

2024-2025 Annual Report



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uumilwaukee.org

The First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee

A Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Established 1842

ANNUAL REPORT

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ANNUAL REPORT

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

2024-2025 Operating Budget: \$1,069,625

Adult Members: 661

Religious Education Enrollment: 80

Contributing Households: 400

MEMBER

- Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA)
- MidAmerica Region, UUA (MAR)
- Common Ground of Southeastern Wisconsin
- Interchange, Inc.
- Interfaith Council of Greater Milwaukee
- Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH)

CHURCH STAFF

SENIOR MINISTER

The Reverend Jennifer Nordstrom

ASSOCIATE MINISTER

The Reverend Dena McPhetres

MINISTER OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The Reverend Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

MINISTERIAL INTERN

Steve Sieck

DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION

Jean Johnson

OFFICE MANAGER

Shari Wright

FACILITIES MANAGER

Ken Liddell

FACILITIES ASSISTANT

Jim Spice

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN

Vinnie Hack

CHURCH STAFF CONTINUED

LEAD MUSIC DIRECTOR

Alissa Rhode

CHORAL DIRECTOR

Tristan Strelitzer

COLLABORATIVE PIANIST

Teresa Drews

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION & MEMBERSHIP ASSISTANT

Fiona Higgins

EARLY CHILDHOOD COORDINATOR

Mariah Groshek

NURSERY CAREGIVER

Cecelia Groshek

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As we all know, change is an inevitable part of life. Throughout the 2024-2025 Board year we have found ourselves preparing for upcoming changes to our beloved congregation and ministerial staff.

In September, Rev. Dena McPhetres informed the Board of her planned retirement in June. Providing us the church year to appreciate and celebrate the sixteen years of ministry that she had spent with us. During her time with First Church she has lead our pastoral care efforts and provided a calm, compassionate presence through ministerial and staff departures and arrivals. She has guided many of our committees and provided ongoing support for many programs and projects. We are so lucky to have had her as part of our congregation and we are so happy for the next chapter of her life.

To prepare for the shift in ministry and staffing the Board approved the search committee for an Acting Assistant Minister. With the diligent efforts of the search team we are very excited to be welcome Rev. Chris Long this summer. Thank you to Lynn Connolly, Ben Trubach, George Bledsoe, Dale Skaggs, and Nancy Spransy for your time and effort in this process.

The Board met in June for a retreat to collaborate on our intentions for the year. From trainings offered by the Anti-Racism team it was determined that the Board would incorporate advice and resources from the Anti-Racism Team into the Board meetings. The Board has purchased a monthly subscription to the BLUU Box through the UUA to provide monthly readings and discussion prompts used to open our meetings. We also examined how to engage and connect with current and future members of the congregation.

The church received two large gifts this year from Nelson Kading and Richard & Barbara Weiss. The Board gave much consideration to the best ways to allocate these funds in alignment with our values and to provide for our future. The Board determined the short-term needs of supporting the annual operating budget during the period before the Forge Our Future endowment's full distribution. We also allocated one-time bonuses to staff members in appreciation for their consistent hard work. The Board instructed the staff to investigate air conditioning in the sanctuary and common room, as the Kad-

ing-Weiss Air Conditioning System, with a ceiling cost of \$200,000. The remainder of the Kading and Weiss funds will go to the endowment. In light of the current political environment and the populations feeling the most impact from the current federal policies, the Board is working with the Social Justice council to allocate a percentage of the bequest funds to impact local organizations.

Many of us have enjoyed the sermons and presence of our Ministerial Intern, Steve Sieck. He will also be departing at the end of this church year. I would like to thank him for all of his contributions these past couple years. Finally, after seventeen years Tom Briscoe will be stepping down from the role of Treasurer. His commitment and support of our staff and congregation has been invaluable. Thank you for your dedicated service.

I have been truly fortunate to work with the church staff and members of the Board. The mutual support, compassion, dedication and energy that is contributed throughout the year make the work easier and more rewarding. Thank you so much for all you do.

Stacy Koenen
Board of Trustees President

ENDS STATEMENTS

We, the people of First Church, build community where we:

1. Value, develop, and celebrate the gifts that come from authentic connection across difference, emphasizing racial, ethnic, and generational difference.
 2. Recognize power differences and challenge injustice where it arises.
 3. Follow the leadership of people most affected by injustice, partnering to move the Milwaukee community toward justice.
 4. Generously give and receive support, connection, and care in times of joy and challenge.
 5. Promote Unitarian Universalism and our shared values in the world.
 6. Open ourselves to wonder, making ourselves vulnerable and available to find meaning, inspiration, and transformation.
 7. Create communal experiences celebrating our interconnectedness.
 8. Create accessible, courageous, and innovative welcome to people who might find a sense of belonging and a spiritual home with us.
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VALUES

At the heart of First Church, we value:

Wonder

Authentic Connection

Love

Justice

MISSION STATEMENT

We gather together to:

Nurture the Spirit. Engage the Mind. Inspire Action.

2023-2024 ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT

Overview

In compliance with Board policies 4.4 and 4.5, the Finance Team oversees the financial condition of the church by:

- Monitoring/Managing financial performance of investments to determine if it is in compliance with the budget;
- Analyzing financial data and developing alternatives and strategies when necessary;
- Preparing the budget for each new fiscal year;
- Serving as a resource for teams, ministries, and the Board concerning financial matters.

The Finance Team closely monitors the financial results of our church and keeps the Board of Trustees and the congregation informed of any significant developments. We generate projections to help forecast the financial condition of the church over the near and long term and to assist with the formation and maintenance of a balanced budget. We develop strategies to help improve the financial status of the church as needed, while trying to fulfill the diverse program goals established to pursue the church's Ends.

I would like to thank the team members: Tom Briscoe (Treasurer), Gordon Mueller, Ron Oshima, Holly Patzer, Alisha Koneazny, Laura White, and the staff lead, Jean Johnson, for their many hours of hard work and valued input. Without their dedicated involvement, this team could not accomplish its important responsibilities.

Income and Expenses

July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

The following page compares the budget and final income/expense statement for the 2023-2024 church year. The first section shows the income while the second section shows the operating expenses for the year. Ideally, the income should balance the expenses to yield an Income Net of Operations of \$0 or a balanced budget. The Finance Team budgeted a negative balance of \$204,818 for the church year. Final numbers for "Income Net of Operations," not including extraordinary income, show a negative balance of \$168,060 (\$36,758 better than expected).

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| Income | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Total income was \$834K which was 4% (\$31K) below the budget of \$865K.• Pledges (\$729K) were 100% of budget.• Investment income (\$17.3K) was below budget 32%. This income includes interest and dividends minus expenses and bank charges. Bank charges were very high at 160% of budget due to more stock transfers & attendant fees than in recent years and fraud protection program fees of more than \$175 per month which we enrolled in Q2 of 2022. Finally, we budgeted \$30K from Endowment Fund interest which was not received.• The apartment income was above budget 177%. There was full occupancy and no unexpected expenses. |
| Expense | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Total expense was \$1,002K which was 6% (-\$68K) below the budget of \$1,070K:• Salaries & housing budget (\$581K) was 7% below budget. Salaries were low due to the departure of the Membership Development Coordinator and reduced hours for the Facilities Manager.• The UUA, MICAH, Interchange and Interfaith Conference contributions were paid in full. UU Congregations in Crisis and FUSM-Sponsored Seminarian contributions were not paid.• Basic operations (6%), building expenses (6%) were over budget. \$10K of Capital Maintenance expense was added to the building expense budget due to the depletion of the Capital Maintenance Fund.• Religious education (91%) and Committees (46%) were below budget.• Extra Operations were paid by a transfer from the Fund Balance (\$21.9K), including designated funds. |

2023-2024 ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT

Income and Expenses continued

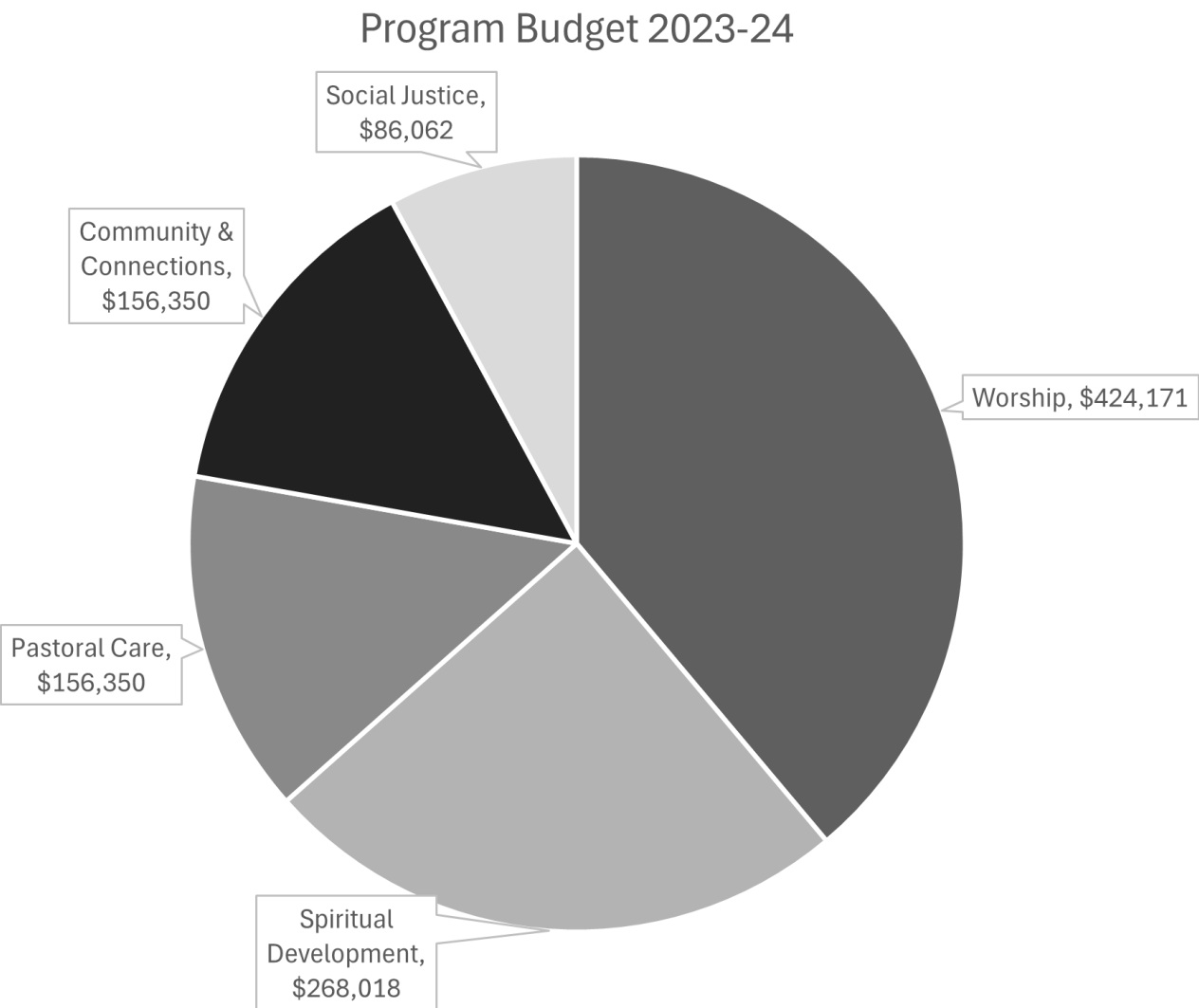
July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

Income Net from Operations was a \$168K deficit, a 6% deficit decrease from the budgeted deficit of \$205K. The pledges in future years must increase, or other income streams established, to cover this cost for First Church to become fiscally sustainable. We look forward to Endowment Fund earnings providing some additional income in the future.

