It is interfaith, interracial, and interclass. The First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh was one of the founding members of PIIN over 25 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 a link to the monthly Board meetings ask Sandy Woolley.**

For information about PIIN go to [PIINPA.org](http://PIINPA.org) or contact any of the following 1st UU PIIN Core Team members: Madeline Darnell, Linda Fleming, Laura Gallagher, Joan Harvey, Laurie Lavine, Bob Mitchell, Sue Oerkvitz, Karen Burns Rutigliano, and Sandy Woolley. We would welcome additional members.

**PIIN is a “community organizing” organization. PIIN’s goal is to empower volunteer leaders to work on social justice issues related to their own self-interests** by teaching

them the tools of community organizing (1-1s, cutting an issue, and taking direct actions). PIIN works in partnership with other organizations on common justice issues.

**Issues PIIN focused on in 2024-25 include:**

1. Criminal Justice reform, including:
  - a. Improving conditions in the Allegheny County Jail.
  - b. Helping citizens returning from prison with a 12-week course (CB/EXPO) and helping them find their voice and power to improve the criminal justice system (Transformational Justice).
2. Environmental Justice, including:
  - a. Asking the Allegheny County Council to raise permit fees for companies to provide more funds to monitor the air quality in the Allegheny County.
  - b. Advocating for a grocery store in Claritin, currently a food dessert
3. Gun laws - Supporting the work of CeaseFirePA, a member of PIIN.
4. Public Education
  - a. Working with Great Public Schools (GPS), which advocates fair funding of public schools, using the fair funding formula for distribution of funding, and for accountability for charter schools for both their performance and use of funds that the students' home schools must pay.
  - b. Supporting the work of 412 Justice that advocates for transparency and public involvement of any decisions of the Pittsburgh Public Schools to close schools and change the feeder patterns.
5. Canvassing – What PIIN calls “Integrated Voter Engagement”
  - a. Canvassing in the Mon Valley in the summer and fall of 2024, door to door asking about people’s concerns and encouraging them to register and exercise their vote.
  - b. Working with PA Voice, PIIN will register new voters before the Primary.

**PIIN celebrated 25 years of Justice Work in the Pittsburgh region with a Fundraising Gala February 16, 2025.** Community organizing requires People and Money, and 1<sup>st</sup> UU is providing both volunteer leaders and financial support. Bob Mitchell is chairing the First UU/PIIN Environmental Team, which includes 1<sup>st</sup> UUs Karen Burns, Madeline Darnell, Ebe Emmons, Laura Gallagher, Claus Makowka, Mary Redford, Peg Schmidt, Mary Schinhofen, Will Snavelly, Becky Studer, and Sandy Woolley. Karen Burns Rutigliano leads PIIN’s grant writing efforts. Laurie Lavine, Laura Gallagher, Kirsti Atkins, and Sandy Woolley work on public education, Sandy Woolley is recording secretary and on the personnel committee, and the whole First UU Core team worked on the Fundraising Gala and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Pies for PIIN, We are gratified to have raised \$26,000 at the Pies for PIIN. **Save the Date! The 3rd annual Pies for PIIN is scheduled for Sunday, August 17, 2025, 1-3:00 p.m.**

I hope you can see that First UU’s contributions to PIIN are critical to PIIN’s justice work. Do you want to know more? Go to [PIINPA.org](http://PIINPA.org), or ask anyone named in this report.

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](http://PIINPA.org).**

Submitted by: Sandy Woolley

## Environmental Justice Task Force

### **I. Introduction**

This report describes the strategy and activities of the Environmental Justice Action Team (EJAT) from May 2024 through April 2025. EJAT was established in May 2022 following approval of a resolution to undertake an Environmental Justice initiative by the congregation at that year's annual meeting. The resolution called for "direct action working with oppressed communities; public advocacy at the local, state and national levels; educating ourselves and others; and changing our own social and environmental behaviors."

Much of our efforts over the past year have focused on improving air quality in the Mon Valley. They encompass direct action, public advocacy, and education as discussed in Sections II and III. Another ongoing focus is on "minding our own store", which has included the installation of LED lighting and a solar array on the roof of the Mason Wing. Over the past year we undertook another form of changing our own environmental behaviors through a composting program that is described in Section IV.

EJAT activities represent a key component of fulfilling one of the two church priorities from the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan, which is to:

#### **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

Over the past two years our activities have been informed by the teaching and experience of the Gamaliel Network. Rev. Kate Walker and Bob Mitchell attended a Gamaliel advanced leadership training conference in Nashville Feb. 28 - March 1 last year. The Gamaliel training emphasized two key requirements for achieving social justice:

#### **"Cutting an issue"**

The Gamaliel training highlighted the distinction between "issues" and "problems". A problem is broad, general, and chronic and may convey the sense of being unsolvable. In contrast, an issue is specific, concrete, and potentially winnable in the short term. Over the past three years EJAT has moved steadily from the broad problem of air quality in the Mon Valley to two focused issues:

- Proposed EPA regulations in 2023-2024. First U activists supported the successful approval of tighter regulations of air pollutants as discussed in the 2024 Annual Report.
- Improved local enforcement of the new regulations, particularly through the establishment of higher permit fees, in 2024-2025

#### **Building power**

No matter how well we have identified a specific winnable issue, we still need to build a power base to maximize the likelihood of achieving success. We are building power in several ways:

- Coordinating our church's EJ efforts with those of the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN) that has included active participation of both the North Hills and Sunnyhill Unitarian congregations. PIIN is an affiliate of the national Gamaliel Network.
- Doing issue "deep" canvassing in frontline Mon Valley communities as part of PIIN's Integrated Voter Engagement program
- Conducting educational outreach, including through our church's Sunday Forum speaker series that was restarted in September after a four year hiatus

Sections II and III provide more detail about cutting our issue and building power.

## **II. Cutting our issue**

Successful social justice leaders have identified three essential questions to answer in order to achieve effective results:

1. What do we want?
2. Who has the decision-making power to get what we want?
3. How do we get the decision maker(s) to take action to achieve our objective?

EJAT is guided by addressing these questions as described next.

During the first year (2022-2023) of the EJAT initiative we identified a general goal of achieving better air quality in the Pittsburgh region, specifically in frontline Environmental Justice communities of the Mon Valley such as Braddock and Clairton. See Fig 1.

Within that broad goal we continue to work with Valley Clean Air Now (VCAN) and the Environmental Integrity Project (EIP). EIP, which is based in Washington DC, was instrumental in influencing the Environmental Protection Agency in 2023 to propose tighter regulations on the emission of hazardous pollutants such as benzene from steel-making facilities. During late 2023 and into 2024, First U EJAT folks joined members of VCAN and other regional activists in online EPA hearings. Our attendance and written and verbal inputs helped achieve final approval of the new regulations. More details about those activities can be found in the 2023-2024 annual report.



*Fig. 1. (Left) Quenching of a coke battery at the Clairton Coke Works on July 20, 2024. "Wet" quenching dumps water on coal that has been heated to 1800 F for nearly a day, releasing hazardous air pollutants. (Right) Foliage at the Montour Trail trailhead across the street from the Clairton Coke Works on July 20, 2024. Foliage farther from the CCW facility appears green and healthy.*

### **II.A What specific action(s) do we want?**

Local enforcement of EPA regulations, including new regulations for coke and steel making, in PA is primarily handled by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

While the EPA sets federal environmental standards, the DEP is responsible for implementing and enforcing these regulations within the state. The DEP's Office of Environmental Justice also works to ensure community engagement and address environmental justice concerns in the region. It is the responsibility of the Allegheny County Health Department to monitor and enforce these regulations.

Now that new EPA regulations for coke and steel making facilities are in place as of 2024, we have shifted to the goal of having the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) rigorously enforce them. A key requirement for ACHD to enforce the new regulations is adequate funding and staffing. A significant portion of enforcement funding comes from Title V permit fees that operators of polluting facilities must pay in order to receive their operating permits. Per the EPA, these fees must be sufficient to fund all reasonable Title V permit program costs.

An additional potential source of ACHD funding is from fines assessed in violation of the regulations. These monies go into the Clean Air Fund from which the ACHD has access to 5% to support their enforcement work. The remainder of these funds are to be used for community grants to minimize the impacts of pollution and to protect residents in impacted areas.



On July 1, 2024 Dr. Iulia Vann became the new director of ACHD. Her hiring and the subsequent hiring of other new staff raised expectations for a more dynamic and engaged health department. Her participation in a community meeting in Clairton on Nov. 14 strengthened those expectations. See Fig. 2. At that meeting she listened to statements by 4 members of VCAN. Some of the statements were harsh but she listened with apparent empathy. She said she considers community engagement an essential element of her job, and that the Nov. meeting would just be the first. There were also 6 students from the Pitt School of Law's Environmental Law and Policy Clinic led by Professor Joshua Ash. A strong theme from the law students was the Pennsylvania Constitution's Environmental Rights Amendment and successful legal cases based on it.

