

2025-2026 Annual Report



First Unitarian
SOCIETY OF MILWAUKEE
nurture. engage. inspire.

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The First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee

A Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Established 1842

ANNUAL REPORT

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ANNUAL REPORT

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

2025-2026 Operating Budget: \$1,074,090

Adult Members: 671

Religious Education Enrollment: 68

Contributing Households: 395

CHURCH STAFF

SENIOR MINISTER

The Reverend Jennifer Nordstrom

MINISTER OF FAITH FORMATION

The Reverend Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

ACTING ASSISTANT MINISTER

The Reverend Chris Long

DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION

Manni Marquez

OFFICE MANAGER

Shari Wright

FACILITIES ASSISTANT

Jim Spice

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN

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 CONTINUED

LEAD MUSIC DIRECTOR

Alissa Rhode

CHORAL DIRECTOR

Tristan Strelitzer

COLLABORATIVE PIANIST

Teresa Drews

FAITH FORMATION ASSISTANT

Fiona Higgins

EARLY CHILDHOOD COORDINATOR

Mariah Groshek

NURSERY CAREGIVER

EmmaLynn Catalan

NURSERY CAREGIVER

Analisse Moriarity

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Where did the time go? Wherever it went, it was time well spent. Your First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee Board of Trustees (BOT) spent the 2025-2026 church year attending to church affairs in a deliberate and thoughtful manner.

As stewards of the governance process that guides church operations, the board very methodically monitored the execution of established policies. Doing so allowed our senior minister and her staff to efficiently and effectively perform the many functions of the First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee .

In addition to this monthly policy monitoring responsibility, three other major initiatives deserve recording in the 2025-26 Annual Report.

The first is the recreation of the congregation's Ends Statements. It was in 2017 that we last developed Ends Statements for First Church. At that time eight statements were adopted. Since then the world, our community and our congregation have changed dramatically. For this reason, as well as a fading recollection and connection to the statements of that time, the board decided it was the year to reconsider and recreate our Ends.

Beginning with its June retreat the Board of Trustees started the process of revising our Ends Statements.

During February and March more than 100 congregants participated in 35 small groups to reimagine a future for this congregation and its place in the community. From this effort the BOT crafted three new Ends Statements. They will be considered by the congregation over the summer of 2026 for final presentation in the Fall.

The second initiative addresses a matter of financial stewardship, another central responsibility of the BOT. The original Memorial Trust Fund (MTF) was established in 1925 and was reconstituted in 1963. The terms of the Trust define it as a principle protected account. It has grown to more than \$345,000.

With the success of the Forge Our Future (FOF) campaign and the resultant formation of the FOF Endowment Trust, also principle protected, the BOT, decided to initiate the process required to move the move the MTF dollars to the FOF Endowment Trust. It was determined that there was greater benefit, organizationally and financially, to have the two funds merged, than to maintain them separately. Com-

pletion of this process requires a vote of the congregation.

The third initiative relates to the BOT's responsibility for overseeing the maintenance of its capital assets, the church building and its infrastructure, for the benefit, safety and future of the congregation. Three capital projects were studied and developed over the course of the church year. They were projects to (1) upgrade the fire safety and communication system, (2) air-condition the sanctuary and common room, and (3) expand the solar energy system.

All the projects are under serious consideration, but the fire safety system is the clear priority. As of this writing no final decision has been made regarding any of these projects.

There were other important events, coming and goings of staff in which the BOT and its members were engaged but its major actions and responsibilities are outlined above.

Finally, I want to express gratitude to my BOT colleagues, our senior minister and staff and, in no little way my wife, for supporting me in my role as president. A more intelligent, committed and encouraging collection of humanity is seldomly found.

Final mention must also be made of our retiring BOT members. Dana Brooks, Stacy Koenen and Stacey Thieme.

After three years of diligence and committed work let us shower them with our gratitude.

Mark Chambers
Board of Trustee President

2024-2025 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, 2024 – June 30, 2025

The following page compares the budget and final income/expense statement for the 2024-2025 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 -\$158K for the church year. Final numbers for "Income Net of Operations," not including extraordinary income, show a negative balance of \$118K (\$40K better than expected).

- Income**
- Total income was \$916K which was 4% (\$35K) above the budget of \$881K.
 - Pledges (\$755K) were 101% of budget.
 - Total activity income (\$11.6K) was 53% of budget. Feast for Funds received \$9,322.
 - Investment income (\$81.5K) was 163% of budget. This income includes interest and dividends minus expenses and bank charges. In addition, \$30K was transferred from the Endowment Trust.
 - The apartment income net of expenses (\$38.4K) was 187% of budget. There was full occupancy and no unexpected expenses.

- Expense**
- Total expense was \$1,033K which is 99% of budget (\$1,039K):
 - Salaries & Minister's Housing budget (\$595K) and Total Human Resources (\$795K) were 99% of budget.
 - Budgeted contributions (96%), Basic Operations (107%), Building Expenses (99%) were within 10% of budget.
 - Religious Education and Committee Expenses were at 113% and 83% of budget, respectively.
 - Extra Operations were paid by a transfer from the Fund Balance (\$59.6K). This exceeded the budget by \$37K due to ministerial transition expenses, cost of the emergency comms system, Immigration Solidarity expenses and TQUU expenses funds.

2024-2025 ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT

Income and Expenses continued

July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025

was a \$118K deficit, a 75% deficit decrease from the budgeted deficit of \$158K. 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 to provide additional income.

Extraordinary income was significant and included a bequest of \$637K, a gift of \$100K, two ERTC (Employee Retention Tax Credit) payments totaling \$122K and an unrealized gain of \$37.2K on investments. Legacy 2024 fund was created to hold some of the extraordinary income (\$598K) until special projects could be defined.

Net Income including Extraordinary Income was \$778K.

FUSM 2024-2025 INCOME & EXPENSE SUMMARY

ITEM	'24 - '25	'24 - '25	Ratio
	BUDGET	Final - June 30, 2025	
Contributions			
Pledges	\$750,000	\$755,299	101%
Other Contributions	\$38,780	\$28,742	74%
Total Contributions	\$788,780	\$784,041	99%
Activity Income			
Feast for Funds	\$15,000	\$9,322	62%
R E Fees	\$3,000	\$2,150	72%
Other Sources	\$3,715	\$80	2%
Total Activity Income	\$21,715	\$11,552	53%
Investment Income	\$50,000	\$81,498	163%
Apartment Income Net of Expenses	\$20,500	\$38,415	187%
TOTAL INCOME	\$880,995	\$915,505	104%
Human Resources			
Salaries, Wages & Minister Housing Allowance	\$601,179	\$594,530	99%
Professional Expenses	\$22,105	\$18,936	86%
Insurance - Health & Disability	\$89,100	\$90,885	102%
Retirement Savings	\$48,659	\$51,518	106%
Payroll Taxes	\$28,387	\$27,921	98%
Other	\$12,775	\$11,247	88%
Total Human Resources	\$802,205	\$795,037	99%
Budgeted Contributions	\$23,371	\$22,434	96%
Building Expenses	\$91,300	\$90,540	99%
Basic Operations	\$89,456	\$95,878	107%
Religious Education	\$7,150	\$8,056	113%
Committees	\$25,797	\$21,518	83%
Extra Operations			
Transfer from Fund Balance	-\$22,350	-\$59,637	267%
Ministerial Transition		\$7,402	
Emergency Comms System		\$7,266	
Capital Maintenance	\$12,000	\$17,895	149%
UU the Vote		\$500	
EF Trust Attorney Fees	\$0	\$1,106	
Immigration Solidarity Expense		\$15,000	
Krug Projects/Thaney/Music Fund	\$5,350	\$5,157	96%
TQUU Expense		\$300	
Sabbatical Minister Coverage		\$0	
Morter Lecture Committee	\$5,000	\$5,010	100%
Total Extra Operations	\$0	\$0	
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$1,039,279	\$1,033,462	99%
INCOME NET OF OPERATING EXPENSES	-\$158,284	-\$117,957	75%
Extraordinary Income			
Bequests	\$0	\$636,616	
Unplanned Large Gifts		\$100,000	
ERTC		\$122,484	
Gain/Loss on Investment (unrealized)	\$0	\$37,152	
EXTRAORDINARY INCOME	\$0	\$896,252	

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, 2025, First Church had two unrestricted CD's valued at \$277K in operational accounts. This money, along with cash assets of \$187K satisfies the safety net of 15% of budgeted operating expenses (\$1,039K) which equals \$156K. 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 an Associated Bank CD which holds Legacy 2024 funds (\$598K), a Brewery CU CD (\$94K) with 4.3% interest, a Self-Help CU CD (\$57.4K) with 3.82% interest, an Associated Bank CDs (\$68.7K) with 3.25% interest to hold ERTC funds and two investment accounts totaling \$21K with WWBIC at 1% and 2%. Funds at WWBIC, Self-Help CU, and UUCEF comply with our Socially Responsible Investment policy.

The Memorial Trust Fund (restricted) holds \$337K and the General Fund (unrestricted) holds \$661K.

Balance Sheet

June 30, 2025 – Total net assets were \$2,066K

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.

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.

