

# Annual Report

2025–2026

**First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh**



*Love is at the Center of Our Values - Mural by Mary Weidner*

*Annual Congregational Meeting — May 17, 2026*

# Board of Trustees

## Officers

Jim Pashek (2027), President

Maria Lauro (2027), Secretary

Kyle Gracey (2026), Treasurer (2nd term)

## Members

Brian Junker (2026), Past President

Jean Schmidt (2026)

Richard Dum (2027)

Lucinda Beattie (2028)

Deb McGuire (2028)

Casey Taylor (2028), Vice President

Rev. Kate Walker, Minister (Ex-Officio)

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# From the President of the 2025–2026 Board of Trustees

This has been an amazing year for First Unitarian Church. I have organized this report into three sections, (1) three important events during the year, (2) how the Board of Trustees updated the church's strategic plan and (3) brief observations from this year's committee reports.

## Important Events of the Year

### Capital Campaign

Your generosity was everywhere but especially in your giving to the Capital Campaign. Thank you Al and Rob Schwartz for leading that effort. We raised about \$1.1 million for much needed capital improvements. Through the steadfast work of Martin Schmidt and the Building and Grounds Committee, we have all begun to see that money put to good use. See the Building Committee's report for a complete list of projects undertaken and those planned.

### Reverend Kate's Sabbatical

Reverend Kate is taking a much needed four-month sabbatical that began in January. This required our wonderful staff, Rita, Cicely, Dan, Erica, Ellen and Kris, to step up and keep the ball rolling. This they did, facing challenges and finding solutions. Next time you see a staff person, please thank them. The Sunday Celebrations Committee, led by Stephanie Pawlowski, has had the difficult task of inviting interesting speakers during the sabbatical. They have, in my opinion, hit a home run. Your Board of Trustees has taken on additional responsibilities and have done so with grace and humor. We can all be proud of how we have made it through the sabbatical. I am glad Reverend Kate was able to have the time to reinvigorate, and I suspect we are all looking forward to her return on June 1. We welcome her back to the pulpit on June 7 and will also enjoy the annual picnic in the park that day. Thanks to JoAnn Flanagan and the Social Events Committee for organizing these events.

### Potential Loss of Parking on Morewood

In April, at a meeting convened by Councilperson Erika Strassburger, we learned that the City is building this summer a new bike lane from Fifth Avenue north to Castleman Street on Morewood, along with other intersection improvements. To build a safe bike/scooter system, the City's Department of Mobility and Infrastructure (DOMI) is exploring options for ways of making Morewood safer for non-motorists from Millvale to CMU. One scenario discussed at that meeting was to shift the travel lanes on Morewood and continue a new bike lane from Castleman to Ellsworth on the west side of Morewood. This would require eliminating parking on Morewood next to the church. Many of you in the congregation have offered opinions to me and some have contacted the Councilperson's office directly. Councilperson Strassburger assures us that there are no formal plans developed; that the City is in a "listening" phase of the planning. As soon as we hear more, we will quickly get the information out to the congregation.



|  |   |  |                                |  |
|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
|  |   |  |                                | 3.assemble info into summary report for the VIM And board  |
| Implement the Capital Campaign projects as money becomes available   | Ongoing                                       | Richard Dum<br>Cinda Beattie   | Building & Grounds             | In close coordination with Martin Schmidt, B&G Comm Chair for project Implementation and Treasurer for Funding Implementation  |
| Improve messaging within the church to support Board Recruitment and improve leadership pipeline   | Ongoing<br><br>Participated in Committee Fair | Cinda Beattie<br>Jim Pashek<br>Maria Lauro<br>Casey Taylor<br>Brian Junker | Communications and Stewardship | Talk about the Board, Personal growth and fun we have, increase board involvement in service.<br><br>1.Integrate a message from the board in service<br><br>2. Participate in “committee fair”<br><br>3.Continue to formalize leadership development strategies<br><br>4.Personal Message from Board each month (rotate among board members) |
| Develop an external communications strategy in collaboration with the communications committee<br><br>New Member database, cleaning up Mail Chimp data base and Cicley Moultrie hired to improve communication | Ongoing                                       | Casey Taylor<br>Rob Schwartz<br>Michael Saffron<br>Mark Whittaker          | Marketing and Communications   | Develop an Audience Strategy<br><br>1.Identify examples of external communications, what have we tried, what worked and what didn’t?<br><br>2.who do we realistically expect to consider coming to First Unitarian (Audience)? Who would we want to consider coming?<br><br>3. Determine objectives.   |
| Support staff, core leadership during Rev Kate’s sabbatical  | As needed                                     | Jim Pashek<br>Deb McGuire  | Personnel Committee            | Established agreed upon boundaries   |
| VIM Discernment  | Done  | Jean Schmidt   | VIM                            | VIM Targeted Discernment (Jan-Mar)<br><br>1.ID Target Audience for this year’s discernment<br><br>2.Develop script and organize facilitators<br><br>3.Schedule meetings, summarize<br><br>4.Report to board  |
| Board Assessment by Congregation   |   | Kyle Gracey  | Board                          | Congregational Assessment of Board (April)   |

|   |                                     |                          |                             |  |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Board Self-Assessment                           | Scheduled to be done by end of year | Brian Junker             | Board                       | 1.Prepare Congregation Assessment instrument   |
|   | Scheduled to be done by end of year | Kyle Gracey              |                             | 2.Distribute and promote<br>3.Tabulate results<br>4.Report to board<br>Board Self-Assessment (May)<br>1.Update self-assessment<br>2.Ditribute to board<br>3.Tabulate results and report to board |
| Develop specific strategies for being inclusive | Ongoing                             | Jean Schmidt             | Anti-racism Task Force      | Continue inclusion initiatives (said another way, make First UU more attractive to everyone)   |
|   |                                     | Deb McGuire              |                             |  |
|   |                                     | Casey Taylor (RE)        | Lifespan Religious Ed Dept. | Further engage youth and families  |
|   |                                     | Community of Communities |                             | Improve Social Hour  |

**Two new Strategic Plan Initiatives**

VIM updated the Rolling Strategic Plan (2025-2028) for the church. The Mission Statement is to:

- Connect:** We connect deeply in community
- Inspire:** We inspire reverence and spiritual growth
- Serve:** We serve each other, our local community, and the world
- Learn:** We pursue lifelong learning together

Based on feedback from about 70 people during cottage meetings, two new plan priorities for 2025-2026 evolved. They were:

- Create a loving **safe haven** and welcoming refuge for congregants and staff, as well as for the wider community, and
- Becoming a recognized community **hub of social justice action**.

**Examples of “Safe Haven,” this year:**

- Creating a “pop up” labyrinth in the Ellsworth yard to celebrate World Labyrinth Day on May 2. Thanks to Alice Carnes for a joyful and meditative experience that weekend.
- Installing a new banner on the bell tower on the Morewood side of the church.



World Labyrinth Day

Bell Tower Banner

- Continuing SongSpace with very special music, organized by Brian Junker.
- Sponsoring “Crew 0412” Scout Troop for teens. Thanks Julie Downs.
- Stephanie Pawlowski and the Sunday Celebrations Committee inviting thought provoking speakers to the pulpit.
- Building a new playground that is much loved by our kids. Thanks to the Servansky family for identifying a need and making it happen.



New Playground

**Examples of “Hub of Social Justice Action” this year:**

I was there with my PIIN t-shirt in County Council chambers for the culmination of a long lobbying effort on the part of our Environmental Justice Committee. County Council finally did the right thing by increasing fees and penalties for polluters. Thanks go to Bob Mitchell, Sandy Woolley, Reverend Kate and others, some pictured below at the Council vote.



Supporters at the City Council chambers after the vote

Members of our church have been attending the Weekly Vigil on Friday mornings on the Southside hosted by Sisters of St. Joseph, Pax Christi and Casa San Jose for immigrants seized by ICE.

The Racial Justice Task Force has been working with Bethel AME Church in the Hill District. One action from this partnership is assisting this spring in breaking ground on a community garden and aquaponics project to help with food insecurity in the neighborhood.

### **And so Much More that this Congregation is Doing this year – from the Committee Reports**

I hope you will take the time to review the committee reports included in this annual report of the church. It describes a thriving and engaged community doing great things. The following is a sample from the more than 40 committees and task forces who submitted reports to the annual meeting. My sample was taken before all the reports turned into Board Secretary Maria Lauro.

- Dance Choir – I hope you saw “Walking With Earth” at the 4-20 service. Inspiring.
- Music Endowment – distributed about \$5,000 in awards.
- Council of Communities – will be presenting the Volunteer recognition awards at the annual meeting.
- Khasi Hills – Shelly Ross travelled to the Khasi Hills and presented on 3-1. Funded 2 teaching positions for the 7th year. Sponsored the most amazing coffee hour banquet.



Khasi Hills Coffee Hour

- UU Justice PA – Post carding, thanks Becky Studer and Write Here/Write Now, thanks JoAnn Flanagan.
- Safety Committee – implemented a State funded safety grant that included 10 CCTV cameras. Thanks Chris Milcarek and Bob Baron.
- Building and Grounds – many projects under way including the lighting and technology in the sanctuary. Thanks, Martin Schmidt, for your steadfast leadership.
- Council on Shared Ministry worked on the Behavioral Covenant.
- Gathering of Men – providing interesting topics each month for the 35th year. Thanks, Jim Reitz, for your years of leadership and helping move furniture with the “guys.”



Men's Group volunteers moving furniture

- Life Span – Thank Erica Shadowsong for growing your Family Ministry and Community Building.
- Nominating Committee – under Lee Carnes leadership, we have three proposed board of trustee members to vote on at the annual meeting: Neal Binstock, Clint Geller and Susan Whittaker. Also, three new members to the nominating committee: Tony Rutigliano, Danielle Staresinic and Karen Woodall.
- Pastoral Care – started a Grief Group this spring.
- Racial Justice Task Force – summer film series, workshop series on the 8 pillars of caste and coordinated with Forum to provide speakers.
- Share the Plate – Provided \$27,000 to worthy groups.
- Social Justice Endowment – disbursed \$10,000 in awards.

- Treasurers Report – see annual report and hear Kyle Gracey’s overview at the annual meeting.
- Young Adults – hired a new coordinator, Deena Gray.

I want to thank the congregation for supporting the board this year and when I messed up, gave me some grace. Your board of trustees has worked hard all year and I want to thank you: Kyle Gracey (Treasurer), Jean Schmidt (Strategic Planner extraordinaire) and Brian Junker (Past President) who will be rolling off the board on June 30. Special thanks to those board members staying on for another year: Casey Taylor (Vice President), Maria Lauro (Secretary), Richard Dum, Deb McGuire and Cinda Beattie.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Pashek, President of the Board of Trustees

# Minister's Report to the Congregation

17 May 2026

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**

## **“Ministry is all that we do—Together”**

By Rev. Gordon McKeeman

*Ministry is that quality of being in community that affirms human dignity— beckons forth hidden possibilities, invites us into deeper, more constant, reverent relationships, and carries forward our heritage of hope and liberation.*

*Ministry is what we do together as we celebrate triumphs of our human spirit, Miracles of birth and life, Wonders of devotion and sacrifice.*

*Ministry is what we do together—with one another— in terror and torment—in grief, in misery and pain, enabling us in the presence of death to say yes to life.*

*We who minister speak and live the best we know with full knowledge that it is never quite enough...*

*And yet are reassured by lostness found, fragments reunited, wounds healed, and joy shared.*

*Ministry is what we all do—together.*

Gordon McKeeman's words have been offered in our UU faith for many decades helping guide congregations through difficult tensions, celebrating tender moments, and most importantly, binding people to one another even when something appears broken.

I have always found his words fundamentally important for their weight in reminding the faithful – you and me – that we all bear responsibility for creating and sustaining community. While I may be called forth as a professional, grounded in training and experience, I do so knowing I am never alone. We have a shared ministry even as I carry the “office” of ministry with all its responsibilities, holding myself accountable with reverence and gratitude.

As I write this, I have about three weeks of sabbatical and study leave left on my calendar. It is hard to summarize this time free of major responsibilities, particularly since it's not quite complete.

In my career I have been blessed with three other sabbaticals, each one a bit different, and yet each offered a similar pattern while embracing the differences.

Pattern: I let go, I grieve, I repair and rebuild, and return.

This pattern was broken during my sabbatical in 2020 due to the pandemic when I needed to return to work halfway through my sabbatical. This is important because it meant I was not ready to return since I was in the depths of grief. In January of this year, I came to recognize I had been holding that grief for a long time. I suspect it contributed to a low grade burn out that I was not fully conscious of until I launched this current sabbatical.

Many of you noted, I had a lot of plans: travel, books, catching up on my pile of back issues of New Yorker and The Atlantic (a few doubted this goal could be achieved), skiing, biking, spending time with my extended family (including my dogs), and visiting friends. I also made commitments to lead PIIN (Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network) as President and to the UUMA (Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association) to start writing a new curriculum on healthy boundaries for religious professionals.

I also planned on staying in touch with all of you by occasionally submitting a pastoral update. The pattern of letting go started on schedule in January, however, I hit that deep water of grief early in February and had to let its healing waters take my heart into its depth.

Grief for clergy is about the people we bury, the stories of Beloved carrying illness and loss, the members who wander away without a word, the disappointments (there are so many), and the endless letting go of ideas, visions and dreams. Add in contemporary layers of heightened national political, environmental, economic and international turmoil and pain. Grief is complicated, and in the busy pace of ministry, there is often little time or space to give grief its very real and persistent demand of time.

Time has done its work on me, supported by me slowing down. You all know slowing down is hard for me. I have taken on the image of a sloth on a bike (common in Costa Rica). I lean into a leisurely morning and then when I can't take it anymore, I get moving, preferably on a bike, then rest some more with a book or one of those back issues of the New Yorker or The Atlantic (no, I have not caught up ... yet).

I have traveled. I drove over 4000 miles in January to Colorado and New Mexico where I visited with friends, attended a Denver Broncos playoff game (they won that game, but lost the next one), spent five days in Crested Butte by myself, went hiking and cross-country skiing and attended a UUMA conference in Albuquerque. It was a great trip marred only by witnessing a bad car accident and navigating a high windstorm on I70.

I attended a training in Nashville, TN for PIIN hosted by Gamaliel, PIIN's national affiliate, and hung out with my study group in Savannah, GA. I visited family in California, Brooklyn, NY and Rockton, IL, and have one more retreat with my husband in Jersey Shore, PA later this month. I was planning on visiting our friends in Khasi Hills, India, but the Indian government had different plans when they denied my visa application (they do not give a reason).

I can feel my heart lightening, my body gaining energy, my head clearing. My eagerness for ministry is returning right on schedule. I miss all of you and trust when I officially return on June 1, there will be many smiles and some hugging

### **Highlights of 2025-2026**

- June: Annual Picnic and attending UUMA annual gathering in Baltimore, MD where I co- led a Healthy Boundaries training for religious professionals.
- July: I enjoyed serving as the minister of the week for the UU's at Chautauqua.
- August - September: Erica and I organized and led Safety workshops for church leaders and ushers.

- October: Guest preached in Cumberland, MD; led program for regional clergy retreat in Ohio.
- November: participated in Interfaith Thanksgiving Service for East End congregations; hosted UU Pittsburgh Cluster meeting.
- September- December: Prepared staff and members for my sabbatical/study leave; laid groundwork for congregational writing of a Behavior Covenant.

**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
- Stephanie Pawlowski, CLM

I am beyond grateful for dedicated staff: Erica Shadowsong, Kris Rust, Ellen Gozion, who focus 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 Nick Binfield and Manny Theiner.