Extraordinary income a \$53K gain (unrealized) from Investments.

Net Income including Extraordinary Income was -\$115K.

This Program Budget shows how our budget serves our mission.



FUSM 2023-2024 INCOME & EXPENSE HIGH LEVEL SUMMARY

	'23 - '24	'23 - '24	Ratio
ITEM	BUDGET	Final - June 30, 2024	%
<u>Contributions</u>			
Pledges	728,500	728,965	100%
Other Contributions	43,600	33,658	77%
Total Contributions	772,100	762,624	99%
<u>Activity Income</u>			
Feast for Funds	15,000	15,874	106%
R E Fees	3,000	2,375	79%
Other Sources	1,357	1,583	117%
Total Activity Income	19,357	19,832	102%
<u>Investment Income</u>	54,000	17,322	32%
<u>Apartment Income Net of Expenses</u>	19,350	34,195	177%
TOTAL INCOME	864,807	833,972	96%
<u>Human Resources</u>			
Salaries, Wages & Minister Housing	622,988	581,261	93%
Professional Expenses	25,530	21,133	83%
Insurance - Health & Disability	105,600	96,237	91%
Retirement Savings	53,888	53,890	100%
Payroll Taxes	30,047	25,649	85%
Other	13,900	12,883	93%
Total Human Resources	851,953	791,052	93%
<u>Budgeted Contributions</u>	23,210	21,910	94%
<u>Building Expenses</u>	76,300	81,105	106%
<u>Basic Operations</u>	84,022	89,097	106%
<u>Religious Education</u>	7,150	6,531	91%
<u>Committees</u>	26,990	12,338	46%
<u>Extra Operations</u>			
Transfer from Fund Balance	(52,600)	-21,878	42%
Capital Maintenance	34,600	0	0%
EF Trust Attorney Fees	-	8,662	
Krug Projects/Music Fund	13,000	6,875	53%
Sabbatical Minister Coverage		521	
Morter Lecture Committee	5,000	5,820	116%
Total Extra Operations	-	-	
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$1,069,625	1,002,032	94%
INCOME NET OF OPERATIONS	-\$204,818	-\$168,060	82%
<u>Extraordinary Income</u>			
Bequests	\$0	\$0	
Gain/Loss on Investment (unrealized)	\$0	\$53,424	
EXTRAORDINARY INCOME	\$0	\$53,424	
NET INCOME	-\$204,818	-\$114,637	

Investment Report

In compliance with Board policy 4.6.10, the Finance Team actively monitors our investments and manages the funds per our investment policy goals and objectives. The full investment policy is available on request.

On June 30, 2024, First Church had two unrestricted CD's valued at \$146K in operational accounts. This money, along with cash assets of almost \$125K satisfies the safety net of 15% of budgeted operating expenses (\$1,070K) which equals \$160K. These funds, in addition to the unrestricted fund balance, satisfies the Investment Objective by Fund Schedule which requires an additional 15% of operating expense "Back-up Safety Net." The remaining funds in the General Fund as well as the Memorial Trust Fund were invested in the UU Common Endowment Fund which is managed to approximate 60% bonds and 40% equities.

Additional investments include a Brewery CU CD with 5.1% interest, a Self-Help CU CD with 4.6% interest, a Landmark CU CD with 4.9% interest, an Associated Bank CD with 5.15% interest and two investment accounts with WWBIC at 1% and 2%. The Associated Bank and Landmark CU CD's hold Endowment Fund contributions. Funds at WWBIC, Self-Help CU, and UUCEF comply with our Socially Responsible Investment policy.

Balance Sheet

June 30, 2024

Total net assets were \$2,959K, which was 32% higher than June 30, 2023. This is attributed to the contributions to the Forge our Future Endowment Fund.

Description of Funds:

Restricted (by donor) Funds

Morter Fund:	This fund was established in accordance with a bequest of a former member. The funds are designated to sponsor seminars on individual responsibility.
Memorial Trust Fund:	This fund contains unspecified bequests. Money placed in the fund can be expended or borrowed only by a super majority of the congregation. The Finance Team manages it. A fixed percentage of the fund's assets provide quarterly income to the church's operations.
Minister's Discretionary Fund	This fund contains contributions for our ministers to help people in financial need.
Forge our Future Endowment fund:	This fund contains restricted funds that have been received by the congregation to establish an Endowment Fund.

Unrestricted Funds Designated by the Board

Capital Maintenance Fund:	The Board designated these funds for large repairs and improvements to our facilities.
Krug Special Programs Fund:	This fund was designated by the Board in March 2019 to fund special projects in 2019-20 through 2021-22. Some projects were postponed due to the pandemic and have continued when feasible. The Music Programs Fund is a subset of the Krug Special Programs Fund.

Unrestricted Funds

Unrestricted Fund Balance:	This fund is the amount retained after payment of expenses or the allocation to designated funds. It increases during fiscal years in which there is an operating surplus and decreases during years in which there is an operating deficit. For fiscal security, the Board has adopted a policy of maintaining a balance in this fund that is equal to or greater than 15% of the operating expenses for the most recent fiscal year. If the balance drops below this 15% level, the restoration of the fund becomes a fiscal priority.
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Noreen Gilbertsen, Finance Team Chair

FUSM BALANCE SHEET FOR FY 2023-2024

6/30/2024

ASSETS		
	June 30, 2023	June 30, 2024
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash	\$73,905	-\$6,047
Money Market	\$37,321	\$127,574
Endowment Holding Account	\$283,464	\$1,096,327
Other	\$7,866	\$3,320
Total Current Assets	\$402,557	\$1,221,175
INVESTMENTS		
Memorial Trust Fund - UUCEF	\$328,436	\$339,553
WWBIC	\$21,435	\$21,435
CD's	\$140,838	\$146,208
Endowment Holding CD	\$525,561	\$552,135
General Fund - UUCEF	\$815,840	\$678,634
Total Investments	\$1,832,110	\$1,737,965
TOTAL ASSETS	\$2,234,667	\$2,959,140
LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Prepaid Pledges	\$69,365	\$74,128
Apartment Security Deposit	\$2,994	\$2,643
YRUU Account & Service Trip Savings	\$5,305	\$5,305
27th Pay Period Accrual	\$22,184	\$23,884
Accounts Payable	\$833	\$3,055
Total Current Liabilities	\$100,680	\$109,014
RESTRICTED FUNDS		
Sabbatical Accrual	\$3,462	\$7,941
Morter Fund - Donor Restricted	\$64,247	\$58,427
UU the Vote		\$500
Tom Thaney for the Arts	\$3,980	\$5,980
Memorial Trust Fund	\$328,436	\$339,553
Forge our Future Endowment Fund	\$809,025	\$1,648,462
Minister's Discretionary Fund	\$5,306	\$578
Total Restricted Funds	\$1,214,457	\$2,061,441
UNRESTRICTED FUNDS		
Unrestricted Fund Balance	\$663,630	\$647,913
Net Income	-\$3,934	-\$114,637
Capital Maintenance Fund		\$125,000
Krug Special Programs Fund	\$258,674	\$127,057
Music Programs Fund	\$1,161	\$3,353
Total Unrestricted Funds	\$919,530	\$788,685
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE	\$2,234,667	\$2,959,140

BOARD COMMITTEE & ENDOWMENT

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

As a committee of the Board of Trustees, the Nominating Committee (Nom Com) is charged with nominating members for the Board and the Nom Com. This church year, the Nom Com met monthly from November 2024 through April 2025. FUSM Director of Administration Jean Johnson is the staff liaison to Nom Com.

The five members of the Nom Com reached out to both new and established members of the congregation via one-on-one relational meetings to identify skill sets and areas of interest, so that we could guide members toward meaningful and impactful engagement with First Church, and identify potential candidates for the Board of Trustees and the Nom Com.

We conducted approximately 30 one-on-one meetings to discuss how potential candidates might like to be involved as leaders. We find using the process of one-on-ones to be an important way to become acquainted with members of the church and to hear their thoughts on lay leadership.

Furthermore, we continued our work from previous years to broaden diversity in all its aspects in FUSM lay leadership.

BOT liaison to Nom Com Ryan Pawlowski helped us determine anticipated needs and skill sets for Board of Trustees members. We also contacted church leaders to identify people in our church community that we should talk to about church involvement and potential leadership.

Additionally, this year the Board asked the Nom Com to nominate a candidate for Treasurer, to replace long-serving current Treasurer Tom Briscoe. Nom Com, in consultation with the Finance Team and Reverend Jennifer, identified several FUSM members with appropriate skills and experience to the Board. Mark Bishop was approved by the BOT at their April 2025 meeting.

In addition to ourselves, Nominating Committee members this church year were Lisa Koneazny, Michael Pointer-Mace, and Anne Schwarzkopf. We offer our thanks and appreciation to those many generous and

talented members of our congregation who have responded to the call of leadership.

Jane Cliff and Laura White, Co-chairs

ENDOWMENT



The purpose of the Endowment Fund of The First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee is to provide a means whereby monies and other assets may be received, managed, and invested. The principal (corpus) of the Endowment Fund shall be protected. Income of the Endowment Fund may be dispersed from time to time to meet the operating, strategic, and other financial needs of the Society, all as determined by the Board of Trustees of the Society.