Noreen Gilbertsen, Finance Team Chair

FUSM OPERATING BALANCE SHEET FOR FY 2024-2025

6/30/2025

ASSETS		
	June 30, 2024	June 30, 2025
CURRENT ASSETS -		
Cash	-\$6,047	\$81,180
Money Market	\$127,574	\$104,943
Other	\$3,320	\$1,000
Total Current Assets	\$124,847	\$187,123
INVESTMENTS		
Legacy 2024		\$575,576
Memorial Trust Fund - UUCEF	\$339,553	\$336,584
WWBIC	\$21,435	\$21,435
CD's	\$146,208	\$276,837
General Fund - UUCEF	\$678,634	\$661,020
Other		\$7,320
Total Investments	\$1,185,830	\$1,878,773
TOTAL ASSETS	\$1,310,678	\$2,065,896
LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accounts Payable		\$4,157
Prepaid Pledges	\$74,128	\$70,005
Apartment Security Deposit	\$2,643	\$1,944
YRUU Account & Service Trip		
Savings	\$5,305	\$5,305
27th Pay Period Accrual	\$23,884	\$25,584
Other Liabilities	\$3,055	\$1,306
Total Current Liabilities	\$109,014	\$108,302
RESTRICTED FUNDS		
Sabbatical Accrual	\$7,941	\$12,941
Morter Fund - Donor Restricted	\$58,427	\$53,417
UU the Vote	\$500	
Tom Thaney for the Arts	\$5,980	\$6,580
Memorial Trust Fund	\$339,553	\$336,584
Minister's Discretionary Fund	\$578	\$5,038
Rev Dena Internship Fund		\$18,625
Total Restricted Funds	\$412,979	\$433,185
UNRESTRICTED FUNDS		
Unrestricted Fund Balance	\$647,913	\$490,158
Net Income	-\$114,637	\$778,295
Capital Maintenance Fund	\$125,000	\$107,105
Immigration Solidarity Action Fund		\$3,700
Krug Special Programs Fund	\$127,057	\$123,399
Music Programs Fund	\$3,353	\$3,353
TQUU Fund		\$18,400
Total Unrestricted Funds	\$788,685	\$1,524,409
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE	\$1,310,678	\$2,065,896

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 through April. Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom is the staff liaison to Nom Com.

The 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, Deborah Conta, 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.

In addition to ourselves, Nominating Committee members this church year were Lisa Koneazny and Michael Pointer-Mace. 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 and operates as an independent 501(c)(3) entity administered by the Endowment Trustees. The initial Endowment Trustees appointed by the Board in January 2024 are Betty Schroeder (2026), Ron Oshima (2028), and David Becker (2030) whose terms expire on June 30 of the year indicated.

The Endowment Fund fiscal year is the calendar year, January 1 to December 31. In 2025 the Endowment Fund received \$565,277 in new contributions bringing the total cumulative contributions to \$2,578,234. The Endowment Fund made distributions of \$60,000 to FUSM in 2025.

BOARD COMMITTEE & ENDOWMENT

(Continued from page 11)

As of 31 December 2025, the Endowment Fund held assets of \$2,877,130, of which \$2,835,354 was invested in the Unitarian Universalist Common Endowment Fund and \$41,775 in Associated Bank Checking and Money Market Funds.

In the second year of the Endowment Fund the Endowment Trustees continued creating the initial operational framework around the Endowment Fund.

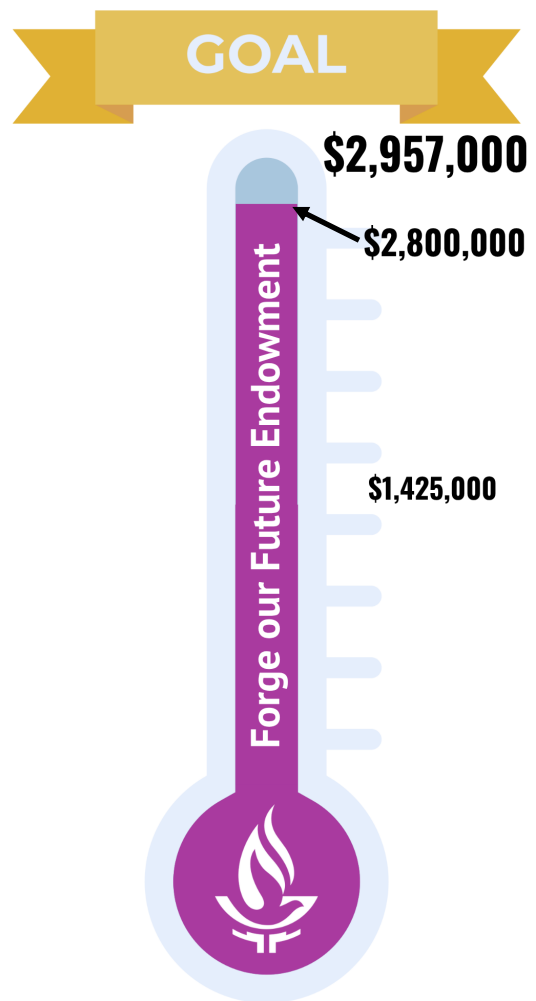
The Endowment Trustees worked with church administrators and church accountant The Giersch Group to establish independent accounting and reports for the Endowment, which will allow easier tracking of the cumulative contributions (received face value) to the Endowment Fund to be used for the “principal protection” provisions of the Trust.

This was also the first year the Endowment Trust filed federal tax forms and Wisconsin state annual reports (for calendar year 2024) as required for an independent 501 (c)(3) entity. The Trustees spent significant time working with tax preparer, Lance Gordon Tax Services, in creating, tracking, and responding to the initial Federal IRS tax filing (Form 990) and Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions annual report (Form 1952).

The Endowment Trustees wish to acknowledge and thank the church Director of Administration Mani Marquez, Office Manager Shari Wright, and Treasurer Mark Bishop for their significant efforts in support of the Endowment.

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.

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



Pledge fulfillment progress as of May 8, 2026

ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES: May 18, 2025

Board of Trustees members present: Stacy Koenen (President and Meeting Chair), Mark Chambers (Vice President), Joe Riepenhoff, Secretary and Recording Secretary), Dana Brooks, Sarah Richards and Stacey Thieme. Amy Wilbourne could not attend.

Congregation members present: > 90 in person and 25 online.

The meeting was called to order at 12:05 PM.

1. Approval of 2024 Annual Meeting Minutes

Stacy Koenen entertained a motion to amend the draft minutes to correct the surname of Terri Wiggins, incorrectly stated as Terri Lewynn, and to approve the corrected minutes from the 2024 annual meeting. Moved: Bruce Wiggins; Seconded: Janine Chambers.

Passed unanimously.

2. Remarks from Board President

Stacy Koenen described the activities of the Board over the past church year that included the search for a new assistant pastor. Thank you to the search team for their time and effort: Lynn Connolly, Ben Trubach, George Bledsoe, Dale Skaggs, and Nancy Spransy. The Board discussed allocation of funds from two generous gifts from the Nelson Kading Estate and Richard & Barbara Weiss to achieve the best use toward accomplishing our Ends. The Board allocated the gifts to provide for building maintenance and updating, modest income adjustments for staff, a sum for the Social Justice Committee and the remainder to the Forge Our Future Endowment Fund.

Thank you to retiring trustees, Sarah Richards, Joe Riepenhoff and Amy Wilbourne for their service as trustees for the past three years

3. Nominating Committee Report

On behalf of the Nominating Committee, Laura White thanked the retiring trustees who served as members of the committee: Sarah Richards, Joe Riepenhoff and Amy Wilbourne. Thank you also to Anne Schwarzkopf (formerly Alexander) for her three years of service on the Committee.

Thank you to Tom Briscoe who is retiring from his role as treasurer, which he has held for sixteen years.

The Nominating Committee was tasked with the search for a new treasurer and recommended Mark Bishop. The Board of Trustees has approved Mark Bishop to serve as our next treasure and Mark has accepted. Thank you Mark for accepting this responsibility.

The Committee nominated Deborah Conta, Kathy Donius and Andrew Whitver to serve for 3 years (2025-2028) on the Board of Trustees. The motion by Tom Briscoe, seconded by Liz Irwin Moore, to adopt that nomination and elect the nominees.

Passed unanimously.

The motion by Tom Briscoe, seconded by Liz Irwin Moore, to adopt the nomination of Connie Craig and Deb Solis and elect the nominees to serve for 3 years (2025-2028) on Nominating Committee

Passed unanimously.

4. Financial Condition Report with Q & A

The Board of Trustees thanked Tom Briscoe for his years of service as treasurer and gave him a small gift in appreciation of his long service.

In turn, Mr. Briscoe thanked Gordon Mueller, Ron Oshima, Holly Patzer, Alisha Koneazny, Laura White, and the chair Noreen Gilbertson, for their many hours of hard work and valued input.

The Finance Team and Mr. Briscoe are responsible to verify that FUSM is in compliance with Board policies 4.4 and 4.5. Mr. Briscoe reported that the church is in good financial condition, able to pay its financial obligations.

5. Endowment Trustees Report with Q & A

Dave Becker reported on the work of the Endowment Trustees in its first year of work. The Endowment Trustees were elected by the Board of Trustees (BOT), but they are not part of BOT. The first assignment of the EF trustees was to create the initial operational framework for a separate legal entity, the EF. The Endowment Fund has been registered with the I.R.S. and the State as required by law. The trustees have created separate EF trust accounts and EF contributions have been and will continue to be transferred into those accounts. The largest EF account is held by UUA Common Endowment Fund (UUCEF). All contributions to the Endowment Fund will be transferred by June, 2025 to that or other secured accounts

The Memorial Trust Fund was created by the Members in 1925. Although the Memorial Trust has been updated and modified in 1963 and 1970, it does allow the further amendment only with a vote of a minimum of 50 members by written ballot, by mail, approved by three-quarters of the Members who vote. The current balance of the Memorial TrustFund is approximately \$340,000. The Board of Trustees and the EF trustees may ask the Members to approve the merger of the Memorial Trust with the Forge Our Future Endowment Fund. If so, Members will learn about the possible merger and be asked to approve or reject the idea in the future.