During April of 2024, the ACHD proposed higher permit fees to enable effective enforcement. The higher fees were also supported by County Executive Sara Innamorato. Our immediate goal since November 2024 has been to advocate for

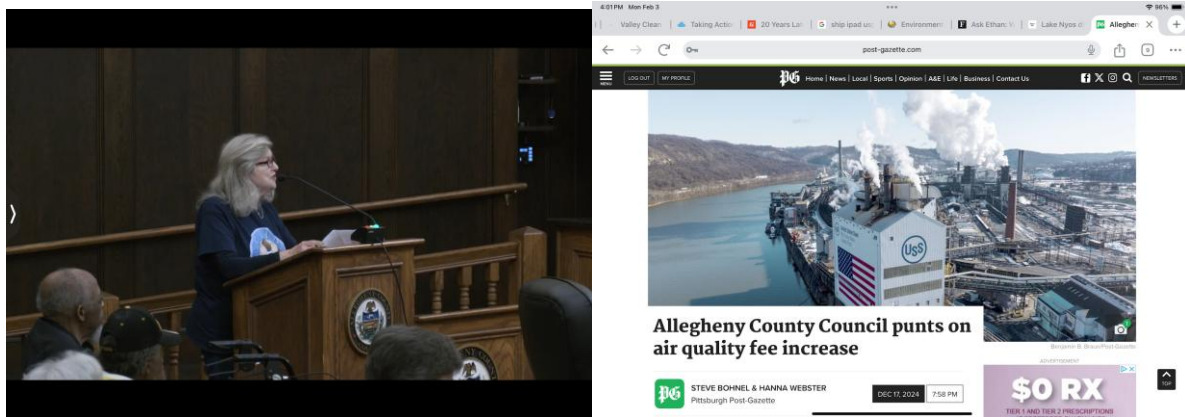
Allegheny County Council approval of these increased permit fees.

*Fig. 2. Allegheny County Health Department Director Dr. Iulia Vann speaking with Valley Clean Air Now (VCAN) Secretary Tom Bailey prior to an ACHD community meeting Nov. 14, 2024 at the Clairton Community Building. First U and PIIN activist Madeline Darnell is in the foreground.*

## **II.B Who has the decision-making power to get what we want?**

Those permit fee increases must be approved by Allegheny County Council before they can go into effect. However, it became apparent in December that there were not yet enough "yes" votes to pass the proposed fee increases; only eight yes votes, of the ten needed.

Thus for the past six months, EJAT has focused its advocacy on county council members. We have strengthened our efforts by integrating them with PIIN. On Dec. 17 eight First U and PIIN members attended the council meeting. Our own Karen Burns spoke and provided transportation for two Clairton residents who are also leaders of VCAN and spoke at the meeting. See Fig. 3a.



*Fig. 3. (a - Left) First U and PIIN activist Karen Burns addressing County Council members Dec. 17, 2024 in support of increased permit fees. (b - Right) Story in Post-Gazette reporting County Council decision to postpone vote on permit fee increase.*

At the December 17 meeting County Council decided to postpone the vote because it was known that there were not enough votes to pass it. See Fig. 3b. If the fee increase proposal is voted down, it could not be considered again for two years.

On March 25 seven First U congregants and four other PIIN members attended the County Council meeting when we thought a vote would be held. We gathered before the meeting for refreshments and collaboration with PennFuture and Conservation Voters of PA (CVP), graciously arranged by Natalie Davidson of CVP. Natalie also conducted an online training session the week before the meeting.

Three PIIN representatives spoke at the meeting, including Rev. Kate Walker. See Fig. 4. Council again postponed a vote as there wasn't enough support to pass and referred the proposed fee structure back to the ACHD.

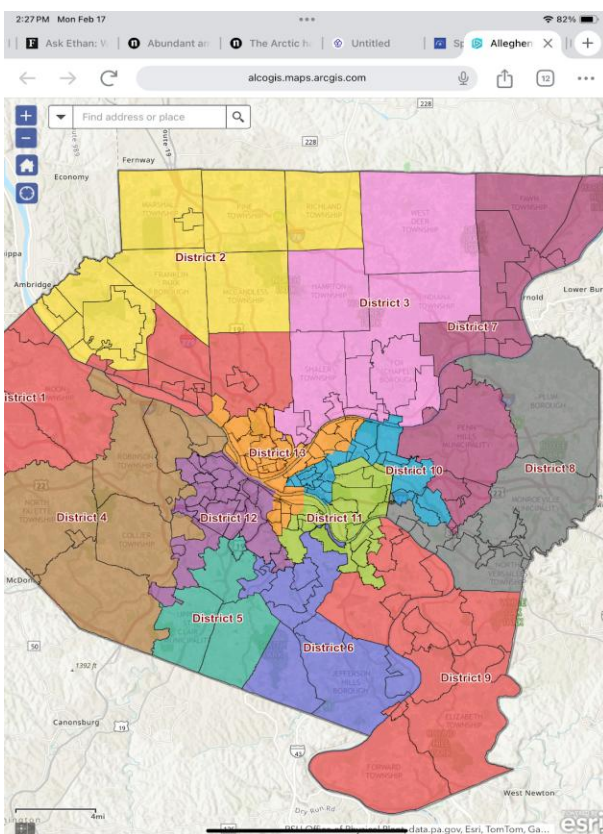


*Fig. 4. Rev. Kate Walker addressing County Council members March 25, 2025.*

## **II.C How do we get the decision maker(s) to take action to achieve our objectives?**

By attending County Council meetings and conferring with Breathe Project Executive Director Matt Mehalik as well as council member DeWitt Walton, we realize we should revise our tactics.

For several months County Council members have heard comments from dozens of residents exhorting them to increase the permit fees. Most of the comments make it seem like any opposition must be ill founded, that there cannot be any legitimate basis for opposition. However, we had an opportunity to speak with one opposing council member who is generally progressive and clearly shares many of our values. He fears that the proposed fee structure could be unfair to small businesses. He also calls for a direct dialog between the council and ACHD.



Matt Mehalik, executive director of the Breathe Project and member of the North Hills UU Church, has advised us that Dr. Vann has not clearly articulated ACHD needs with respect to air quality enforcement and the permit fees in particular. Matt also shared that Dr. Vann and County Executive Sara Innamorato were no longer highlighting the need for higher permit fees. In fact, we saw at the March 25 meeting that Ms. Innamorato spent 30 minutes updating the Council on her activities with no mention of the permit fees.

*Fig. 5. Map of Allegheny County Council districts from the County Council website. This map, plus a list of Zip codes by district, allows us to identify church members in each district.*

Thus we are initiating an effort – along with other PIIN churches – to identify at least one resident in each Council district to get to know their member as a person — not merely as a politician we wish to influence on a particular issue. This will enable us to better understand each member's position on the permit issue as well as many upcoming issues related to social justice. Fig. 5 shows the map of council districts we are using to determine the districts that PIIN activists live in.

As we prepare for closer relationships with Council members, we also need to educate ourselves more on key details, including budget and staffing of the health department, the number of operating permits submitted and approved each year, and how permit fees and county appropriations contribute to ACHD's monitoring and enforcement efforts.

## **III. Building a base of power**

Social justice leaders from Gamaliel and other organizations stress the importance of building a base - a base of power in the communities where we are advocating for healthier air quality and other forms of Environmental Justice.

We are building power within 1st Unitarian in several ways. On July 20, 2024 VCAN Secretary Tom Bailey conducted another walking tour of the Clairton Coke Works for some of our congregants, including five members of the Men's Group. This was the third tour Tom has done

for us. Most participants describe the tour as a compelling experience where they get a much better understanding of both the Coke-making operation and the impacts on residents of Clairton, Glassport and adjoining communities.



*FIG. 6. First U congregants participated in a walking tour of the Clairton Coke Works on July 20, 2024 conducted by VCAN Secretary Tom Bailey (standing, second from right). Seated front right is VCAN leader Johnie Perryman who routinely said that his doctor urged him to leave Clairton to protect his health. Sadly, Mr Perryman died in March.*

### **Integrated Voter Engagement**

The most important source of power for Environmental Justice are the residents of frontline communities. Beginning in May and up to the November election, we joined other PIIN activists in door-to-door

deep canvassing as part of PIIN's Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) program. "Deep" canvassing means asking residents what issues are most important to them — rather than telling them what we think they should be concerned about.

The focus was on the communities of Swissvale, Braddock, North Braddock, and Rankin, where PIIN has member congregations. The campaign kicked off formally on May 16, with a voter engagement training that had almost 40 participants. A total of 88 people participated through the course of the campaign. Participants from First U included Karen Burns, Laura Gallagher, Sue Oerkvitz, Pat Ulbrich, Sandy Woolley, Becky Studer, Bob Mitchell, Rev. Kate Walker, and Lois Hurt.

### **Pittsburgh UU the Vote**

On the weekend of September 21-22, Pittsburgh was in the national Environmental Justice spotlight because of the pending sale of US Steel to Nippon Steel and the consequences for air



*Fig. 7. Canvassers gather for lunch and a training session before issue canvassing in the Mon Valley on Sept. 21, 2024.*

quality and health in the Mon Valley. Consequently, activists from UU the Vote, UU Justice PA, Pittsburgh-area UU congregations, Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN), and SuperMajority converged on Pittsburgh to take action in Pittsburgh communities on the frontline of environmental degradation.

For most of us, this was a first opportunity to meet and work with [Supermajority](#), which is driven by a single-minded purpose—to strengthen the political power of women to make the [Majority Rules](#) real for all people in our country. To do this, Supermajority focuses on mobilizing young women voters—particularly infrequent and non-

voting women ages 18 to 35—because we know they are the most important segment of the progressive women's voting bloc.

Over 35 people participated from the Pittsburgh area (First Unitarian, North Hills, and South Hills congregations), New York, Maryland, Washington DC, and Delaware, including many first time canvassers. Canvassers gathered on Saturday at the Pittsburgh Mennonite Church for lunch, a canvass training and then hit the doors talking to voters. See Fig. 7.