The First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee Endowment Fund was established in March 2024 with the execution of a Trust Agreement between The First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee ("FUSM") and three initial Endowment Trustees. The three initial Endowment Trustees appointed by the Board in January 2024 to administer the Trust are Betty Schroeder, Ron Oshima, and David Becker with term lengths of 2, 4, and 6 years respectively.

Much of the work of the Endowment Trustees in the first year has been to create the initial operational framework around the Endowment Fund. This includes:

1. Completing the registration of the FUSM Endowment Fund as an independent 501 (c)(3) entity with Federal IRS in June 2024 and with the state of Wisconsin in Oc-

BOARD COMMITTEE & ENDOWMENT

(Continued from page 11)

tober 2024.

2. Establishing independent financial accounts for the Endowment Fund separate from all FUSM accounts. This includes a checking account with Associated Bank to facilitate transfer of funds from FUSM to the Endowment and allow the Endowment Fund to pay for its own expenses, and an account with the UUA Common Endowment Fund (UUCEF) for long-term investment of assets.

3. Working with the FUSM Director of Administration and staff to separate and align operating mechanisms to receive, track, and report on contributions to the Endowment Fund separate from FUSM general operations. As of January 2025 contributions can be made directly to the Endowment Fund. FUSM continues to track all contributions to the Endowment Fund to allow full accounting of the received face value of original contributions for consideration in the “principal protection” provisions of the Trust.

4. Transferring funds currently held by FUSM into Endowment Fund accounts. Funds collected from the Forge Our Future Campaign were initially held in CDs and Money Market Funds. Beginning in February 2025 these funds have been transferred to the UUCEF investment account in 4 tranches using a strategy of dollar cost averaging with the plan that all funds will be moved to the investment account by the end of May 2025.

5. Working with church staff to prepare for 2024 Endowment tax reporting as an independent 501 (c)(3) entity.

6. Working with the Finance Committee to establish timelines for Endowment reporting and distributions that align with FUSM fiscal year, budget timeline, and cash flow needs.

7. Communicating to the congregation on a regular basis through articles in the Chanticleer.

8. Establishing and documenting operating procedures around the Endowment. Since this is the first year fol-

lowing the creation of the Endowment Fund and many activities and decisions are being done and made for the first time, the Endowment Trustees have spent much time this year establishing and documenting regular operating procedures. By documenting some formal procedures and creating an archive of documents the ETs hope to make our work transparent to the Board and Congregation and assist future Endowment Trustees so they may quickly come up to speed on existing operating mechanisms.

The Endowment Trustees wish to acknowledge and thank the church Director of Administration Jean Johnson, Office Manager Shari Wright, and Treasurer Tom Briscoe for their significant efforts to help plan and complete the above activities.

We also wish to thank all the generous donors to the Endowment Fund and encourage all additional contributions. Your contributions provide a lasting gift to the church and help reduce our annual operating deficits. Currently pledges alone, that you so generously make, are not enough to cover our annual operating expenses. Thank you for caring about the strength and vitality of our congregation to enable us to continue connecting, caring, learning, and joining with others to make a positive impact on our community.

As of April 2025, \$2,814,400 has been pledged to the Endowment Fund, \$2,284,100 has been collected, and \$1,010,000 has been transferred to the Endowment Fund Investment Account.

For 2025 the Endowment Fund will distribute \$30,000 to FUSM to support the work of the church.

Submitted by Endowment Trustees David Becker, Ron Oshima, and Betty Schroeder.

ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES: May 19, 2024

Board of Trustees members present: Pat Geenen (President of Board and Meeting Chair), Stacy Koenen (Vice President), Joe Riepenhoff (Secretary and Recording Secretary), Tony Panciera, Sarah Richards, Dana Brooks, Amy Wilbourne.

Present: >70 in person + 25 online.

The meeting was called to order at 12:33 PM.

1. Approval of 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes (Pat)

Moved to approve the minutes from the 2023 annual meeting.

Moved: Rod DePue. Seconded: Tom Briscoe

1 opposed, 1 abstention. Passed.

2. Remarks from Board President (Pat Geenan)

3. Nominating Committee report (Jane Cliff)

Motion to approve the nomination of Mark Chambers, Elizabeth Hayes and Ryan Pawlowski for 3 years (2024-27) on the Board of Trustees.

Moved by: Kathy Rivera. Seconded by: Ron Oshima.

Passed unanimously.

Motion to approve the nomination of Lisa Koneazny and Laura White for 3 years (2024-27) on Nominating Committee.

Moved by: Terri Lewynn. Seconded by: Connie Georgenson.

Passed unanimously.

Ceremonial motion to approve Tome Briscoe as acting Treasurer for FUSM 2023-24.

Moved by: Jane Cliff. Seconded by: Mark Chambers.

Passed unanimously.

4. Financial Condition Report with Q & A (Noreen Gilbertsen)

FUSM is in compliance with Board policies 4.4 and 4.5. Total income was \$805K and total expenses \$988K, total net assets were \$2,234K, .

5. Forge Our Future Endowment Task Force Update with Q & A (Dave Becker)

“With the Trust Agreement fully executed the responsibility for next steps regarding the Trust now falls to the Endowment Trustees and the EFTF’s charge from the Board has been completed.”

6. Stewardship Report with Q & A (Kathy Donius)

7. Remarks from the Minister of Religious Education (Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson)

“This year has set a foundation for a new way in faith formation. It has been a busy, growing, joy-filled year of new opportunities for our children, youth and families and I look forward to building on the good work we have begun.”

8. Remarks from the Associate Minister (Rev. Dena McPhetres)

“First Church is full of energy. May we continue to celebrate life in its fullness, open our doors and hearts wider, and nourish the spirits of all who seek a home here.”

9. Remarks from the Senior Minister (Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom)

“Our congregation has dug into its purpose this year with renewed vitality and strength, as people have come together to care for one another, discern and return to their values, and make meaning of these times.”

10. New Business / Comments from the Congregation with Q & A.

Motion to adjourn the 2024 Annual Meeting.

Moved by: Elizabeth Lentini. Seconded by Tony Panciera.

1 opposed, 1 abstention. Passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:30pm.

2024 - 2025 CHURCH LEADERSHIP

CONGREGATION OFFICERS

PRESIDENT
Stacy Koenen

VICE PRESIDENT
Mark Chambers

SECRETARY
Joe Riepenhoff

TREASURER
Tom Briscoe

BOARD MEMBERS

Dana Brooks (2023-26)
Mark Chambers (2024-27)
Elizabeth Hayes (2024-27)
Ryan Pawlowski (2024-27)
Sarah Richards (2022-25)
Joe Riepenhoff (2022-25)
Stacy Koenen (2023-2026)
Stacey Thieme (2023-2026)
Amy Wilbourne (2022-25)

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Jane Cliff, Co-Chair
Laura White, Co-Chair
Anne Alexander
Lisa Koneazny
Michael Pointer Mace

TEAMS, MINISTRIES, AND GROUPS

ACTING ASSISTANT MINISTER

SEARCH TEAM

Lynn Connolly, Co-Chair
Ben Trubach, Co-Chair

ADULT SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Rev. Dena McPhetres

ANTI-RACISM TEAM

Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom
Debra Klepp
Marisa Riepenhoff

AUDIO

Nick DaVia
Alissa Rhode, Lead Music Dir.

BOOK DISCUSSION

Barbra Lancelot
Eileen Teska

BUDDHIST STUDY GROUP: GATHERING WATERS SANGHA

Mark Miller

BUILDING & GROUNDS

Russ Drewry
Ken Liddell, Facilities Manager

CHANCEL CHOIR

Tristan Strelitzer, Choral Dir.

CHILDREN'S RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Thea Watters
Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

CHRONOLOGICALLY GIFTED

Juliet Hills
Barbara Collignon

DENOMINATIONAL AFFAIRS

Bruce Wiggins
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

FEAST FOR FUNDS

Scot Henry

FINANCE

Noreen Gilbertsen
Jean Johnson, Dir. of Admin.

FORUM

Mark Mueller

GALLERY

Jeff Percy
Alisha Koneazny

HERITAGE SOCIETY

Lisa Koneazny

HISTORY/ARCHIVES

Linda Presto
Jean Johnson, Dir. of Admin.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)

Allan Ries
Shari Wright, Office Manager

WELCOME & BELONGING

Dave Hoover
Laurie Petersen
Steve Sieck, Ministerial Intern
Ben Trubach

MORTER LECTURE

Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

PASTORAL CARE ASSOCIATES COORDINATOR

Jeri Percy through Dec 2023
Lynn Connolly as of Jan 2024

PASTORAL CARE PROVIDERS COORDINATOR

Liz Irwin Moore

PERSONNEL

Amanda Panciera
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

PLEDGE DRIVE

Adam Zaiger
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom
Shari Wright, Office Manager

POETRY GROUP

Diane Horne

PULPIT GUEST

Rev. Dena McPhetres

SHAWL MINISTRY

Patti Agacki
Connie Georgenson

SUNDAY FLOWERS

Shari Wright, Office Mgr.

SWANS (Seasoned Women Are Naturally Social)

Barbara Collignon

THEME CIRCLES

Rev. Dena McPhetres

TQ4UU

Jeff Pearcy

Lisa Larson

USHERS

Cheri Briscoe

Steve Sieck, Ministerial Intern

UU MEN'S GROUP

Steve Sieck, Ministerial Intern

UU WELLSPRING

Diane Horne

WORSHIP ASSOCIATES

Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

Amanda Panciera

Desiree Pointer-Mace

FAITH-BASED PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS**CATHEDRAL CENTER**

Treenut Wilson

COMMON GROUND

Jerry Fredrickson

GUEST HOUSE SHELTER

Thea Waters

Elizabeth Lentini

INTERCHANGE FOOD PANTRY

Beth Bruch

INTERFAITH CONFERENCE OF GREATER MILWAUKEE

Patricia McFarland

MICAH (Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope)

Pat McFarland

Bob Monahan

SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL

Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

Bob Monahan

BLACK LIVES MATTER 2 WI UUs

George Bledsoe

DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Pete Koneazny

Pat McFarland

David Umhoefer

EARTH JUSTICE MINISTRY

Barbara Leigh

Bruce Wiggins

Terry Wiggins

IMMIGRANT SOLIDARITY & ACTION

Michael Pointer Mace

Ann Ritchey

SHARE THE PLATE

Bob Monahan

Nancy Spransy

WUUSAN

Juanita Mast

OTHER LEADERS**THEME CIRCLE FACILITATORS:**

Rev. Dena McPhetres

Marilyn Blackmon

Suzie Considine

Nancy Cross Dunham

Laurie Foss

Lisa Gies

Kari Gunderson

Candice Haight

Diane Horne

Patricia McFarland

Carley Mostar

Nancy Pajewski

Nancy Spransy

Pam Wilkie

Andrew Whitver

PASTORAL CARE ASSOCIATES:

Rev. Dena McPhetres

Sue Austin

Vince Bushell

Deborah Conta

Dennis Conta

Fred Gutierrez

Pete Hill

Diane Horne

Shauna Leinbach

Elizabeth Martorell

Ann Ritchey

Jan Van Schaik

2024-2025 Sermon Schedule

JUNE 2

"The Power and Beauty of the Present"
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

Rev. Dena McPhetres

Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

JUNE 9

"The Joy of Gender"
Rev. Bowie Kling-Garcia

JUNE 16

"It's Juneteenth! I'm Just Dad"
Steve Sieck

JUNE 23

"Why Renew?"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

JUNE 30

"You're Batting 1000% So Far"
Steve Sieck

JULY 7

"You Are Your Best!"
Cheri Taylor, Member

JULY 14

"Identity is a Kaleidoscope"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

JULY 21

"We All Belong"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

JULY 28

"I'm sorry, do I know you?"
Steve Sieck

AUGUST 4

"Resting at the Edge"
Andy Agacki, Member

AUGUST 11

"The Soul Loves the Body"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

AUGUST 18

"Freedom, Family, Flags, and Faith"
Rev. Jim Foti, Pulpit Guest

AUGUST 25

"Suffer Through It!"
Amy Wilbourne, Member

SEPTEMBER 1

"I and Us"
Rev. Mark Richards, Pulpit Guest

SEPTEMBER 8

"You Don't Need a Treasure Map"
Ingathering Sunday
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

SEPTEMBER 15

"What If All We Have Is Jello Salad?"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

SEPTEMBER 22

"Inviting Relationship"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

SEPTEMBER 29

"The Road Not Traveled"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

OCTOBER 6

"I'm Listening"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

OCTOBER 13

"Listen to the Silence"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

OCTOBER 20

"Do You Trust Me?"
Steve Sieck

OCTOBER 27

"A Clearing for the Soul"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

NOVEMBER 3

"Be Not Afraid"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

NOVEMBER 10

"The Story Has Not Ended"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

NOVEMBER 17

"Making Amends"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

NOVEMBER 24

"Oops, I Did It Again!"
The Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

DECEMBER 1

"No Time Like the Present"
Steve Sieck

DECEMBER 8

"Presence as Practice"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

DECEMBER 11

Blue Christmas Vespers
Rev. Dena McPhetres

DECEMBER 15

"Presence Takes You Beyond"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

DECEMBER 22

"The Present of Presence"
Holiday Pageant
Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

DECEMBER 24

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICES

The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom
The Rev. Dena McPhetres
The Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

DECEMBER 29

"Warning: Your Connection is Unstable"
Steve Sieck

JANUARY 5

"Why Do We Tell Stories?"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

2024-2025 Sermon Schedule

JANUARY 12

"It's Complicated"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

JANUARY 19

"Makin' Cake"
Dasha Kelly Hamilton, Pulpit Guest

JANUARY 26

"Repetition Is Our Friend"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

FEBRUARY 2

"Inclusion for Liberation"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

FEBRUARY 9

"How Do I Know I Belong?"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

FEBRUARY 16

"Stop Signs, Cows, and Covenants"
Steve Sieck

FEBRUARY 23

"Tales of Inclusion"
Annual Youth Service
The Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

MARCH 2

"Practicing Trust in Community"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

MARCH 9

"You're Not My Cardiologist"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

MARCH 16

"Mutual, I'm Sure!"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

MARCH 23

"Trust in the Universe?"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

MARCH 30

"How Long 'til My Soul Gets It Right?"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

APRIL 6

"This Joy That I Have"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

APRIL 13

"When the Revolutionary Comes to Town"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

APRIL 20

"Life Rises Again"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

APRIL 27

"Joyful Solidarity: Accompaniment as an Expression of Our Faith"
Steve Sieck

MAY 4

"What Do We Need to Imagine?"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

MAY 11

"The Imagination Bridge"
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

MAY 18

"Religious Education Sunday 2025"
The Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

MAY 25

"Imagining a Better Way Forward"
Steve Sieck

JUNE 1

"Gratitude Can Free Us"
The Rev. Dena McPhetres
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

Wheel of Life

May 10, 2024 - May 14, 2025

Deaths

Thallis Hoyt Drake
Irene Gordon
Donna M. Jacobson
Timothy Raymond Ruf
Christopher (Kit) Vernon
John G. Walker

Dedication of Parents and Children November 24, 2024

Lincoln Kavanaugh
Neil Kavanaugh
Children of Leah & Andy Kavanaugh

Jadzia Sproehlich
*Child of Ayla Sproehlich and
Matthew Sproehlich*

Dedication of Parents and Children May 11, 2024

James Tiberius Sproehlich
*Child of Ayla Sproehlich and
Matthew Sproehlich*

New Members

Fall 2024

Alecia Altstaetter
Heather Bartlett
Linda Bartlett
Marilyn Blackmon
Wayne Blackmon
Marie Bridges
Christine Davies
Hannah Fox
Andy Kavanaugh
Leah Kavanaugh
Nick Longrie
Ayla Sproehlich
Matthew Sproehlich

Winter 2025

Preston Carr
Andrea Evert
Pam Parker
Beverly Pilarzyk
Tom Pilarzyk
Margo Renner
John Sagone
Krystle Smith
Jerry Szarzynski
Lori Szarzynski
Christian Wood
Mari Wood
Stacia Wrench
Laura Zajkowski

Spring 2025

Anne Ballentine
Sue Bernstein
Anne Comstock
Hannah Comstock
Bre Fabry
Jane Hereth
Kristina Kirkham
Will Koebel
Evan Maruszewski
Sarah Maruszewski
Mary Murphy
Bill Sakalaucks
Emily Walker-Miller
Dalyn Ward
Liz Zuege

Wheel of Life

May 10, 2024 - May 14, 2025

Heritage Society

Keith & Paula Anderson
JoAnn Bachar
Bob Balderson
Christian Becker & Christina
Zawadiwsky-Becker
Mark & Jo Ann Bishop
Patricia McFarland &
Nick Bokas
Rod Botts
Tom & Cheri Briscoe
Paul & Susanne Carter
Dennis & Deborah Conta
Susan Comstock
Alexis Fielek
Mary Ann Fisher
Jerry Fredrickson & Jill Erickson
Scot Henry & Laura White

Sally Heuer & Steven Culver
Mary Houseman
Drew Kennedy & Lois Wesener
Tina Keppel
Pete & Lisa Koneazny
Hank Kulesza
Adele Kaferly
Bob Moore & Liz Irwin Moore
Mark & Lonni Mueller
Ellyn & Mike Newman
Janet Nortrom
Mimi Notestein
Patrick & Barbara Patterson
Holly Patzer
Kathy & Bob Porter
Linda Presto
Tom Radoszewski

Michael Radtke
Miriam Reading
Kathy Rivera & Sally Lewis
Dale Skaggs & Lynda Lambert
Dick & Nancy Spransy
Jane Stoltz
Eileen Teska
Melinda Vernon
Don Weimer & Chris Linder
Bruce & Terry Wiggins
Jacki Zandi

Staff Reports

MINISTRY

SENIOR MINISTER

Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

Dear First Church,

It has been a full and intense year at First Church, with our beloved Associate Minister, Rev. Dena McPhetres' retirement announcement, a search for a new Acting Assistant Minister, the joyful announcement of Rev. Chris Long joining our Team as such, Minister of Religious Education's Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson's sabbatical, a very full year Defending Democracy, joyous new members and vibrant worship.

WORSHIP

We have had a vibrant and full worship life this year! Attendance in person and online is healthy and continues to be above our pre-pandemic average. Members report being nourished by worship and buoyed in these challenging times. Our worship attendance average to date is 319 / Sunday. This counts the people who attend in person and online live Sunday morning, as well those who watch Sunday's online service later in the week. Our average live attendance (in person + online live Sunday morning) is 239 / Sunday. We are learning that some of our online viewers are not just households, but remote gatherings, an opportunity to explore. Our Worship Associates have been sharing amazing, powerful stories throughout the year, and have reported that serving as Worship Associates is a powerful spiritual development and faith formation force in their lives. Five Worship Associates will be leaving the team this year, with four staying on, so we will bring on another six associates for 2025 – 2027.

STAFF

Our beloved Rev. Dena McPhetres announced her retirement this fall, and we will say goodbye to her with a Retirement Party on May 30, 2025, and a celebration and release ritual during her last worship service with us as our Associate Minister on Sunday morning, June 1, 2025. Rev. Dena will be away from the congregation for a year to give time for relationships to change, shift and settle, as is best practice with ministers and religious professionals in Unitarian Universalism.

We also announced our new Acting Assistant Minister, Rev. Chris Long, in March of this year, and look forward to him joining the staff on Aug 1, 2025. Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson is stepping up to act as our Minister of Lifespan Faith Formation following Rev. Dena's departure, taking on the work of Adult Spiritual Development for a comprehensive, life-span faith formation portfolio. Rev. Kimberlee will be on sabbatical following the May 18 Religious Education service through Aug 1, 2025.

We also welcomed Vinnie Hack on staff as our Facilities Maintenance Technician in December of 2024. Vinnie has been a wonderful and diligent addition to our staff team.

KADING BEQUEST AND WEISS GIFT

We received two incredibly generous donations to First Church this year. The first was a bequest from Nelson Kading, our church member who died in November of 2023, and gifted half of his estate to First Church. He was a kind, reserved man, who was part of the second-service Coffee Hour crew for many years. The second is from the Richard and Barbara Weiss Fund at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. Richard and Barbara Weiss are long-time church members who are both alive and well and simply wanted to make a generous donation to the church. Nelson Kading's bequest to First Church is about \$600,000 and the Richard and Barbara Weiss Fund gave First Church a \$100,000 gift for unrestricted support. The FUSM Board of Trustees decided to allocate a portion of these funds to short-term, medium-term, and long-term financial needs of the church, as well as a 10% social justice allocation.

The Board determined our primary short-term need to be support for the annual operating budget during the bridge period to the Forge Our Future endowment's full-strength distribution support and allocated \$150,000 to this short-term financial need. The Board also allocated small one-time bonuses to staff members in appreciation for their work, given that the majority of staff did not receive cost of living increases this church year.

Looking at our medium-term needs in light of this unex-

Staff Reports

pected windfall of generosity, the Board instructed the staff to investigate air conditioning in the sanctuary and common room, as the Kading-Weiss Air Conditioning System, with a ceiling cost of \$200,000. Staff has been working with our Buildings and Grounds team to determine costs and feasibility.