**Larger Pittsburgh Community I support:**

- PIIN as President
- Anti-Racist Faith Leader

**I remain committed to my colleagues and larger faith:**

- monthly study group that has an annual in-person retreat.
- serving as an Advocate on behalf of complainants to the UUA's Safe Congregations Office.
- co-authoring new curriculum on healthy boundaries and repair for religious professionals.



# Treasurer's Report

Fiscal/Calendar Year 2025

Submitted by: Kyle Gracey, Treasurer

Our operating budget ended more negative than expected, but our deficit decreased substantially compared to earlier in the winter, due in part to additional endowment revenue allocated by the Board, and additional pledges and financial contributions received in late December 2025 and early January 2026. Our long-term finances remain healthy, and we had already received 56% of the contributions pledged to the Capital Campaign, even though the Capital Campaign contribution period does not end until June 2028. All information below is as of the end of December.

## Financial Position, Investments, Budget Variance

Total assets at the end of the year were \$563,371, a \$348,000 increase from the start of the year, due to receiving Capital Campaign contributions. The total assets do not include the money in our endowments and other investments. The section further down provides the balance of each investment fund as of the end of the year, along with a brief description of how the funds can be used. Total liabilities were \$569,910, also increased due mainly to receipt of donations for the Capital Campaign. Overall, we ended the year with total equity of negative \$6,540, a combination of our \$4,310 in retained earnings from 2024, and 2025's \$10,850 net loss.

Operating income was \$576,991, nearly matching the budgeted \$579,886. This result was partly due to a Board decision in December to reallocate \$9,500 from the Core Endowment withdrawal—originally designated for capital expenses—toward operating needs. Because the Capital Campaign fully funded 2025 capital projects, this reallocation helped reduce the net loss.

Operating expenses totaled \$587,841, or 102% of the \$573,887 budget. The overage was driven by higher-than-expected insurance premiums and building maintenance costs, along with some 2024 security wages that were paid this year.

Overall, this resulted in a net loss of \$10,850, which is about \$17,000 below the budgeted net gain of \$5,979.

The table below shows our operating budget-to-actual:

| Category           | Actual              | Budget              | Difference          |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Income</b>      | <b>\$576,990.52</b> | <b>\$579,866.00</b> | <b>-\$ 2,875.48</b> |
| Donations          | \$463,648.33        | \$490,700.00        | -\$27,051.67        |
| Investments        | \$ 89,879.47        | \$ 66,378.00        | \$23,501.47         |
| Rentals/Gift Cards | \$ 12,408.75        | \$ 11,664.00        | \$ 744.75           |
| Miscellaneous      | \$ 11,053.97        | \$ 11,124.00        | -\$ 70.03           |
| <b>Expense</b>     | <b>\$587,840.57</b> | <b>\$573,887.00</b> | <b>\$13,953.57</b>  |
| Salary & Taxes     | \$294,014.73        | \$291,864.00        | \$ 2,150.73         |
| Ministry           | \$ 63,005.75        | \$ 69,096.00        | -\$ 6,090.25        |
| Music              | \$ 14,485.35        | \$ 15,372.00        | -\$ 886.65          |

|                     |                      |                    |                     |
|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Services            | \$ 4,981.14          | \$ 6,144.00        | -\$ 1,162.86        |
| Religious Education | \$ 24,901.87         | \$ 26,436.00       | -\$ 1,534.13        |
| Denominational      | \$ 40,348.00         | \$ 33,396.00       | \$ 6,952.00         |
| Office              | \$ 32,799.80         | \$ 30,776.00       | \$ 2,023.80         |
| Building & Grounds  | \$ 70,692.24         | \$ 57,012.00       | \$13,680.24         |
| Utilities           | \$ 40,048.16         | \$ 41,895.00       | -\$ 1,846.84        |
| Miscellaneous       | \$ 2,563.53          | \$ 1,896.00        | \$ 667.53           |
| <b>Net Income</b>   | <b>-\$ 10,850.05</b> | <b>\$ 5,979.00</b> | <b>-\$16,829.05</b> |

### **Finance Committee**

In addition to monitoring our finances over the past year, the Finance Committee completed a multi-year overhaul of our financial policies and procedures.

### **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. We also began a review of whether there are investment options that could yield a higher risk-adjusted return, while preserving our commitment to socially responsible investing.

### **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, Incoming Finance Committee Secretary), Robert Baron (Controller), Margaret Noether (Assistant Controller), Ward Kelsey (Investment Manager), Pat Schuetz (Outgoing Finance Committee Secretary), Rita Gates (Business Manager), Lee Carnes, Chap Donovan, Bob Mitchell, Gail Pesyna, Martin Schmidt and Brian Rohleder.

### **Investment Account Balances, Income, and Key Restrictions**

The net total of our endowed and restricted funds was \$3,442,650 on December 31 2025, an increase of \$319,519 over the previous year.

#### **Income Restricted Funds:**

##### **Core Endowment \$1,288,786**

3.5% of 3-year average balance can be spent each year for unrestricted expenses. Generated \$38,745 in operating income.

##### **Harkcom Fund \$63,250**

Dividends can be spent on unrestricted expenses. Generated \$3,477 in operating income.

##### **Memorial Trust \$58,566**

Dividends can be spent on unrestricted expenses. Generated \$3,381 in operating income.

##### **Mullins Memorial Endowment \$464,975**

Dividends can be spent on unrestricted expenses. Generated \$16,936 in operating income.

**Simon Income Fund \$191,784**

Dividends can be spent on unrestricted expenses. Generated \$6,561 in operating income.

**Goldsmith Concert Fund \$73,011**

Dividends typically spent on music expenses. Generated \$4,310 in operating income.

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

**Campus Ministry Endowment \$214,431**

3.5% of 3-year average balance per year can be spent as grants for campus ministry activities. \$6,636 was available to spend in the year.

**Music Endowment \$186,196**

3.5% of 3-year average balance per year can be spent as grants for music-related expenses. \$5,765 was available to spend in the year.

**Social Justice Endowment \$332,848**

3.5% of 3-year average balance per year can be spent as grants for justice-related activities. \$10,274 was available to spend in the year.

**Endowment for Ministry with Children and Youth \$45,612**

3.5% of 3-year average balance per year can be spent as grants for children and youth activities. \$1,402 was available to spend in the year.

**Capital-Restricted Funds**

**Goldsmith Targeted Fund \$128,953**

Dividends support operating budget. Generated \$7,612 in operating income. Principal can be spent on capital projects.

**Goldsmith Growth Fund \$206,387**

Balance can be spent on capital projects. Generated \$5,352 in operating income.

**Capital Endowment \$75,913**

3.5% of yearly balance supports capital projects. Established in 2025, so did not generate income yet. 13.3% of Capital Campaign donations go toward principal.

**Donaldson-Genzler Fund \$111,939**

Dividends support operating budget. Generated \$10,757 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

2025–2026 Church Year

## May 2025

- Building Charter Revision — updated Building & Grounds approval threshold from \$3,000 to \$10,000; changed committee reporting frequency from monthly to quarterly. Passed unanimously.
- Governance Manual Update — approval of updated verbiage for the section on Group-designated accounts.

## June 2025

- COSM ministerial assessment of Rev. Dr. Kate Walker accepted. Passed unanimously.
- Sabbatical leave for Rev. Dr. Kate Walker approved. Passed unanimously.
- Creation of Assistant Treasurer position approved. Passed unanimously.

## July 2025

- Board officers elected for 2025–2026: Jim Pashek, President; Kyle Gracey, Treasurer; Maria Lauro, Secretary. All passed unanimously.
- Composting pilot program approved — six-month commercial composting service trial. Passed unanimously.
- Assessment Schedule approved. Passed unanimously.

## August 2025

- Renewal of Stephanie Pawlowski's Commissioned Lay Minister agreement for three years. Passed unanimously.

## September 2025

- Casey Taylor appointed Vice President. Passed unanimously.
- Board Priorities for 2025–2026 approved. Passed unanimously.
- Committee appointments approved unanimously: COSM: Ebe Emmons appointed to complete Sue Oerkvitz's term; Kate Snow appointed Chair for one year. Finance & Investment Committees: Chap Donovan appointed to both committees for five-year terms.
- Behavioral Covenant development process approved. Passed unanimously.

## October 2025

- Revised Finance Committee Charter approved. Passed unanimously.

- Strategic Plan approved, including two new annual priorities: (1) Create a loving, safe haven and welcoming refuge; and (2) Become a recognized community hub of social justice action. Passed unanimously.

### **November 2025**

- COSM Charter Update — voted to strike Section C. Passed.

### **December 2025**

- Endowment Committee appointments approved: Children & Youth RE Endowment: Rose Saville Iksic and Tessa McCarty. Music Endowment: Heather Cunningham. Social Justice Endowment: Debbie Conway. Campus Ministry Endowment: Kessa Ahomana.
- 2026 operating budget approved. Passed.

### **January 2026**

- Updated 2026 budget adopted. Passed unanimously.
- Julie Downs appointed interim chair of the Children & Youth RE Committee.
- Jim Reitz appointed to the Investment Committee.

### **February 2026**

- Appointment of Mary Redford to the Children and Youth RE Endowment Committee. Passed unanimously. (Note: Mary Redford subsequently declined.)
- Authorization to withdraw \$41,548.20 from the endowment fund as 2026 operating income. Passed unanimously.

### **March 2026**

- (Executive session) Kyle Gracey and the Finance Committee directed to immediately pay all penalties and owed taxes for the affected employees. Passed unanimously.
- (Executive session) Board empowered Kyle Gracey and the Finance Committee to work with each affected employee to recover the payroll taxes owed. Passed 5 yes, 2 no, 1 abstention.

### **April 2026**

- RE Endowment Committee Appointment — Katy Schmitz appointed for a term beginning January 2027, with non-voting observer status through end of 2026. Passed unanimously.
- Recommendation that the Behavioral Covenant be presented to the congregation for a vote at the Annual Meeting. Passed unanimously.

# Nominating Committee Report

The Nominating Committee met on Zoom on the first Wednesday of each month from September 2025 to May 2026. As in previous years, the committee asked different groups at the First Unitarian Universalist Church for input. We recommend continuing to survey groups for nominations in 2026. The committee also reviewed its Charter, which was last updated in May 2018. Members use SharePoint to access primary and historical documents to help meet their goals.

Members of the Nominating Committee: Nancy Latimer, Becky Studer, Mike Lotze, Bill Schuetz, Kurt Summerville, Hugh McGough, Kathy Miller, Laura Gallagher, and Lee Elliott Carnes (Leader).

Candidates are:

## **Board of Trustees:**

- Neal Binstock
- Clint Geller
- Susan Whittaker.

## **Nominating Committee:**

- Tony Rutigliano
- Danielle Staresinic
- Karen Woodall.

## **Endowment Committees:**

- Campus Endowment – Kesa Ahomana
- Children and Youth Endowment – (Mary) Katy Schmitz, Rose Saville-Iksic, Tessa McCarty
- Music Endowment – Heather Cunningham
- Social Justice Endowment – Debbie Conway

As the leader of the Nominating Committee, I want to express my sincere thanks to each member of the Nominating Committee for participating and for their creative energy that they gifted to the First Unitarian Universalist Church. Additionally, I valued and appreciated the wisdom and “institutional knowledge” offered by members of the Board of Trustees.

Submitted by Lee Elliott Carnes on 4/12/2026

# CONNECT COUNCIL

## Hospitality Ministry Membership Team

Team Members: Amy De Chicchis, (co-chair), Joan Harvey (co-chair), Michael Safran, Raeann Olander-Murray with support from Rev. Kate Walker

Mission: As part of the Connect Council, the Membership Team helps new 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 or just join us after services 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 2025-2026: We welcomed the following 18 people as new church members during the past church year (5/1/2025-4/30/2026): Chrisie Ambrass, George Cook, Eric Cressley, Richard (Chap) Donovan, Tacy Donovan, Micki Downs, Basyll Durnan, Nani Durnan, Deena Gray, Jeanie Gounaris, Bruce Rabin, Kate Thurston-Griswold, Verna Robinson, Fritz Roth, Kathleen Sandusky, Pam Weaver, Greg Whiteker, and Julia Whitaker. 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 again notable that several of our new members are already significantly involved with activities at the church, including leadership roles, with the Church Services and active participation in our Men's Group, 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. We have continued to revise the First Unitarian Church Trifold to be available for visitors and new members to learn about our church and its many activities. Of particular note, we restarted our potluck dinners for new members, the first since Covid. We were again pleased to witness the bonding of 12 new members and their newly forming connections with each other and our church. We will certainly continue to hold these and to facilitate the pursuit of individual activities and relationships within the church. We also offered a Breeze Photo Booth/Information Center for new and continuing members during the Board Committee Fair this past spring.

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

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

2026 Annual Report

The men's group at the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh is now in its 35th year. Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.,

From September through May. We commonly meet in the Priestley Room - but during the winter - January through March, we met on Zoom. During the summer months, June, July and August - we scheduled a number of Excursions, which the men could participate in according to their interest and schedules. We had two hikes, a visit to the Old Allegheny County Jail (now a museum), a visit to Soldiers and Sailors and prepared an EECM meal. Many of the men were able to participate.

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 a supportive group, 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 in 1991. Jim Reitz is the group's contact person and coordinator, [J5650R@Comcast.net](mailto:J5650R@Comcast.net).

– Jim Reitz

## Covenant Groups

Over the past year, the Covenant Groups Committee has focused on strengthening existing groups, supporting participation, and creating opportunities for deeper connection within the congregation.

Committee members in 2025-2026: Rob Masterson (chair), Julie Downs, Nancy Latimer, Corey Layman

This year, the committee:

- updated membership lists and reviewed the status of all existing covenant groups
- welcomed several new members into ongoing covenant groups
- began the process of forming a new covenant group for parents of young children
- developed plans for a new “incubator” process designed to help launch additional covenant groups in the future
- invited two new members, Raeann Olander-Murray and Chas Murray, to join the committee, with their service beginning in late May

Two members are rotating off the committee (Nancy Latimer, Corey Layman)

## Marketing & Communications

Committee Members: Rob Schwartz (Chair), Michael Safran, Maria Lauro, Mark Whittaker, Lucinda Beattie (Board Liaison)

In 2026, the Marketing & Communications Team focused on strengthening the church’s core communications tools and processes, with an emphasis on website improvements, email strategy, and visitor engagement. Important foundational work was advanced to support more effective outreach and connection.

### Highlights and Activities:

**Website Enhancements:** The team continued ongoing updates to the church website, including improved home page content guidelines and enhanced security measures. Search engine optimization (SEO) was a key focus, with an initial audit identifying opportunities to improve visibility through meta descriptions and keyword optimization. Training was initiated to expand staff support for this work, though further alignment and capacity are needed to fully implement these improvements.

**Email Communications:** Efforts continued to transition to MailChimp as the primary platform for congregation-wide emails. The team explored opportunities for list cleanup, segmentation, and improved targeting, including distinguishing between engaged and unengaged recipients. Additional strategies under consideration include allowing users to set communication preferences and sending database “cleanup” and re-engagement emails.

**Visitor Engagement and Data Strategy:** Working with Ben Junker, the team began exploring data visualization (e.g., age, location, interests) to better understand who is engaging with the church. These insights are expected to inform future outreach strategies, such as targeted follow-up emails or livestream invitations for those who live farther away.

**Automated Communications:** The team identified opportunities to implement automated email journeys through MailChimp, including a welcome message and brief follow-up survey for new subscribers. Coordination with existing communications will be important to ensure a consistent and non-duplicative approach.

**Digital Content and Outreach:** Efforts to expand digital engagement included posting service clips on Facebook and exploring enhancements to the church’s YouTube presence, including adding a more prominent donation link. These channels continue to provide opportunities to connect with both members and a broader audience.