6. Stewardship Report with Q & A

Adam Zaiger, in his first year as captain of the pledge team reported that following this year's pledge drive, "Fan the Flame", was successful and we thank everyone who participated. The goal as 3.5% increase in pledges, but the drive has achieved approximately a 3% increase over last year. As of May 12, 2025, 97% of members have pledged \$768,000 with additional pledges expected.

Thank you to the pledge team: Pat Hidson, Mark Miller, Mark Richards, Bizzy Schultz, Kathy Donius, who has been a sort of informal chair of the pledge team, and of course Reverend Jennifer.

Thank you also to our inspirational speakers, Bob Balderson, Mark Chambers, Alexis Fielek, Rollie Hanson, Kathy Rivera, and Dave Umhoefer, Fred Gutierrez, Kristi Davis, and Miles Pointer Mace, for their hard work during this campaign. Thank you to everyone in the congregation who has contributed and worked so diligently for the church fundraiser this year.

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

In this second year of our new religious education model, we continue to build on those new models to match the needs of the congregation, the children of all ages and their families.

Youth now remain with the congregation in the sanctuary for about 1/3 of the service and this allows them to experience many of the core components of worshipping with our faith community as well as the multi-generational services like the one we had today.

The RE program is supported by dedicated staff: Fiona Higgins as our RE assistant and membership assistant, and Mariah and Cecilia Grashok in the nursery and the preschool. Without our volunteers we would be unable to provide the children with an appropriate individual experience. Thank you volunteers.

8. Remarks from the Associate Minister Rev. Dena McPhetres

It has been a pleasure to serve the congregation as your associate minister for the past sixteen years. Ministry at First Church is a team sport that engages all the members who participate in the many projects and duties on a daily basis as committee members, ushers, and other volunteers, as well as, of course, the staff. Although I will be in the vicinity, I will not be involved in activities for the next year. I will miss you all.

9. Minister Emerita

Stacy Koenen reported that the Trustees have recommended that the Congregation grant Rev. Dena McPhetres emerita status to recognize her long and meritorious service to the Congregation. Emerita status will give her the right to vote at the UU Assembly if she is in fellowship with the UUA. Stacy Koenen moved and Mark Chambers seconded the motion to grant emerita status to Rev. McPhetres.

Passed unanimously.

10. Remarks from the Senior Minister Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

This has been a year of transition. In many ways, it has been a frightening time. We have helped each other throughout the stress and we have still managed to fight fascism together. The mission of this congregation has been so clear during this time. We care for one another, we have been showing up for one another, we've been making a point to nurture each other's spirits as well as lean into our own spiritual practices to make it through this time.

We've been staying awake, staying smart about it, getting into the strategy, but also getting into the streets. Taking care of children, supporting others in community and showing up for demonstrations are all individually fighting for democracy. Thank you to the members who participate in our teams, committees, and support groups. Thank you to all members and staff who provide support and technical services. We will keep fighting the good fight together.

11. New Business and Comments from the Congregation with Q & A.

B.J. Ermenc suggested that the word "love" be added to our mission statement, possibly at the end: "We gather to nurture the spirit, engage the mind and inspire action with love." Also everyone needs to recognize the threats that people with disabilities face under the current administration. It would be helpful if there were a committee to raise awareness about the hardships and micro-aggressions that people with disabilities suffer.

Christian Becker described the significant contributions made by Worship Associates each year.

At the suggestion of Dale Skaggs, those able in the Congregation stood while all applauded the work performed by the Senior Minister throughout the years.

12. Motion to adjourn the 2026 Annual Meeting.

Moved: Dale Skaggs. Seconded: Ryan Pawlowski

Passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:35 pm.

2025 - 2026 CHURCH LEADERSHIP

CONGREGATION OFFICERS

PRESIDENT
Mark Chambers

VICE PRESIDENT
Ryan Pawlowski

SECRETARY
Kathy Donius

TREASURER
Mark Bishop

BOARD MEMBERS

Dana Brooks (2023-26)
Deborah Conta (2025-28)
Mark Chambers (2024-27)
Kathy Donius (2025-28)
Sarah Fowles (2026-28)
Elizabeth Hayes (2024-27)
Ryan Pawlowski (2024-27)
Stacy Koenen (2023-2026)
Stacey Thieme (2023-2026)

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

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

TEAMS, MINISTRIES, AND GROUPS

ADULT FAITH FORMATION
Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

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
Manni Marquez, Dir. of Admin
Russ Drewry
Keith Anderson
Ben Trubach

CHANCEL CHOIR
Tristan Strelitzer, Choral Dir.

CHILDREN'S FAITH FORMATION
Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson
Megan Smith

CHRONOLOGICALLY GIFTED
Juliet Hills
Barbara Collignon

DENOMINATIONAL AFFAIRS
Bruce Wiggins
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

FEAST FOR FUNDS
Scot Henry

FINANCE
Noreen Gilbertsen
Jean Johnson/Manni Marquez

FORUM
Mark Mueller

GALLERY
Jeff Percy
Alisha Koneazny

HERITAGE SOCIETY
Lisa Koneazny

HISTORY/ARCHIVES
Linda Presto
Jean Johnson,/Manni Marquez

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)
Allan Ries
Shari Wright, Office Manager

MORTER LECTURE
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

PAGAN GROUP
Nick DaVia
Patricia Witt

**PASTORAL CARE ASSOCIATES
COORDINATOR**
Diane Horne

**PASTORAL CARE PROVIDERS
COORDINATOR**
Laura White

PERSONNEL
Amanda Panciera
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

PLEDGE DRIVE
Adam Zaiger
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom
Shari Wright, Office Manager

POETRY GROUP
Diane Horne
Lila Daut

PULPIT GUEST
Rev. Chris Long

SHAWL MINISTRY
Patti Agacki
Connie Georgenson

SUNDAY FLOWERS
Shari Wright, Office Mgr.

**SWANS (Seasoned Women Are
Naturally Social)**
Barbara Collignon

THEME CIRCLES

Rev. Chris Long
Diane Horne
Nancy Sprancy

USHERS

Fiona Higgins, Faith Formation Asst.
Jeanne Kowalski
Ben Trubach

UU MEN'S GROUP

Andy Boddyspargo
Michael Pointer Mace

UU WELLSPRING

Diane Horne
Laurie Foss

WELCOME & BELONGING

Rev. Chris Long
Dave Hoover
Laurie Petersen
Ben Trubach

WORSHIP ASSOCIATES

Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom
Amanda Panciera
Austin Pawlowski

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

JUSTICE SINGERS

Tristan Strelitzer
Desiree Pointer Mace
Anne Hefter
Alexis Fielek

MICAH (Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope)

Pat McFarland
Bob Monahan

SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL

Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom
Bob Monahan
Bruce Wiggins

BLACK LIVES MATTER 2 WI UUs

George Bledsoe

DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Pete Koneazny
Pat McFarland
Juanita Mast

EARTH JUSTICE MINISTRY

Barbara Leigh
Bruce Wiggins
Terry Wiggins
Ted Kraig
Jenny Abel

IMMIGRANT SOLIDARITY & ACTION

Michael Pointer Mace
Ann Ritchey

SHARE THE PLATE

Bob Monahan
Nancy Cross Dunham

TQ4UU

Lisa Larson

WUUSAN

Juanita Mast

OTHER LEADERS

THEME CIRCLE FACILITATORS:

Rev. Chris Long

Marilyn Blackmon
Nancy Cross Dunham
Laurie Foss
Kari Gunderson
Diane Horne
Patricia McFarland
Vashti McCollum
Nancy Pajewski
Nancy Sprancy
Andrew Whitver

PASTORAL CARE ASSOCIATES:

Rev. Chris Long

Sue Austin
Vince Bushell
Deborah Conta
Dennis Conta
Fred Gutierrez
Pete Hill
Diane Horne
Shauna Leinbach
Elizabeth Martorell
Ann Ritchey
Jan Van Schaik

2025-2026 Sermon Schedule

JUNE 1

“Gratitude Can Free Us”
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom
Rev. Dena McPhetres
Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

JUNE 8

“Pride As Liberation”
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

JUNE 15

“Working for Collective Liberation”
Rev. Marilyn Miller
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

JUNE 22

Worship with UUs Around the Country!
Livestreamed from General Assembly

JUNE 29

“Everything Is Holy Now”
Rev. Suzelle Lynch

JULY 6

“Life Believing In Itself”
Rev. Mark Richards

JULY 13

“A Battle of Imagination”
Rev. Julica Hermann de la Fuente

JULY 20

“What Our Tales Tell About Us”
Rev. Kelly Asprooth-Jackson

JULY 27

“Blessing as Protection”
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

AUGUST 3

“Small Is All”
Rev. Hannah Roberts Villnave

AUGUST 10

“The Road Ahead”
Dale Skaggs, Member

AUGUST 17

“Pointless Piety or Purposeful Practices?”
Rev. Jim Foti, Pulpit Guest

AUGUST 24

“Beyond Positivity and Kindness”
Pardeep Singh Kaleka

AUGUST 31

“Coming Home”
Rev. Beth Monhollen

SEPTEMBER 7

“Building Belonging: the Home of Resistance”
Ingathering Sunday
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

SEPTEMBER 14

“We Belong to the Water”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

SEPTEMBER 21

“Take Me to the Alley: Belonging as Spiritual Practice”
The Rev. Chris Long

SEPTEMBER 28

“Unlocking the Heart”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom
James Crews, Poet and Irma Morter
Lecturer