The Board allocated 10% of the funds remaining after the above allocations to social justice work, which the Social Justice Council divided between their two priorities: supporting immigrants and trans people at this dangerous moment in history.

The Board identified the Forge Our Future Endowment as the instrument to use for our long-term financial stability, and allocated the remainder of the Kading and Weiss funds to the endowment. After the capital project is complete, \$150,000 is put into Unrestricted Funds, and \$37,400 is given to social justice work, the remainder of the Kading and Weiss funds will go into the Forge Our Future Endowment

IN CLOSING

It has been a full year at First Church. We have been incredibly blessed by our members' generosity, and all the ways you show up for one another and the community as a whole. The world at large is troubling, but we will face it together with the strength of love.

With love,
Jennifer

SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL

The Social Justice Council has been busy this year, in the summer and fall focusing on its 2024 priority of Defending Democracy and elections, and in the winter and spring on its 2025 priority of Sanctuary and Accompaniment with immigrants and trans people.

Over the summer, church members organized with MICAH and attended We All Belong campaign events: a Saturday, July 13 press conference in front of the Fiserv Forum, and a Sunday, July 14 pep rally at the Zelazo Center. Rev. Jennifer spoke at both events and was featured in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. FUSM members and Rev. Jennifer also attended several protests during the week, including the one

held by the families of Sam Sharpe, killed by out-of-town police who came to Milwaukee for the RNC, and D'Vontaye Mitchell, who was killed by Hyatt hotel security at the end of June.

The Council began the church year with a retreat on Saturday, Aug 24, 2024, co-led by the Defend Democracy team. The retreat connected members with their own "why" the 2024 election is important and gave them time to practice sharing it and listening to one another.

Our Defend Democracy team organized canvassing with Common Ground the weekend of Nov 2 and 3, with around 100 Unitarian Universalists from our congregation and others participating with UU the Vote's get out the vote canvassing, which registered voters, did voter turnout, and built power for housing reform in Milwaukee public housing. The Defend Democracy team also led a democracy pep rally on Nov 3, and we blessed the poll workers and democracy defenders in worship that Sunday. On Tuesday, Nov 5, the DD team did an enormous amount of work getting out the vote, doing voter rescue, working as counters at Central Count, and working as poll workers. Your ministers worked as a poll chaplain (Rev. Dena), a poll worker (Rev. Kimberlee), and organized local clergy for an all-day interfaith prayer vigil at Central Count (Rev. Jennifer). On Wednesday, Nov 6, we opened the church and held space for about 30 people during the day, and another 35 people who attended the evening vigil / prayer service and small group reflection.

The UU Climate Revival took place Oct 5-6 at First Church, with keynote speaker Lea Morris delivering our annual Irma Morter lecture to about 80 people in person, and 67 online. About 20 people attended morning climate workshops, and the Climate Revival planning team is following up with synthesis work and possible future visioning sessions next church year.

In January, the Social Justice Council invited the Anti-Racism Team and the Trans and Queer UU (TQUU) Team to their Jan 22, 2025 meeting to talk about post-inauguration threats and how the three teams can collaborate to lead the church in justice work. This is the first time these three teams have met together. The teams noticed the biggest threats to the immigrant and trans communities and agreed by consensus to work together on accompaniment and

Staff Reports

sanctuary for threatened communities.

A new Immigration Solidarity and Action Team began in January and was welcomed on to the Council at their February meeting. The Defend Democracy Team led post-card writing in the Common Room on Sunday, March 9, sending 700 postcards encourage voting in the April election.

ANTI-RACISM TEAM

The Anti-Racism Team has purposefully engaged with other First Church teams and the congregation as a whole, growing the capacity of our lay leaders in working toward anti-racism in their areas of leadership. After workshops with the AR Team, lay leaders throughout the church moved their teams further towards anti-racist operations. For example, Intern Minister Steve Sieck and Marisa Riepenhoff led two training sessions with ushers and the membership team on Radical Welcome at First Church based on the UUA's Widening the Circle Training, and Reverend Kimberlee and the Children's Religious Education team created an anti-racism parenting group. Myles Pointer-Mace worked with Dennis Conta and the pastoral care team to incorporate anti-racism into their practice. Anti-Racism themes are apparent in our members' involvement in Sunday Forum, Religious Education, the Board of Trustees, Choir, Social Justice, Immigration Solidarity Action, Trans and Queer UU Team, Worship Associates, and the Welcome and Belonging Teams. Team Members are also active with social justice partner organizations like MICAH, Black Lives Matter to WI UU, and the NAACP.

Rev. Kimberlee and Jenny Abel led a collaboration of the Anti-Racism and Earth Justice teams hosting the Bad River movie screening on Indigenous Peoples' Sunday, with ninety people in attendance and a collection of \$432.00 for the "Defend Bad River" fund. Native American Earth Justice Activists Marin Webster Denning and Susan Simensky Betila, as well as Aurora Conley from the Bad River Tribe, were special guests on our discussion panel after the movie. We held three events with Wisconsin Poet Laureate Dasha Kelly, including a Truth Evolution Workshop on Nov 24, with about 60 people in attendance, a "Makin' Cake" worship service on Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Sunday in January, and a poetry workshop with our youth that fed into our Youth Service in February.

Our Anti-Racism Team also led our members to participate in two Rev. Dr. MLK, Jr. events, one by the MLK Coalition and one by the Wisconsin Black Historical Society. Around 30 FUSM members attended the events in the community. Aso of the writing of this report, the Anti-Racism Team is preparing for Juneteenth Sunday and planning Anti-Racism workshops for next year, and support the social justice council priorities of supporting immigrants and trans people.

DENOMINATIONAL AFFAIRS

The major news on the denominational front this church year was the vote to pass a revision to our national UUA bylaws, which changed the wording in the Principles and Purposes section of the bylaws. Adoption of the new language occurred at General Assembly 2024 after last year's FUSM Annual Report was written and after the FUSM annual meeting was held. The proposed revision had been studied for several years by a Board of Trustees-appointed Commission, with discussions online and among congregations nationwide. Even so, there were many people feeling strongly that the (then current) seven principles were near and dear and should not be changed. Some argued passionately at GA that there had not been enough discussion. As an indication of the importance of the proposal, the FUSM Board of Trustees took a very unusual step and encouraged FUSM delegates to vote in favor of the proposal, while also voting their conscience. UU Religious Educators came up with a wonderful way of remembering the seven "new" values: use the acronym "JET PIG" to stand for justice, equity, transformation, pluralism, interdependence, and generosity – which all surround the central value of love.

Also important at GA 2024 was the business resolution espoused and advocated for by young adults to address climate change. This proposal followed the 2014 resolution to divest from fossil fuels by the UU Common Endowment Fund except for funds needed to undertake shareholder advocacy. Young adults concerned about their future and that of the planet, wanted total divestment from fossil fuel and related companies. This passionately-argued proposal failed to pass at GA.

The big activity this year at GA – which will be both live in Baltimore, MD and virtual -- will be the election of Moderator. The Moderator is the chief governance officer of the

Staff Reports

Association. A solo person and a duo are running this year. To date, 6 church members have committed to attend GA either in person or virtually, five as FUSM delegates. We are allocated 13 delegates based on our size (membership). Senior Minister Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom continues to serve our faith as the President of the Senior Ministers of Large UU Congregations, working with the Senior Ministers on covenant, leadership, and vision.

PLEDGE TEAM

Pledge Team Members: First Church Staff – Jennifer Nordstrom & Shari Wright, and First Church members – Kathy Donius, Pat Hidson, Mark Miller, Mark Richards, Bizzy Schultz, and Adam Zaiger (chair).

Our Pledge Drive theme this year was “Together we Fan the Flame,” where we asked members to reflect on how they fan the flame at First Church and how First Church ignites their internal flames. Pat Hidson designed hand painted chalice mosaics, and the project allowed members to help construct them while including a few words about what the chalice flame means to them.

Pledge Goal: The Pledge Team set out to match last year’s progress, seeking a 3.5% increase in last year’s pledges or a pledging total of about \$788,000. The long-term goal is to become pledge sustaining and this year’s goal was set to build on last year by keeping up with inflation and with the understanding that a number of pledging households continue to contribute to the Forge our Future Campaign. Outcome: As of April 23, 2025, we are projecting a final pledge drive total of approximately \$793,274, a 4% increase in pledges compared to last year’s budgeted pledge income. Thank you to everyone who pledged and otherwise participated – 2(%), 4, 6, 8 - who do we appreciate! Becoming pledge sustaining requires at least a 10% increase in pledging and the Pledge Team understands that not every household is able to make such a dramatic increase, but every pledge helps. To that end, we took a “bracketed” approach to our pledge request this year and members seemed receptive to increasing pledges based on their individual circumstances.

Our visiting stewards touched base with approximately 90 households during our pledge drive, and we plan to try and connect with every membership household over a four-year period. While we continue to emphasize the importance of

pledging during the annual pledge drive, visiting steward work has continued long after the pledge drive's close to help with annual budget determinations.

Pledge Team Thanks. Much Gratitude to our Pledge Team members, visiting stewards – Bob Balderson, Mark Chambers, Rollie Hanson, Kathy Rivera, and Dave Umhoefer; our Stewardship Trainer, Alexis Fielek; and our Testimonial Speakers – Anne Hefter and Alexis Fielek, Katie and Noel Kegel, Fred Gutierrez and Kristi Davis, and Myles Poitner Mace.

ASSOCIATE MINISTER

Rev. Dena McPhetres

What a wild and woolly year it has been – busy, challenging, scary, and beautiful all at once! In October, I gave notice of my retirement effective June 30, 2025. November brought devastating election results. We held space for each other during the sacred darkness of the winter holidays with their grief and tenacious hope. The first hundred days of the new administration challenged us to reach deep into our faith, our relationships, and lean into the risk of speaking out and accompaniment of those most affected by injustice. We fell back onto coping skills learned during the pandemic to process and respond to the onslaught of bad news while caring for each other and our mental health. Through it all, I keep thinking how lucky I am to have you and this beloved community. What an honor to serve you as a member of our fabulous ministry and staff team. How strong and resourceful you are as a community. How poignantly I will miss you after I retire. How proud I am of you and our living faith tradition.

I am not surprised that you attracted someone of the caliber and depth of experience as the Rev. Chris Long to serve as your Acting Assistant Minister going forward. You are a healthy inspiring congregation that attracts healthy and inspiring ministers with rich gifts of talent and skill. I am relieved and humbled to hand the relay race baton to Rev. Chris this summer. You will love him, and he will serve you well! I know you will welcome him with open arms.