**Strategic Planning and Collaboration:** The team refined a communications audit framework to better assess current tools and identify priorities. Ongoing collaboration with the Membership team has focused on improving visitor follow-up and strengthening pathways to deeper engagement. Additional coordination across committees is being explored to better align communications and engagement efforts.

**Volunteer Support:** Recruiting volunteers to support social media and communications efforts remains an ongoing need. The team discussed more flexible ways for individuals to contribute without requiring full committee participation.

**Looking Ahead:** In the coming year, the team will focus on implementing SEO improvements, fully utilizing MailChimp's capabilities—including automation and segmentation—and strengthening visitor follow-up processes. Clarifying roles, improving coordination, and expanding volunteer support will be key to enhancing how we communicate and welcome others into our community.

## 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 into 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 35 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 Board:

- Laura Wenneker- Chair
- Janet Bednarz - Secretary
- Linda Fleming - Treasurer
- Sarah Holler and Margaret Noether - Hospitality
- Margaret Fuhrman and Madeline Darnell - Membership
- Laurie Lavine and Lee Fogarty- Programs
- Jan Harrison, Marcia Bades - Social Responsibility
- Alice Carnes - Bequests
- Alice Carnes - Poet in Residence

### Women's Alliance Programs

September 2025-April 2026

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 leads.

October: Pennsylvania Supreme Court Judge Christine Donohue spoke to us about the upcoming election for retention of judges, and member Linda Archinaco lead us in a session of Qigong.

November: Jo Schlesinger from Abuelas Responden (Grannies Respond), Alina Harbourne from Jewish Family Community Services and W.A. member Joan Harvey spoke to us about their work with immigrants who are newcomers to Pittsburgh. Mary Weidner, a Women's Alliance member and professional artist, presented work from her exhibition in the Undercroft Gallery.

December: Sue Frietsche, Executive Director of the Women's Law Project, spoke to us about their work defending the rights of women and girls. We had our holiday luncheon.

January: We had a book discussion on Breakfast With Buddha by Roland Merullo.

February: Children's author and First U.U. member Karen Williams spoke to us about her work and the books she has written. Dr. Liz Pienkos spoke to us about her work in perinatal mental health.

March: We heard about Gwen's Girls from the Executive Director, Dr. Kathi Elliott. W.A. member Alice Carnes lead us in Sacred Circle Dancing.

April: Our Social Responsibility Team went over the various organizations from which we will choose to donate. Reverend Dr. DeNeice Welch from PIIN explained her circuitous route to leading the organization and the many issues PIIN addresses in the Pittsburgh area.

May: We will have a check in about a trip that has had an impact in our life. Members are encouraged to bring photos if possible. Our last meeting of the year will be our spring luncheon.

### **Social Responsibility Donations**

With funds primarily collected from our dues (\$50/year, as possible), members nominate and then vote to make donations to local non-profit organizations. We do this annually, with a focus on groups serving women, girls and children, and having an impact both on fighting racial oppression and supporting environmental justice. This year we considered 15 organizations recommended by members. Since many small organizations depend on having numbers of donations in addition to the funds, we will soon vote on a tiered plan so that we can give something to all of them.

- 1) Amachi Pittsburgh - supporting children, youth, and families impacted by incarceration in Allegheny County for over 21 years.
- 2) ARYSE - works with refugee and immigrant youth in the Pittsburgh area.
- 3) Bella Terra Stables (a women-owned non-profit in Murrysville - yes, with real horses! ) - focusing on equine-assisted psychotherapy for children and families.
- 4) Casa San Jose - connects with, supports, and advocates for the Latino community through programs, including afterschool programs, mental health support, emergency housing, weekly clinics, food pantries, summer camps, community meetings, and Know Your Rights sessions.
- 5) Gwen's Girls – "When given the opportunity, any girl can succeed."
- 6) Homeless Children's Education Fund (HCEF) - providing children and youth experiencing homelessness in Allegheny County with a more equitable educational experience by partnering with students, families, and schools to eliminate the barriers caused by unstable housing.
- 7) Jeremiah's Place - Pittsburgh's only 24-hour crisis nursery providing emergency childcare for families in need.

8) Jewish Family and Community Services, Refugee & Immigrant Services - providing innovative and effective social service solutions to problems facing families and individuals of all ages and walks of life,

9) Manchester Bidwell Corporation - engaging the Pittsburgh region and beyond by uniting education, creative expression, and social enterprise to inspire individuals of all backgrounds to achieve personal success.

10)Maple Unified Student Academy (MUSA) (a non-profit organization in Homestead) - providing low cost, high-quality, state-licensed educational and childcare programs for children ages 3-12 in the Mon Valley area, including Pre-K, after-school care, and summer camps, focusing on safe, inclusive, and joyful learning environments

11)NAMI Keystone Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh) - Local NAMI Affiliates in communities across the state raise awareness and provide essential and free education, advocacy, and support groups to individuals and families affected by mental illness.

12) Open your Heart to a Senior and In Service of Seniors (Pittsburgh) programs, (overseen by Wesley Family Services) - help ensure that seniors who are isolated, homebound, or without families' support receive the help they need to stay nourished, connected, and independent.

13) Reading Ready, Pittsburgh – supports the healthy development of young children by increasing access to free books and by encouraging significant family engagement through reading.

14) SisTers PGH <https://www.sisterspgh.org/> - is a BLACK and TRANS-led nonprofit organization that serves the Transgender community of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

15) Women for a Healthy Environment - a local non-profit environmental health organization that educates residents about public health risks, addresses toxins in the built environment, and works on building coalitions among community members to create change.

**Bequests: Total \$1653.90 as follows:**

December 2025: Kris Rust for Christmas musicians \$500.00

March 2026: Maureen Porter to support her trip and presentation at the United Nations\* \$1,000.00

\*70th Anniversary of the Commission on the Status of Women, and The International Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women (ICUW) in special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Various Sunday Flower Team members reimbursed \$153.90

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

1) The Pillowcase Sewing Circle, making bright pillowcases for patients at Children's Hospital. Annie Stunden spearheads this project. 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) UU JusticePA Postcarders: 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. 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 the 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,

Laura Wenneker

## **Young Adult Ministry**

Young Adult Ministry saw important rebuilding and renewed direction this year through the hiring of a new Young Adult Coordinator, Deena Gray. As a parent and newer member of the congregation with a background in education, she has brought both relational warmth and organizational focus to the role.

Under her leadership, regular programming has been reestablished and expanded. This includes continued Monday evening board game nights as well as the introduction of more consistent Sunday gatherings, providing multiple points of entry for young adults to connect with one another and with the broader life of the church.

A key area of growth has been outreach and relationship-building. Deena has begun establishing connections with college students at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh, while also building strong relationships with young adults already connected to the congregation. Through this process of listening and engagement, she has gathered valuable insight into the needs and interests of the group.

Emerging from this work, young adults have expressed a clear interest in social action and community engagement, as well as a preference for meeting during the week. They have also begun the process of covenanting, signaling a desire to deepen their shared identity and commitment as a group.

Overall, this year has laid a strong foundation for the continued growth of Young Adult Ministry, with increasing clarity around structure, leadership, and the evolving needs of this community.

# INSPIRE COUNCIL

## Worship Team

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

The Worship Team works with the minister to support Sunday worship services. 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, Chrisie Ambrass re-joined the team.

In last year's report, I noted a quiet year for the worship committee due to having an intern handling a lot of the committee's responsibilities. With Rev. Kate's sabbatical, this year was the opposite! Stephanie trained Chrisie to be a co-worship coordinator. Stephanie and Chrisie rotated Sundays assisting with direct communication with guest speakers, crafting services, creating orders of service, and managing other logistical issues. The liturgists stepped up for a greater number of services than in a typical year and handled a greater number of tasks in each service.

Overall, we have received positive feedback on the guests we have had grace our pulpit during Rev. Kate's sabbatical. We hope the variety of individuals, topics and themes have been meaningful and engaging.

The worship committee is still rather small and could use more people. Anyone with interest in worship, public speaking experience and/or a strong and clear speaking voice is welcome to reach out to the team.

## Commissioned Lay Minister

I am currently 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. My agreement with the congregation is, in part, that I will present four services a year. This past year, I officiated one wedding and an interment of ashes.

Every three years, a CLM must go through a recommissioning process. I was recommissioned with unanimous approval of the CLM council in October 2025. Around the same time, I was asked to join the CLM's leadership council, which runs the CLM program, approves applicants, and provides support to applicants and current CLMs. On April 25, 2026, I attended the virtual CLM retreat, which focused on deep conversations in times of conflict.

In my report last year, I noted that the coordination of services in the summer (when Rev. Kate is off) is the most challenging part of my work. This year, and in preparation for Rev. Kate's sabbatical, I invited Chrisie Ambrass to work with me as a second worship coordinator to independently craft services with guest speakers, draft the orders of service, and work closely with program staff. I edited our liturgist script and checklist, uploaded several "back-up" sermons in case a guest cancelled at the last moment, participated in multiple planning meetings with Rev. Kate and program staff, and personally invited the majority of the guests to speak.

Even though Chrisie's assistance was invaluable, Rev. Kate's sabbatical was extremely difficult for me on a personal level. I typically volunteer with First Church about 10-12 hours a month.

Since January, I have averaged at least 10-12 hours a week. This is on top of a full-time job and raising a child with significant special needs.

What led me to becoming a CLM was my interest in worship, in writing and presenting sermons, and in participating in meaningful services. Absent one poetry and hymn service that Ellen and I presented in July 2025, I did not have the opportunity to present a single sermon this year. When I first learned of Rev. Kate's sabbatical, I proposed offering a sermon every other month—one in Jan, March and May. The planning team was so concerned about filling the Sundays however, that we over-committed to guests in the pulpit. I take full responsibility for not advocating for myself. I couldn't bring myself to turn people away who so kindly stepped up.

Unfortunately, during the sabbatical time, instead of doing what I love and what brought me to the CLM program originally, I found myself spending all of my time on logistics and emails. Since January, I fielded hundreds of emails. More often than not, I feel I have been upsetting people in my responses rather than helping. I lost what I love about working with this congregation. In April, I was unable to hide my stress from program staff and they stepped in to help take some of the load off my plate.

I recently met with Rev. Kate over a cup of tea and shared my experiences with her. With her recommendation, I will take a well-earned summer off. In September, I will reflect on how I want to structure my time as a CLM in ways that are healthy, celebratory and nourishing.

Stephanie Pawlowski

## **Affiliated Community Minister**

This was my fifth 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. 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 program has been on hold all year, so unfortunately, we've been without residents or interns since last August. In addition, our Catholic staff chaplain resigned in the middle of December, and it's been a challenge at times being able to meet the spiritual needs of our Catholic patients since then. I have continued to carry a large clinical caseload that includes leading spirituality groups in our specialty addiction treatment clinic and serving as a co-investigator in a pilot study involving a chaplain intervention for moral injury. Our research study is winding down now. While we struggled to both recruit and retain research participants, I found it a rewarding experience overall. Last February, I spoke about my involvement with the study before a national VA audience of addiction specialists. Great news is that I succeeded last November in finally being awarded my board certification specialty certificate in substance use disorders (SUD). In theory what this means is that I should qualify for a promotion at some point.

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 March 2025 – February 2026, I participated in "Rooting in the Sacred," a wonderful program for spiritual development through the Thrive Network based in Oakland, California. On Saturday, February 21st, I attended the annual Pittsburgh Racial Justice Conference, which allowed me to do some networking among local community organizations and to take a meaningful workshop on harm reduction. In mid-April, I

had the honor of joining in the joyful 60th anniversary celebration at my former congregation in Murrysville, East Suburban UU Church. I'm excited to be preaching at First Church again on Memorial Day weekend.

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

## Director of Instrumental Music

My work for the congregation continues to center around creating meaningful and engaging musical experiences at Sunday morning worship services. I am thoughtful about my programming, accompanying, coordinating instrumentalists and encouraging congregational participation, and working with our Tech crews. Most recently, during Rev. Kate's sabbatical, I have worked closely with Stephanie Pawlowski and Chrisie Ambrass as well as with program staff—Erica Shadowsong and Kris Rust—to plan weekly worship services. We've created a season of varied, meaningful and beautiful services, and I think our work together has gone very smoothly, has been a pleasure and successful. I have felt supported by a collaborative and communicative team, which also includes our Tech Team and Slides Creating Team Julie Downs and Kathleen Sandusky.

This year has been musically rich. Some of my instrumental music collaborations and highlights have been:

Accompanying Mimi Jong, erhu (Chinese string instrument).

Professional string players Ahmer'e Blackman, cello, and Nicole Lennartz, violin on two Sundays.

Accompanying soprano and guest speaker Zuly Inirio, and soprano Michele Bankole.

The Acoustic Gathering on several Sundays. Especially fun was playing original music by both Brad Yoder and The Early Mays.

First UU Hymn Band playing hymns and covering pop/rock songs for services.

Maddy Izzo, flute, performing live while displaying videos on the sanctuary screens. Maddy and I created three photo montage videos to accompany compositions inspired by specific ideas or poems. Maddy regularly includes a wide range of repertoire by female and BIPOC composers.

The Cunningham Family Band: Julie (ukelele), Jackson (drums), with Heather and Paul (various).

Joining Kris Rust and the Community Singers for the Spring Equinox service led by Miguel Sague and including members of the Taino Caney Spiritual Circle.

Coordinating with and supporting the Dance Choir for music and spoken word pieces.

Planning two unique services with Stephanie Pawlowski: Poetry and Music and Healing.

1st UU Acoustic Gatherings welcomes players of all ages and abilities to develop musicianship and community. We meet two Thursdays each month and we have a lot of fun making music in a relaxed atmosphere. Musicians this year have included: Ebe Emmons, Maddy Izzo, (flutes), Chris Milcarek, Cynthia Magistro (mandolins), Nancy Latimer, Pam Weaver (ukeleles), Julie Stunden (banjo), Carol Washburn (lap dulcimer), Hugh McGough, Nick Izzo, Martin Schmidt, Sam Hans-Greco, Ward Kelsey (guitars), Madeline Celi Kitch (piano, harmonium), Lois Hurt

(melodica), Sandy Roman (steel guitar, harmonica) and Will Snavely (harmonium). The Gathering is open to anyone in the community. One friend of the band has joined our rehearsals to date and I look forward to others from the wider community joining us in the future.

Musicians playing in The Hymn/Cover Band have included: Brian Junker (banjo, guitar, vocals), Danny Rectenwald (guitar, mandolin, vocals), Heather Cunningham (guitar, lead and backup vocals, harmonica), Paul Cunningham (keys/synthesizer, electric bass, drums and backup vocals), Corey Layman (guitar, lead vocals, drums), Mike Shanley (electric bass), Greg Whiteker (electric bass, guitar), Liam Lyons (drums). Highlights from The Band: Heather covering Cyndi Lauper, the full band covering Lennon-McCartney, and several original works by Corey Layman.

Individual musicians joining Kris or me for hymns and/or repertoire: Maddy Izzo, Ebe Emmons (flutes), and Mary Denison (recorder), Lee Saville-Iksic (piano, percussion), Al Schwartz (piano), David McLaughlin (violin), R.C. Grainger (trumpet), Howard Cespedes (flute, clarinet), members of local folk band Joy Street, Michele Bankole (soprano), Ahmer'e Blackman (cellist), Nicole Lennartz (violin), Mimi Jong (erhu), Dr. James Johnson (jazz piano), with Jeff Grubs (bass) and Thomas Wendt (drums). Danny Rectenwald (songwriting, classical guitar) and Brian Junker (songwriting, guitar, banjo) have both offered performances of their original music. Madeline Celi Kitch has played solo piano apart from Acoustic Gathering and accompanied Michele Bankole. Christmas Eve featured a brass quartet. New members Jon Drucker, piano, and Kate Thurston-Griswold, soprano, debut as soloists at First U on Sunday morning May 10th.