OCTOBER 5

“Empathy Teaches the Truth”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

OCTOBER 12

“Balancing Action and Presence”
The Rev. Chris Long

OCTOBER 19

“Compassion Changes Things”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

OCTOBER 26

“Honoring Our Beloved Dead”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

NOVEMBER 2

“Imagining Abolition”
Rev. Dr. Michael Tino

NOVEMBER 9

“The Story Has Not Ended”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

NOVEMBER 16

“Complicated Gratitude”
The Rev. Chris Long

NOVEMBER 23

“Antidote for the Heart”
The Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

NOVEMBER 30

“Until We Are All Free”
Rev. Allison Farnum

DECEMBER 7

“Choosing Hope”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

DECEMBER 14

“Hope in the Dark”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

DECEMBER 17

Solstice Vespers: Songs to Light a Winter's Night
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom
Katie Dahl, Anne Heaton, & Jenny Bienemann, Guest Musicians

DECEMBER 21

“Hope of the Holidays”
Holiday Pageant
Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

DECEMBER 24

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT

SERVICES

The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom
The Rev. Chris Long
The Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

DECEMBER 28

Kwanzaa 2025: The Anatomy of Hope
Rev. Chris Long

2025-2026 Sermon Schedule

JANUARY 4

“Choose Your Own Adventure”
Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

JANUARY 11

“Resistance and Surrender Dance”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

JANUARY 18

“Resistance Recipes”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

JANUARY 25

“Small But Mighty”
Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

FEBRUARY 1

“Universalist Resilience”
The Rev. Erik David Carlson, Pulpit
Guest

FEBRUARY 8

“How Do I Know I Belong?”
The Rev. Dena McPhetres

FEBRUARY 15

“When You’re Going Through Hell, Keep
Going”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

FEBRUARY 22

“Fortifying Our Resilience”
The Rev. Chris Long

MARCH 1

“Attention to Relationship”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

MARCH 8

“Stop Scrolling and Lock In”
Annual Youth Service
Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

MARCH 15

“Is It ADHD or Is It Existence?”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

MARCH 22

“Do You See What I See: Faithful Re-
sponses to Trauma”
The Rev. Chris Long

MARCH 29

“Let the Infinite Hold”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

APRIL 5

“Call Me By My New Name”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

APRIL 12

“Unitarian Universalism: Is Healing
Possible”
The Rev. Chris Long

APRIL 19

“2050 Is Calling”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

APRIL 26

“God Is Change, Shape God”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

MAY 3

“Curioser and Curioser”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

MAY 10

“I Wonder...”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

MAY 17

“Faith Formation Sunday”
The Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

MAY 24

“A Drink from the Well of UU Well-
spring”
Diane Horne, Member

MAY 31

“Where Do We Come From?”
The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

Wheel of Life

May 10, 2025 - May 14, 2026

Deaths

Robert Munnecke
Dan Haislmaier
Jack Forbes Wilson
Doug Skinner
Don Weimer

Weddings

Ryan Pawlowski and Austin Baldwin
Anne Hefter and Alexis Feilek
Andrew Whitver and Kevin Brannaman

New Members

Fall 2025

Kathy Abbott
Clinton Althaus
Jean Casey
Dale Durrent
Thomas Moran
Sue Murphy
Tina Nap
Alex Rash
Matthew Rivers
Adam Veasman
Sara Westberg

Winter 2025

Sam Friedland
Jessica Goodman-
Schutz
Indiana Strombom

Spring 2025

John Bailliekova
Erin Hoekstra
Scott Hall
Heather Leigh
Janet Linke
Tom LoGuidice
Mary Stone
Michael Thorson

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
Chris Linder
Bruce & Terry Wiggins
Jacki Zandi

Staff Reports

MINISTRY

SENIOR MINISTER

Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

Dear First Church,

We have been in a season of transitions this year at First Church, welcoming Rev. Chris Long as our Acting Assistant Minister in July, saying goodbye to our long-serving Director of Administration Jean Johnson in January, and welcoming our new Director of Administration Manni Marquez in December. We've had a vibrant worship life with high attendance and lots of visitors, and a very engaged social justice life in the congregation.

WORSHIP

Our 2025 -2026 worship year was meaningful and bustling! Members consistently share that worship nourishes their spirits and uplifts them in the struggles of life. We have moved into a rhythm of about 1/3 of worship attendance online, and 2/3rds in person. Our worship attendance average to date is 350 / 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. This is about 30 more people / Sunday than last year. We began the church year averaging about 100 more people / Sunday than last year.

The powerful storytelling from our Worship Associates resulted in one of the highest number of applications for our Worship Associate program. I was able to accept half of the people who applied for the program this year, and I expanded the program to do so.

The Irma Morter Lecture team joyfully welcomed famous poet James Crews to First Church as our Irma Morter Lecturer on Saturday, September 27, 2:00 – 3:30pm, and as a pulpit guest on Sunday morning September 28. There was also an all-ages poetry workshop from 1-2pm on Sunday September 28, where several heart-felt and moving poems to Jack Forbes Wilson were shared. Around 400 people experienced some aspect of the James Crews Irma Morter Lecture series.

STAFF

The big story of the 2025 – 2026 church year is staff transitions. We joyfully welcomed Rev. Chris Long to our staff team in August of this church year as our Acting Assistant Minister. Rev. Chris is leading our Pastoral Care,

Welcome and Belonging, and Summer Services areas of church life. Also in August, Jean Johnson announced her retirement. We formed a Search Team in the fall, which with great joy hired Manni Marquez as our new Director of Administration. Manni began work in Dec, training in the position with Jean, and stepped into the role on his own in Jan. Jean concluded her 27 years of service to the church in Jan of 2026, and we celebrated her retirement at a party in February.

The three ministers, Fiona Higgins, Faith Formation and Membership Assistant, and Shari Wright, Office Manager, traveled to Fort Collins, CO, Nov 1-5 to join 3 other large congregations on a learning trip to Foothills UU Church. Foothills has fewer members than we do (550), but a higher average Sunday attendance (500), so we went to learn from their success. The overarching takeaway was their focus on getting “seekers” (new people who have attended 3 times in 3 months) connected to a small group in church. There are many details around how to track attendance and communicate with these folks, but it is a place of potential growth for us. We also developed lateral staff relationships between our staff members and folks at Foothills, Whitebear UU, and Arlington UU.

We also did a fair amount of responsibility restructuring within the existing staff team. After two turnovers in our Facilities Manager position this year, we decided to try a different approach. In March, we began a three-month trial of folding the Facilities Manager position into the Director of Administration position, and moving more communications work into the Office Manager position. Office Manager Shari is now managing the UUMilwaukee.org website and posting our communications on Facebook and Instagram. Also, excitingly, Shari is taking over as staff lead of the Stewardship Team, with me stepping down to just being a working member of that team. She has been leading the Team in practice throughout the 2025-26 church year with great success, and we made that leadership official this spring. Fiona Higgins is taking on more leadership in membership. Our Facilities Maintenance Tech, Vinnie Hack, resigned in March, after a little more than a year on staff (Dec '24), and we are in search for a new hire.

In 2027, we will be celebrating 20 years of Alissa's service to the church by giving her a sabbatical. She will be gone from mid-Feb 2027 through June of 2027, and Tris-

Staff Reports

tan and Teresa will be covering the music during this period, along with the band. This is an exciting opportunity for them to explore more music leadership and management. We are so grateful to Alissa for her 20 years of service, and are glad our sabbatical funding plan can provide this opportunity for rest and renewal.

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board will report more on this themselves, but it was an exciting year supporting their work to develop new Ends. After many online and in person listening sessions with the congregation, the Board drafted three new Ends which they will share with the congregation at the annual meeting. They will receive feedback from you on these Ends, and work over the summer to share a final draft with the congregation in the fall of 2026. These new Ends will guide our shared ministry together for the next 5-7 years. Great work! Additionally, the Board has been hard at work on our Memorial Trust Fund and Endowment, and examining various capital projects, including air conditioning, an integrated fire alarm system, and solar panels.

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 very active this year focusing on its priority of "Successfully turning the tide towards livable future & creating democracy," developed at a Sept 14 retreat.

Our congregation was very involved in learning about authoritarianism and how to resist it. In the fall around 100 of our people, plus folks from other congregations, participated in an Organizing Revival Training led by Rev. Jennifer and MICAH's Lead Organizer, Hannah Freeman, about how authoritarianism works and how movements for democracy have succeeded here and around the world. On January 17, about 300 people attended a Non-Violent Civil Resistance

training at First Church facilitated by Rev. Jennifer and Hannah Freeman. About 100 people were from First Church, ~50 from MICAH, and the other ~150 were unaffiliated. Rev. Jennifer and Hannah Freeman of MICAH shared the Civil Resistance training with the NAACP on Saturday, February 21. Rev. Jennifer became Chair of MICAH's Religious Leaders Caucus in November 2025.

Rev. Jennifer traveled to Minneapolis on Jan 22, 2026, to answer the call from MARCH, a Minneapolis-based interfaith coalition, to support the city and its people in resisting authoritarianism, and attacks on immigrants, people of color, and anyone resisting. On Friday, January 23, Rev. Jennifer went on a pilgrimage with a busload of ministers from George Floyd square to the memorial for Renee Good. Then on Saturday, Jan 24, she served as a chaplain to the people in Minneapolis grieving the murder of Alex Pretti that morning. Our siblings and kin in the Twin Cities were incredibly grateful for the solidarity and support of people all over the country, but it meant a lot for Wisconsin and Minnesota to be together in this time of grief and outrage. So many Minnesotans told me about their connections to Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and our church. It meant everything that we were there, and with tears in their eyes they promised to show up here when it is our turn to hold the line for democracy, justice, and human decency.