Here are some details about the program areas in my portfolio over the last year.

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ADULT SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Adult Spiritual Development (ASD) offered opportunities for spiritual growth and learning, thanks to our many facilitators! Groups included in-person, online, and multi-platform options.

- Annie Dillard Study Group met once a month for 8 months with ten participants plus facilitator Dennis Conta.
- Poetry Contemplation group has 20 people actively participating with an average attendance of 12-15 participants weekly. A team of six lay leaders rotate facilitation: Lila Daut, Nancy Dunham, Mary Gleason, Diane Horne, Liz Leshner and Lynde Uihlein.
- Practice of Presence weekly silent meditation began again in our sanctuary in November with around four people attending plus facilitator Andrew Whitver.
- Silent Retreat at Cedar Valley Retreat Center in April had 22 participants with a team of 4 facilitators: Sarah Fowles, Lynda Strong, Chris Aiken, Rollie Hanson.
- Theme Circles will complete its seventh year at First Church, where members and friends gather in groups of eight with a trained facilitator to delve deeper into our monthly worship themes. Participants make a commitment to attend once a month October – June.
- Standard Theme Circles served 37 participants plus 8 facilitators in 6 circles. Although 50 people registered, there was attrition due to life events such as job changes, schedule conflicts, overcommitment, and dislike of Zoom.
- Focused Theme Circles included a UU Writers circle with 3 participants plus 2 co-facilitators; Parents Theme Circle with 8 participants plus 2 co-facilitators; and a new LGBTQIA+ Theme Circle with 5 participants plus 2 co-facilitators. Although 22 people registered for Focused Theme Circles, there was attrition of 6 people due to life events.
- A total of 6 new facilitators joined our team. Theme Circles served a grand total of 53 people, plus 14 facilitators. Registration for next year begins September 1.
- UU Wellspring “Sources” group, in its fourth year at First Church, met twice a month for 10 months with 5 participants plus co-facilitators Diane Horne and Ryan

Pawlowski. Participants took a deep dive into the six UU sources of wisdom--committing to daily spiritual practice, reading homework, and reflecting together on UU history, theology, identity, and their own spiritual growth.

- We expanded UU Wellspring this year with their new offering “Love at the Center” which had 4 participants plus co-facilitators Laurie Foss and Jeri Pearcy.

MEMBERSHIP

The Membership Team meets monthly to brainstorm, create, and support courageous and accessible welcome and engagement for our guests, friends, and members. They support our usher and greeter teams, Journey to Membership classes, New Member Ceremonies, and Pizza Nights. This year we embraced the shifting landscape of membership in the 21st century and renamed our team “Welcome & Belonging” to better reflect our ministry with the broad range of seekers from first visit to lifelong members. We also renamed the Sunday member services table “Questions & Connections” to better signal what actually happens there. Our goal this year was to “make things obvious” so people can find the information and connections they need at First Church.

We welcomed part-time staff member Fiona Higgins as our first RE & Membership Assistant who provided important support to our visitors, usher & greeter teams, and Journey to Membership classes. Shout out to Ministerial Intern Steve Sieck who gave invaluable energy and time supporting our work by weaving the fabric of community with ever stronger and more resilient threads. This winter our member engagement folks began reaching out to people who completed Journey to Membership classes at approximately 3-month, 6-month and one-year marks to build relationships and strengthen connections, including both Members and Active Friends. This spring we began exploring improvements to accessibility and look forward to your ideas in this area. Huge thank you to our welcome volunteers at the greeter lectern, our usher team of around 50 steadfast members, and our volunteers at the Questions and Connections table – it takes a village!

As of May 1, 2025: Adult members: 661

Active Friends: 69

Staff Reports

Pledging Friends: 35

New Members since May 1, 2024: 50

Withdrew membership since April 1, 2024: 12

PASTORAL CARE

There is an old saying 'Grief shared is halved; Joy shared is doubled.' The support we give and receive from each other, both formal and informal, makes a world of difference to our well-being as individuals, families, and as a community.

Over the summer, I redesigned our Pastoral Care Associates (PCA) training (again!) bringing it back in-person which we held on 4 full Saturdays in the fall with co-facilitators Sarah Richards, Dale Skaggs, Lynn Connolly (who also serves as PCA Coordinator), myself, and Steve Sieck, Ministerial Intern.

Our team of 9 new Pastoral Care Associates are in their first year of service in a 3-year term, plus 2 former PCAs opted to continue for another term, making a team of 11. PCAs offer a confidential listening presence to members and active friends who face significant life events including illness, accidents, surgeries, death of a loved one, separation and divorce, birth, adoption, parenting challenges, hospice, homebound elders and the stress of caregiving, among other life transitions. PCAs made multiple contacts with 55 members or active friends since last April. Rev. Jennifer, Rev. Kimberlee, Steve Sieck, Ministerial Intern, and I made at least 164 pastoral care contacts with members and active friends.

We delivered 27 shawls and lap robes, and 13 baby blankets from our Shawl Ministry. Many of these were distributed at our post-election gathering.

Our Pastoral Care Provider (PCP) Team of church members provide practical help for short term needs. We received 6 requests for rides and 3 for meals, all of which were met by 10 providers. We have 25 providers listed as active.

Memorial Service Reception Co-Coordinator Jacki Zandi and Terry Wiggins organized 6 receptions with the help of 7 volunteers.

SMALL GROUPS

Five Affinity Groups were active through a variety of online, in-person, and multi-platform options including Book Discussion, Gathering Waters Sangha (Buddhist Study Group),

Chancel Choir, Seasoned Women Are Naturally Social (SWANS), and The Chronologically Gifted. Three new Affinity Groups began this Spring: UU Young Adults (UU-YA), Pagan Gatherings, and UU Christians. These Member-Led Ministries gather around shared interests or demographics to find connections and deeper belonging. Affinity Groups are open to everyone to come and go as they please.

SUMMER SERVICES

Summer worship services and religious education programs continue to be an important ministry for our year-round church. I work closely with the Pulpit Guest team to plan and coordinate summer services. I also provide one-to-one coaching for each member who leads a service. We held 13 summer services in 2024, including 4 clergy pulpit guests, 2 member-led services, 3 led by Ministerial Intern Steve Sieck, 3 led by me, and one led by Rev. Jennifer.

CONCLUSION

As I conclude 28 years of ordained Unitarian Universalist ministry, 16 of which I was blessed to spend with First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee, I am filled with gratitude and joy. Thank you for the honor of serving First Church. You will be in my heart always.

Yours,

Rev. Dena

MINISTERIAL INTERN

Steve Sieck

When I arrived at First Church in August 2023, I had completed one year of seminary. I was hungry to learn and new to ministry. By June 2025, I will have graduated seminary, been called to settled ministry, and ordained in preliminary fellowship. What happened in between is the story of my internship, of the capacity for First Church to love an intern into the call to ministry.

I began my work with assignments in membership, focusing on the welcoming team that developed inclusive practices for visitors and the usher and greeter team. I was trained in to support the Pastoral Associates and became a

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minister on call for pastoral crises. I served in Worship Associate retreats and learned with the Anti-Racism team. I attended MICAH clergy meetings to see how interfaith justice efforts work. I led memorials and worship services. I co-taught adult faith formation courses and trainings, as well as ongoing Journey to Membership classes. Over the 2024-2025 church year, I started an adult spiritual growth group for male-identifying members, and they are now preparing to be member-led. Through this journey, my supervising ministers supported me through the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (the group that determines if a candidate is ready for preliminary fellowship in ministry), and the search process for ministerial placement.

I write this shortly before leaving to 'candidate' for settled ministry, and my heart is full of gratitude for the First Church community for its support and encouragement.

ADMINISTRATION

DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION

Jean Johnson

Reporting to the Senior Minister, I am responsible for overall administrative functions of the church including financial management, human resources administration, communications, and facilities management. I manage these areas with a combination of talented staff, expert volunteers, and contract services. I supervise our wonderful Office Manager, Facilities Manager, and Facilities Assistant as needed. As the church's administrator since 1998, I have a long and broad overview of church operations. Here are some highlights of the year.

OFFICE/ADMIN HIGHLIGHTS

Office Manager Shari Wright is responsible for general operations of the office so that it functions efficiently and smoothly. In addition to general office and admin processes, her responsibilities include technology integration, events planning assistance, IT and database management, contributions accounts and data, and along with me, publications and communications.

Last year when we lost Membership & Development Coordinator Lynne's position, Shari stepped up to help with membership and the annual pledge drive. She continued to work with Rev. Dena and Fiona Higgins to refine processes to support member engagement. Shari was a strong leader for the Pledge Team, providing data to help with strategy and follow-up, brochure layout, and forecasting the pledge campaign outcome for budgeting purposes. Shari has begun to lead with Rev. Kimberlee a task force on safety communications systems, a first step toward better emergency procedures for detection and notification systems. I am enormously grateful for Shari's expertise, outstanding dedication to the church and our work, and her care for our church community.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The IT Team is led by Office Manager Shari Wright with members Steve Culver, Laurie Foss, Allan Ries (Chair), and new member Christian Wood - all of whom are experienced IT professionals. The team provides IT strategy and governance, meeting once a month to discuss subjects like upcoming projects, the performance of the network, and network security. TSR Managed Services provides day-to-day technical support.

During 2024-25, we added more WiFi access points and upgraded the WiFi controller for more security and wider WiFi coverage in the building. A new network security training program was implemented for all staff to learn about best practices for noticing and handling computer threats. We upgraded older model computers, and more upgraded computers will be needed to keep up with security updates. During a recent electrical storm that interrupted our Internet, TSR Managed Services provided crucial technical support to restore the affected network components and restore service within 2 days.

Along with TSR's expertise in Microsoft solutions, we redesigned the structure of our SharePoint sites and files thereby improving lay leaders' access to the cloud-based SharePoint sites. More church groups are now utilizing the Microsoft SharePoint sites for team collaboration.

FACILITIES HIGHLIGHTS

Facilities Manager Ken Liddell is responsible for managing building repairs and improvements. He manages our new part-time Facilities Maintenance Technician Vinnie Hack

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and works with the assistance of the talented Building and Grounds Team, headed by Russ Drewry along with Keith Anderson.

Ken, the B&G Team, and I have done some important projects this year. Highlights include: painting the preschool room and a larger nursery room and carpeting the new nursery room, infilling an old rarely-used window well that was collapsing, replacing the 1980s wooden main entrance doors with commercial doors including automatic openers for accessibility. At the direction of the Board of Trustees, we've engaged a consulting engineer Peter Zak to explore air conditioning solutions for the Common Room and Sanctuary; Zak will create an RFP and get design/build proposals from selected mechanical contractors.