From all of our canvassing, we found that residents cared most about issues that directly impact them. Those who have incarcerated family members or who experienced gun violence cared most about those issues. And those who have asthma or other related health issues are most concerned about air quality and other environmental hazards. We identified residents who are especially concerned about these issues and are going to follow up with them after the primary election in May.

Below are raw notes from Mon Valley residents to whom we spoke:

- **Stacy** Has health issues. Wearing a mask. Would like an air purifier. Mentioned sulfur smell from Braddock plant. House next door is falling apart, also a health hazard. Hasn't contacted ACHD — we need to help there if possible
- **Sherry** Interested in learning about environmental lawsuits against US Steel for air quality
- **Wanda** Retired teacher. Has asthma and is very concerned about air quality. Interested in issue/candidate forum. Seems like good prospect to help us
- **Allison** She was gardening in her front yard. Also noted the lack of trees and canopy. She likes the park at the end of her street. She is very interested and knowledgeable about air quality issues. Interested in the July 28 meeting. Doesn't have a lot of time “not religious “

From May through October, our First U, PIIN, UU the Vote and Supermajority canvassers knocked on a total of 3720 doors, which yielded 604 conversations with residents.

#### Sunday Forum Speaker Series Restart

Building Power was also the topic of the Sunday Forum on Sept 22, 2024. That was the very first Forum since the series was suspended in March 2020 due to the pandemic. Bob King of Calvary Episcopal Church and Karen Burns described how they and other First U and PIIN volunteers were using the IVE approach to canvass in Swissvale, Rankin, Braddock, and Clairton during the Summer and Fall of 2024. Residents of frontline communities continue to experience a range of injustices because historically they have had so little influence on policy decisions. Many understandably feel alienated and have disengaged from the civic and democratic process. Bob and Karen described how the IVE process is designed specifically to address — and reverse — this unfortunate and unfair situation

It was a great privilege for the Forum to welcome Dr. Matt Mehalik as its speaker on Oct. 27, 2024. Matt serves as Executive Director of the Breathe Project, a coalition of local residents, environmental advocates, public health professionals and academics advocating for healthier air for the Pittsburgh region. He has taught environmental policy and community resiliency courses at Carnegie Mellon University since 2008. Matt has written multiple peer-reviewed publications in sustainability, design, and education and has co-authored Ethical and Environmental Challenges to Engineering with Michael E. Gorman and Patricia Werhane. He serves as the chair of the board of trustees of Phipps Conservatory in Pittsburgh.

In both his presentation and extensive Q&A Matt provided information about key facts, trends, and challenges facing Southwestern Pennsylvania's air quality stemming from both legacy polluters like coking and steelmaking facilities as well as new airshed threats from the invasion of petrochemicals in our state. He also discussed some of the latest initiatives, tools, and campaigns that the Breathe Project and its Collaborative of over 65 organizations have developed to help move the needle on improving the region's continuing poor air quality, improve regional public health, and position the community for a better chance at a more sustainable future



Fig. 9. . Graphic promoting the Sunday Forum on Oct. 27, 2024 by Matt Mehalik, who is Executive Director of the Breathe Project and an active member of the North Hills UU Church.

#### Community Day And Back to School Welcome Day in Clairton

Jan Harrison and Karen Burns represented First U and PIIN at Community Day in Clairton on July 13, 2024. They made contact with Danette Thompson, Family Outreach Coordinator for the Clairton School District. Danette invited us to participate (using the same PIIN engagement questions we have used for IVE) in their upcoming August 14th - "Clairton Back To School Welcome Day" for families across Clairton.

Joan Harvey, Laura Gallagher, and Bob Mitchell from first U, Susan McCarthy from Sunnyhill, and Bob King (PIIN IVE and Calvary Episcopal) attended the Clairton Back to School Welcome Day on August 14, 2024. They collected 13 contact names, including the Clairton Principal and a representative from the Unity Group of Clairton, which is working on environmental issues.

Participants had the opportunity to spend about four hours in the Clairton High School gym and another location outside. We met many families— parents there to register their children for the upcoming school year. We were impressed by the high level of energy and pride in Clairton. This provides an important counterpoint to the external perception of a downtrodden community seeking help from others.



Fig. 10.(Left) .Clairton Back to School Day in the gym with community organizations at tables around the perimeter. (Right) Laura Gallagher and Bob Mitchell at the PIIN table.

### Working Through and With PIIN



PIIN co-sponsored a candidate forum focused on Environmental Justice in Allegheny County that was organized by 412 Justice. The forum took place on Oct 30 at Renziehausen Park in McKeesport. Overall attendance was 150-200 of whom about 30 were from PIIN including First U. congregants. Candidates attending included Summer Lee and Jill Stein from the Green Party.

Fig. 11. Promotional poster for Environmental Justice Candidate Forum on October 30, 2024 led by 412 Justice and co-sponsored by PIIN.



A major step in building power has been joining with other area churches through PIIN. The deep canvassing work is done as part of PIIN's Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) program. Four PIIN members, in addition to First U congregants, attended the March 25 County Council meeting and PIIN president Rev. Dave Swanson spoke. See Fig. 12.

Fig 12. Rev. Dave Swanson, PIIN President and Minister of the Pittsburgh Mennonite Church, speaks at the County Council meeting on March 25, 2025.

## IV. Minding Our Own Store Through Composting

Composting diverts organic waste - food, plants and basically anything that was once living - from landfills where its decomposition would contribute to climate-warming gases, and converts this waste into rich compost that can be used to replenish nutrients in the soil.

In the spring of 2024, Juliet Staresinic, a ninth-grader in our UU community, suggested to our Board that we could/should begin composting the food and organic waste produced on our own church premises. She was familiar with her family's composting efforts, using a commercial, non-profit composting organization to collect and process the waste and she felt that the larger church community should be doing this too. When she presented this idea to EJAT it was received with enthusiasm as recycling/composting falls into the part of EJAT's mission to "mind our own store." However, there was also some wariness as "backyard composting" had been tried in the past and was eventually abandoned due to sanitary (rodents) and labor issues.

Backyard composting requires substantial knowledge: what can be composted and how to create the right mix of nitrogen- and oxygen-creating waste streams so that the process works correctly and the waste pile does not attract rodents or pests and become extremely odorous before the process is completed. It also requires a lot of labor and consistent attention for turning the waste pile and monitoring its temperature. While in a smaller residential situation, this is often a labor of love and commitment, it is difficult to scale up for a situation where the labor is volunteers, and there cannot be constant supervision.

Use of a commercial organization to collect and process the organic waste, returning it to us later as valuable rich compost, would seem to solve our sanitary, labor and consistency problems of the past. There is also an added benefit. By implementing composting at the church using this method we could educate our community about composting and demonstrate a way for members to participate at home, as Juliet's family does, thereby magnifying the benefit to the earth. We could, "Mind our own store," and help others mind theirs too.

In the fall of 2024 members of the church, Juliet and Danielle Staresinic, Joan Harvey and Jan Harrison, began testing the collection of waste at the after-service coffee event to see how much waste we produce, and how we could handle what was collected. We needed to work out how volunteer labor (thus not relying on the church staff with their already busy workload) could deal with the waste once collected and before a composting service could pick it up for processing. From this experiment we learned that composting needs to become an integral part of the process of putting on each event. Just as utensils need to be washed and items cleaned and tidied after each event, so too the food scraps need to be collected during the event and placed in the receptacle outside for a composting service to collect. By making composting one more step in the process of putting on an event it negates the need to establish a separate volunteer composting force that could be available for multiple events.

We also learned that anyone involved in putting on an event needs to know what can and cannot be composted so that composting considerations can be taken into account during the planning of an event, as well as the implementation. For example, planning to use compostable plates and napkins is a useful source of the oxygen-generating component of the waste stream and also keeps these items, as well as the food scraps, out of the landfill. Education can be accomplished by thorough signage in both kitchens, as well as a few short in-person instruction sessions that EJAT members could provide.

Of course there is a cost for a commercial service, and we needed to test whether a compost service was viable for our congregation. The cost can be viewed as similar to paying for an essential utility, but could our UU community afford this added cost even though it has a very high value to us in our quest to benefit the environment?

In March 2025, we began a three-month trial with Carbon Compost (CC) to see how the process works for us. Carbon Compost is the non-profit organization used by Juliet's family. While some commercial composting organizations see composting as a profit-driven endeavor, the owner of CC, Louis Mennel, is passionate about both benefits of composting, i.e., keeping waste out of the landfill and creating valuable nutritious soil to return to the earth. This is the driver behind starting his non-profit organization. His company provides a way to keep organic waste out of the landfill for people who are unable to use other non-commercial methods such as the backyard method. He has presented to the Women's Alliance about his organization, although he was equally happy to consult with people on their own backyard composting, demonstrating his commitment to composting rather than profit.

Currently, for the trial period, Carbon Compost picks up our organic waste on a weekly basis then, once a year in spring, we are entitled to an amount of compost commensurate with how much waste we have recycled. This compost can be used by our volunteer gardeners or, if we do not need it, it is donated free of charge to local community gardens. CC picks up a large tightly-closable bucket that they provide, from a place near to where the Church's trash and recycling is collected. At the same time a new, clean bucket is dropped off for use during the following week. At each event that generates food or other organic waste, this waste is collected in smaller tightly-closable buckets throughout the event (from set up through clean up) and then transferred to the big bucket outside at the end of the event. This trial encompasses a number of end-of-year events at the church and will be completed by the end of May (or early June to include the End-of-year picnic.) Then, the process, cost and benefits from the trial will be presented to the Board, ready for implementation of a composting program, if approved, early in the next fiscal year (or before if possible.) The cost of conducting this three month trial is being generously borne by individual members.