The Social Justice Council voted unanimously to stand in solidarity with a Milwaukee Common Council resolution that calls for the immediate release of Salah Sarsour, the President of the Islamic Society of Milwaukee, and insists on his right to due process. While this resolution does not secure Salah's release, it is an important step recognizing Unitarian Universalism's value of honoring the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. Rev. Jennifer and a number of the SJC members attended the April 2 press conference about Salah's detention.

Immigration Solidarity Action Team led a vigil for the jury selection for Judge Hannah Dugan with a coalition of organizations on December 11, 2025. Our Solidarity Singers sang, Team leader Michael Pointer Mace spoke, and Rev. Jennifer prayed. We were featured on WISN News 12 that evening, and were in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel two days in a row. In March, the Social Justice Council sponsored a post-card writing to the Common Council and Mayor Johnson to pass the ICE Out MKE legislative package,

Staff Reports

with postcard writing during coffee hour March 8 and 15 generating about 400 postcards. The legislative package passed unanimously, and Common Council members recognized the effect of our postcards.

PLEDGE TEAM

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

Our Pledge Drive theme this year was “Rooting, Rising, Thriving.” Members were asked to reflect on the UU values, faith, and how we become stronger. Pat Hidson continues to give us creative projects to participate in our theme. She created mini-trees with tree branches and tree-dwelling ornaments to write on and adorn the tree.

The Pledge Team set out with a goal of raising \$1,000,000, which would fully fund our annual operating budget. This year, instead of asking all members to increase their pledges by a percentage, we did more targeted ask based on capacity, engagement, and the completion of Forge Our Future endowment pledges. As of May 8, 2026, we have received \$824,800 of pledges in hand, with a projected total pledge of \$830,000 once all the pledges have been turned in. This is an 8% increase from the 2024 – 2025 church year’s pledge income. Much of this increase is due to the generous increases from our Steward of the Chalice members (see the group description and members below.)

We also established a new group of about 40 households called “Stewards of the Chalice.” This group is comprised of our top financial donors, those who have pledged \$5000/year or more to the annual operating pledge budget. The purpose of the group is to learn from the top financial stewards of our church about what is working with stewardship and what we could do better. We hosted the first Stewards of the Chalice event with a listening session. We hope our Stewards of the Chalice will work with us to encourage greater generosity and stewardship throughout the congregation, and we look forward to continuing to learn from them.

The pledge team decided to rename the group to the Stewardship Team and focus on an improved stewardship visits. The goal of stewardship is to build deeper relationships

and overall engagement in the stewardship of the church, with stewardship visits focusing on that overall goal rather than just a financial ask. The team will meet more often throughout the church year.

Office Manager Shari Wright functionally operated as our staff team lead this church year, and led many of the successful innovations towards greater stewardship. We decided to make it official, and Shari will lead the Stewardship Team, with Rev. Jennifer participating as a member of the team.

STEWARDS OF THE CHALICE MEMBERS

Erik Alexander	Liz Irwin Moore
Keith Anderson	Allen Jacobson
Paula Anderson	Jeremy Koenen
Katherine Arndt	Stacy Koenen
Laurie Baker	Paul Kosidowski
Bob Balderson	Jeanne Kowalski
Dave Becker	Lynda Lambert
Janet Boles	Tom LeBel
Susan Borri	Sally Lewis
Rod Botts	Mark Miller
Cheri Briscoe	Amy Monahan
Tom Briscoe	Bob Monahan
Tess Burkart	Bob Moore
Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson	Gordon Mueller
Erik David Carlson	Trish Mueller
Richard Claxton	Michelle Naples
Jane Cliff	Nancy Pajewski
Lila Daut	Mike Paulson
Kathy Donius	Kathy Rivera
Jill Erickson	Richard Schreiner
Jerry Fredrickson	Duane Schultz
Bill Frink	Kyra Seely
Noreen Gilbertsen	Dale Skaggs
Alison Graf	Lynde Uihlein
Sue Haislmaier	Melinda Vernon
Julie Hamrick	Bruce Wiggins
Jeff Hansen	Terry Wiggins
Joan Hansen	Patricia Witt
Rollie Hanson	Adam Zaiger
Tom Hester	Jessica Zaiger
Mary Houseman	Dawn Zandt
Beau Humphries	John Zandt
Wendy Humphries	

Staff Reports

ACTING ASSISTANT MINISTER

Rev. Chris Long

Becoming a part of the First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee staff on August 1, 2025, as the Acting Assistant Minister has been a highlight of my ministerial journey for which I am eternally grateful. My gratitude extends to Reverend Jennifer Norstrom, the Search Committee which selected me, the Board, the Staff and all of you for the welcome I have received, the affirmation of my skills and gifts for this position and the grace shown as I continue to learn with and from all of you as we work to embody the mission of First Church, **“To nurture the spirit, engage the mind and inspire action”**.

I would be remiss to not expressly thank Rev. Jennifer Norstrom for her unwavering training, guidance and support in every aspect of my portfolio thus far for which I am truly grateful.

Additionally, one of the many highlights of my time here has been the ability to have time to have tea, coffee and meals with many of you to get to know each other a bit better and to better understand why so many of you truly love First Church for the thriving community, lively worship services, and justice work.

The following is a report which captures some highlights from areas within my portfolio during the 2025 – 2026 Church Year. Of particular note, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to all of the volunteers that have positively supported the work of my Ministry. I would also like to uplift the extra support given by the coordinators, chairs and co-chairs of each team throughout the areas of my portfolio. Without their ongoing, unwavering support none of this sacred work would have been possible. The portfolio areas “Under My Care” are as follows:

PASTORAL CARE ASSOCIATES

Lynn Connolly was the coordinator of the Pastoral Care Associates team for the last three years. In January 2026, she decided to step away from this role and Diane Horne agreed to step into the position after extensive support and training by Lynn. With Diane as our PCA coordinator, we have eight other Pastoral Care Associates. The team met monthly, with each maintaining a sustainable case load of

members and friends. We currently have twenty-five active contacts amongst the PCAs, who provide confidential, deep listening support through life’s blessings and travails. During our monthly meetings, training was provided to continue to enhance our active listening techniques and best support members and friends of the church. Opportunities for continued support of our PCAs were provided in confidential debriefing of case studies to better equip members of the team.

PASTORAL CARE PROVIDERS

Laura White continues to coordinate our Pastoral Care Providers team. We continue to maintain a robust list of over twenty-five members who are willing to provide support to other members and friends who may be experiencing a need for occasional meals, rides to and from needed appointments, and to the grocery store.

THE SHAWL MINISTRY

Juliet Hills, coordinator of our Shawl Ministry and a dedicated group of fabric artists continue to create shawls, lap coverings and blankets, crafted for babies, children, youth and adults. These treasures are created for members and friends of First Church that may be experiencing difficult times, hospitalization, or a loss of any kind. If you know of anyone who could use the comfort of one of these beautifully crafted items, please reach out to me and I will pass one along.

MEMBERSHIP

Fiona Higgins, The Faith Formation and Membership Assistant, and Shari Wright, Office Manager, have been instrumental to my transition into this position. Specifically, they have provided technical and administrative support with necessary details in working to understand the infrastructure of our Membership ministry and the necessary data systems to maintain necessary documentation.

WELCOME & BELONGING TEAM

Mariah Kauder and Ben Trubach have chaired our Welcome and Belonging Team this year. Jeanne Kowalski has also gone above and beyond in supporting the Welcome and Belonging Team in countless ways. They, along with five other dedicated volunteers, form the Welcome and Belonging Team. Last fall, we held a retreat to get to know each other a bit more and to continue to define the role of the Welcome and Belonging Team in our Journey to Member-

Staff Reports

ship program. The team met monthly to clarify the support needed for our three Journey to Membership Sessions held this Church Year. In January 2026, the team decided to form two teams: The Welcome Team and the Belonging Team. The Welcome Team continued to clarify the roles of Greeter and Ushers and to ensure first-time visitor and long-time members always feel welcome here at First Church. The Belonging Team has come together to create ongoing activities to stay connected to members here for three months, six months and at the one-year anniversary as a member. There will be potluck pizza party celebration on May 19, 2026 to host these newer members.

THEME CIRCLES

Diane Horne and Nancy Sprancy were co-chairs of our Theme Circles for the year. For Theme Circles, we have 8 circles this year: three are affinity groups (parents, writers, LGBTQ+) and five are standard. We have 14 facilitators and 60 participants. The eight Theme Circles met monthly with groups continuing to affirm the importance of having this critical ministry within the life of the Church. Nancy has decided to step away from chairing the group. Diane and I are working to select another co-chair from within the groups that exist.

BEING UU: BEING MALE

The co-chairs of “Being UU: Being Male”, Andrew Boddy Spargo and Tony Panciera, worked tirelessly to maintain the energy to continue this group which started during the 2024 – 2025 Church Year. The stated intentions for this group have been to provide an ‘open space for dialogue, connection, reflection and community’ for members and friends of the Church who identify as male (cisgender, transgender, gender non-conforming). The group continued to meet the first Sunday of each month after the second service from 12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. where an average of 20 males were present over a potluck lunch. The group discussed a variety of topics including cultivating authentic connections, the importance of honoring chosen pronouns, disrupting sexism, and parenting today. They also held their first Annual Retreat on April 4, 2026.

In deep UU Faith, JOY, sustainability and love,

Reverend Chris Long
Your Acting Assistant Minister

ADMINISTRATION

DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION

Manni Marquez

As I was coming on board to the FUSM family in early December 2025, no one said taking over for an institutional staff member of 27 years, Jean Johnson, was going to be easy. However, I have been welcomed and supported since my first day. It’s been half a year of a wonderful experience working with great people and being part of an amazing organization with an impactful social justice presence in the community.