This church year the building has been humming with many meetings, special programs, trainings, and organizing gatherings. We remain committed to offering video conferencing to those who cannot come to the church buildings and to make gathering easier for all. Wonderful special events and groups the staff supported include: Climate Revival weekend with Morter Lecturer music activist Lea Morris; two Dasha Kelly Hamilton programs, many Defend Democracy events, trainings and gatherings; large gatherings of the growing Immigrant Solidarity & Action group; four March Interfaith Conference lectures with lunch; and four beautiful memorial services with receptions.

Facilities Assistant Jim Spice has handled them all with flexibility, warmth, and grace. Jim provides a friendly and secure welcome at the front door; setup and take down of furniture, equipment, and AV; brews gallons of coffee and sanitizes mounds of dishes; answers your questions and helps you run your technology needs. I'll note that during the pandemic we reduced Facilities Assistant hours from 37 to 25 per week, and Jim works all 25. Thank you, Jim!

FINANCE OPERATIONS HIGHLIGHTS

Financial systems operated smoothly this year. Working with Office Manager Shari Wright and our outside bookkeeping firm, I provide accurate monthly financial statements and pledge fulfillment reports. Working with the Finance Team, we provide quarterly reports to the Board of Trustees. I also lead the development of the annual budget. We keep a close eye on our primary income

source which is contributions; operating pledge payments have been strong this year. A huge thank you to the Finance Team, led by chair Noreen Gilbertsen, for their knowledgeable and constant service to First Church. I've learned so much from each of you. Please find a financial report from Noreen in this annual report.

Highlights include: I gathered a task force to interview new bookkeeping firms last spring and we made the switch to a new firm in fall 2024; this change has created efficiencies and removed operational tasks from the Treasurer's responsibilities. I also assisted the Board and Nominating Committee in updating the Treasurer's role description and then recruiting a new Treasurer for the coming year. As a new requirement of our property insurance company, I engaged an accredited appraiser; I cannot find record of an appraisal being done in decades.

Forge Our Future Endowment pledge payments have been steady—nearly \$2.3 million as of the date of my writing. With the trustees, the staff has developed administrative processes and accounting that are parallel to the church operations, including reconciling with the database contribution records and sending quarterly statements. The Endowment Trustees have established a separate checking account to which we can directly deposit contributions, and a money market account, both at Associated Bank. They've also opened the investment account with UU Common Endowment Fund. See a report from the Forge Our Future Endowment Trustees in this annual report.

This year, as every year, has been filled with new challenges and joys. Although it is in part because of these difficult times, it's been wonderful to see folks returning to church, as well as many new folks finding us for the first time. Our connection as a church community is precious, essential, and strong. I'm honored to serve First Church.

Jean Johnson
Director of Administration

Staff Reports

MUSIC

LEAD MUSIC DIRECTOR

STRENGTH OF OUR MUSIC TEAM

Lead Music Director Alissa Rhode, Choral Director Tristan Strelitzer, and Collaborative Pianist Teresa Drews continue to provide a wide array of music programming to support our Sunday services. Our three musicians collaborated and performed together this church year in a variety of configurations.

INTERFAITH CONCERT

Members of our Chancel Choir took part in an Interfaith Choral Concert this Spring, singing together with choirs from Congregation Shalom, Mount Carmel, Milwaukee Jewish Chorale, and Galilee Lutheran church. Thank you to Teresa Drews for connecting us with this opportunity!

CHORAL SCHOLARS

We have had one soprano choral scholar participate in Chancel Choir this church year. Krug funding will continue to fund one choral scholar for the majority of 2025-2026.

SINGERS IN THE STREETS

Tristan Strelitzer and Desiree Pointer Mace are co-leading a renewed effort to continue developing our muscle for community singing in the oral tradition. They will be offering upcoming opportunities to build collective repertoire to have at the ready for protests and community response events.

AUDIO

Our music staff continues to work with our Audio and Livestream Teams to provide a reasonably high quality audio experience both live and online. While the blessings of variety we experience from service to service can at times pose significant challenges in this area, both our in-room Audio and Livestream operators continue to provide thoughtful and careful attention to the task. We are extremely grateful to them for this important and valuable service. We would happily train and welcome more volunteers to join these teams.

Alissa Rhode
Lead Music Director

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

MINISTER OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

First Church continues to grow into our religious education model, learning how to adapt it throughout the church year to match the needs of our families, schedule, themes and capacity. The RE program features a nursery and pre-school that is led by staff Mariah and Cecelia Gros, an All-Ages circle time and theme-based choice model for children 6-12 and emerging Youth Group, both co-lead with staff and volunteers. Most Sundays, our children and youth now remain with the congregation for a third of the Sunday services, allowing them to experience many core components of worshipping with our faith community as well as multi-generational service once a month.

This is our second year with this faith formation model, and we made adaptations as opportunities and needs emerged. For example, this winter during OWL for 4-6th graders session our All-ages group attendance decreased, and we decided to adjust the choice and volunteer options accordingly. Additionally, we shifted our plans to collaborate with our Earth Justice Ministry team on a Plastic Free MKE project. Also, our middle school age children now join the Youth group when they meet on the first and third Sundays of the month, this allows them to integrate into this group early as they are comfortable.

One big change this year is the improved space for the youngest church participants. The Pre-school room was updated with new paint, equipment and furniture; and the Nursery was moved to the larger Anthony Room, which was upgraded with new paint, carpet and diaper changing table. The Nursery space can now better accommodate children; children, families, volunteers and staff are enjoying the new space. Special thanks to Jean Johnson and Ken Lidell for their efforts on this much-needed project! The former nursery is now being utilized as the religious education library, allowing access for the collection of books for staff, families and volunteers.

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Additional initiatives of our religious education program include maintaining check-in attendance system for all children and youth, the faith formation room and worship activity bags, offering Time for All Ages in Worship during Sunday services, tracking new children in our congregation, (from baby blanket to child dedications), welcoming new families, supporting the Parent Theme Circle, creating the R.E. Weekly Update and scheduling RE volunteers each week. Fiona Higgins has been a welcome addition assisting in this layered work. We experienced steady numbers in RE registration and attendance this year, though we continue to struggle with steady volunteer support .

CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILY RE TEAM

Vision: The religious education program is rooted in the mission of the church, Nurture the Spirit, Engage the Mind, And Inspire Action. We envision a church community that models a way of being in the world that supports our children, youth, and families to develop a strong core of Unitarian Universalist values.

Mission: Children's Religious Education Ministry Team's mission is to nurture spiritual growth by engaging and inspiring our children, youth, families, and volunteers.

GOAL: The Children's RE team 24-25's goal is to welcome connect and support families and volunteers as we grow into our inspired Religious Education program. We will focus on inclusivity and the diversity of our children honoring the flexibility every family's needs motivating volunteers and working to create a satiable RE program.

The Children's Religious Education Team met monthly throughout the year to plan, support and work together in creating events and programming for RE. The CRE team includes Thea Watters who continued as the chair, and Adam Zaiger, Megan Smith and Tammy Hilgeman, as well as new members, Anna Strelitzer and Suzie Considine. In February, the CRE team worked to create Magic & Mystery

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION METRICS

*All but two of the non-member registrants joined the church by April 2024.

2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	Comparisons taken on average through the 2nd Sunday of March
80	69/12*	48/14	48	31	Number of registered children and youth: member/non-Member
39	40	32	26	21	Average Sunday RE Program Attendance, not including MG Services.

Family Fun night, which was a delight with members of the community supporting activities for the children. I am grateful for their belief, support and dedication to religious education; they are our most dedicated volunteers and ambassadors for faith formation at First Church.

2024-25 CHURCH YEAR HIGHLIGHTS IN R.E.

The R.E. program and staff supported these special programs and events this year: Our Whole Lives for our 4-6th graders, UU Climate Retreat, Defend Bad River Screening, Sandwich Making for Guest House, Morter Lecture with Lea Morris, Jingle Bus Ride, Truth Evolution and Youth Workshop with Dasha Kelly Hamilton, Mystery Friends pen pal exchange and party, Holiday Giving Tree, Valentine Making, Plastic Free MKE, and Blessed at Pridefest.

The OWL program for 4-6th graders ran this winter with 11 children participating and our dedicated OWL facilitators Crysta Jarczynski, Rollie Hansen, Amy Horst, Stacy Koenen, and Stacey Thieme leading the sessions and staff support of Fiona Higgins and myself. We are extraordinarily grateful to these volunteers in creating this life saving comprehensive sexual education experience for our emerging adolescents.

Throughout the year we offer Multi-generational Worship, that I lead and/or help co-create with our children, youth, and congregation. I wrote the holiday pageant, The Present of Presence, to feature the meanings of the religious holiday of December with a record twenty-three children participating. I also guided our Youth in the creation of Tales of Inclusion Youth Service, inspired by working with Dasha Kelly Hamilton and am currently developing RE Sunday Service.

It has been a busy, growing, joy-filled year of new opportunities for our children, youth and families and I look forward to building on the expanding faith formation in the future at First Church.

With gratitude,
Rev. Kimberlee

Member-Led Ministries Reports

COMMON GROUND

Tenants United

Throughout the summer, many First Church members volunteered to knock on doors at Housing Authority City of Milwaukee (HACM) properties to interview tenants and document the many substandard living conditions. In addition each tenant was provided assistance in voting if needed.

Common Ground has been exposing the incompetency of HACM and its director since March of 2023. Common Ground was showing up at HACM board meetings to insist the myriad problems be fixed and for the director to resign. He did resign in late 2024. In addition, an agreement was made with the Department of Neighborhood Services that tenant complaints be fixed within 30 days.

We have had some victories, but Common Ground is still working with the residents to form a stronger union .

Diversity Issues

Common Ground is starting a campaign to increase diversity on Milwaukee County juries. Currently, many criminal defendants are forced to stand trial without a true cross section of the community on the jury. This means there are often no Black or Latino people serving.

Fire and Police

It is vital that our police and fire departments represent the diversity of Milwaukee. Sadly, women and people of color are massively underrepresented. This must change.

CG is working on strategies to increase the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women and people of color in our police and fire departments.

We wish to express our gratitude to the many First Church Friends of Common Ground who have supported our work through these years. Should you have any questions about Common Ground or wish to become involved, please contact one of our Core Team members: George Bledsoe, Lynn Connolly, Kristi Davis, Mary Ann Fisher, Jerry Fredrickson, Allan Jaberg, Ann Ritchey and Cathy Startt.