I engaged Substitute accompanists for about eight services this year so far, including the Dr. James Johnson Trio service. Pianists who filled in for me were Lee Saville-Iksic and Thanakarn "Bank" Limtham.

Pittsburgh Community Gamelan, led by Jay Arms, was in residence through March 2026; following a lull in attendance, they are now on hiatus. Kris and I would like to house their gamelan again—in the music office—when or if they return to First Unitarian.

Day-to-Day. My work at First Unitarian generally includes the following activities, among some other things I've likely left out. I attend one All Staff and two Programming Staff meetings each month (excluding summer). The programming staff met as needed (less frequently) during Rev. Kate's sabbatical. All of us on the programming staff have regular communication with each other and with service participants and we are always busy working in SharePoint! This past year I accompanied and/or assisted in planning three to four services per month. I attend several Community Singers rehearsals each year and play for many/most of their Sunday morning services. I mostly accompany services at the piano; occasionally I play the organ; now and then I sing traditional songs, with or without old-time banjo or harmonium; on very rare occasions I perform original songs or form vocal duets or trios with other singers. In addition to working with instrumentalists, I help coordinate and work with hymn leaders, as needed, to support congregational singing. I communicate weekly service needs to the Tech and Slides teams and make stage plots and tech sheets as needed. I renewed my commitment to the First U SongSpace concert series and have helped at the tickets and merchandise tables at several events. I have contributed non-musical (poetry, visual art) to a few services. Many of the professional guest musicians and substitute accompanists I have paid to perform are BIPOC or female. The demographics of the Acoustic Gathering and Hymn Band match those of the congregation at large. As much as I can, I try to encourage music-makers to participate in the music program at First Unitarian. All are welcome!

Respectfully submitted by Ellen Gozion

*Director of Instrumental Music*

## Vocal Music Program

During the 2025-26 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

**Black Pride Concert** in East Liberty

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

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

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

The Community Singers and AAMI singers also performed at the **Allegheny Unitarian Church** during LGBT Pride Month – June 2025. Our presence at this service 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, and have taken the lead in planning several Sunday services in Rev Kate's absence. 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 the Lemington Chorale, Reverend Deryck Tines, Let Freedom Sing & the Afro American Music Institute, Dr. Herbert Jones, Chantal Braziel, Miguel Sagué & Caney Indigenous Spiritual Circle, Alton Mitchell & the Rodman Street Baptist Church Choir, Morgan Hawkins, Zuly Inirio, Michele Bankole, Solomon Onyukwu, Eric Acosta, Kenny Stockard, Desmon Jackson and Mel Holley. 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/>.

Thanks to the “volunteer board” in the weekly church newsletter as well as outreach to the Saturday Light Brigade radio show, the SongSpace committee has grown. It now consists of Gary Crouth, Andrew Papale, Irma Tani, Brian Junker, Cynthia Magistro, Braiden Hoffman & Ellen Gozion. Other volunteers for the series include Rob & Al Schwartz, AK Molteni, Kate Snow, MR Kelsey & other church members, as well as Jim Herbert and friends of Irma Tani such as Jean Siegel. If you are interested too, please let us know!

During the period June 2025 – May 2026 the following concerts took place:

Friday October 3: Hiroya Tsukamoto (Japanese-American instrumental guitarist and composer).

Saturday November 22: Three Rivers Song Collective (six Pittsburgh-based songwriters writing and singing about Pittsburgh: Tai Chirovsky, Christopher Mark Jones, Liz McBride, Guy Russo, Ben Shannon, and Brad Yoder).

Saturday January 24: Madeline Jo and Friends (dynamic Pittsburgh twenty-somethings alternative folk-pop band) with special guest Devin Russian (local indie rock-pop singer-songwriter).

Saturday March 24: Larry & Joe (international multi-instrumentalists and singers blending Venezuelan and Appalachian folk musics).

Saturday May 2: Joe Jencks (Irish-American singer-songwriter and balladeer).

All but one of our shows this year featured immigrants and/or first-gen children of immigrants. Generally, we book artists who, while not explicitly Unitarian- or religious-centric, do align with aspects of social justice and/or our values and principles (<https://www.first-unitarian-pgh.org/about-us/our-beliefs/uu-principles-and-sources/>).

The guarantees required to bring in quality performers from out of town have grown considerably, with ~ \$1000 being the minimum, up to as much as \$3000. To mitigate some of the risk involved, SongSpace collaborated with Calliope (<https://calliopehouse.org/>) on one high-profile show this year, Larry & Joe, and is planning to collaborate with Calliope on one show again in the 26-27 season. SongSpace also expresses its deep appreciation for the Music Endowment Committee, who provided a “backstop fund” in case losses for Larry & Joe were too heavy (in the end we did not need to use the backstop fund).

SongSpace has developed a strong reputation among a core following of attendees (a mixture of church members and members of the general public). It remains a challenge to maintain and grow our audience, and another goal of the Calliope collaboration is to broaden our audience base. Also toward that end, 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).

Brian Junker, May 4, 2026

## **Dance Choir**

### **Current Members**

Tory Butterworth, Alice Carnes, Linda Fleming, Jennifer Halperin, Jan Harrison, Ioulia Kornberg, Nancy Latimer, Karen Litzinger, Mary Pat Mengato, Michele Roberto, Cathy Rohrer, Sarah Sheard

### **August**

- Zoom meeting to check in, brainstorm and plan for the year

### **September**

- Zoom meeting for specific scheduling and start planning for the Winter Solstice service
- Mary Pat collaborated with musician Jett Downey to lead circle dances for her Equinox concert on Sept 20

### **October**

- Began weekly rehearsals for Winter Solstice
- Created service themes and choreographed and rehearsed for the Winter Solstice service
- Welcomed 3 new dancing members!
- Met with musician Jett Downey and Brian Junker to start joint collaboration with Dance Choir, Jett Downey, and the Joy Street Band.

### **November**

- Continued Solstice service planning, choreographing, rehearsing and met with musicians
- Reset a dance piece from Skyloom as one of the dances for the Solstice service
- Applied for and received Music Endowment grant to pay guest musician Jett Downey to music direct, arrange, and perform in Solstice service

### **December**

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

### **February/March**

- Zoom meeting for Spring planning - Earth Day piece, other projects
- Coordinated with Ellen Gozion for music for Earth Day piece

### **April**

- Choreographed, rehearsed, and performed new piece, "Walking With Earth," to recognize Earth Day in April 20 service
- Created, rehearsed, and performed dance piece to Hafiz poem "The Sacred Dance of Life," for "Joy as Resistance" themed service on April 26
- Hosted Social Hour on April 26

### **Summer**

- Planning to lead and participate in Sacred Circle Dance for Memorial Gathering for Pat Trudeau on July 12
- Gestating new piece ideas for next church year!

### **Looking ahead -**

- 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

## Art Committee

| Month     | Artist  | Medium                           | Show Up  | Show Down | Reception | Coordinator                | Coordinator Contact  |
|-----------|---|----------------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------------------------|--|
| Sept 2025 | Members Art Show (Linda Kauffman)                 | Mixed                            | 9/7/25   | 10/31/25  |           | Linda Kauffman             | LK01@andrew.cmu.edu  |
| Oct       | Members Art Show (Linda Kaufman)                  | Mixed                            | 9/12     | 10/30/25  |           | Linda Kauffman             | LK01@andrew.cmu.edu  |
| Nov.      | Mary Weidner                                      | Paintings, watercolors           | 10/31    | 12/4/25   |           | Ali Masalehdan             | al_asgar@yahoo.com   |
| Dec       | Quilts (Annie Stunden, Al Schwartz, Barb Gengler) | Quilts                           | 12/4/25  | 1/4/2026  |           | Annie Stunden              | annie.stunden@gmail.com  |
| Jan 2026  | Member Photo Exhibit (Joe Jencik)                 | Photos                           | 1/5/2026 | 2/30/2026 | 1/11/26   | Joe Jencik / Kirsti Adkins | joejencik@gmail.com<br>kladkins1@verison.com                                   |
| February  | Member Photo Exhibit (Joe Jencik)                 | Photographs                      | 1/5/2026 | 2/30/26   |           | Joe Jencik, Kirsti Adkins  | joejencik@gmail.com<br>kladkins1@verison.com                                   |
| March     | Adrian Daner                                      | Gouache, mixed media, watercolor | 3/1      | 4/15      | 3/8       | Ali Masalehdan             | Notathome329@gmail.com<br>al_asgar@yahoo.com                                   |
| April     | Adrian Daner                                      | Gouache, mixed media, watercolor | 3/1      | 4/15      |           | Ali Masalehdan             | al_asgar@yahoo.com   |
| May       | Marion Gist                                       | Paintings and prints             | 4/15     | 5/30      | 4/1       | Ali Masalehdan             | gistgallery@gmail.com<br>ali@masimex.com<br>al_asgar@yahoo.com<br>412-805-5397 |
| June/July | Pillow Cases (Annie Stunden)                      | Pillow cases                     | 5/30     | 7/30      |           | Annie Stunden              | annkairath@gmail.com   |

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

## 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 foreseeable future. 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 30, 2026

## Alternative Gift Market

First UU’s amazing congregation continued our compassionate tradition of hosting and supporting an Alternative Holiday Gift Market on December 7th and 14th 2025. (A disruptive snowstorm on December 14th occasioned a snow-make up day on December 21st.) The concept, as many of you know, 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 a creative array of 22 worthy causes (vetted for reliability/capacity to deliver as promised) who are AGI’s domestic and international charity partnerships. We added First UU special friends’ displays for Khasi Hills and the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN).

We are enormously proud to report that our congregation generously donated \$ 5,581 (\$4,210 to AGM causes, \$775 to Khasi Hills, and \$596 to PIIN/ally causes (Casa San Jose and Valley Clean Air).

The AGI organization encourages gifts of conscience all year long. Their web address is <https://alternativegifts.org>. Their theme “Gifts Inspiring Change” is illustrated through cause selections in six categories: Gender Equality; Health & Well-Being; Education; Hunger Relief, Environmental Sustainability; and Emergency Disaster Relief.

In 2026, the First UU Alternative Holiday Gift Market will take place on December 6th & 13th.

Respectfully submitted,

First UU AGM Team volunteers: Karen Burns, Margaret Stevens, Nancy Latimer, Sandy Wooley, Maria Magone, Janet and Dan Bednarz, Karen Woodall, Linda Fleming, Laura Gallagher, Laurie Lavine, Jan Carlino, and Tony Rutigliano

## Khasi Hills Partnership

Members: Shelley Ross (chairperson, beginning 04/2026), Karen Litzinger (departing chairperson), Moira Dunn, LeeAnn Haworth, Lois Hurt, Mary Pat Mengato, Eleanor Mayfield, Maureen Porter, Anne Van Cott.

Highlights:

- School and Teacher Sponsorship – We continued our support for the Annie Margaret Barr Higher Secondary School in the Khasi Hills of India, which we have sponsored in many forms since 2003. In 2015-2016 we helped the school expand to become a Higher Secondary School by adding grades 11 and 12, and since then we have been funding the salaries of the two teachers for these higher grades. As of annual report writing, we have raised our \$9,600 goal to cover the teachers' salaries, plus (as last year) an additional 10% (\$960) that the Unitarian Union of North East India (UUNEI, equivalent of UUA) reserves from contributions for various other funding needs of schools and churches throughout the Khasi Hills.
- Leadership Restructuring – We are functioning well with our new structure, in which most members serve as a point person for a project or task. Shelley Ross is now chairperson, succeeding Karen Litzinger who served as chair for over 10 years. Karen remains a team member and will continue to lead the annual Khasi Hills service.
- September Anniversary Day Events – This was the 6th year of acknowledging Khasi Hills Anniversary Day, their most important holiday, which celebrates the founding of Unitarianism in the Khasi Hills. Our September 21 church service included a brief address and recognition.
- International Travel – Shelley Ross travelled to the Khasi Hills in October and November of 2025. She spoke at the inauguration of the school's rainwater harvesting system, which was funded through Faithify by our church's initiative.
- Khasi Hills Partnership Sunday and Social Hour Luncheon – The March 1 service featured a sermon by Shelley Ross about her trip. The theme of the sermon was "welcoming;" other features included video greetings from our Khasi Hills partners and a demonstration of rainwater harvesting during Time for All Ages. The service was followed by a celebratory and very popular social hour reception featuring cuisine of North East and Mainland India.
- UUA International Office Connections – Multiple team members attend the roughly quarterly meetings of UUA India Partners to receive updates.
- Other Activities – Shelley Ross spoke about her trip at the Sunday Forum on April 19. Also, we have initiated outreach to other Pittsburgh-area UU churches to invite them to participate in expanding our support of the school to and strengthen our local connections.
- Looking Ahead – We expect to continue our annual events, refine leadership/team restructuring, and pursue ways of attracting other Pittsburgh area churches to join us in our support of the school.

#### ● Financial Report

Donor Newsletter Outreach – This was the second year of a September newsletter with sponsorship form, which raised \$4,424 from 40 donors. After the Fall campaign, we received an additional \$3,178 from donors.

Alternative Gift Market – We raised \$755 from 14 donors.

March Share the Plate Month – This raised \$335 (in the 50-50% split from plate cash). In addition, we raised \$925 from donors contributing directly to the Khasi Hills during Share The Plate month.

## UUs for Justice in the Middle East

Unitarian Universalists for Peace and Justice in the Middle East donated \$1000 from the sales of Palestinian Olive Oil at the Church to the following charitable organizations with the stipulation that it be used for worthy causes in the Palestinian Territories including Gaza:

|                         |       |
|-------------------------|-------|
| UNICEF                  | \$300 |
| Doctors Without Borders | \$200 |
| World Central Kitchen   | \$300 |
| World Food Program      | \$200 |

We are continuing with our sales and hope that we can provide additional donations. Members of the UUJME are Ali Masalehdan, Kirsti Adkins, Joan Adibi and Margaret Fuhrman.

## Share the Plate

May, 2026

The Share the Plate committee is proud to report on the amazing generosity of First Unitarian Church's congregation. Through our monthly Share the Plate donations the church has donated \$27,079.04. The monthly amounts since our last Annual Meeting in May of 2025 can be seen below. The total donations since last year have continued to increase. The committee welcomed the following new members this year: Rebecca Studer, Adrienne Duquesnoy, George Cook, and eric cressley.

\*The Bethel AME amount includes a donation from the Social Justice Endowment.

Total donations since May, 2025: \$27,079.04

Total donations in the prior year: \$15,532.89

Share the Plate Committee: Mary Denison, Karen Burns, Kirsti Adkins, Cinda Beattie, Margaret Noether, eric cressley, George Cook, Adriene Duquesnoy, Rebecca Studer

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

May 2026

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."

In 2025, the fund supported people who needed support for groceries, medical bills, home stability and utilities. The current balance of the fund as of May 8, 2026 is \$1,487.67.

## East End Cooperative Ministry Shelter Meal

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

Each month, a dinner coordinator plans the menu and assigns the preparation of the different dishes with the various volunteers. Normally, about 5 or 6 volunteers help with each dinner.

In addition to individual members, church organizations such the Board of Trustees, the Men's Group and several covenant groups have sponsored a meal this past year.