I am a direct report of our Senior Minister, and I oversee all the Church’s administrative functions which include financial management, human resources management, communications, vendor negotiations and facilities management. No one does this type of work alone. I have a great team that I supervise, and they contribute to the success of all these fields. I currently supervise the church’s Office Manager, Facilities Technician, and Facilities Assistant.

Here are some highlights of the year:

OFFICE/ADMIN HIGHLIGHT

Our Office Manager, Shari Wright, streamlines our operations for maximum efficiency. She leads our technology integration and IT management, all while managing our pledge contribution accounts and event logistics. Shari also plays a key role in our outreach, co-managing publications and communications.

This year, Shari has worked hard to advance the work of the Stewardship Team and the pledge drive. She coordinated the mailing of over 400 pledge ask letters with the brochures and pledge card. It was a successful endeavor.

Another vital project Shari undertook was managing The Memorial Trust Fund (MTF) voting ballots for the proposal to move the MTF to the Endowment Fund. With help from our facilities assistant a total of 600 church members were sent voting ballots with return envelopes.

Shari is also the staff lead on the IT team. This year, the team finalized the church Data Management policy and submitted it for Board approval. Once the policy is approved, the IT team will begin work on new policies regard-

Staff Reports

ing data breach contingency plans. In the summer the IT team will review the process of inventorying and managing our data.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Led by Office Manager Shari Wright and Chair Allan Ries, the IT Team, including Steve Culver, Laurie Foss, and Jeremy Koenen, oversees IT strategy and governance. The group meets monthly to review network performance, security, and infrastructure upgrades. In partnership with TSR Managed Services, the team ensures robust technical support and system reliability.

During the 2025-26 period, we significantly increased bandwidth by installing a new internet connection via the adjacent apartment buildings. We also completed all organization computers' migration to Windows 11. These hardware and software updates allowed for the implementation of AutoElevate, a tool that enhances security, streamlines remote support, and automates local backups to protect against cyber threats. This increases TRS' ability to enhance security and control features for our systems.

We have modernized our church communications by upgrading to a high-definition VoIP phone system. By retiring our outdated phone system hardware, which frequently suffered from poor audio quality and connection issues, we now enjoy superior clarity and expanded features. This investment ensures our staff remains accessible and better equipped to support the needs of our congregation and community.

FACILITIES HIGHLIGHTS

Following the resignation of Facilities Manager Ken Liddell, and an extensive search for a successor, we have shifted our approach to fill this position. In coordination with the Senior Minister, I have stepped into the role under a strategic short-term plan. To ensure this is a sustainable long-term solution for this historically challenging position, we have established formal check-ins at 45 and 90 days to evaluate the workload and operational impact.

This year, the Building and Grounds Committee vetted several major proposals, including sanctuary or common room air conditioning, a comprehensive fire alarm system, and an expansion of our solar power grid. Each project underwent a rigorous feasibility study and operational impact analysis, supported by multiple competitive bids. After meeting with various vendors and comparing proposals, the committee has submitted its formal recommendations to the Board for

a final vote.

During our recent internet upgrade, we discovered significant damage to the apartment building's roof flashing. This deterioration had created a large opening, compromising the structural integrity of an attached brick wall. As one of my first major initiatives as Facilities Manager, I secured a competitive bid from a reputable contractor and worked with the Board to expedite the repair. I am pleased to report that the work will be completed by the time this annual report is published.

Comprised of Russ Drewry, Ben Trubach, Keith Anderson, and myself, the Building and Grounds Committee is dedicated to the stewardship and preservation of our campus. Our work is guided by our Ends Statements and core principles, alongside a comprehensive 2022 condition report from Graef-USA Inc. This strategic document assesses the church and apartment buildings, detailing the projected lifespan and replacement costs for our critical infrastructure, internal systems, and structural components.

FINANCE OPERATIONS HIGHLIGHTS

This is my first year, or half year to be technical, at the First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee (FUSM) as the director of administration. I would like to give kudos to my predecessor Jean Johnson who postponed her retirement to train me and ensured that finance operations would have a smooth transition. Even after retirement Jean has graciously been available for questions and troubleshooting when needed. Thank you, Jean!

I am deeply grateful for the warm welcome and abundant support I have received since stepping into this new role. The encouragement from our church members, staff, the Board, and the Finance Committee has been invaluable. I want to extend a special thanks to our finance team, a remarkably knowledgeable group led by Chairperson Noreen Gilbertsen for their patience and guidance as I continue to master our financial reporting and operational processes.

In collaboration with Office Manager Shari Wright and our external bookkeeping firm, I ensure delivery of accurate monthly financial statements and pledge fulfillment reports. Partnering with the Finance Team, we provide the Board of Trustees with comprehensive quarterly updates. In addition, it has been quite an experience to help lead and be a part of this year's annual budget development process, which includes maintaining a close watch on our primary revenue stream: contributions. I am pleased to report that

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operating pledge payments have remained strong throughout the year. Thank you!

Another highlight this year is the implementation of a corporate credit card program. Issued to select staff, these cards facilitate efficient purchasing for church supplies, professional services, and development opportunities. This new system allows for superior tracking of expenses and digital receipt management. We remain committed to identifying further opportunities to modernize and strengthen our financial workflows.

My first year with First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee (FUSM) has been both challenging and deeply rewarding. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve this congregation and community, and I look forward to the years ahead. While this church has a storied history of milestones reaching back to the 1800s, I truly believe we are on the threshold of our best chapters yet. I am thrilled to be part of this journey and the bright future we are building together.

Manni Marquez
Director of Administration

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..

CHANCEL CHOIR

Our Chancel Choir continues to grow! Two special choral events this year included the Interfaith Thanksgiving service with North Shore Presbyterian and Congregation Shalom, as well as a combined choir with Unitarian Universalist Church West.

CHORAL SCHOLARS

We have had one soprano choral scholar participate in Chancel Choir this church year. We plan to hire at least one choral scholar next church year.

MKE JUSTICE SINGERS

Social Justice singing really took off this year! Following the Nonviolent Resistance training on MLK weekend, First Church served as a host and incubator for MKE Justice Singers. This interfaith group is co-led by Tristan Strelitzer, church members Desiree Pointer Mace, Alexis Fielek and Anne Hefter, along with other community leaders.

HOUSE BAND

The House Band continues to contribute musical energy and inspiration to many Sunday services. As band member Elizabeth Hayes moves out of state, we thank her for sharing her gifts with us for so many years.

AUDIO

Alissa Rhode supervised an audio upgrade to Max Otto Hall this winter. 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

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FAITH FORMATION

MINISTER OF FAITH FORMATION

Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

OVERVIEW

First Church continues to grow and deepen our faith formation model, now in its third year. This year we focused on building belonging, compassion, resilience, and mindfulness into our Sunday sessions, weaving our UU values through every aspect of programming. The faith formation program features Fiona Higgins (F.F. Assistant), Mariah Groshek (Pre-School Coordinator) Analisse Moriarty and EmmaLynn Catalan (Nursery Caregivers), who provide attentive care on Sundays and supplemental care for church events. Our All-Ages circle time and theme-based choice model for elementary children continues, co-led by staff and volunteers, alongside a growing Youth Group. Most Sundays, our children and youth remain with the congregation for a portion of Sunday services, experiencing core components of our worshipping community (chalice lighting, music, story, meditation, and welcoming) before processing to the lower level for continuous faith formation.

I lead circle time most Sundays, which includes our chalice lighting, land acknowledgment, Indigenous people's learning, and exploration of the monthly theme through wonder box, singing, or group games. Children then choose between UU Play and UU Maker Space, and throughout the year we gather for All-Ages Faith Formation for social justice projects like sandwich making, celebrations like our Halloween Party, and preparation for upcoming services. This choice-based model continues to empower our children to select what best suits their needs, allows for age-integrated learning, and lets our staff and volunteers stay focused on relationship building. Fiona Higgins has been invaluable as our Faith Formation Assistant, managing everything from materials and volunteer coordination to running the Mystery Friends program and delivering holiday gifts. I am grateful for her partnership in this layered work.

Additional initiatives of our faith formation program include maintaining our check-in attendance system, worship activity bags, offering Time for All Ages in worship, tracking new children, welcoming new families, creating

the F.F. Weekly Updates, and scheduling volunteers each week. We experienced growth in faith formation during regular attendance this year, though we continue to need more steady volunteer support. This year also involved intentional preparation for my sabbatical, which begins May 18 and runs through July 31, 2026, and I am confident that the program is in capable, loving hands.

MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Vision: The faith formation 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. 2023-24

Mission: Children's Faith Formation Ministry Team's mission is to nurture spiritual growth by engaging and inspiring our children, youth, families, and volunteers. ~Rev. 2017-18 2020-21 2023-24

Goal: The Children's Faith Formation Team's 25-26 goal is to welcome, connect, and support families and volunteers in our inspired Faith Formation program. We will focus on inclusivity and the diversity of our children, honoring flexibility to accommodate every family's needs, motivating volunteers, and creating a sustainable Faith Formation program.

The Children's Faith Formation Team met monthly throughout this year to plan, support, and work together in creating events and programming. The CFF team includes: Rev. Kimberle, Fiona Higgins, Megan Smith, Andrew Boddyspargo, Suzie Considine, Tammy Hilgemann, Adam Zaiger, and Anna Strelitzer. This team organized the Halloween Party, bravely led Faith Formation on November 2 while Fiona and I were on a learning trip to Fort Collins, Colorado, hosted a multigenerational Game Night that welcomed approximately 40-50 people of all ages, and formed a Safety Policy Task Force to review and update all faith formation safety policies. I am deeply grateful for their belief, support, and dedication; they are our most committed volunteers and ambassadors for faith formation at First Church.