We especially wish to express our appreciation to Cathy Startt. Cathy has led our fundraising campaign since First Church became a Common Ground member. She deserves to finally retire after all these years. Thanks so much Cathy!

For more information go to <https://www.commongroundwi.org/> for more detail and to view past campaigns.

Forward Scholars

Forward Scholars continues to be a very successful tutoring program for Milwaukee K5-3 students, with average reading gains of two grade levels. First Church is a major supporter of Forward Scholars, with Kristi Davis and Molly Schiffler serving on their board. MPS is no longer providing funding for FS, so fundraising is needed to keep this program viable.

Jerry Fredrickson

EARTH JUSTICE MINISTRY

EJM is a member-led ministry. Co-Chairs this year were Barbara Leigh, Terry Wiggins, and Bruce Wiggins.

Walk & Roll events continued, organized by Jacki Zandi and Paula Anderson. W&Rs started during the pandemic to gather together, enjoy nature and share friendship. A local host who knows a park with a paved trail leads the hike. For example, in Kletsch Park in Glendale, overlooking the Milwaukee River dam, we saw people fishing for salmon traveling upstream to spawn.

At our monthly gatherings, named "Food, Fun, Future," we shared food, played a game (led by Barbara), and planned our activities.

EJM leaders attended Social Justice Council meetings. Bruce helped plan and facilitate Council meetings.

As part of the Climate Revival, conceived by UUA staff for congregations nationwide, we sponsored a workshop which

Member-Led Ministries Reports

was capped by Lea Morris delivering the Morter lecture and leading the congregation in song.

To get out the vote for Fall national and Spring state elections, EJM members sponsored and promoted writing post cards to voters. We collaborated with FUSM's Defend Democracy group, the Environmental Voter Project and Citizens Climate Lobby. Church members wrote thousands of post cards.

The Anti-Racism Team and EJM showed the film, "Bad River" -- and co-hosted a discussion which included Wisconsin Indigenous leaders.

Amy Monahan and Kim Lamers produced a display on the problems with plastic in our environment and displayed it during March social hours. We encouraged FUSMers to visit the Plastic-Free MKE website to pledge to reduce their use of single-use plastic. Plastic-Free MKE was the Share the Plate Recipient for March.

Terry Wiggins continued as liaison to 350 MKE, the Coalition on Lead Emergency (COLE). Hannah Fox started as liaison to Our Future Milwaukee but then turned it over to Terry.

We are planning to encourage First Church members to address climate change. We will be hanging a poster of a tree on Sunday, April 20 (Earth Day and Easter service) through Flower Communion on June 1. People will commit to act during the six weeks.

Communication was important: The EJM Google Group reached more than 50 people, we published in the FUSM newsletter, and we updated our web page.

Bruce Wiggins

IMMIGRANT SOLIDARITY AND ACTION

The First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee Immigrant Solidarity & Action has quickly responded to the developing needs of our community. Our group has formed subcommittees to build partnerships with community groups most directly affected by undemocratic and cruel policies within the United States and within Milwaukee. As Unitarian Uni-

versalists and people of conscience, we see no choice but to organize and to act.

New American Program- Voces de la Frontera (VDLF)- An IS&A subgroup have begun observing English as a Second Language and Citizenship Classes in order to volunteer teaching these classes. At least one new Monday night class has begun and a proposed Thursday night class is currently forming.

Fundraising- An IS&A subgroup targeted generous donations to VDLF's New American Program and its May Day March. The group is developing further avenues so that people of conscience can support directly affected neighbors and members of our community

Critical Consciousness- An IS&A subgroup is in the process of organizing a book group reading On Tyranny by Timothy Snyder. This group will be selling copies of the book Benefiting Boswell Books and VDLF.

Direct Action- An IS&A subgroup recruited FUSM and community members to attend the VDLF May Day March with an 04/27 art build. This group inspired further action by bringing Forum Speaker Nicolas Lampert on 05/04.

While our group has begun to act, the needs of our community are significant. Recent events have made it clear that the IS&A needs to deepen our connection with the FUSM Pink Haven/TQUU group in order to articulate a Rapid Response team. It is clear that our community will call on us to act quickly in the near future. We must be ready when our neighbors reach out and are in need.

Respectfully submitted in solidarity,

Michael Pointer Mace
IS&A chair

SUNDAY FORUM

2024-2025 Goals:

- Build the Sunday Morning Forum Technology Team, including equipment options.
- Recruit a person interested in becoming a co-chair with Mark Mueller

Member-Led Ministries Reports

- Extend the Role of Host to fully support and guide scheduled presenters.
- Expand the demographic range of Hosts.
- Encourage and build Forum Topics selections through partnership with church interest groups, programs, RE, music/arts.

Members of the Forum Committee. Members are responsible for inviting, scheduling and hosting presenters. Group members include: Barbara Collignon, Jerry Fredrickson, Dianna Dentino, Barbara Leigh, Trent Muller, Bruce Wiggins, Juliet Hills, Deb Solis, JoAnn Bachar, George Bledsoe, Pat MacFarland Lorraine Jacobs, Jon Ward, Lisa and Pete Koneazny, Mark Mueller, Connie Craig, Ann Batiza, David Umhoefer, Ted Kraig, Dennis Conta, Rod Depue, Patric Mulvey, Dave Umhoefer

Forum topics. Hmong, Julian Assange, Election Realities, NAACP, Harris Campaign, Patric Cudahy, Quaker Lobbying, Democracy Campaign, Mapping Racism, Milwaukee Fire Department, Women of the West, James Luther Adams, Holocaust Survivor, Greener Communities, WNOV, Immigration, Milwaukee Climate and Equity Plan, Viewwaukee, Wisconsin for Environmental Justice, Deaf Experience, Milwaukee Community Gardens, Refugee Resettlement, Mike McCabe, Philip Chard, United Nations Association, Genetic Counseling, New Milwaukee Public Museum, David Drake, Senator Chris Larson, Marquette Lubar Center, Sacred Hart of China, Bridge Project, The Power of Art Organizing, You Are Smart, County Board

The Sunday Forums have been regularly offered on Sunday mornings at First Unitarian Society-Milwaukee for close to 60 years. Scheduled weekly, at 10:00-11:00am, in Max Otto Hall, presentations are live/in person events with coffee and hot water for tea. They are also recorded on Zoom or Live Stream for viewing on the First Unitarian-Milwaukee YouTube Channel. Average in-person attendance is 25 - 35.

Forums are open to members and visitors. Visitors often become members because of their exposure to Sunday Morning Forums. Consider joining the Sunday Forum team. Our fall planning meeting will be in June. We review topics and plan the Fall session

Mark Mueller

FEAST FOR FUNDS

The Feast for Funds silent auction raised \$9,525.72 on the 32Auctions site, and brought in slightly more from post-auction purchases of remaining "Buy Now" activities. The auction began online-only on 11/3/24, and ran through 11/17/24, which included two Sundays of items displayed in the Leenhouts Common Room. There were over 80 bidders, and over 80 donors of experiences and items. Planning will begin in September for the 2025 bidding season. I am grateful for the generosity and enthusiasm of both donors and bidders.

Scot Henry

BUDDHIST STUDY GROUP

The Gathering Waters Sangha, or Buddhist Study Group, has experienced another meaningful year. We sometimes describe our group as a book club with meditation. Unlike other book clubs, however, the density of thought in some of our readings prolongs the time we spend with a given book. We completed two books this past church year: one on the Eightfold Path, and The Book of Joy, the latter about perhaps the final meeting and discussions between two close friends, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The Sangha carries on without a spiritual leader following the death several years ago of Steve, and later Jeanne, Lowry. Despite that, we have a strong core of members and we continually strive to hold the door open for others. Our attendance waivers throughout the year ranging between 8 or 9 on the low side, and the mid teens for the upper. Many of the attendees find that they come away with much greater insight following our discussions than from reading the material alone. We tend to help each other both understand, and to harvest more depth from our readings, and from our individual spiritual practices.

Mark Miller

Member-Led Ministries Reports

TRANS AND QUEER FOR UU (TQUU)

We are proud to share the progress and achievements of the Trans and Queer for Unitarian Universalism (TQUU) team over the past church year. Launched last year, TQUU works to lead culture and systems change at First Church to create a spiritual community where trans and queer people fully belong and are part of the fabric of our congregation.

This year, our team chose to focus on programming in alignment with the Pink Haven Coalition. The mission of Pink Haven Coalition is to create a collective of organizations and individuals committed to trans liberation and joy, while growing community defense, mutual aid, and alternative systems of care for gender diverse people. By aligning with Pink Haven and working within its network, we can make a greater impact on trans communities. We are called to this work. We believe that our congregation is well positioned to make an impact because of our history of leading on LGBT issues, and our powerful networks of community resources.

We are organizing a program to support transgender passengers - individuals and families who want to migrate to Wisconsin from legislatively unsafe states. This program aims to provide accompaniment and resources to people seeking refuge from hostile environments. We are working closely with the social justice council, whose focus this year is on migration issues affecting both trans and immigrant communities.

There will be numerous opportunities for the broader church community to get involved in this work. We look forward to sharing more with you and inviting your participation in this important justice ministry.

Luc Maker

THE SWANS (SENIOR WOMEN ARE NATURALLY SOCIAL)

The SWANS (Senior Women are Naturally Social) have been around since 2009 and now that Covid is no longer a threat, the flock is gathering again for friendship and mutual support. We started as Senior Women Alone or Newly Single but found Senior Women are Naturally Social is more inclusive. This past year we met occasionally for lunch, museum visits and attended member Judy Frieber's art exhibition. Sunday, May 5th, we'll visit the Milwaukee Art Museum for their special exhibit and again break bread in fellowship.

Barbara Collignon

THE CHRONOLOGICALLY GIFTED

The Chronologically Gifted were grateful to be able to meet in person after being confined to Zoom meetings during Covid. We met several times from September to May (December and January excepted) for potluck lunch in Otto Hall following the 11:00 service. We were joined by several new members and by Stephen Sieck. We enjoyed sharing jokes, news and concerns and took pleasure in fellowship and building new friendships. On the average, we numbered 16 persons in attendance.

Barbara Collignon and Juliet Hills

Co-Leaders

**The congregation of The First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee
affirms and promotes the full participation of persons in our activities without regard to race, color, gender,
physical or mental challenge, sexual identity or orientation, age, class, national origin, or ancestry.**

**Indeed, we are interested in actively promoting
more diversity within our congregation.**