# LEARN COUNCIL

## Lifespan Religious Education

### Children & Youth Religious Education Registration & Attendance

Total Registered: 53

- PreK - 6th Grade: 31
- High School Youth: 6
- Middle School Youth: 16

Sunday Morning Attendance:

- September 15, 2024 13 Attenders
- October 6, 2024 16 Attenders
- October 20, 2024 11 Attenders
- November 3, 2024 12 Attenders
- November 10, 2024 0 Attenders
- November 17, 2024 17 Attenders
- December 8, 2024 0 Attenders
- January 5, 2025 10 Attenders
- January 19, 2025 10 Attenders
- January 26, 2025 11 Attenders
- February 2, 2025 16 Attenders
- February 9, 2025 17 Attenders
- February 16, 2025 12 Attenders
- February 23, 2025 7 Attenders
- March 2, 2025 4 Attenders
- March 16, 2025 7 Attenders
- March 23, 2025 3 Attenders
- March 30, 2025 11 Attenders
- April 6, 2025 8 Attenders
- April 13, 2025 22 Attenders
- April 27, 2025 12 Attenders

**Average Sunday School Morning Attendance: 10**

#### Special:

- We had 12 new attendees on Sundays who came for 5 or more Sundays.
- Our largest event was the Easter Egg Hunt, with 29 children and an average age of 6.
- We did not gain any new BIPOC families this year. 2 BIPOC families' attendance went down.
- According to Breeze, overall attendance for the year went up by 20%.

## **Programs:**

- Sunday Morning RE - We began with 4 Sunday morning classes: PreK/K, 1st-3rd Grade, 4th-6th Grade, and 7th-9th Grade. In the second half of the year toward the end, around March, we combined the 4th-6th Grade and 7th - 9th Grade classes. In addition to the two Spirit Play classes of younger ages, the combined class began with a curricula and became more free-form where teachers used discussion topics but came up with their own activities.
- Our Whole Lives 7-9th Grade - *Our Whole Lives* began in October and we hired professional facilitators from a nonprofit called YOUiversal Education. This has helped a lot with consistency and with parent confidence. Logistics took some time to organize consistently. This was successful, but expensive, something we will need to plan for in future years if we want to continue to do it!
- Coming of Age 10th - 12th Grade - We had 6 Coming of Age youth, down to 5 who completed the program and created Credo statements. The class was led by the ministerial intern, Mac Perkins-High, and Erica Shadowsong, the LRED. Classes were short, and I would like to see them be a little longer next time since they are only about once a month.

## **Adult Faith Development**

The religious education program offered one book discussion group this year, facilitated by the LRED, on a book called *Healing Resistance*. 5 people are attending this book group, but others have expressed interest. I would like to continue to try to get wider participation in reading this particular book from the whole congregation over the next season as it is very relevant to the times. Members of the group are interested in sharing in a service and in training in non violent resistance, which I will be looking into for the church.

## **Young Adults**

Young adults had several successful events; they have had regular Sunday gatherings after the service, led by myself, Kate, or Mac. When there has been a special after service event, they have joined that instead (such as the Spring Luncheon). This group also made and served one of the EECM meals the church is responsible for, and it was a very positive experience they would like to do again. On alternating Monday nights, there has been a board game night that is advertised on Meetup.com, bringing in other young adults that we have not yet seen on Sundays. Some of our Sunday young adults sometimes attend the board game nights as well. The event has an average attendance of 9 people.

## **Congregational Life**

I believe we have made some strides this year in improving the quality and variety of our multigenerational events, including the Story time in the service, holidays like the Christmas pageant and Earth Day, and special events like this year's Ice Cream Social / Everybody's Birthday.

We all made a large effort to be thoughtful and creative about ways to make multigenerational events feel truly multigenerational. We believe we need to continue this to encourage more families to attend multigenerational services, as sometimes we do not see as many as we expect.

We need to consistently count children and youth on those days that they stay in the service or attend a special church event.

## **Religious Education Council and Leadership**

The religious education council has mostly consisted of Jean Schmidt, Cathy Rohrer, and Ebe Emmons, all of whom were on my sabbatical team. As this has essentially lengthened their original commitment, I believe all are ready to see more new leadership added so that they can step down. This summer and going into the fall, I have a goal of recruiting a new leadership team.

## **Campus & Young Adult Ministry**

In August, neither our Young Adult program nor our Campus Ministry had much of an established presence. I am able to report that we have made significant steps towards establishing both in the past nine months, though I would strongly recommend continued care and attention.

For Campus Ministry, the largest progress has been on building connections between our church and like-minded professionals. This includes the Queer Interfaith Alliance on Campus (QIAC), as well as the Council of Religious Advisors at Carnegie Mellon. We are now part of both organizations. I was never sought out as a specifically pastoral or specifically UU presence while on campus, and instead my efforts went towards co-planning and co-hosting events for students. These included *Spirituality and Sound* with the help of Lee Saville-Iksic and an event I ran during election week to help center emotions by connecting to the earth. With QIAC and the Center at Carnegie Mellon, we also hosted an event on being both Queer and Religious, and a series of events for the Trans Day of Remembrance (in November) and Trans Day of Visibility (in March).

I have not re-established connections with Pitt, Chatham, or other local colleges and universities yet. However, we were contacted by a group of UU students at West Virginia University, and I served as their off-site mentor for a number of months while they were working to establish a UU student group at WVU. Unfortunately, the status of that group is a little up-in-the-air right now due to events in the leaderships' lives. My impression from both the students at WVU and at CMU is that it is a time when our young people are chronically overwhelmed and drawn thin. However, they also have a lot of energy surrounding justice issues, and in particular the surrounding the rights of trans people and the war in Gaza.

It is my intention to help whoever follows me in the campus ministry role to maintain the connections I've worked on building this year. In addition, I recommend that they pursue connections at Chatham and Pitt, and to figure out a way to provide pastoral care on campus.

Our Young Adults (ages 18 through ~35) at the church have re-established a community. We have a little over a dozen folks who have been attending regularly, with a rotating group of around half a dozen who are here each week. They are highly motivated by service to the larger community, and many report that justice work is a primary reason that they sought us out. Additionally, many need a community of support during an administration that directly threatens them and those whom they love.

Another branch of the Young Adult community is an every-other-week boardgame night which is run by Erica Shadowsong and her husband Alf. We started running these nights in December, and after a slow start, they now serve a group of around nine young adults each night. This serves a different community than our after-church Young Adult meetings, and I think is an invaluable part of our ministry.

Mac Perkins-High (Intern Minister)

# Humanist Group

The Humanist Group has had a successful fourth season, with nine monthly programs. Our steering committee, consisting of Lucinda Beattie, Amy De Chicchis, Kim Francis, Stuart Hastings, Nick Izzo, and Claus Makowka, arranged the programs. All meetings were hybrid (Zoom and in-person) and total attendance averaged around 20. Here is a list of presentations..

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| September | Three Contemporary Humanists, presented by members of the steering committee. Amy DeChicchis spoke on Anthony Fauci, Lucinda Beattie spoke on former Congressman Barney Frank, and Stuart Hastings spoke on cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker.   |
| October   | Rebecca Markert, VP and Legal Director for Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, spoke via Zoom on Current Issues in the Separation of Church and State. This focused on an important case in Louisiana then underway.   |
| November  | Church member Randy Weinberg spoke on The Legacy of Redlining. He showed how the housing disparities created decades ago because of a federal policy of the 1930's intended to reduce housing foreclosures, left a legacy of segregated neighborhoods which continues today.  |
| December  | Church Member Nick Izzo spoke on The Ethics of Placebos in Clinical Trials, showing how in most cases placebos are essential in establishing the effectiveness of a drug.   |
| January   | A video of a conversation between Yuval Noah Harari and Steven Pinker about the principal challenges facing humanity today was shown and discussed, by an in-person and on-line audience.   |
| February  | CMU Professor Emeritus Robert Cavalier spoke on Toward a More Deliberative Democracy, describing a CMU program which he has run for many years.   |
| March     | Justin Shin, a Pitt graduate student in the History and Philosophy of Science, spoke on The Human and Material Resources of AI, showing us some serious environmental and social problems caused by the demands of Artificial Intelligence.   |
| April     | DeWitt Walton, Director of the program "Breaking the Chains of Poverty" sponsored by the A. Phillip Randolph Institute, Pittsburgh branch, and his associate Sierra Parm, spoke on this program, which gives at risk youth the training needed for a union apprenticeship. A particularly lively discussion followed. |
| May       | Dr. Richard Dub spoke on Worries about AI: Speculative Problems and Foreseeable Problems. What do we really have to be careful about, and what is unlikely among the threats being discussed at this time.  |



*Dewitt Walton and Siera Parm speak at the April Humanist Group meeting*

# Sunday Forum

## Introduction

First Unitarian's 2024-2027 Strategic Plan highlighted the following goal:

**“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.”**

During the past year we have advanced that goal by restarting the Sunday Forum speakers series. The Forum had abruptly ceased operations in March of 2020 due to the pandemic. We are pleased to have resumed the Forum during the 2024-2025 church year.