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.**

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

If you are interested in sponsoring a dinner please contact the church office or Sam Hens-Greco at [Samhengreco@gmail.com](mailto:Samhengreco@gmail.com)

## Medical Equipment Loan Program

The Medical Equipment Loan Program has been in existence for 10 years and has helped a great many of our church members, friends, and family members. Currently we have the following equipment available: 3 Walkers and 1 basket, 2 Rollators (Walkers with Seats), 3 Wheelchairs, 1 Cane, 3 sets of Crutches, 1 set of Crutches with Forearm Support, 1 iWalk Knee-Crutch, 2 Knee Scooters, 1 Potty Chairs with Rails, 1 Raised Toilet Seat, 2 Shower/Bath Chairs, 1 Shower Transfer Chair. Additional items (such as leg boots, air casts, knee ice compressors/chillers, sock aides, and reacher/grabbers, 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.

loulía Kornberg took over the task of managing the medical equipment. She contacts the people on the list annually to ensure that the list is up-to-date. She has had only a few people contact her during this past year in need of DME, but the list is accurate as of May 2026.

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 1st of every month:*

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

[medicalequipment@first-unitarian-pgh.org](mailto:medicalequipment@first-unitarian-pgh.org) 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 15th of every month:*

#### **Medical Assist Equipment Loans:**

[medicalequipment@first-unitarian-pgh.org](mailto:medicalequipment@first-unitarian-pgh.org) 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), Mike Robertson, Bob Sullivan, Karen Woodall, Rev. Kate Walker. Rev. Walker is on sabbatical January through May 2026.

During the past year the Pastoral Care Team met in person at church and then on Zoom since Rev. Walker was on sabbatical. Team members shared concerns of congregants as well as our own concerns. We share what congregants permit so their confidentiality is kept. The Caring Table is set up most Sundays in the Undercroft Gallery or elsewhere if needed. Cards can be signed for joys and sorrows. Some team members make calls, send emails, and visit members when possible.

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:

David Mitchell Russell: January 20, 2026

Dale Hershey: February 26, 2026

This past year two support groups were started in May 2025. Caregiving support was facilitated by Jan Carlino and Kathy Miller. Grief support was facilitated by Chris Beregi and Karen Woodall. Caregiving support ended in September 2025 and was not continued. Grief support was continued in 2026 and had participants.

On April 12 the Pastoral Care Team hosted the social hour. During service Kathy Miller shared a prayer during joys and sorrows. It was called Sacred in the Ordinary by Tamara Lebak.

We recently welcomed Mike Robertson to the Pastoral Care Team and he looks forward to contributing to our team. We seek to 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.

We have been asked to participate in a church service this Summer. We are going to talk about plans and coordinate with the Worship Team.

Jim Cunningham

## **Racial Justice Task Force**

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.

### **Charter:**

Some key portions of our Charter are included here.

### **Purpose**

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

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

*Educate and inform ourselves on racism in ourselves, in our church, in our communities and in the world.*

*Participate in the democratic process of choosing which 1-2 racial justice issue(s) we will focus on each year.*

*Regularly attend and participate in our monthly meetings, which are intended as planning sessions as well as a venue for sharing information and experiences.*

*Regularly engage in RJTF projects and actions around our selected issues.*

*Work with the Minister(s) on assisting the congregation with education and skills-building to live into the 8th Principle of Unitarian Universalism and create a church culture of inclusion and Beloved Community.*

### **RJTF Leadership and Meetings**

We follow a shared leadership model with a 'steering wheel' team currently comprised of Denice Galpern, Maria Magone and Jean Schmidt. We have a distribution list of approximately 30 individuals, with an average meeting participation of 10-12 congregants.

The Racial Justice Task Force began meeting every two months (a change from every month) in September 2025, with our most recent meeting in March of 2026. Meetings are held on Zoom on the 3rd Monday of designated months at 7-8:30PM, with an exception for January. This year we delayed meeting until the 4th Monday in January to accommodate our support for the Let Freedom Sing Concert (facilitated by Kris Rust and co-sponsored by the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh) on the 3rd Monday in honor of the life and work of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr..

### **Moving the Needle – Making Things Happen**

Our 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, since congregational events are designed to draw individuals from 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**

A subcommittee of the RJTF, this group expanded from 7 to 9 congregants this past year, with their first meeting for Year 2 of the program held in February 2026. The group is continuing to meet every two months with Paula Cole Jones, co-founder of the 8th Principle movement and a nationally recognized UU social justice leader/facilitator from the All Souls UU Church in Washington, DC. The work of this group uses the Community of Communities model to build equity and inclusion into church culture, to ensure that the 8th Principle and the new UU Shared Values go beyond words we recite to being fully realized in our church community and the UU tradition at large.

#### **Racial Justice Film Series – June through August 2025**

Under the leadership of Denice Galpern, RJTF members put on a monthly RJ film series that ran from June through August 2025.

**June: Sing Sing - a film based on the real-life Rehabilitation Through the Arts program**

**July: Critical Condition: Health in Black America - a documentary from the PBS Nova 'Body and Brain' series**

**August: American Coup: Wilmington 1898 - a PBS documentary from the American Experience series**

Viewings, along with pot-luck dinners, were followed by discussions to engage participants, educate on racial justice topics, and build community. The average participation was 15, including some newcomers.

#### **Workshop Series on Isabelle Wilkerson's '8 Pillars of Caste' – Fall 2025**

Designed and facilitated by Liz Hrenda, this 4-part interactive workshop series ran for a second iteration, Sept. 28. to Nov. 2, 2025. The program included participants from the wider community and was aimed at building understanding of systemic racism and developing proactive anti-racist strategies. RJTF members provided lunch for 6-10 participants on average for each session.

#### **Partnership with First U Sunday Forum Speaker Series**

The Forum restarted this year with RJTF member Clint Geller as part of the leadership circle. Clint represents racial and social justice interests in programming this series, and RJTF member

Maria Magone also serves on the Forum Committee. Racial and social justice programs that Clint arranged included: Airi Tilley, Court Watch Volunteer Coordinator Abolitionist Law Center (ALC), spoke on “All eyes on the courts – court watching efforts in Allegheny County”; Professor Jackie Smith, from the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, spoke on “Housing as a human right”; Dr. Daniel Holland, from the Center for African American Urban Studies and the Economy (CAUSE) History Department, Carnegie Mellon University, spoke on “Social justice in Pittsburgh in historical perspective”; Rev. Dr. Dale B. Snyder, Sr., Pastor of Bethel A.M.E. church, spoke on “The Homestead Act of 1862 and the broken promise of “Forty acres and a mule, ” which the RJTF co-hosted. Finally, Michael Kraus, Curator of Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall and Museum, will speak May 10 for the final Forum of the church year on “The role of Western Pennsylvania’s African American Soldiers in the Civil War”.

### **Community Outreach and Building of Partnerships**

#### **Year 3 of Partnership with Bethel AME Church – strengthening and deepening relationship, centering the repair of truth, wealth and power**

3 RJTF members joined the Bethel AME Research subcommittee in Fall 2025 to explore together how to maximize use of their Hill District land to build food sustainability through a combination of urban gardening, hydroponics and aquaponics. Groundbreaking for the first gardening plot on Bethel Church property is on target for May 2026.

This was our third year of securing a Social Justice Endowment award towards financial reparations, combined with February 2026 Share-the-Plate to benefit Bethel: total amount \$6,532.28

RJTF members Clint Geller and Maria Magone continue to serve 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 members of the RJTF participated in an event celebrating Black History at the Bethel A.M.E. church, in February 2026. One of the Speakers, Hazel Murray, spoke about Black Union soldiers buried in a local cemetery. Clint shared records he has that helped Mrs. Murray with her search for the soldiers’ histories.

Seven RJTF members participated in Bethel’s annual Halloween service event in October 2025: Trunk or Treat.

Multiple RJTF members and other First U congregants participated in Bethel’s annual multifaith Juneteenth celebration June 22, 2025, allowing us to further build fellowship and connection with clergy and congregants from Bethel and other churches that are also on the path of enacting reparations.

#### **Building Partnership with Abolitionist Law Center (ALC)**

RJTF has continued to build partnership this year with the Abolitionist Law Center (ALC), with initial participation in their Allegheny County Court Watch Program and participating for the second year in a row in an end-of-year letter writing campaign to support young people incarcerated as minors who are still in jail or prison. RJTF hosted a hybrid community event at church on Feb. 1, 2026, about Solitary Confinement and ALC efforts to ban the practice. This moving session centered testimony from survivors of solitary confinement in PA prisons.

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

Institutionalize the CoC model – increase integration into First U’s culture

Expand congregation-wide engagement in RJ work by better communication of our activities and opportunities.

Develop partnership with Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP. Many members of RJTF have joined the NAACP and we would like to expand this to a churchwide initiative

Enhance integration between the RJTF and other social justice communities within First Unitarian, namely the Environmental Justice Action Team (EJAT) and PA Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN) group.

The Racial Justice Task Force is currently meeting on the third Monday of alternate months @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 with us at church or email [racialjustice@first-unitarian-pgh.com](mailto:racialjustice@first-unitarian-pgh.com)

## UU Justice PA / UU the Vote / Write Here Write Now

First Unitarian Annual Report 2025-2026

UUJustice PA Postcarding and Write Here/Write Now with UUSJ

UUJusticePA "Brings UU Voices to the Public Square in PA" and the Mission is "Pursuing justice by voting, advocating and making just public policies". PA is one of ~30 state-based advocacy organizations and it represents ~ 6000 UUs across the commonwealth. The 25-26 church year began with our interim Director Clara Jenkins and Legislative Associate Arly Henninger-Voss leading our work from Harrisburg. They maintained an active presence and critical recognition of our support of progressive values in Harrisburg and Arly tracked the progress of legislation through the Pennsylvania House and Senate in collaboration with UUJusticePA's Justice Teams and partner organizations, allowing PA UUs to advocate for our UU Values and positive change.

They were replaced in December by our new permanent Director, Michael Mehrazar, who comes to us after several years working in Harrisburg for Penn Future, one of our collaborating groups. He can be reached at [admin@uujusticepa.org](mailto:admin@uujusticepa.org). He is supported by part time staff Edith Ruiz, Financial Manager, and Jesi Butler, Communications Contractor.

Go to <https://uujusticepa.net/> to learn more about the organization, sign up for updates, find Team meeting dates, and read the recently relaunched monthly Newsletter, 'Keystone Justice, Living our UUValues in PA'. And of course, DONATE to support the work.

Ongoing 1st Unitarian participation includes "Postcarding", on legislation identified by Michael and the Justice Teams to support or oppose Bills as they relate 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](mailto: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 will give donations from Share the Plate in August '26.

We currently 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 and Laura Wenneker who drops into Team meetings as she is available. We still need someone to follow the newly active LGBTQIA+ group; if you or someone you know is interested, please refer them to Michael at [admin@uujusticepa.org](mailto:admin@uujusticepa.org). All are invited to these monthly Team meetings-go to [www.uujustice.net](http://www.uujustice.net) for information. As in past years, we hope to have several First UU members (ably recruited by Jan Harrison) attend the Cease Fire advocacy day in Harrisburg in support of Gun Violence Prevention legislation on June 2, 2026. Look for more information soon.

UU the VOTE prioritizes the protection and strengthening of our democratic institutions. Building on the March 18 action alert opposing the SAVE Act, there will soon be expanding opportunities for UUs to engage directly in the electoral process through phone banking, door knocking, educational events, and more. Democracy thrives when everyone participates, and UU the VOTE wants to make it easier for you to get involved. Watch the Bulletin Board for details.

The UUJustice Annual Meeting will held on Zoom, May 30 from 9-11 AM. Check the website for registration and meeting details.

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. We successfully supported the retention of three supreme court judges in the November '25 election who are 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 have postcarded on this issue and will continue to work with Fair Districts PA and LWV [League of Women Voters] on this during the next months.

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

*Supported HB 2189-Increase the Minimum Wage (passed House, now in Senate Committee)*

Supported HB 1505-Protecting Access to Pre-K

Supported HB 300-Comprehensive anti-discrimination law

Supported HB 150- Cyber Charter school reform

Supported HB 997-Protecting PA Personal Information

Supported HB 1908 and 1909-Increase penalties for Protection From Abuse order violations

Supported HB 1667-Implementing PA rural jobs tax credit program

Supported HB 31 and SB131- Independent redistricting Commission in PA

*Supported HB 200-Family Care Act (Passed House, now in Senate Committee)*

Supported SB 1140- Human Trafficking Awareness Training

Supported SB 1193-Keep ICE off PA's Property

Supported HB 670-Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances

Supported HB 728-Providing Drivers Licenses and Work Permits to people released from prison

Supported HB 2005-Removing Waiting Period and counseling Requirements for Abortion

Supported HB-501-PRESS, PA Reliable Energy Sustainability Standard

Supported HB 1957-Reproductive Rights Amendment

Supported HB 2199-Gender Based Bullying Prevention

Supported HR 402-Resolution demanding federal accountability in DHS and ICE Enforcement and Withholding Appropriations Until Reforms Are Enacted

*Supported HB 1800-Marriage Equality (Passed House, now in Senate Committee)*

Supported HB 2161-Requiring Electric Utilities to Replace the Trees They Remove

Supported HB 460-Protecting PA Health Services and Facilities

Supported HB 2059-Establishing Mandela Rules for Imprisonment in PA

Go to [www.ujusticepa](http://www.ujusticepa) 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).

Write Here/Write Now 2025

Early in 2025 a letter writing project directed to our federal Senators and Legislators, Write Here/Write Now, was initiated here at 1st UU using materials from Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice, our Advocacy organization addressing national issues in Washington DC. Jo Ann Flanagan had extensive experience with this group before her relocation from VA to Pittsburgh and we are grateful for her bringing us into this work. We met on the 2nd Sunday of the month immediately after Worship Services, 11:30 AM, in the Schweitzer Room. Sample letters, talking points, and background information for a current critical issue was provided. You came to write letters that were hand delivered to our elected officials. Some of the issues we addressed are Immigration, Scientific Integrity, and Federal legislation on gerrymandering. Interest has dwindled and due to other responsibilities of the leadership this effort did not continue into 2026.

It should be noted that many 1st UUs have been present at multiple actions here in Pgh protesting the recent Executive Orders and their implementation that are undermining our Democracy. Thanks to those who post information as to dates and times so we can be present to uphold UU Values in the public space. The challenges continue.

Becky Studer, UUJusticePA liaison; Laura Wenneker, UU the Vote; JoAnn Flanagan and Margaret Fuhrman, Write Here/Write Now.

**TRANSFORMATION PLURALISM GENEROSITY LOVE INTERDEPENDENCE EQUITY JUSTICE**

**Join fellow UUs on 4th Thursdays to support our Values in the public arena**

## **Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN)**

The Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN) is a grassroots coalition of faith congregations, organizations, and individuals committed to building power for justice in Southwestern Pennsylvania. By building potent relationships, training leaders, negotiating successfully, and publicly demonstrating its power, PIIN influences policy and practice to create the conditions for flourishing, just communities. First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh was one of the founding members of PIIN over 25 years ago and our own Rev. Kate Walker is PIIN's current president.

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

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.

PIIN is led by a Board of volunteers, but staff are essential to support volunteers. PIIN is excited that donations have made it possible to hire Rev. Dr. DeNeice Welch as Executive Director in 2026. Other staff includes Dr. Jim Highland, as an organizer, and Claire Pullen, as communications coordinator. If you heard Rev. Welch's sermon on April 12, "Putting Feet on Our Prayer," or her inspiring presentation to Women's Alliance on April 16, you'll understand why she will lead PIIN to higher levels.