HIGHLIGHTS IN FAITH FORMATION CHILDREN & YOUTH

The faith formation program and staff contributed to and offered these special programs and events this year: Our Whole Lives for our 7th-9th graders, Sandwich Making

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for Guest House (a record-breaking 512 sandwiches!), Jingle Bus Ride, Mystery Friends pen pal exchange and party, Holiday Giving Tree, Holiday Pageant "Hope for the Holidays," Community Valentine Making, Adventures in Resilience family workshop, Multigenerational Game Night, Youth Service and Youth Overnight.

The OWL program for 7th–9th graders ran this year with twelve youth participating, led by our dedicated facilitators Erik Alexander, Angie Brist, and Carley Mostar joining returning facilitators Katie Kegel, Crysta Jarczyński, and Jessie Moffat, with Deb Solis and Jeremy Koenen as substitutes. I now serve as OWL coordinator with Fiona Higgins assisting with material set-up and communications. A highlight was welcoming community guests who courageously shared their coming-out journeys with our youth. We are extraordinarily grateful to these facilitators for creating this life-affirming comprehensive sexuality education experience for our young people.

Our Youth Group meet on most first and third Sundays to check in and explore themes this year including compassion, gratitude, resistance, and paying attention. Youth tried fundraising for the future UU heritage trip to Boston by selling bagels and donuts during coffee hour, and welcomed board members Elizabeth Hayes and Stacey Thieme for conversations on democracy, church governance, and Ends Visioning. On April 10, twelve youth gathered for the Youth Overnight, an evening of artmaking, games, and community building. In February, I meet with the youth group every Sunday to guide them in the creation of their service "Paying Attention" in March featuring reflections from Ryan Bruch, Elinor Poulson, and Suzie Larson with music from our youth musicians nurtured by Alissa Rhode, our music director. They put together an insightful and meaningful service.

Throughout the year I led and co-created multigenerational worship with our children, youth, and congregation. This year "Hope for the Holidays," was our original interfaith holiday pageant performed by 18 children and youth with 8 preschoolers, 26 in total! I led "Antidote for the Heart," a Thanksgiving multigenerational worship centering gratitude as spiritual practice, and the New Year's Release and Renewal service featuring an interactive ritual of letting go and intention setting. I also led Sunday service "Small But Mighty" in January and co-led our Easter multigenerational service with Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom.

Volunteer recruitment remains our greatest ongoing need, though every person who showed up did so with tremendous heart. Through the Holiday Giving Tree, Fiona and I delivered 50 presents to NAMI Southeast Wisconsin, and our community sent 75 handmade valentines to members needing extra care.

FAITH FORMATION FOR ADULTS

This year, what was previously called Adult Spiritual Development was brought under the umbrella of Faith Formation for Adults. This expanded role includes supervising and supporting education-focused, member-led groups, large First Church events, and new opportunities requested or offered by the community.

- UU Wellspring "Sources" group, in its fifth year at First Church, met twice a month for 10 months with 10 participants plus co-facilitators Rollie Hanson and Laurie Foss. 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 also offered our first advanced program from UU Wellspring, Deep Questions, with 5 participants and co-facilitators Diane Horne and Jeri Pearcy. In Deep Questions, we look at the 7 principles of our UU Faith, follow a daily spiritual practice, read homework and reflect on how we work with the principles in our individual lives and our congregation.
- Poetry Contemplation group has 22 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.
- The UU Pagan group, led by Nick DaVia and Patricia Witt, has been gathering our community for connection and for rituals honoring the eight Sabbats that follow the Wheel of the Year.
- Silent Retreat at Cedar Valley Retreat Center in April had 18 participants with a team of 5 facilitators: Sarah Fowles, Lynda Strong, Shauna Leinback ,

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Jolynn Woehrer and Kari Gunderson.

- Mindfulness Meditation session, led by Aspen Dellutri that drew 25 participants in April.
- Spirit Play Game Group, led by Jeremy Koenen will begin in May.

My ministry also includes giving addition support to adult faith formation events and groups throughout the year including: Morter Lecture Weekend with James Crews in September, Non-Violence Training for People of Faith in January, Safety Team with Fire Alarm System, Pledge Promotions Video Creation, Immigrant Solidarity Action May Day Protest, Bad River Event with Anti-Racism Team and participate on the TQUU Team.

It has been a busy, growing, joy-filled year of meaningful connection for our children, youth, families, and adults, and I look forward to returning from sabbatical with renewed energy to build on the good work this community has done together!

With gratitude,
Rev. Kimberlee

Comparisons taken on average through the 3rd Sunday of April, not counting M.G. Sundays.	2025-26	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Number of registered children and youth: registered/guests	67/7	80	69/12*	48/14	48	31
Average Sunday F.F. Program Attendance, not including MG Services	44	39	40	32	26	21

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ANTI-RACISM TEAM

Education and Community Engagement

This past year, the Anti-Racism Team deepened the congregation's commitment to racial equity through intentional education and community engagement. ART offered two workshops designed to help members examine systems of racism and their own roles within them – creating space for honest reflection, courageous conversation, and renewed commitment to anti-racist practice. These sessions drew on both scholarly frameworks and lived experience, inviting participants to move from awareness into action in their daily lives and within the congregation itself.

Black Art, Cultural Advocacy, and Museum Work

ART also led members beyond the walls of the congregation to encounter the power of Black artistic expression firsthand. Through organized outings to view Black art, members engaged with the stories, creativity, and resilience of Black artists whose work both challenges and inspires. At the same time, ART has been actively engaged with the development of the new Nature and Culture of Wisconsin, advocating for the authentic and inclusive representation of Milwaukee's Bronzeville community and Black Wisconsinites in the museum's curation and programming. This work reflects ART's conviction that cultural institutions must tell the full story of who we are as a community.

Partnership with the Social Justice Team

In collaboration with the Social Justice Team, ART expanded its witness to include the experiences of Indigenous peoples. The congregation gathered in the sanctuary to view *Bad River*, a documentary film whose power was deepened by a panel discussion with Native community members who shared their perspectives and responded to questions. This partnership with the Social Justice Team exemplifies ART's growing understanding that racial justice and Indigenous sovereignty are intertwined struggles – and that the congregation's commitment to justice must be broad enough to hold them both.

Collaboration with the Immigration Solidarity Team

The Anti-Racism Team also strengthened its partnership with the Immigration Solidarity Team this year, recognizing

that the struggle against racism is inseparable from the work of welcoming and protecting our immigrant neighbors. Together, these teams have worked to align the congregation's witness around a shared vision of peace and justice – one that sees care for the stranger not as a separate cause, but as a natural expression of the same values that drive anti-racist work. This collaboration reflects the congregation's deepest calling: to love our neighbors not in word alone, but in sustained, organized, and courageous action.

Debra Klepp

COMMON GROUND

Below are summaries of some current Common Ground Campaigns.

Tenants United

For many months, Common Ground and Tenants United leaders knocked on doors, met hundreds of tenants, organized meetings, conducted research, and documented complaints of angry tenants.

This work came to a head on March 26th, 2026 at a press conference with City Attorney Evan Goyke and his team, held next to one of the properties owned by one of Milwaukee's most notorious slum landlords, David Tomblin of Highgrove Properties.

The City Attorney's suit declared Tomblin's properties a public nuisance, asking a judge to appoint a third-party receiver to manage his properties. Tenant's rent money would then be given to the receiver to make the needed repairs to the properties instead of going to Tomblin. Other slum landlords take notice! This campaign is far from over. Our goal is to "evict" Tomblin from the city.

Jury Diversity

We want to make juries in Milwaukee County fairer by increasing participation of African Americans. Based on our research and conversations with experts, stakeholders and about 200 African Americans, we have developed a proposal that financial hardship should not be a barrier to jury

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service. We are advocating that juror compensation be increased from \$25 to \$100 per day.

Also, we are working to inspire more African Americans to serve through outreach, education, marketing and rebranding jury duty as an opportunity for justice.

Forward Scholars

Forward Scholars continues to be a very successful literacy tutoring program for Milwaukee K5-3rd grade students, with average reading gains of two grade levels. First Church is a major supporter of Forward Scholars, with Kristi Davis (chair) Molly Schiffler and Sally Lewis serving on their board.

South Side

The main concern of south side residents is crime. After listening to 1,057 of our members and meeting with dozens of experts and stakeholders, a south side detailed safety plan was developed. Please see the Common Ground web page for the details of the plan.

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, and Cathy Startt.

Please go to <https://www.commongroundwi.org/> for more detail and to view all campaigns.

Jerry Fredrickson

EARTH JUSTICE MINISTRY (EJM)

The most significant thing this year was expansion of our leadership group as prelude to a transition to new leaders. Ted Kraig and Jenny Abel joined long-time leaders, Barbara Leigh, Terry Wiggins, and Bruce Wiggins.

Second most significant, EJM continued monthly gatherings, named “Food, Fun, Future Gatherings” (FFF), where we

recognize that fun and food are necessary to build community – needed to address environmental and social challenges in our society. The “Future” portion of meetings discusses projects and activities.