The Forum is both an internal event that fosters a sense of community and an outward-facing event that attracts like-minded people from the community. The Forum Committee began meeting in early 2024 and consists of the following members: Kim Francis, Clint Geller, Joan Harvey, Stuart Hastings, Michael Lotze, Maria Magone, Ali Masalehdan, Audrey Masalehdan, Bob Mitchell, Jim Reitz, Cathy Rohrer, and Becky Studer.

The committee decided to have two speaker events per month on the second and fourth Sundays from September through May. Exceptions are Ingathering Sunday and some holiday weekends as determined by the committee. A major change compared to the prior Forum is that participants can now attend remotely via Zoom as well as in person in the Schweitzer Room. Also, we can host remote speakers via Zoom. Each Forum event is recorded via Zoom subject to approval by the speaker(s).

One explicit purpose of the renewed Forum is to provide an opportunity to challenge ourselves, to consider viewpoints and topics that may be uncomfortable. This seems particularly important in the present cultural and political climate as we strive to understand disturbing events. However, we also acknowledge our values and cannot host speakers or topics that violate those values. We endorse and conform with the church's Policy on Alignment of Activities with Our Principles and Values. Accordingly, the committee will identify any proposed topics/speakers that are problematic and submit them for consideration, including to Rev. Walker.

## Forum Speakers and Topics 2024-2025

Below is a list of Forum events from September 2024 through April 2025

Sept 22, 2024

### Building Power for Social Justice through Voter Engagement

*Speakers: Bob King, Calvary Episcopal Church and Karen Burns, First Unitarian are activists for PA Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN)*

Residents of frontline communities continue to experience a range of injustices because historically they have had so little influence on policy decisions. Many understandably feel alienated and have disengaged from the civic and democratic process. The speakers described a process designed specifically to address — and reverse — this unfortunate and unfair situation. That process is called Integrated Voter Engagement or simply IVE. PIIN volunteers used the IVE approach to canvass in Swissvale, Rankin, Braddock, and Clairton during the Summer and Fall of 2024.

### Oct 13, 2024: Speaking our Truths in Love: Navigating Facts and Fictions surrounding Critical Race Theory

*Speaker: James Huguley, Assoc. Prof. University of Pittsburgh Dept. of Social Work*

Dr. James Huguley of the Center on Race and Social Problems provided a basic overview of Critical Race Theory. He also broadened the topic to address ways to discuss issues of race more generally.

**Oct 27, 2024: Story of Air Quality and Sustainability for Southwest PA and the Mon Valley**

*Speaker: Matthew Mehalik, Breathe Project Executive Director*

The speaker provided information about key facts, trends, and challenges facing Southwestern Pennsylvania's air quality stemming from both legacy polluters like coking and steelmaking facilities as well as new airshed threats from the invasion of petrochemicals in our state. He also discussed some of the latest initiatives, tools, and campaigns that the Breathe Project and its Collaborative of over 65 organizations have developed to help move the needle on improving the region's continuing poor air quality, improve regional public health, and position the community for a better chance at a more sustainable future.

**Nov 10, 2024: Prospects for Controlled Nuclear Fusion as a Green Power Technology**

*Speaker: Anter El-Azab, Prof. of Materials Science & Engineering, Purdue University.*



*Tess Riesmeyer speaks about her participation in a travel seminar on the US Civil Rights Movement and the BlackFreedom Movement guided by Classrooms without Borders*

Prof. El-Azab explained how nuclear fusion works, how fusion energy is generated, how scientists and engineers are trying to capture that energy and convert it to electricity, and the challenges facing the research and development efforts at the present time.

**Jan 12, 2025: The Lost Cause and Its Deacons: The Religion of Historical Mythology**

*Speaker: Al Mackey, retired USAF Colonel, erudite Civil War history blogger, and middle school teacher.*

Mr. Mackey identified the major tenets of this myth, which downplayed both the importance and evils of slavery in causing the war, and portrays the Confederate cause as a noble freedom struggle against impossible odds. He discussed how key figures spread the myth and acted to squelch the historical truth, with the result that many modern day adherents believe in it with an almost religious fervor.



*Al Mackey speaks about the "Lost Cause" to a Schweitzer Room and online audience via Zoom on Jan 12, 2025.*

### **Jan 26, 2025: Imminent Changes to Immigration Policy, and the Challenges Ahead**

*Speaker: Patrick Young, Esq., Special Professor of Immigration Law, Hofstra University*

Prof. Young discussed the constitutional and legislative history of immigration law, examined current conditions for immigrants, and described the impact of immigrants on American society. He then addressed what the Trump Administration is likely to do over the next four years as well as what may be done to counter those initiatives.

### **Feb 23, 2025: Marching Down Freedom's Road**

*Speaker: Tess Riesmeyer, Local teacher and historian*

Tess described her participation in a travel seminar on the US Civil Rights Movement and the Black

Freedom Movement guided by Classrooms without Borders, a Pittsburgh-based education and Social Justice non-profit.

March 9, 2025

### **Hope in the Dark: Climate Action in 2025**

*Speaker: Dana Siler Pennsylvania State Coordinator, Citizens' Climate Lobby*

Dana Siler posed the question "What do we do?" now that a climate denier who campaigned on the promise to give oil companies what they want sits in the oval office. The situation seems grim. Dana described how members of Citizens' Climate Lobby managed to make climate progress under the first Trump administration, and how they are determined to do it again while fighting for our democracy.

### **March 23, 2025: The Role of Music in Social Justice Struggles**

*Speaker/Performer: Tom Hoffman, retired labor organizer, and long-time social struggle activist and musical performer.*

Tom demonstrated how he uses music to motivate and engage groups of people in social justice causes through an interactive performance with mandatory audience participation.

### **April 13, 2025: Pandemics and Public Health**

*Speakers: Christine Milcarek, PhD and Julianne Baron, PhD, CPH, RBP*



*Julianne Baron speaks about public health aspects of pandemics on April 13, 2025.*

Evidence of pandemics extends back to the earliest recorded times. Increasing encroachment of humans into the natural world has led to the spread of most zoonotic diseases. The speakers described those diseases throughout history, the advent of vaccination, and the eventual elimination of smallpox through public health measures. How diseases spread and how they might be prevented were also discussed.

## **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. At the conclusion of the 2025 annual budget drive, a total of \$468,714 in pledges and gifts had been recorded from 184 pledging units (slightly exceeding the goal of \$460,000). The total dollars pledged for 2025 were 6.1% higher than what was pledged in 2024.

For the third consecutive year, the committee used the rollover pledging process. A set increase of 5% was applied to all 2024 pledges. Members and pledging Friends were asked to notify the committee by October 31 if they wished to adjust this amount (up or down). If they did nothing, that indicated that the rollover pledge amount was accepted.

Approximately a third of the congregation was contacted by Stewardship Committee members and Board of Trustee members to engage in stewardship conversations.

In the first quarter of 2025, the committee identified the following priorities for the coming year:

- Establish cross-committee partnership with the Membership Committee

- Create a Planned Giving Society to provide awareness and educational opportunities regarding legacy giving
- Create a process for identifying and pursuing grant opportunities
- Establish a regular schedule for sharing messages about Stewardship with the congregation throughout the year

## **Committee on Shared Ministry (COSM)**

The Committee on Shared Ministry has been working in a variety of ways during our monthly meetings.

Our primary role is to support our minister in her work. We sometimes share concerns we have heard or share our own personal observations as to things that are happening in church. Each meeting we take time to "take a pulse" of how things are going and offer any insights that might help Kate.

In the past couple months, we have also been working on the semi annual ministerial assessment. The steps have included the following:

- sample a variety of assessments
- reach out to other congregations to see how they complete assessments
- choose an assessment that meets our needs.
- get BOT approval
- begin the process of assessment.

At present the surveys have been collected and the committee is in the process of consolidating the responses into a report for the board of trustees. The results will be summarized and shared with the board later this Spring.

We lost our long time member, Susan Oekvitz who has moved across the country and is willing to continue supporting the committee from a distance until the Ministerial Assessment report is completed. At the end of the Spring we will need 3 new members for the Committee on Shared Ministry.

Submitted by Mary Denison

## **Building and Grounds Committee**

**Members:** Jim Pashek, Brian Rohleder, Chris Milcarek, Laura Wenneker, 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.

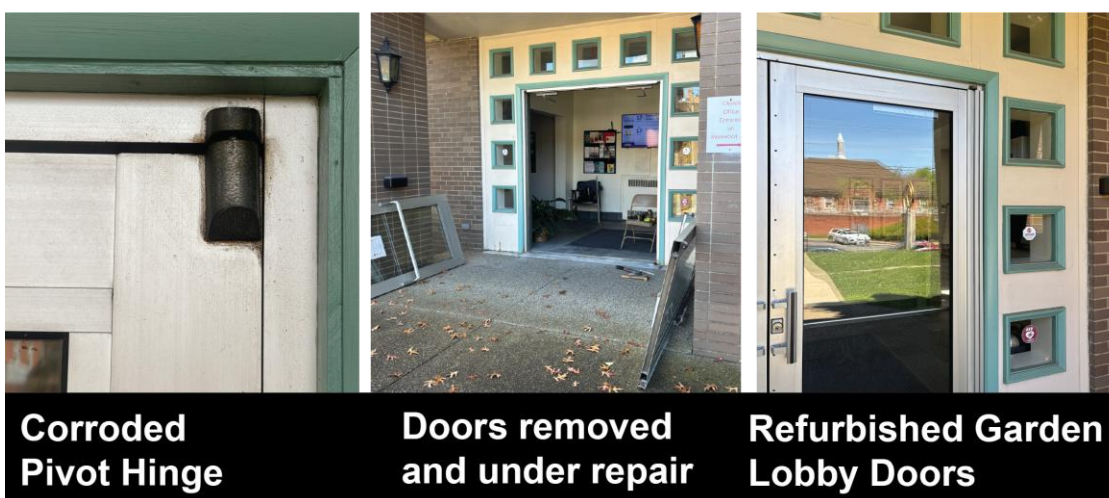
## Completed Projects for 2024 – 2025

### 1. Tree Pruning and Maintenance

The Schoyer oak at the front of our church was overdue for pruning and maintenance. Davey Tree Company trimmed branches overhanging and touching the sanctuary roof and removed all dead wood. The poplar, maple, and hemlock trees in the back garden were also pruned, as they were overhanging our neighbor's property.