Community organizing requires both People and Money, and 1st UU is providing both volunteer leaders and financial support. Bob Mitchell is co-chairing the First UU/PIIN Environmental Justice Task Force, which includes Karen Burns, Madeline Darnell, Ebe Emmons, Laura Gallagher, Claus Makowka, Mary Redford, Peg Schmidt, Mary Schinhofen, Will Snavelly, and Becky Studer. Nick Izzo has joined the newly formed Immigration Task Force and chairs a subcommittee. Karen Burns Rutigliano leads PIIN's grant writing efforts. Sandy Woolley chairs the Public Education Justice Task Force. Laurie Lavine and Linda Fleming are on the Gala planning committee. This year the Gala is on Sunday, May 17, 4-7 p.m., at Rodef Shalom. We hope you'll attend and hear all about PIIN's work. Tickets are available on [piinpa.org](http://piinpa.org).

All Core Team members helped with the 3rd annual Pies for PIIN last August. We are gratified to have raised \$19,000. Save the Date! The 4th annual Pies for PIIN is scheduled for Sunday, August 16, 2025, 1-3:00 p.m.

PIIN currently is working on five issues: Environmental Justice, Immigration Justice, Transformational Justice, Public Education, and Integrated Voter Engagement.

PIIN has had several successes this year, including:

The Environment - Allegheny County Council unanimously voted in favor of increasing operating permit fees for facilities that produce air pollution. (November 18, 2025)

Immigration - Allegheny County Council passed ordinance 13809-26, prohibiting county collaboration with ICE. (March 10, 2026)

Transformational Justice – Allegheny County Council voted down a proposal to overturn the 2021 ban on the use of leg shackles on residents of the ACJ. (November 5, 2025).

The PPS Board of Directors voted “NO” against implementing the Future-Ready Facilities Plan in November 2025. However, in January, after seating three new Directors, the Board voted to again consider the Plan.

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 the 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, on behalf of the 1st UU PIIN Core Team.

## **Environmental Justice Task Force**

### **WINNING AN IMPORTANT ISSUE**

In 2025-2026 the First Unitarian Environmental Justice Task Force focused primarily on the goal of convincing members of the Allegheny County Council to approve a measure to sufficiently fund air quality enforcement by the health department. This issue was identified through a process of discernment described in last year's report.

Fees paid by industries when they apply for operating permits are critical because they support health department employees as they carry out the permitting process. When a business wants to build a facility that will emit hazardous substances, it must first submit an application for an operating permit to the Allegheny County Health Department. The application specifies the expected amount of resulting pollution, and should indicate how emissions will be limited using best available technology. The facility also pays a fee to the health department along with the application. The permit fee needs to be sufficient so that employees of the health department can thoroughly the application.

The health department considers many factors as it reviews the application. How much pollution will the proposed facility emit? Is the analysis in the application correct and reasonable? Does it meet applicable regulatory standards? What will be the impact of the region's air quality? The department may approve the application as is, require changes, or deny it.

The permitting process for a facility as large and complicated as the Clairton Coke Works is very labor intensive. It requires staff knowledgeable in both technical and legal matters. Over the past decade the health department hasn't been able to keep up with permit applications because they haven't had enough qualified staff. And for some operating permits they did approve the EPA has pointed out flaws in their analysis — resulting in approval of facilities that will pollute too much.

To remedy this situation the Allegheny County Executive recommended a permit fee increase in the Fall of 2024. That was a welcome move, but it soon became known that County Council did not have enough votes to approve the increase. Ten votes (out of 15) are needed, but there were only 8 yes votes as of late 2024.

Environmental activists, including First U members, other PIIN members, and partner activists began speaking at council meetings to get council to move forward. But yes votes remained stalled at 8. So early in 2025 we decided to concentrate our efforts on increasing the permit fees. In March we set a goal, along with other PIIN churches, to "fill the room" where council meetings are held. Our members spoke at council meetings along with folks from the Breathe Project, 412 Justice, Clean Air Council, PennFuture, the Environmental Integrity Project, GASP, VCAN, and others.

At the same time we embarked on a process to get to know council members individuals rather than as just public officials. First U's EJ team works in collaboration with PIIN's EJ task force and has access to PIIN churches all around the county. We worked to identify at least one of our First U or PIIN members to develop a working relationship with each council member. We also adopted the premise that all council members are operating in good faith. Rather than just lecture members at meetings, we worked to get to know them.

Through that process, as well as continuing to show up and speak at meetings, we reached the point at a September meeting when council president Pat Catena said "We hear you". He said that council members were actively working on the permit fee issue.

Finally, on Nov. 18, council put the vote on its agenda. Over 45 people signed up to speak that day. The room really was packed, including about 30 from PIIN churches and a dozen from First U.



*First Unitarian, PIIN and other Pittsburgh area air quality activists “fill the room” on Nov. 18, 2025 when the Allegheny County Council approved increased permit fees by a unanimous 13-0 vote.*

To our surprise and delight the measure was not only approved. It was approved unanimously 13-0 by all council members present. Dewitt Walton, who previously opposed the measure and is Rev. Walker’s council representative, was one of the “yes” votes.

### **SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE**

An important component of achieving policy goals is the concept of shifting the narrative. In the case of Mon Valley air quality, the narrative for decades has been one of jobs vs. health. Even residents in frontline Environmental Justice communities often rationalize pollution and associated health risks as an unfortunate but necessary cost of having jobs. We and other activists have tried to make the case that it is possible to have both jobs and health through appropriate regulations and enforcement. We have pointed out that reasonable regulations and enforcement protect the health and safety of workers as well as residents.

On August 11, 2025 there was a tragic explosion at the Clairton Coke Works that killed two workers and injured 11 more, some quite seriously. Both the Chemical Safety Board and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) have issued reports highly critical of Nippon/US Steel. Both agencies identified poor site design and inadequate procedures as contributors to the accident and to its death and injury toll. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the union and individual workers have become more receptive to the need for government regulatory oversight in the aftermath of the explosion. It is unfortunate that it sometimes seems to require tragedy to remind us that safety benefits everyone.

We hope that this shifted narrative facilitates progress moving forward. Other local positive developments offer hope for continuing progress on Mon Valley air quality. County Executive Sara Innamorato initiated the process that led to the needed increase in permit fees. Her administration also proposed ten highly qualified new members for the Air Advisory Board, which has significant influence on policy development. The new board includes prominent VCAN activist Qiyam Ansari and Randy Sargent from CMU’s CREATE Lab. The previous board

was dysfunctional— it rarely met with a quorum and most of its members had little or no background in air quality.

The county also hired a new director of the health department, Dr. Ulia Vann, in 2024. Dr. Vann, in contrast to the previous director, seeks out input from residents and activists. She is currently meeting four times a year with Pittsburgh air quality stakeholders led by Breathe Collaborative executive director Matt Mehalik, who is also a member of the North Hills UU Church. Bob Mitchell represents PIIN at those meetings.



*An explosion at the Clairton Coke Works on August 11, 2025 killed two workers and injured 11 others, some seriously.*

## **WORKING AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL**

In spite of the current adversarial federal stance on environmental issues, First U EJ members found a voice at the national level. During 2025 the EPA issued a plan to roll back the hard-won regulatory improvements for coke oven operations that went into effect at the end of 2024. Following mandated procedures, the EPA on September 9, 2025 conducted a public online event so that citizens could make statements supporting or opposing the proposed rollback.

It seemed at the time that statements opposing the rollback might be only symbolic — that the EPA under the current administration would listen to objections but then proceed with the rollback. Nevertheless, members of the First U EJ Action Team, other PIIN EJ members, and activists from our partner organizations made statements to the EPA. The EPA document proposing the rollback claimed that children in particular would not be affected. It was therefore straightforward to cite published empirical studies that contradict that claim. The EPA also claimed that the technology for fence-line monitoring for benzene was not readily available — even though the same monitoring is routine for oil refineries throughout the country.

It was an unexpected but welcome surprise the following week when the EPA announced that it was abandoning the proposed rollback. Even in the current often counterfactual government context, the factual objections raised by so many citizens convinced the EPA to reverse course. Although an executive proclamation later sought to undo this outcome, we and other citizens in the region and across the country collectively strengthened the case for maintaining the 2024 coke oven rules. We also provided ample evidence for court cases that are proceeding now to oppose the executive proclamation. As stated elsewhere in this report, the Allegheny County Health Department remains committed to enforcing the 2024 rules — including fenceline monitoring for benzene.



*Bob Mitchell makes statement at Sept 4, 2025 EPA hearing*

## **FOCUSSING ONGOING AND FUTURE EFFORTS**

We celebrate the success of permit fees that will fund the health department so it can thoroughly review permit applications and enforce regulatory guidelines. We also welcome a new narrative that includes health, safety and jobs. But we are not stopping now. Instead we are building on that success. We want to see measurable improvements in air quality.

In particular, we are working with partner organizations to ensure that fenceline monitoring is installed at the Clairton Coke Works. The monitoring will include detection of benzene, which is a known carcinogen. Such monitoring is an important part of new EPA regulations approved in 2024. Even though the current federal government seeks to avoid the approved regulations, Dr. Vann has stated that the county health department will proceed to implement them.

Another important goal is the establishment of accessible real-time notifications for residents when incidents occur such as the August 11 explosion and the 2018 Christmas Eve fire that left the Clairton Coke Works without effective pollution controls for 100 days. In addition to explosions and fires, there have been numerous incidents of obvious malfunctions and spikes in pollution levels with little if any notification to the health department, let alone residents who are endangered.

As part of an ongoing community outreach effort, Dr. Vann is meeting with Clairton residents on May 27, 2026 to explain what the health department is doing in the aftermath of the August 11 explosion and to respond to their questions and concerns.



*Allegheny County Health Director Dr. Ulia Vann will visit Clairton on May 27, 2026 for a conversation about the tragic explosion at the Clairton Coke Works on August 1*

## Summary of First U Composting in 2025/2026

At the end of last year, the First UU Board agreed to conduct a composting trial for disposing of food waste created during social events at the church. The background to this project was described in last year's EJAT Annual Report. Please refer to this for additional background information.

In brief, the purpose of composting is to divert organic waste from landfills, where its decomposition contributes to climate-warming gases, and convert this waste into rich compost that can be used to replenish nutrients in the soil. This purpose is in line with our UU values to care for the Earth and our Environmental justice goals of "minding our own store". A second goal of composting at First UU is to educate our community so that members might also take steps in their own homes to carry out this UU value.

### THE TRIAL

#### Timing

The trial began on October 1, 2025, and runs through mid-June 2026, covering most of the major social events during the church year. A report to the Board with final results of the trial, and any recommendations regarding the future of the program, will be made at the July Board meeting.

#### The Process

A commercial, nonprofit composting company, Carbon Compost (CC)\*, was engaged to pick up our organic waste on a weekly basis. CC composts this waste and then, in the spring, returns rich compost soil to First UU that can be used in our church garden. (\*see last year's EJAT Annual Report for why CC was chosen.)

Organic waste is collected at each social event using designated composting buckets. Two buckets, along with the necessary, green, compostable liner bags, have been placed in each of our main social event locations, the Undercroft Gallery and the Schweitzer Room. Various signs

are placed around the two event locations, in both the kitchen and where members scrape their plates, indicating what is, and is not, compostable and reminding members to compost where possible.

At the end of an event, the waste collected is transferred to a large yellow bin located outside, near our recycling bins. Once a week, on a Tuesday, CC picks up the waste, including the yellow bin, and leaves a clean, replacement, yellow bin for use during the following week.

The church members putting on an event are responsible for the collection process inside the building, as follows:

- Putting the lined buckets where access is easy for members when scraping their plates, encouraging composting, directing people to the signs describing what can/cannot be composted.
- Transferring the waste in its green compostable liner bag to the outside bin. (Using the buckets to carry it so nothing drips on the way!)
- Returning the buckets inside and replacing the green compostable liner bag, ready for the next event.

### **RESULTS TO DATE**

- 24 weekly pickups (weather and other issues prevented 4 pickups)
- Weight of organic waste composted and diverted from the landfill:
- Total 245 Lbs.
- Average/week: 10.2 lbs.
- Maximum in a week: 31.4 lbs (including a major social event)
- Minimum in a week: 2 lbs (very limited social activity — some weeks we didn't even have an after-church coffee event.)
- Cost: \$45/4-weeks. \$540 per year, if paid on an annual basis rather than monthly.
- Compost received: two free 20 lb bags of compost used by the Garden Committee for our church garden. This is the limit for any composting partner, but additional bags may be purchased at \$5 per 20 lb bag. Note: A quick internet search showed that 20 lb bags of compost, of this quality, costs between \$30 and \$60 per bag. Purchasing additional compost was not considered for this trial.
- Enthusiastic community response, while still on a learning curve for the practicalities. Many individuals have enquired about how they can compost at home using this commercial pick-up method or other methods.

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Complete the trial.
- Report to the Board, with recommendations for the future, in July 2026.

# LEARN COUNCIL

## Lifespan Religious Education

Religious Education this year has focused on rebuilding, strengthening, and expanding a culture of participation, connection, and shared ownership across all ages. From children and youth programming to family engagement and adult faith development, this has been a year marked by growing momentum and renewed energy.

Program Snapshot Religious Education served a growing number of children, youth, and families this year, with Sunday morning attendance typically ranging from 12–17 participants in the fall and increasing to regular attendance in the mid-to-high teens by spring, with several Sundays reaching 21 children. Nursery participation remained smaller, averaging around 2 children weekly, while youth programming engaged smaller but steadily committed groups. In addition to weekly programming, multigenerational events regularly drew broader participation, with some events welcoming over 50 attendees. The hiring of two new Nursery Care providers along with a new Young Adult Ministry Coordinator have allowed us to build greater capacity for growth at all levels.

Overall Trends and Growth Attendance in Sunday morning Religious Education showed steady growth over the course of the year. While weather and seasonal factors occasionally impacted numbers, the overall trend reflects increasing consistency and engagement, particularly among returning and newly connected families.

Volunteer participation also strengthened significantly. Clear expectations, improved communication, and intentional recruitment practices contributed to more consistent classroom coverage, including substitute support and nursery staffing. This shift helped create a more sustainable and collaborative program structure.

Children and Youth Programming Sunday morning classes remained the core of the program and were supported by a strong team of experienced teachers and engaged parent volunteers. Classrooms have begun to function not only as learning environments, but as small communities where relationships among children, families, and volunteers can deepen.

Middle school programming, particularly the World Religions class, saw consistent participation and strong family support. The addition of shared meals and parent discussion opportunities alongside youth programming created space for connection among adults as well as youth.

High school youth programming, while smaller in number, demonstrated encouraging signs of renewed momentum. Youth expressed interest in meeting more frequently, and leadership support helped reestablish regular gatherings after a period of reduced activity.

As the year progressed, increasing energy and volunteer interest led to early steps toward developing more structured leadership for youth programming, with the goal of building sustainable, forward-looking program planning.

Family Ministry and Community Building A major focus this year has been strengthening relationships among families and fostering a sense of belonging within the congregation. Efforts included increased intergenerational activities during social hour, family-centered events, and the exploration of a parent covenant group.

Special events such as the Everybody's Birthday Ice Cream Social and the Easter Egg Hunt demonstrated strong participation and multigenerational engagement, with attendance and enthusiasm growing from previous years. These events created meaningful opportunities for connection, especially among people who might not otherwise interact regularly.

There has also been intentional attention to improving systems for tracking attendance and staying connected with families, including those with very young children not yet fully enrolled in RE programming.

Adult Faith Development Adult faith development continued to evolve throughout the year, with a focus on supporting existing programs while exploring new opportunities. Attendance at offerings such as the Forum showed signs of strength, and collaboration with other ministry areas helped expand visibility.

A significant moment came in the spring, when a sermon inspired by Healing Resistance led to a notable increase in interest in small group discussion. This resulted in multiple participants organizing their own reading groups and engaging more deeply with shared material. This response highlighted the importance of integrating adult faith opportunities with worship life.