- We hold a monthly Walk & Roll to a local park, enjoying nature and camaraderie.
- We support the annual Earth Day service in April. In 2025 we posted in the Common Room a drawing of a tree where people could put leaves on the tree with commitments for environmental action. This year, we handed out seed packets to grow wildflowers that help pollinators. Both years, we encouraged FUSM members and friends to join Riverkeeper’s river cleanups. This year, Riverkeeper set a record in the Guinness Book of Records for most persons cleaning up rivers in one day at multiple sites.
- Our members hosted speakers at the First Unitarian Forum: Leah Holloway from Plastic-Free MKE, UWM Prof. David Petering on impacts of data centers, Andi Sciacca from the City’s ECO Office on food waste, and Kathy Erdman from Third Act WI, an advocacy group formed to promote democracy and action addressing climate change.
- Jenny Abel led a group discussion of the book What if We Get It Right.
- We continue to work to help this church erect more solar panels that create renewable energy, save money, and reduce green house gas emissions.
- EJM representatives attend FUSM’s Social Justice Council.
- EJM members supported social justice activities by FUSM groups such as Defend Democracy, Immigration Solidarity & Action, MICAH, and Common Ground.
- To extend our reach and work, we have established partnerships and appointed volunteer liaisons to Plastic-Free MKE, COLE (Coalition on Lead Emergency), MEJA (Milwaukee Environmental Justice Alliance), Our Future Milwaukee, and Third Act Wisconsin.

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Looking forward, we will continue our FFF Gatherings. Also, representatives are initiating an education/advocacy group to address the harms of hyperscale data centers.

Communication is important: the EJM Google Group continues to reach some 50 people and we published often in the Chanticleer

Bruce Wiggins

IMMIGRANT SOLIDARITY AND ACTION (IS&A)

Immigrant Solidarity & Action inspired action in Milwaukee this year. This FUSM committee was a leading voice for democracy, inspiring Milwaukee in acts of solidarity with Judge Hannah Dugan, Islamic Society of Milwaukee's Salah Sarsour, No Kings rallies, and Voces de la Frontera's (VDLF) May Day march. Our members provided important support for ICE Out MKE common council legislation with a postcard writing campaign that sent 440 postcards to our city alders. In addition to direct action, IS&A members were important volunteers for VDLF's New American program, teaching English as a second language and preparing students for the citizenship exam. FUSM members were recognized as VDLF's "Volunteers of the Year" for their important contributions.

Michael Pointer Mace
IS&A chair

INTERCHANGE FOOD PANTRY

Interchange Food Pantry served 55,682 guests in 2025 at our two pantry sites: our main pantry in downtown Milwaukee and a satellite pantry in collaboration with the St. Mark AME Church in zip code 53206, one of the most economically distressed areas in the United States.

We continue to serve all zip codes, with 98% of our guests living in the city of Milwaukee. Of those we serve, 47% are children, followed by adults aged 18-59 (41%) and seniors aged 60 and above (12%). And 82% of our guests live in Milwaukee's food deserts, with the majority coming from the near north side.

Our cornerstone program, and the most popular with our guests, is our fruits and vegetables program. This focuses on fresh produce that we buy wholesale, and in 2026, we are adding frozen produce. The fruits and vegetables provided to our guests are consumer friendly and culturally specific.

Highlights from this past year:

- We held our fourth Thanksgiving Dinner Giveaway in 2025, serving 1,364 families with a turkey, traditional trimmings, and 15 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables the weekend before Thanksgiving.
- We held our second Summer Peanut Butter drive in summer 2025, providing extra protein in the form of peanut butter to families with children from June 15 to Sept. 15, 2025, with our third drive underway in summer 2026.
- We have met with Hunger Task Force and worked out an agreement to rejoin their network! This will provide additional produce (including from their farm), higher-quality protein items, and improve the shelf-stable goods our guests enjoy. We will receive our first shipment of food from them in May 2026.
- We hired our first full-time operations manager in 2025, who is helping improve our social media presence.

We are grateful for the small but dedicated group of people who volunteer at the pantry week in and week out, along with schoolchildren, families, and businesses volunteering throughout the year.

Beth Bruch

SHARE THE PLATE

Since 2011, the Share the Plate program has worked to share 50% of all cash collected in the Sunday service offering plates with worthy non-profit organizations whose work in the larger community reflects our Unitarian Universalist values. Church members are invited to nominate organizations who meet basic criteria: mission and work aligns with UU principles; have non-profit status; and pro-

Member-Led Ministries Reports

vide services within the Milwaukee metro area to a range of economically and socially challenged populations. The team meets a number of times a year to review nominations and select organizations who will be recipients for an entire month. The Children and Youth Faith Formation groups are also invited to nominate their choices for Share the Plate for two months of the church year.

In addition to financial contributions, the Share the Plate team encourages Church members to get to know more about the mission and work of the recipient organizations. To this end, the organizations are invited to send a representative to coffee hours on the first Sunday of the month of their designated collection period. A team member hosts these representatives, helping them set out information on the Social Justice table, and inviting coffee hour attendees to spend a few minutes to learn more about the organization. As another way to help church members learn more about Share the Plate recipients, each month a team member writes an article for the Chanticleer, describing the mission and work of that month's designated organization.

From September 2024 through August 2025, \$29,606 was collected and distributed to Share the Plate recipient organizations, including funds raised in special collections during the Christmas Eve services, and another special collection to assist efforts to respond to the Los Angeles wildfires that year. Share the Plate contributions are on track to match or exceed that amount for 2025-2026.

Over the last 15 years since Share the Plate began in 2011, the program has raised well over \$300,000 for recipient organizations. A complete list of past recipients can be found on the Share the Plate page of the First Church website.

The Share the Plate team is grateful for the congregation's continued generous support of our community partners who feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, address issues of racial and ethnic injustice and disparities, and provide other urgently needed community services.

Bob Monahan and Nancy Cross Dunham, Co-chai

SUNDAY FORUM

The Sunday Forums have been regularly offered on Sunday mornings at The First Unitarian Society-Milwaukee for close to 60 years. Forums are scheduled weekly, at 10:00-11:00am, in Max Otto Hall. There are no Forums during the summer months. Forums are live-streamed for viewing on the First Unitarian Society of 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.

This year there were 36 Forums. The following is a list of the topics. MICAH, Hunan Refugee Relief, Black Holes, Councilman Brauer, Turner Hall, International Institute of Wisconsin, WUWM, Slumlords, Health care Reform, Vision Forward, The Power We Hold: Environmental Justice and the Fight for Energy Democracy, The Art of Loosing and The Art of The Impossible, META: Public Education and Social Justice Organizing, Adjacency Theory, Deportation War, Food Waste, The 8th Fire, Turning the Tide on Plastics, Democracy and Art, Invest Your Values, Third Act Wisconsin, Palestine, On Your Marq, Data Centers and Climate Change, Wisconsin Justice Initiative, Blood to Rubies, Town Hall on Economics, John Stano: My Music and First Church, West Coast UU Congregations, Persisters and WISDOM, Cooking for Justice: How FoodRight Empowers Milwaukee Youth Through Hands-On Nutrition Education, Intersection of Government and The Rule of Law, United States Supreme Court, Nuns and Sisters in the Roman Catholic Church, Tricklebee Cafe, Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council

Mark Mueller

FEAST FOR FUNDS

The Feast for Funds silent auction raised \$10,177 on the 32Auctions site, and brought in slightly more from post-auction purchases of some "Buy Now" activities. The auction began online-only on 11/2/25, and ran through 11/16/25, which included two Sundays of items displayed in the Leenhouts Common Room. This was the second year

of making paper bid forms available to those who would not be bidding online. There were 75 unique winners/buyers and more bidders, and 54 events/activities and items. Planning will begin in September for the 2026 bidding season. I am grateful for the generosity and enthusiasm of both donors and bidders.

Scot Henry

TRANS AND QUEER FOR UU (TQUU)

This has been a challenging year for many communities, including our LGBTQIA+ community. The Trans and Queer for Unitarian Universalism group has welcomed the opportunity to work together to support trans and queer people both within and beyond our church walls.

Our primary focus this year has been on partnering with the Pink Haven Coalition: a collaborative, trans-led effort working across UU congregations and other people of conscience to advance trans liberation and oppose fascism. The Coalition works to create networks of care and safety for trans people and their families who need to flee to more welcoming locations or to stay as safe as possible where they are.

As we continue in this work, we are deeply grateful for the leadership of Reverend Jennifer and Reverend Kimberlee, for the support of the Board, and for the connections with our partners at Zao MKE Church. Further, our TQUU team has found that coming together, focusing on mutual aid, creating pockets of safety, and developing paths of resistance has brought us much-needed hope and solidarity during these challenging times.

Gratefully submitted,

Lisa Larson, TQUU Co-Chair

THE CHRONOLOGICALLY GIFTED

The Chronologically Gifted generally met on the last Sunday of the month January through April and September through November. Attendance varied from 10 to 14 persons enjoying the opportunity to connect with their contemporaries.

Barbara Collignon

UU YOUNG ADULTS

Formerly known as YANKS and UUUFDA, the young adult group was re-birthing in spring 2025 as UU Young Adults, better known as UU-YA (pronounced oo-yeah). Led by Mariah Kauder and Marie Bridges, the group offers monthly connection opportunities for adult members and friends of the church under 40 years old.

Event themes target social connection, social justice, and/or spirituality. Gatherings in the past year have included brunch, comedy shows, community yoga and meditation, nature walks, a potluck, and sound baths, as well as attending protests together and preparing and serving meals at the Cathedral Center.

Other initiatives have included starting an annual social event with the ministers, an annual “retreat” for group and self reflection, and commUUnity nights. For commUUnity nights, group members take turns hosting us at their homes or another location for an activity of their choosing.

UU-YA has grown from 6 individuals at the group formation meeting in 2025 to nearly 30 folks now signed up for communications. The group looks forward to continuing to grow, both in quantity and quality of connection.

Mariah Kauder

Marie Claire Bridges

**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.**