2. Garden Lobby Doors: After 20 years of use, the doors servicing both entrances to the Garden Lobby had deteriorated. They were renovated with the installation of continuous hinges and repaired locking mechanisms (see image below).

### Schoyer Oak Maintenance



3. Sanctuary Air Project: The SecureAire electrostatic air filters installed to improve air quality in the Sanctuary and Undercroft were not functioning properly. These were removed and replaced with traditional filters. Filtration efficiency was further improved by switching to filters with a higher MERV rating.

4. Hearing assist devices: New hearing assist devices have been purchased to enhance the Sunday service experience for those who need them. If you'd like to one, please speak with an usher. The devices are located near the sanctuary entrance by the Garden Lobby.



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### Ongoing and Future Projects

1. Keys and Locks: As part of our effort to improve safety at the church, new locks are being installed on Channing and Fuller rooms adjacent to the Undercroft.

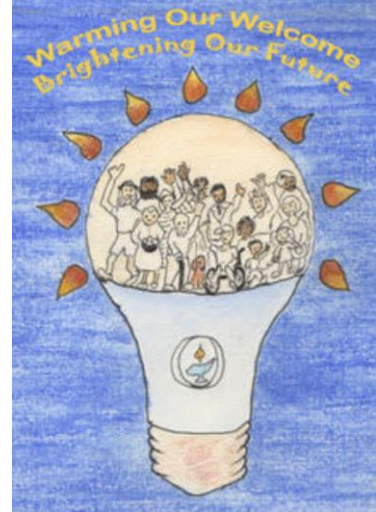
2. Stained Glass Repair: The stained glass window separating the Schweitzer Room and the Garden Lobby has been damaged by people sitting on the ledge and leaning against it. Barriers have been installed to prevent further damage. Repairs to the damaged panes are planned for the near future.

3. Undercroft Upgrades: The Art Committee is generously funding upgrades to the lighting controls in the Undercroft gallery, along with repainting the walls.

### **Capital Campaign: Warming our Welcome and Brightening our Future**

The Building and Grounds Committee is fully committed and engaged with the ongoing Capital Campaign. We are currently collecting bids from contractors for the following projects:

- Installation of LED lighting in the Sanctuary
- Audio/Visual system upgrades for the Sanctuary
- Efficient heating and cooling for the Religious Education (RE) Wing
- Replacement of ceiling paddle fans in the Sanctuary
- Installation of carpet in the Sanctuary
- Replacement of worn carpet in the RE Wing
- Improved access to the altar
- Installation of outdoor lighting
- Creation of an accessible entrance on the Ellsworth side Garden redesign and landscaping
- Bathroom renovations
- 



These much-needed improvements will help preserve the beauty, functionality, and sustainability of our church for generations to come. We encourage all members and friends of the church community to support the Capital Campaign by making a pledge. Every contribution, no matter the size, will make a meaningful difference in helping us realize these important projects and ensure that our building and grounds continue to serve the needs of our congregation and the wider community.

Respectfully submitted,  
Martin Schmidt  
Chair, Building and Grounds Committee

## **Safety Committee**

Prepared by Christine Milcarek

The committee consisted of Nick Izzo, Jill Siegfried, and Chris Milcarek. Jill will be moving to Chicago, so we will need at least one replacement and welcome more.

We met with the ushers and advised them of their role in facilitating safe exit from the building in the event of an emergency. We pointed out fire extinguishers (which have been upgraded) and discussed procedures for ensuring safety.

We wrote and won a grant from the PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) for safety upgrades to the church. Kyle Gracie, treasurer, will assist with quarterly reports. The 74,000-dollar grant is to cover: locks for basement classrooms (Channing and Fuller), a CCTV system, Windows and mylar upgrades for windows and a system for communication of threats across the building and Mason wing. The state will supply approx. \$55K and the church must match \$18 K. A \$10K restricted account was established by an anonymous donor for facilitating the matching funds. The installation of locks is in progress. Bids are being obtained for the CCTV and windows for Rev Dr Kate's office. Three bids are required for items over \$10K. The internet in the Mason Wing will be upgraded to accommodate a communication system (to be

determined) and communication with the garden Lobby and Ellsworth Avenue side doors with the office will be installed. The money is available until mid-2026.

Safe Congregations Policy and Procedure manual was revised in collaboration with Erica Shadowsong, LRED. Erica has appointed members to a Child Safety Committee to review the policy. Once that is done we will discuss it with the Minister and a final version will be submitted to the Board of Trustees. Once those tasks are completed, we hope to review the safety policies, plan a fire drill, and show a film on how to deal with active shooter situations to the congregation.

## Endowment Commitees

### Music Endowment

#### 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 \$5-6K per year. For the 2024 year, the funding available for grants was \$5,944.63

#### **Funding Approved in 2024**

##### **Event Date of Event Funds Requested**

• Easter Gospel Concert March 30, 2024	\$1,486
• UU Community Singers (Pride) June 8, 2024	\$1,190
• UU Community Singers (Pride Picnic) June 8, 2024	\$1,190
• Dance Choir Dec. 20, 2024	\$ 350
• Christmas Eve Brass Dec. 24, 2024	\$1,200
• UU Community Singers (AUU Service) Oct 27, 2024	\$ 260
• Total for 2024	\$5,676

## Social Justice Endowment

#### **Social Justice Committee members in 2025**

Sandra Woolley (term expires 12/2025)

Joan Harvey (term expires 12/2026)

Laurie Lavine (term expires 12/2027)

#### **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 2025 so far:**

1. January 29, 2025, \$500.00 PIIN (PA Interfaith Impact Network), to sponsor PIIN's Fundraising Gala and 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. Application from Sandra Woolley.
2. February 20, 2025, \$400.00 for 1<sup>st</sup> UU annual PIIN membership dues. Application from Kyle Gracey.
3. March 9, 2025, \$1,500 to Bethel AME to be included with the Share the Plate fund for March, in support of the Bethel AME community development/ reparations project.

**Summary of funds awarded in 2025:**

Annual Draw available to this committee as of 1/1/2025: **\$10,273.90**

Total funds awarded as 4/9/2025: **\$2,400.00**

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

The remaining balance in 2025 after all approved awards are paid: **\$7,873.90**

**Social Justice Endowment Awards in 2024:**

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.
3. May 6, 2024: \$1500 to Jean Schmidt/First Unitarian's Racial Justice Task Force to support 5-9 congregational members to join a one-year "Leading Edge" 8th Principal series of workshops in partnership with other UU congregations across the country.
4. May 18, 2024: \$1000 to Kris Rust/First Unitarian Community Singers to support performing in the January 2025 Let Freedom Sing concert. This was a partial award (original request: \$2000); Kris will reapply this fall for remaining funding.
5. May 18, 2024: \$1190 to Kris Rust/First Unitarian Community Singers to support performing in various Pittsburgh regional Pride events.
6. May 23, 2024: \$1500 to Rev. Kate R. Walker to support the salary, benefits, and professional development of First Unitarian's Intern Minister.
7. December 1, 2024: \$1000 to Maria Lauro in support of purchasing gifts for the children of Matilda Theiss.
8. December 12, 2024: \$1000 to Kris Rust/First Unitarian Community Singers to support performing in the January 2025 Let Freedom Sing concert. This award is to fulfill the original \$2000 request from May.

**Summary of funds awarded in 2024**

- Annual Draw available to this committee as of 1/1/2024: **\$10,474.23**
- Total funds awarded as of 10/14/24: **\$10,090**
- Total funds returned as unspent: **\$0.00**
- The remaining balance in 2024 after all approved awards are paid: **\$384.23**

## **Campus Ministry Endowment**

The Campus Ministry Endowment extends the ministry of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh to local universities and colleges, and to young people in the general public. We have funded a request to 1) hire someone to continue to work as a Campus Ministry Coordinator to work on campuses, and to build relationships with college students; and 2) to continue the young adult board game night that brings new people to the church once a month on a Monday night. Our last request that we funded was in April 2025.

Here is a description of our committee's activity in 2025 to date:

- **March 2025: Grant #1 approved to support Young Adult programming**

Beginning balance:	\$6,635.76
<u>Grant #1:</u>	<u>\$6500.00</u>
Ending balance:	\$635.76

Grant #1 was a \$6500 request by Erica Shadowsong to fund the Campus Ministry position at \$4500 which covers 8-12 hours/week for 1/2 of the year, and \$2000 to fund refreshments, including pizza which is a major draw, for monthly game nights.