Additionally, there has been growing interest in offering practical, skills-based learning opportunities—such as safety and emergency response trainings—as part of a broader understanding of faith formation.

Program Development and Direction This year can best be understood as a “threshold” year for Religious Education. Growth in participation, volunteer engagement, and program energy has created both new opportunities and new structural needs.

Efforts have been made to improve organizational systems, clarify communication, and lay the groundwork for future program development. This includes exploring expanded leadership structures, strengthening coordination with other church teams, and identifying areas where additional support may be beneficial as the program continues to grow.

At the same time, care has been taken to allow programs to develop organically in response to the real needs and energy of the community, rather than forcing structures prematurely.

Conclusion Overall, this has been a year of meaningful growth, increasing participation, and deepening connection. Religious Education is moving toward a more sustainable, community-centered model—one that is supported by shared leadership, active engagement, and a strong sense of belonging among children, youth, families, and adults alike.

## Council of Communities

During this period, the Council of Communities continued its role as a coordinating and communication body across the congregation’s Connect, Inspire, Serve, and Learn areas. From August through December 2025, the Council was convened by Rev. Dr. Kate Walker in preparation for her sabbatical. Beginning in January 2026, Erica convened the Council as the staff lead, ensuring continuity of communication and coordination across ministries.

Throughout the fall of 2025, the Council focused on sabbatical preparation, strengthening communication between groups, and supporting volunteer coordination. Key efforts included developing and distributing team charters, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and addressing ongoing volunteer needs in areas such as worship support, technology, and programming. The Council also monitored adult programming and congregational engagement, exploring ways to better communicate opportunities and respond to participation trends.

Website and communication systems remained a consistent focus, with ongoing efforts to update contact information, reorganize content, and improve accessibility for both members and leaders. The Council also supported initiatives to strengthen Sunday hospitality, social hour coordination, and collaboration across committees.

In early 2026, the Council continued this coordination work while preparing for the Annual Meeting. This included refining the volunteer recognition process, determining award categories, and selecting recipients, with attention to making the process more streamlined and meaningful.

Additional areas of focus included supporting the launch of a congregational read, improving visibility and participation in Forum programming, and exploring opportunities for parent and family engagement. Operational improvements—such as clearer communication channels, updated group information, and shared leadership of hospitality and events—remained ongoing priorities.

Overall, the Council of Communities worked to strengthen communication, support volunteers, and improve coordination across the many groups that contribute to congregational life.

## Humanist Group.

The Humanist Group has had a successful fifth season, with eight monthly programs. Our steering committee, consisting of Lucinda Beattie, Amy De Chicchis, Paul Flanagan, Kim Francis, and Stuart Hastings arranged the programs. All meetings were hybrid (Zoom and in-person) and total attendance averaged around 20. Here is a list of what was offered.

**September** This year we asked people to read a book over the summer and come prepared to discuss it in our first meeting of the year. The book was “Humanly Possible”, by British humanist Sarah Bakewell. This book covers the history of humanism over the last 800 years. It was well received by our readers, and the discussion was lively and enjoyable.

**October** Local attorney Bruce Ledewitz, recently retired from the faculty at Duquesne University, spoke on “State Courts in the Age of Trump”. It was a lead-in to the November 2025 election, in which three Democratic PA State Justices were up for retention. We learned that the State Supreme Court had endured some periods of turmoil since the the turn of the century but was now functioning well. It was good to learn also that votes at the court were not always along party lines, and Bruce made a good case for the retention of all three justices. He also predicted that they would be retained, despite money pouring in from out of state to defeat them. And this is what happened; none of the races was close.

**November** Former church member John Hooper, who was co-founder of the Humanist Group at our church, made the arduous journey from his new home, and Unitarian church, in Mt. Lebanon to speak to us on “Humanism from the Inside Out”. It was great to have him back, and learn how new insights from philosophical and scientific studies of human cognition shed light on the nature of how we function.

**December** The December meeting had to be canceled at the last minute.

**January** We had another interesting book discussion. This time the book was “Tech Agnostic”, by Greg Epstein, Humanist Chaplain at both MIT and Harvard. The question discussed was whether “tech”, specifically social media in its broadest interpretation, is tantamount to a religion, and indeed, replaces religion in some sense for many people. (In his book the author proclaimed himself an agnostic on this question and offered a defense of agnosticism in general.) Again, the discussion was lively.

**February** Continuing with the theme of social media, we showed and discussed a film “Trust Me” which documents several disturbing examples of the harm which unregulated social media can cause. Among the examples shown in striking presentations were a New Zealand family whose son came close to dying from tetanus because he hadn’t been vaccinated. His parents, clearly intelligent and educated people, had made this nearly catastrophic decision because of what they found online about an article in a leading medical journal (since retracted by this journal), claiming that vaccination could cause autism.

Also, a case in India was discussed, where residents of a rural village attacked and killed a passenger in a car of vacationing young men passing through their community. They did this because they had heard on social media that child kidnappers were in their neighborhood. (This warning had been based on an incident in another village, far away from one where the visitor was killed.) Other types of harm, such as “fake news”, were also discussed.

March Tom Allen, retired Partner in a large local Law firm with offices around the world, spoke on “Testing the Limits of Presidential Power”. He described three important cases handled recently by the U. S. Supreme Court. We saw why Tom’s courses in the University of Pittsburgh Osher program draw hundreds of local retirees each term. A link to a video of this talk, like recordings of most of our meetings that involve lecturers, is available by writing to [HumanstGroup@first-unitarian-pgh.org](mailto:HumanstGroup@first-unitarian-pgh.org).

April Kim Francis, a member of First Church and on the Humanist Group steering committee, spoke on “Experiential Travel: Destinations, Discoveries, Reflections”. Kim has travelled to 9 countries in recent years, the closest of which is Argentina. Technical difficulties prevented her from covering her full itinerary, but we did learn a lot about Antarctica and surrounding areas.

May In May we watched a film of a one-man show highlighting the life of Thomas Paine, who won acclaim for writings which influenced many colonial Americans to support the American Revolution. But Paine did much more. He was a deist, in contrast to the theist majority in western countries at the time. He wrote a book called “Age of Reason” making the case for deism. This book sold well in both England and the US but was fiercely condemned by the theistic majority in both countries. As a result, though he is often identified as a Founding Father, there is no monument to him in Washington DC.

From the Steering Committee: Lucinda Beattie, Amy De Chicchis, Paul Flanagan, Kim Francis, and Stuart Hastings

## Sunday Forum

The Sunday Forum has been a First Unitarian tradition since 1916. It is a wide-ranging lecture and discussion series that takes place two Sundays each month. Congregation members and outside speakers give talks on science, medicine, history, art, music, culture, social and environmental justice, philosophy, and national politics. Invited speakers include experts from universities, nonprofits, government, and business. Ample time is reserved for questions and discussion.

Congregants and other community members can attend Forum in person in the Schweitzer Room or online via Zoom. Presentations begin at 9 AM unless otherwise announced. All can Access our video library of Sunday Forum programs, or view the schedule for upcoming Forums below at this link: <https://www.first-unitarian-pgh.org/serve/the-sunday-forum/>

All are invited to participate in the journey to a deeper understanding of our multiracial, multicultural society; of the natural world and our place in it; and of emerging technologies that offer both hope and peril. What we learn together will inform our priorities as we seek a more just world and a livable planet for our children and grandchildren.

Below is a brief summary of Forum speakers and topics for the 2025-2026 church year.

## Forum Speakers and Topics 2025-2026

9/21/2025

## **T Cell Chauvinists and Dendritic Cell Evangelists**

*Speaker: Michael Lotze, MD, FACS, FAIO, Professor of Surgery, Immunology, and Bioengineering, University of Pittsburgh*

Advances in cell therapy, including so-called tumor infiltrating lymphocytes (TIL) and chimeric antigen receptor T cells (CAR), have been approved by the food and drug administration (FDA), allowing us to talk about cures for patients with metastatic cancer. There are now seven approved CAR therapies for patients with leukemia, lymphoma, and multiple myeloma. Treatments for rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease, psoriasis, and melanoma are FDA approved and available. Dendritic cells were the first approved cell therapies for patients with prostate cancer and remain candidates for future applications. Dr. Lotze explained the roles of innate and adaptive immunity, how these systems work together to protect the body, and what emerging research suggests about the future of immunology.



*Forum audience on September 21, 2025 listens to Dr. Michael Lotze describing advances in cell therapy, at opic where he is a noted expert.*

10/5/2025

## **All Eyes on the Courts - Court Watching Efforts in Allegheny County**

*Speaker: Airi Tilley, Court Watch Volunteer Coordinator. Abolitionist Law Center (ALC)*

The Abolitionist Law Center launched its Court Watch program in early 2020 to monitor criminal court proceedings in Allegheny County. The Court Watch program is committed to transformative, racial justice by keeping the courts accountable through observation, data collection, and public reporting. ALC Court Watch recruits, trains, and organizes volunteers to attend hearings and document their observations. Data collected by court watchers is paired with other information and used to agitate for systemic changes to court-related policies and practices. Airi Tilley reviewed the Abolitionist Law Center (ALC) and its Court Watch Program--

how it began, how it operates, and how volunteers can join ACL's efforts to observe the courts and hold them accountable for people caught up in the system.

10/12/2025

### **Our Neighbors in the Allegheny County Jail**

*Speaker: Sharon Bonavoglia, chair of the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network's Allegheny County Jail sub-committee and a volunteer with The Prison Society*

Ms. Bonavoglia discussed the Allegheny County Jail: what life is like on the inside; why it is so large; and who works there. She spoke about the recent history of shameful deaths that, just three years ago, ranked the jail #1 nationwide for in-custody fatalities. She shared news about positive changes that are underway and the challenges facing people who are incarcerated there. She explained how these people are also the public's responsibility since they are being housed and cared for using tax dollars. Finally, she told the audience what they could do to help.

10/19/2025

### **Advancing housing rights and racial justice in Pittsburgh**

*Speaker: Jackie Smith, PhD, Professor of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh, and a scholar-practitioner*

Dr. Smith discussed the work of community advocates to promote affordable housing and racial justice in our region, including current work to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Penn Plaza demolition and the 70th anniversary of the demolition of the Lower Hill District. These efforts are part of the Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance's efforts to promote a Human Rights Housing Strategy and Action Plan that includes an end to displacement of low-income residents, protections of tenant rights, and support for social and non-market housing alternatives.

11/2/2026

### **The Diabetes Prevention Program and Its Outcome Study**

*Speaker: Elsa S. Strotmeyer, PhD, MPH, Executive Vice Chair and Professor;*

*Co-Director, Center for Aging and Population Health, Department of Epidemiology, School of Public Health, University of Pittsburgh*

The Diabetes Prevention Program is an ongoing 30-year study, and the results have changed the way physicians treat patients diagnosed with diabetes and pre-diabetes. By 2060, the number of adults with diabetes is expected to triple. Dr. Strotmeyer discussed factors that influence the prevention or delay of disease onset and the complications that can arise as diabetics age.

11/16/2025

### **PHRESH - Pittsburgh Hill/Homewood Research on Neighborhood Change and Health: Nutrition Security and The Importance of Access to Healthy Foods**

*Speaker: Aarohi Fulay, PhD, Postdoctoral Scholar, Department of Epidemiology, Graduate School of Public Health, University of Pittsburgh*

Dr. Fulay discussed nutrition security, how it is currently studied, and what factors are important to achieve nutrition security. She described how the PHRESH project evaluates how access to healthy food impacts public health outcomes and highlighted important research results from two Pittsburgh neighborhoods. Finally, she spoke about the effect of nutrition security on diet, chronic disease risk, and cognitive health.

1/18/2026

### **Social Justice in Pittsburgh in Historical Perspective**

*Speaker: Daniel Holland, PhD, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Center for African American Urban Studies and the Economy (CAUSE), History Department, Carnegie Mellon University*

Dr. Holland discussed social justice in Pittsburgh in historical perspective, with a focus on fair housing and community reinvestment. He connected the past to the present, using the Hill and Manchester as proxies for Black Pittsburgh as a whole.



*Dr. Daniel Holland discusses fair housing and other historical aspects of social justice in Pittsburgh at the Forum on January 18, 2026.*

2/1/2026

### **East German Intellectuals and the Unification of Germany: An Ethnographic View**

*Speaker: Dan Bednarz, PhD*

This talk is based on Dr. Bednarz' ethnographic study of how the intellectuals of East Germany reacted to the demise of their nation, the rapid unification with West Germany, and crumbling of their "dream" to build a socialist world. This massive undermining of their collective identity took place in a context where their careers as "socialist" intellectuals - scientists, educators, artists, journalists - were either rendered inutile or subversive by capitalist West Germany. Finally, Dr. Bednarz discussed how the aftereffects of unification are present in current German politics, with both right- and left-wing parties drawing much of their support from former East German citizens, many of whom still describe themselves as "a former citizen of the GDR now living in the Bundesrepublik (united Germany)."

2/15/2026

### **The Homestead Acts of the 1860s and the Broken Promise of "Forty Acres and a Mule."**

*Speaker: Rev. Dr. Dale B. Snyder, Jr., Pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church*

Reverend Snyder's talk opened a conversation about justice, repair, and the moral responsibility of a nation. He explored the rise, reversal, and lasting historical impact of the Homestead Acts

of the 1860s. Under the Homestead Acts, the federal government granted millions of acres to White settlers (thereby creating generational wealth) while formerly enslaved Africans were denied land promised them as restitution for their unrequited labor. He showed how those decisions shaped the racial wealth gap and land ownership disparities of today.

3/1/2026

### **Alzheimer's Research**

*Speaker: Nick Izzo, Ph.D. is a Research Biologist with expertise in cell-based assay development and drug discovery*

Dr. Izzo's talk included: a brief explanation of Alzheimer's Disease and its underlying pathology; the latest approved drugs and how they work; key data from clinical trials; drugs in development and how they are categorized (symptom management or disease modification); an overview of his research; and recent findings on steps we can take to lower our risk of developing dementia..

3/15/2026

### **PIIN Call-to-Action on Immigrant Support in Pittsburgh**

*Speaker: Kathleen Rueppel, PIIN Immigration Task Force Lead*

PIIN's call to action is focused on 3 main areas of immigration policy as it is practiced in Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania.

- Achieving County Council approval of pending ordinance # 13809-26 regarding Pittsburgh police and sheriff's officers' non-cooperation with ICE - the proposed 287 G contract and the rescinding of boroughs' contracts already signed.
- Allowing undocumented immigrants to have a drivers' license so they may travel to their place of employment.
- Changing policy so ICE and other agents involved be unmasked and that they must show proper ID when asked to do so.

PIIN's Interfaith Religious Moral Statement on Immigration was also discussed.

Dr. Joan Harvey of First UU joined Kathleen Rueppel at the Forum to update us about how Jewish Families & Community Serviced are supporting new Asylum immigrants at this challenging time.



*Kathleen Rueppel, leader of PIIN's Immigration Task Force, describes policy actions that can protect immigrants against current practices of ICE and other agents.*

4/19/2026

### **Traveling to the Khasi Hills**

*Speaker: Shelley Ross, PhD*

Dr. Ross transported the audience with images from her visit to Khasi Hills to visit friends and colleagues. She shared stories about the people, the culture, the environment, and her journey to get there.

5/10/2026

### **The Role of Western Pennsylvania's African American Soldiers in the Civil War**

*Speaker: Michael Kraus, Curator of Collections at Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall and Museum*

In 1863, two years after the American Civil War began, the door opened for African American enlistment. Freeman, former slaves, and runaways flocked to join the Union Army whose mission was to defend the Constitution and to implement the Emancipation Proclamation. Michael will discuss how African Americans from Western Pennsylvania took part in this historic movement.