**From application, Erica Shadowsong, RE Director:** *"We want to continue the game night for as long as it seems popular. This is allowing us to build relationships with repeat attendees. Advertising the game night on Meetup has also served to make our church more visible in the community and more likely to be promoted by word of mouth. While we hope that this event will result in bringing in new young adults to engage with the church, we also believe that it is a ministry in itself as it serves many young adults who are new to the area, seeking connection (which is hard in Pittsburgh), and who may have difficulty making social connections due to different emotional needs or challenges."*

*Young adults tend to be very passionate, and many of them are progressive in their values. Some come to us to find a way to live out their values and are looking for opportunities to serve in the community or help others, such as with the EECM dinner. Many of these young adults have never heard of or don't know anything about Unitarian Universalism, but they understand that we are welcoming and probably progressive because of our banners. I believe young adults who have a positive experience engaging with our congregation will continue to visit UU churches wherever they go and get involved. I also see them bringing friends and significant others, bringing in more people and enhancing our visibility."*

**Campus Ministry Report, Mac Perkins-High, Intern Minister:** *"My general sense is that young people on campuses right now are chronically exhausted and stressed out. Among other ways, this exhaustion that can be seen in a relative lack of volunteer energy from students, as well as students being unable to find the energy to go to events that they are interested in. From talking to my interfaith colleagues, it seems like this level of stress and exhaustion is higher than it has been in the past several years."*

*At the same time, there is a good deal of political and justice-oriented energy from campus students. Inwardly, this manifests itself as mutual aid (something I have especially seen in the trans/queer community.) Outwardly, a main focus continues to be the war in Gaza, which is understood by most of the people I've talked to as the enterprise of a colonial apartheid state. A couple young people I am in touch with cited that as a reason they were unwilling to vote for Harris in the fall."*

*From what I have observed, those who come to the board game nights are in search of community — and especially, community where they can find rejuvenation."*

I am excited about the Campus Ministry work that First UU can support. These funds help the young people in our community navigate a challenging time, make connections with the UU ministry, with others, and have fun. Thank you also to current members Michael Saffran and Andy Norman, our most recent addition.



Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer J. Adibi / convener

## **Endowment for Children and Youth**

Committee members in 2024: Julie Downs (chair; term expires 12/2025), Azi Masalehdan-Block (term expires 12/2024), Sarah Hooper (term expires 12/2026)

Mission: The purpose of the Endowment for Ministry with Children and Youth is to provide financial support for the religious education program (infancy through the end of high school) of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh.

Our Whole Lives programming approved in 2024:

11/24/2024: \$1,000.00 to Erica Shadowsong to support programming for Our Whole Lives (OWL). This funding is to pay for professional facilitators for the Our Whole Lives Sexuality education class for 7th-9th graders. Our most sought after program, OWL requires trained facilitators which have been increasingly difficult to retain. Hiring facilitators will increase the reliability of the program from year to year; we will be able to offer it with confidence, not waiting to find out if we have teachers or not. I am trying this approach based on some advice from some colleagues who have had a positive experience with this.

Our Whole Lives emphasizes our values of equality, equity, compassionate, and respect for all. It also helps educate youth and parents about sexual and gender identity exploration.

OWL serves the larger community; at times, new families will inquire to find out if we have this program available. Additionally, our partnership with the facilitators, who have a company called Youniversal Education, supports their work in communities who have the most need.

The foundation of the OWL program is the inherent worth and dignity of all. It teaches compassion for others, as well as for oneself. And it remains a special draw for families to our congregation.

Summary of 2024 activity:

Funds available to this committee: \$1,421.80

Total funds awarded: \$1,000.00

The remaining balance after all approved awards are paid: \$421.80

## **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/2024/10/2024-2027-Strategic-Plan-Sept.2024-FINAL-2.pdf>

In May of 2024, the VIM Committee, in consultation with the Board and Rev. Walker, decided to continue the strategic priorities that were set in 2023, to extend the progress we've made as a church thus far. The following two priorities were retained as our 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 decided to retain our church focus on 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.

**VIM Activity in the 2024-25 Church Year**

In December of 2024, the VIM Committee, with Board input, finalized a set of Open Questions for this year's round of appreciative inquiry with the congregation. These questions, shown on the next page, focused on the new UU Values recently adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association and asked congregants about their aspirations for our church community following the 2024 US national election.

The VIM Committee ran 14 cottage meeting discernment sessions for the congregation in January and February, with facilitation and note-taking assistance from church members Ebe Emmons, Michael Safran, and Jim Reitz. 5 of the sessions were on ZOOM and 9 were in-person. 80 congregants participated, which is a record for VIM. (For comparison, our most recent VIM cottage meeting effort prior to this one was in 2022, with 59 participants.)

80 individuals participated (70 church members + 10 friends and/or staff)

member /friend >20 years	40
10-20 years	12
5-10 years	9
1-5 years	12
newcomer <1yr	7

Topic of the Open Questions: UU Shared Values and Moving Forward Together



We UUs now have a new/reworked set of Values to hold and inspire us.

In short these are:

- **Interdependence:** We honor the interdependent web of all existence and acknowledge our place in it.
- **Pluralism:** We are all sacred beings, diverse in culture, experience, and theology.
- **Justice:** We work to be diverse multicultural Beloved Communities where all feel welcome and can thrive.
- **Transformation:** We adapt to the changing world.
- **Generosity:** We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope.
- **Equity:** We declare that every person is inherently worthy and has the right to flourish with dignity, love, and compassion.

These freshly articulated Values, with Love at the center, invite us into a period of change and creativity.

**Question 1: Share a story about how you have experienced one of these 6 values in your life at First U.**

This question functioned to:

1. raise awareness of the new values and asked congregants to apply the values to experiences they have had as part of First U.
2. responses helped us to discern the collective **identity** of our community

Overall, the stories shared in response to Q1 largely described:

- the vibrancy, warmth and welcoming of this church community
- support of the community during personal hardship
- interpersonal connections made within and (through service/ justice work) outside the church and positive personal impacts of justice work
- insights leading to personal growth, including valuing new understandings of gender expression and sexual orientation
- importance of full inclusion and embrace of the marginalized
- witnessing the transformation of the church through Rev. Kate's leadership.

Collectively, participants spoke to all 6 Values, with Generosity being the most frequently cited. Many see Generosity, we cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope, as the most valuable experience at First Unitarian. A handful of respondents spoke of their lack of connection to the new UU Values. Several who responded this way noted that they preferred the former Principles, including the 8<sup>th</sup>, for their clarity.

**Question 2: What does it mean to you that LOVE is at the center of our shared values? What does that look like in practice?**

*\*Note about scoring: each participant answer was assigned one point total; if an individual answer included two separate response categories, 0.5 point was scored for each.*

### **1. Love as Compassionate Action (25.5)**

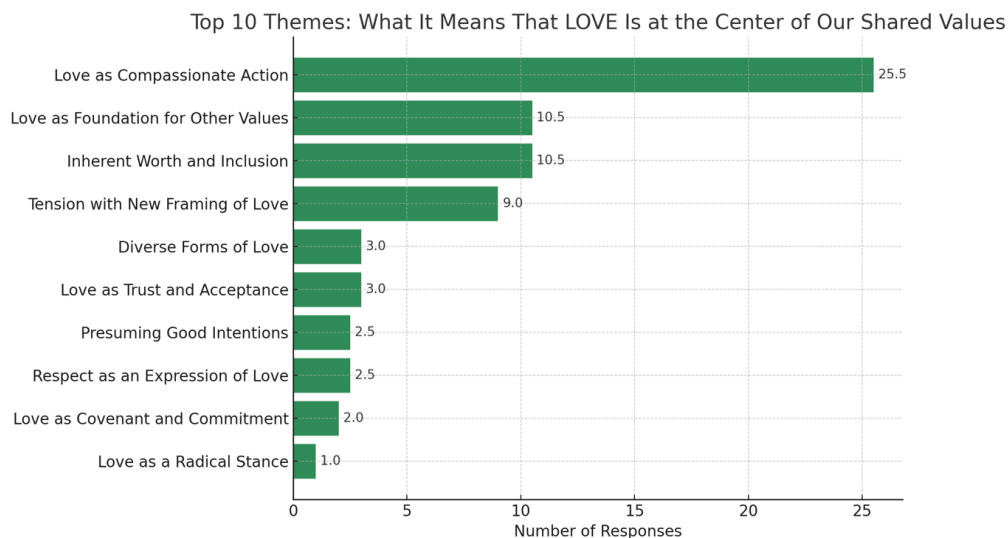
Love is expressed through **acts of compassion, grace, and care for others**. It means considering the **impact of our actions on others**, showing kindness even when it's difficult, and creating an antidote to hatred and fear. This theme emphasizes **empathy, community care, and moral responsibility**.

### **2. Love as the Foundation for Other Values (10.5)**

Respondents described love as **the "how"** behind all other values. It guides **ethical decision-making**, helps resolve value conflicts, and motivates justice work. Love is described not as passive, but as **an active force that shapes priorities and choices**.

### 3. Inherent Worth and Inclusion (10.5)

Many emphasized that love means **everyone is worthy of care and belonging**. It highlights **compassion, inclusion, and seeing the dignity in every person**. Respondents shared experiences of feeling held and supported by the community.



### 4. Tension or Uncertainty with the New Framing of Love (9)

Some expressed **struggle, confusion, or discomfort** with centering love in the values, describing it as **vague, overused, or too abstract**. A few preferred the previous Principles language or found the shift hard to explain in a UU elevator speech.

### 5. Love as Trust and Acceptance (3)

Love manifests as **trust in community**—trusting others and feeling accepted. This theme reflects the emotional safety and connection built through love.