# COMMITTEES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

## Stewardship Committee

The Stewardship Committee focuses on several 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. The goal for the 2026 pledge drive was to raise \$492,000.

For the fourth consecutive year, the committee used the rollover pledging process. A set increase of 4.5% was applied to all 2025 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.

Members of the Stewardship Committee and the Board of Trustees contacted about 50 members of the congregation to engage in stewardship conversations.

At the time of this report (May 2026), 178 member and friend households have pledged \$506,722 to the church's 2026 annual operating budget.

In addition, Planned Giving pages were added to the church's website, providing some basics on how members and friends can make legacy gifts to the church.

In the first quarter of 2026, the committee identified the following priorities for the coming year:

- Officially launch a Planned Giving Society to provide awareness and educational opportunities regarding legacy giving

- Establish a regular schedule for sharing messages about Stewardship with the congregation throughout the year, ideally in partnership with the minister and board of trustees.

## Committee on Shared Ministry (COSM)

The Committee on Shared Ministry meets monthly and is responsible for biannual assessments of the minister and congregation, as well as other assignments that are requested.

The purpose of the Committee is to provide advice and counsel to the Minister, the Board of Trustees, and the Congregation in order to strengthen the quality of shared ministry within the Congregation. For this purpose, "ministry" is defined as any effort that supports the spiritual and emotional health of the community in holding to its vision.

This year, because there was not an assessment due and Reverend Kate was on sabbatical, CoSM accepted responsibility for creating a new Behavioral Covenant. The last Behavioral Covenant for First Church was from 2011, so it was determined that it was time for a new one. VIM had cottage meetings that focused on determining priorities of congregants and used that data to provide an initial draft. We reviewed other churches' covenants, as well, and came up with the one that will be proposed for approval at the Annual Meeting. The goal is to have this posted on the church property.

The current members are Jim Reitz, Ebe Emmons, Chas Murray, and Kate Snow. This spring Jim Reitz will be completing his term on the committee, and we will need 3 new members.

Respectfully submitted,

Kate Snow, Chair

## Building and Grounds Committee

*[IMAGE — insert logo/header from AnnualReport\_2026.docx]*

### Members

Jim Pashek, Brian Rohleder, Arthur Notaro, Chris Milcarek, Laura Wenneker, Nick Izzo, Martin Schmidt (chair) Cinda Beattie and Richard Dum (Board Liaisons)

### 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.

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

The projects outlined below—both completed and in progress—were central to the launch of our capital campaign. Through the generosity of our community, we raised \$1.1 million to support these important improvements. We are especially grateful to Rob and Al Schwartz for their leadership of the campaign, and to all who contributed so generously.

To date, approximately \$400,000 has been invested in completed and ongoing projects, as well as in the initial funding of the Capital Endowment. Roughly \$600,000 remains to support building and grounds improvements. The Building & Grounds Committee is committed to the careful and responsible stewardship of these funds as we move forward with these priorities.

### Completed Projects for 2025 – 2026

1. Sanctuary Lighting. In August, we modernized the sanctuary lighting by replacing outdated incandescent fixtures with energy-efficient LEDs and installing a new dimmer panel after the original system was lost to lightning damage.
2. Sanctuary Technology. We upgraded sanctuary technology by installing display screens for service content (e.g., hymn lyrics, images, readings), adding wall-mounted cameras for live streaming, and updating the integrated computer system with a new IT workstation.
3. Garden Lobby Tile. We repaired the grout and replaced 10 damaged slate tiles in the Garden Lobby to improve safety and appearance.
4. RE Wing Improvements. We enhanced the RE wing by replacing failing carpet in the hallway and Priestly Room and by adding a new water fountain with a bottle filler to better serve building users. Shout out to Phineas for bringing the broken water fountain to our attention.
5. Stained glass repair. We restored stained glass in two locations by replacing broken sections of the window between the Schweitzer Room and Garden Lobby and in one window above the sanctuary stage.
6. Undercroft improvements. We refreshed the Undercroft Gallery by repainting the walls and modernizing its lighting control system.
7. Ceiling paddle fans. The sanctuary's broken ceiling (destratification) fans were replaced with new units, improving air circulation and contributing to more efficient heating and cooling in this high-ceilinged space.
8. Minister's Office Windows. The minister's office windows were replaced with new energy-efficient, double-pane units, resolving drafts and leaks while enhancing safety. We thank Chris Milcarek for securing a grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency that made this project possible.

### Ongoing and Future Projects

1. Office windows. Plans are underway to replace aging, energy-inefficient windows in the church office with double-pane windows consistent with those recently installed in the minister's office.
2. Garden renovation. We are planning a comprehensive garden renovation that includes expanding the patio outside the Schweitzer Room and unifying two separate lawn areas into one continuous, level space. Because these areas are currently at different elevations, this will require careful grading. Throughout the project, we are committed to preserving the memorial garden with minimal disruption, honoring its significance as a place of remembrance.
3. Ellsworth entrance. Plans are underway to replace the aging concrete steps at the Ellsworth entrance with new steps that include integrated lighting. In addition, we are reviewing options for a ramp and walkway from the corner to the Ellsworth door to improve accessibility.
4. Landscaping. We addressed landscaping concerns by removing invasive bushes at the corner and by the Morewood door. In the next few weeks, we will remove a tree near the Ellsworth door that has provided raccoon access to the roof—leading to damage—and will restore the area with new plantings.
5. Exterior lighting. We are currently evaluating proposals to upgrade exterior lighting at the Morewood and Ellsworth entrances, with a primary goal of improving safety and visibility for those attending evening events. The project also includes architectural uplighting of the church and bell tower, which will enhance nighttime visibility while improving the building's overall appearance.
6. Exterior painting. We are scheduling exterior painting this summer to address long-deferred maintenance of wood elements, including windows, doors, eaves, and fascia.
7. RE Wing HVAC. An engineering assessment of the RE wing HVAC system is currently under review. We are evaluating options for more efficient and environmentally sustainable heating and cooling. The existing boiler, dating to the 1950s, is both inefficient and approaching the end of its service life.

Respectfully submitted,

Martin Schmidt  
Chair, Building and Grounds Committee

April 23, 2026

## Safety Committee

Members of committee: Neal Binstock, Nick Izzo, Deb McGuire, Christine Milcarek, Erica Shadowsong, LLRE director

In 2024 we had an audit/ vulnerability assessment made on the church by Homeland security and local police after considering the violence inflicted on our neighboring Tree of Life synagogue. At the end of 2024 Chris and husband Bob Baron secured a grant from the PA commission on crime and delinquency (PCCD) for safety updates to church in accord with shortfalls pointed out by Adam Ameel, Homeland security during the audit. The Board of Trustees approved our budget. The PCCD grant covers \$74K of upgrades with an input of roughly 25% on our part. The upgrades have been made or in progress and are paid for. All the money has been spent. These upgrades include:

Locks on classroom doors in church basement, ten CCTV cameras on the outside of the church, 54 months of the service contract to store the data obtained in the cloud, replacement (work in progress) of ten windows on the church office wing with more secure and energy efficient ones, upgrades to wifi so the public wifi can reach the office wing to connect with it, and

an announcement system (work in progress) running on wifi to alert danger and aid communications across the entire church “campus”. We oversaw upgrades to the security system with SSA indicating window breakage in church office.

Signage for emergency exits was enlarged and upgraded showing exits to our safe gathering space at Winchester Thurston school. A “to go bag” was obtained with emergency supplies for evacuation. In addition, the Safety committee oversaw the purchase of additional security vests for ushers, additional first aid kits, and Narcan doses. We oversaw the completion of a Fire Drill after a Sunday church service, organized a Stop the Bleed workshop attended by 16 people, and a CPR/AED workshop attended by 16 people. CPR mannequins, adult and infant were purchased for that workshop.

Future plans include ongoing checks on safety equipment, an active shooter workshop and film, additional CPR/AED workshops, and upgrades to lighting in association with the Building and Grounds committee. We plan to resubmit an application to PCCD for additional funds.

## **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 help guide the life of our church community. VIM discernment is based on an appreciative inquiry process. Small group “cottage” meetings give members and friends space to share their thoughts and ideas and listen to the thoughts and ideas of fellow congregants. The centerpiece of our church Strategic Plan is the priorities that emerge from this discernment process.

In May of 2025, the VIM Committee, in consultation with the Board and Rev. Walker, set the following two strategic vision priorities as our church focus going forward. We are working to further promote these priorities in various ways throughout the year, including via the Council of Communities communication channels. Goals for the year ahead are to feature the priorities on the church website and to encourage all participants in our church community to innovate and extend the ways they are advancing these priorities.

### **Strategic Vision Priorities**

Create a loving safe haven and welcoming refuge for congregants and staff, as well as for the wider community.

- In all church activities and programming, highlight where possible our love-centered UU values — interdependence, pluralism, justice, transformation, generosity, and equity — that offer a haven in troubled times.
- Assure that our church is safe and welcoming for both congregants and staff by recognizing and counteracting privileges based on race, gender, education, and socioeconomics.
- Create specific activities and programming to facilitate renewal and spiritual growth through healing conversations, mutual support, and internal transformation.
- Reach out to the unjustly oppressed and marginalized, and become a welcoming space and refuge for them.

Become a recognized community hub of social justice action

- Continue and strengthen racial, environmental and other social justice efforts, empowering individuals and working with other groups as appropriate.
- Provide flexible opportunities for personal action in ways that align with the capabilities and passions of our congregants.
- Be a beacon of UU shared values in the wider community, attracting potential congregants and partners and building power for social justice.

## **VIM Cottage Meetings in Support of New Behavioral Covenant for our Congregation**

Creating a behavioral covenant goes hand in hand with our strategic priority of making our church a loving safe haven and welcoming refuge in these times. To support the process of developing the covenant this year, VIM held 5 cottage meetings over a one-month period, from Jan. 7 to Feb. 8, 2026.

An appreciative inquiry question set (see next page) for the cottage meetings was developed in conjunction with Ebe Emmons, from the Committee on Shared Ministry (COSM). Young adults, RE parents and newer members and friends of the church were targeted with invitations, although general announcements were made to the congregation as well, and everyone was welcome to participate. Women's Alliance and the Men's group were also invited to garner broader participation.

We had a total of 31 participants: 17 of these were long time members, while 14 were newer members. Of the 14 newer members, 2 joined within the past month, and 1 of these was a young adult. Also, among our 31 participants, 3 were RE parents.

We would have had a handful of additional participants had the snowstorm and resulting turmoil in schedules not conspired against these folks being able to join us. And 4 of these were RE parents, so it is unfortunate to have missed including them. However overall, we received much valuable input, with many common themes. And as usual, it was a connecting and meaningful experience for participants.

Following the cottage meetings, total responses to question 3 (What words should a behavioral covenant include?) were compiled and used to generate (with AI assistance) a draft behavioral covenant. The draft was then refined by COSM for the consideration of the congregation.

### **OPEN QUESTION SET (January 2026): BEHAVIORAL COVENANT**

We at First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh are developing a Behavioral Covenant this year to guide how we are together in community. We have had two open informational sessions so far about the what and why of covenants, led by Reverend Kate. Now we need to hear your voices to guide us in writing this covenant. Please join a small group 'cottage meeting' this winter to give your answers to the following open questions and to hear the responses of others. The results of these conversations will be used to produce a draft for the congregation to consider. A vote on adopting the final version of the Behavioral Covenant will be held at our annual congregational meeting in May 2026.

What is a Covenant? A deep abiding promise, grounded in my deepest values, that I hold myself accountable to.

Covenants, so important to life in an intentional community, describe behaviors for how we will be with each other. We cannot change the personality of individuals, but we can help one another to be faithful, to seek to create environments in which the possibilities of reconciliation are increased.

1a. Tell a story about an experience you've had of feeling safe, welcomed, included at church.

OR

1b. Tell a story about a time you've felt discomfort or hurt at church and how you responded.

2a. What were the qualities of your experience in Q1a that led to your feelings of safety, welcome and/or inclusion?

OR

2b. What did you find was most helpful in getting over the hurt/discomfort from your experience in Q1b?

3. What words would a behavioral covenant contain that would encourage us to be our best selves together?

Submitted by Jean Schmidt for the VIM Committee (with Alice Carnes, Joan Harvey, Bob Mitchell, Jim Pashek, and Cathy Rohrer)

## Endowment Committees

### Music Endowment

Committee Members for 2025: Danny Rectenwald (chair), Ioulia Kornberg, Christine Michaels

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 2025 year, the funding available for grants was \$5,765.01

### Funding Approved in 2025

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| \$999  | Easter Service                                |
| \$540  | Community Singers                             |
| \$835  | Community Singers                             |
| \$1500 | Christmas Brass Quartet                       |
| \$350  | Winter Solstice Dance Choir                   |
| \$1500 | Song Space Concert Safety Net (not disbursed) |

**Total Requested- \$5724**

**Total Disbursed- \$4224**

### Social Justice Endowment

Social Justice Committee members in 2025-26

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:

1. January 29, 2025, \$500.00 PIIN (PA Interfaith Impact Network), to sponsor PIIN's Fundraising Gala and 25th Anniversary Celebration. Application from SandraWoolley.
2. February 20, 2025, \$400.00 for 1 st 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.
4. May 2, 2025, \$1,500 to Rev. Kate Walker to defray the costs of replacing current banner on church with new one that say, "Justice, Equity, & Compassion."
5. May 30, 2025, \$675.00 for Lemington Chorale of the Afro American Music Institute and UU Community Singers to sing at the Pride Service, June 15.
6. June 21, 2025, \$1500.00 for Shaping the Leading Edge – Living the 8 th Principle, requested by Jean Schmidt on behalf of the Racial Justice Task Force.
7. July 20, 2025, \$660.00 for 1 st UU composting six-month pilot project, requested by Danielle Staresinic with Jan Harrison and Joan Harvey.
8. November 4, 2025, \$1,000 for Giant Eagle gift cards for seniors at Matilda Theiss center located in the Hill District, requested by Heather Masterson.
9. November 4, 2025, \$2,500 to support the MLK "Let Freedom Sing" concerts, requested by Kris Rust.
10. December 25, 2025 \$400 to pay for 2026 annual dues to PIIN, requested by Kyle Gracey (Note: this payment was made in December 2025 for annual dues for 2026)

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

Total funds awarded in 2025 = \$10,435.00

Total funds returned as unspent: \$0.00

Remaining funds to be distributed = \$38.90

**Campus Ministry Endowment**

The Campus Ministry Endowment Committee granted two awards in 2025: \$4,500 to support the hiring of a Young Adult Ministry coordinator, Deena Gray, and \$2,000 to support Monday evening board game nights

**Endowment for Children and Youth**

Committee members in 2025: Julie Downs (interim chair; term expires 6/2026), Rose Saville-Iksic (term expires 12/2027), Tessa McCarthy (term expires 12/2028), Katy Schmitz (term expires 12/2029).

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.

Activity: The committee has tentatively agreed to host coffee hour in the upcoming year; plans TBD.

\$1,000 was awarded 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. OWL requires trained facilitators which have been increasingly difficult to retain. Hiring facilitators will increase the reliability of the program from year to year; the program can be offered with confidence, not waiting to find out if teachers are available. This approach is based on advice from colleagues who have had a positive experience with it.

Our Whole Lives emphasizes our values of equality, equity, compassion, 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 remains a special draw for families to our congregation.

Summary of 2025 Activity:

Funds available to this committee: \$1,401.91

Total funds awarded: \$1,000.00

Remaining balance after all approved awards are paid: \$401.91