### 6. Appreciating Diverse Forms of Love (3)

There was recognition of **different kinds of love**, such as *agape* (universal, selfless love), and appreciation for the sermon on this topic by Stephanie Palowski.

### 7. Presumption of Good Intentions and Belief in Human Goodness (2.5)

Respondents spoke about **assuming good intentions and seeing the good in others**, creating a spirit of **interpersonal warmth and deep mutual respect**.

### 8. Covenant and Accountability Through Love (2)

Love as a **covenantal force** requires ongoing engagement and reflection. Placing love at the center **demands personal and communal accountability**.

### 9. Respect as a Form of Love (2.5)

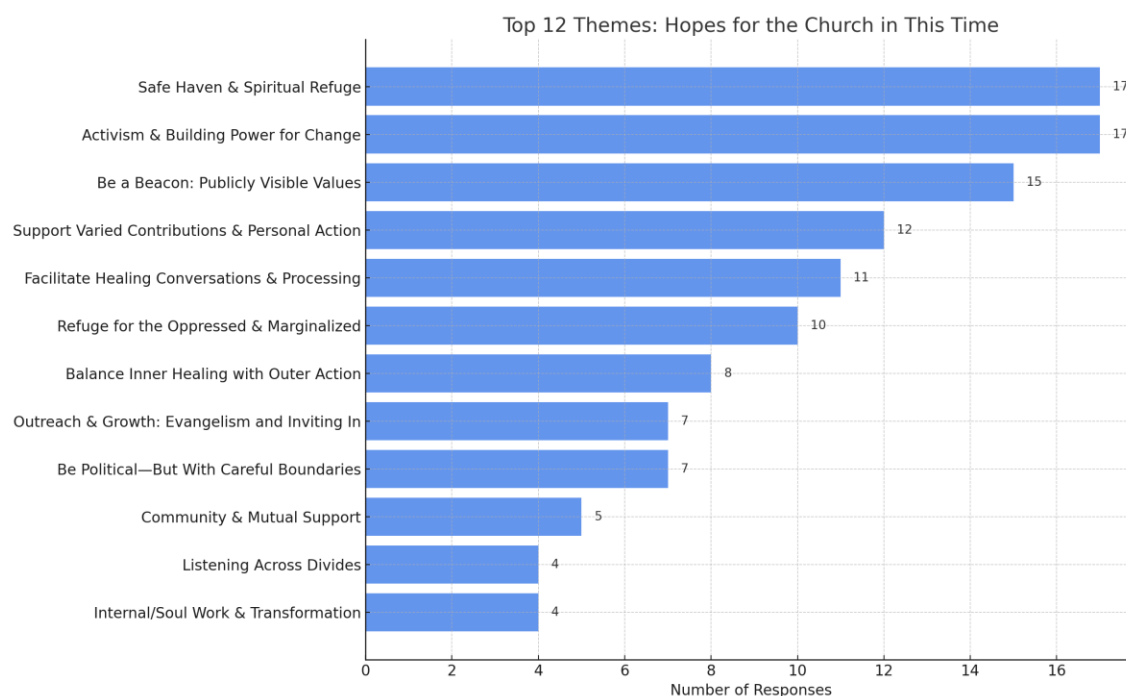
Respect was named directly as an **essential expression of love**, emphasizing mutual regard.

### 10. Love as Radical and Transformative (1)

Centering love is a **bold and radical stance**—a countercultural move that holds deep potential for transformation.

Questions 3 and 4 (below) asked participants to articulate their vision for our religious community.

Question 3: Given the world in which we live, particularly in light of the recent election, and where you are in our life right now, how do you want our church to be in this time?



### 1. Safe Haven & Spiritual Refuge (17 responses)

People want the church to be a sanctuary—a steady, heart-centered place to rest, restore, and renew, especially amid societal turmoil. It should be a place that embodies our strong values, where people feel seen, accepted, and anchored.

### 2. Activism & Building Power for Change (17 responses)

There is a strong call for the church to be active and vocal in the face of injustice—to advocate, organize, and join forces with other groups. This includes empowering individuals and supporting young leaders in activism.

### 3. Be a Beacon: Publicly Visible Values (15 responses)

Respondents want the church to be more visible and outspoken about its values, especially post-election. There's a desire for greater diversity, vibrancy, and presence in the community, countering perceptions of insularity or homogeneity.

### 4. Support Varied Contributions & Personal Action (12 responses)

Many want the church to be a flexible hub where people can contribute in ways that align with their capacity, passions, and context. The church should lead and equip individuals to take meaningful action in the broader world.

### 5. Facilitate Healing Conversations & Processing (11 responses)

Some emphasized the importance of processing emotions post-election—through small groups, open conversations, and temporary initiatives to help people connect, feel heard, and not alone in their reactions to political change.

### 6. A Refuge for the Oppressed & Marginalized (10 responses)

There is a clear call for the church to be a welcoming space for those marginalized by society, including the trans community and others facing systemic oppression.

#### 7. Balance Inner Healing with Outer Action (8 responses)

People want a church that helps them stay grounded and inspired, providing beauty, community, and reflection, while still engaging with the world in a meaningful, loving way.

#### 8. Outreach & Growth: Evangelism and Inviting In (7 responses)

A segment expressed a desire to reach out, grow, and invite others, especially young people and families—with some suggesting the church should transcend political divides while still embodying its values.

#### 9. Be Political—But With Careful Boundaries (7 responses)

There's nuance in how people view politics in church. Some want less overt political messaging, preferring the church to focus on truth-seeking and decompression, while acknowledging that leaders may engage politically.

#### 10. Community & Mutual Support (5 responses)

Respondents want the church to be a loving and supportive community, grounded in care for each other and the belief that connection and compassion are powerful forces for societal resilience.

#### 11. Listening Across Divides (4 responses)

There's a wish to **improve how we relate to those with different views**, especially politically. This includes **learning to listen without hostility** and being equipped to communicate with people outside the church bubble.

#### 12. Internal/Soul Work & Transformation (4 responses)

The church should continue to be a place for **deep internal work**, encouraging **spiritual seeking, transformation**, and a mindset that is **open and nonjudgmental**.

Question 4: What could First Unitarian do to make positive change?

##### 1. Increase Visibility (3 responses)

Respondents want the church to be **more publicly noticeable**, such as replacing or updating signage (e.g., the BLM banner) to **better attract attention** and represent its current mission.

##### 2. Foster Deeper Engagement & Cross-Cultural Connection (2 responses)

There's a strong desire to **dispel divisions** by creating more **interfaith and intercultural conversations**, especially to support mixed-race families and broaden inclusivity.

##### 3. Build Partnerships with Other Churches & Justice Groups (2 responses)

People see potential in **collaborating with other organizations**—from Habitat for Humanity to food initiatives—positioning the church as part of a **regional justice network**.

##### 4. Be More Racially and Generationally Integrated (2 responses)

The church could benefit from efforts to **reflect more racial and generational diversity**, making the community **more welcoming to all ages and backgrounds**.

##### 5. Reach Out to Young Adults and Families (2 responses)

Several responses emphasized **outreach to young adults, new and soon-to-be parents**, and **college students** as an area for growth and connection. Market Montessori-based children's RE Program outside of the church to draw families with young children.

##### 6. Strengthen Community Bonds (individual mentions)

Suggestions included **reaching out to newcomers**, **offering spaces for marginalized communities**, and **creating beauty, joy, and artistry** within the congregation to nurture **stronger relationships**.

#### 7. Be a Leader in Social Action (individual mentions)

The church is encouraged to **take bold, visible stances** and act as a **moral and social leader**, aligning with efforts like the **Poor People's Campaign** and other causes.

#### 8. Improve Communication & Accessibility (individual mentions)

Respondents noted the need for better **promotion of events**, updates through **newsletters**, and a stronger emphasis on **accessibility for people with disabilities**.

#### 9. Offer More Opportunities for Individual Action (individual mentions)

Encouraging members to **act on their own values** through church-supported opportunities would help people feel **empowered and engaged**.

#### 10. Support Marginalized Communities (individual mentions)

Several responses pointed to specific ways the church could support groups such as **refugees**, **Black communities**, and **those with fewer educational or economic resources**.

Question 4 (part b): Fill in the blank "First Unitarian Church is where ....."

Responses from all participants were grouped by major theme and used to create the following synopsis, organized according to the four domains of our mission (connect, inspire, serve, learn).

Our vision of First Unitarian Church is that it is the home of:

- **CONNECT** - Inclusive Love and Individual Action: **Love is central** to creating a supportive community where individuals are heard, seen, accepted, valued, and cared for as their authentic selves, while being empowered to contribute to the greater good.

- **SERVE** - Collaboration and Collective Activism: **Love is central** to fostering justice and empowering intentional action. The community thrives on collective problem-solving, where people work together, both within and beyond church walls, to make a positive impact through action, service, and shared values of justice and compassion.

- **LEARN** - Holistic Education, Personal Growth, and Open Dialogue: **Love is central** to lifelong education and spiritual growth, providing individuals with the tools to explore their own beliefs, engage with diverse perspectives, and become active participants in building a better future.

- **INSPIRE** - A Welcoming and Transformative Space: **Love is central** to the creation of a sanctuary where all deeply feel they belong as they are, offering refuge, inspiration, and the opportunity for personal and collective transformation as individuals work together to co-create a more equitable, sustainable, and loving world.

Closing Words Summing Up Participant Experience in Cottage Meetings

