

2023 Annual Report



First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

389th Annual Meeting 28 January 2024

2023 Annual Report
First Church in Cambridge, Congregational

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Report of the Senior Minister

Need a little hope for the year ahead? Look no further than the pages of this annual report. Our faith repeatedly insists that we ground our hope for the future not by looking ahead but by looking back with gratitude for what God has already done and is doing in our midst. Here at First Church, at least, a review of 2023 can't help but be an exercise in shoring up hope for 2024, no matter what the New Year may bring! As most of our staff can attest, I don't love the seemingly mundane task of writing an annual report, but this year, I've decided to reframe it as a spiritual practice of gratitude — deep and earnest gratitude to God and to so many in our community who make First Church what it is. So, I invite you to read what follows not just as an archival record of a year in our life together but as a prayer of thanksgiving, a liturgy of language and numbers and love intended to capture the extraordinary faithfulness and fortitude of a community we are blessed to call our spiritual home.

In no particular order, and with the usual caveat that I'm sure to leave out something or someone, I give God deepest thanks...

...for the many wonderful and inspiring works of art, beauty, and music that filled our space and lifted our spirits in 2023. For Audrey Bellinger's diverse and wondrous collages - one for every Psalm, for our children's handmade and heart-melting pastoral cards, for Henry Gates's vivid and learned liturgical art, for Freddie Funck's fabulous bulletin cover art, and for Poet-in-Residence Jean Dany Joachim's poems and poet friends who powerfully shared their reflections at our MLK Sunday Service. For the ever-brilliant Peter Sykes and the soulful sounds of guest musicians like Issa Bibbins and his family, and for the tenderness and tears their music so often evoke, and for our devoted choir, from those who just started singing this year to those who have been singing out their hearts for 30, 40 or even 50 years and counting!

...and for Robert Shetterly, whose colorful and compelling portraits of *Americans Who Tell the Truth* graced our walls and enriched our Lenten learning, and for members of the Beloved Community team and the Christian Formation and Mission & Social Justice committees for their joint effort to bring us the portraits to start what, we hope, will be a new tradition of hosting more truth-telling portraits! I'm grateful, too, for Harvard scholars Melissa Barthomolew and Tiya Miles, who joined us for an unforgettable unveiling of the Harriet Jacobs portrait, and for God's spirit and Harriet's, who "called us to attention" when the portrait seemingly jumped off its easel as if to announce her spiritual presence in our midst!

I give God thanks for the January launch of our *Wade in the Water* embroidery project and for its multi-talented advisory team, including Egypt Lloyd, Paula Paris, Gail Willett, Carol Anne Grotian, Sarah Fujiwara, and Laurie Williams. In June, we exhibited the first of what are now three banners remembering and honoring enslaved persons at First Church. And how can we thank God enough for that especially powerful Juneteenth worship service wherein we evoked our ancestors and were joined by Egypt and her family, descendants of Cuba Vassal, who spent most of her life enslaved, and yet who was baptized a free woman at First Church in 1812?

From the ministry of art to the arts of ministry offered by every leader who nourished and sustained our community this year, whether through worship leadership, pastoral care, small group fellowship, or plenary gatherings and feasts, I thank God, too,...

Report of the Senior Minister (continued)

...for the compassionate and gentle care of Susie Neubauer and our Pastoral Care Team captains and members who organized and wrote countless cards of condolence, congratulations, and thanksgiving. For Bruce Hoppe and Jenny Stuart, who worked with a local chapter of National Association for Mental Illness to offer a powerful workshop for caregivers from First Church and neighboring congregations in Harvard Square.

Turning to gifts of feasts and fellowship, I know we all give thanks for First Church's own "Iron Chef" Caitlin Anderson and her family of sous-chefs and helpers who repeatedly cooked and coordinated delicious and nutritious Margaret Jewett Hall-sized meals for us all, and for First Church's chief bottle-washer Steve Weller, who often joins Caitlin and Will in staying late and leading the last of the kitchen clean-up!

And yes, I thank God for our remarkable small group leaders and participants. In 2023, there was a small group meeting almost every day of every week. For Duncan Hollomon and the Monday Contemplative Practices Group, for Brent Coffin and the Tuesday morning text study group, for Carter West and the Thursday evening Bible Study, for Jan Lo and the Friday evening Bible study, for our seasonal Faith & Life Groups, and their leaders that are too many to list, and for Beth Spaulding who has been coordinating them all since the fall. I'm also grateful for our All-Church Fall Retreat at Craigville, where yet another year of wet weather did nothing to dampen the palpable spirit of connection and community, and for Sue Reynolds and the Christian Formation team who helped guide our spiritual formation offerings and joined in truly generative and Spirit-led brainstorming about our seasonal themes. And for leaders of our various Affinity groups – for Phil Jones and our thriving Young Adults group, for Ginny Harlan and Martha Cook and our now-monthly Aging with Grace group, for Alex Steintert Evoy and Sue Reynolds and the Women's Book Group (and Retreat!), for Peter Byerly and David Torrey and the monthly Men's Breakfast, for Lisa and Raven McCarty and Amy Matias for leading our Southern New England Conference-supported Becoming a Trans and Non-Binary Church group. Again, I thank God for Martha Cook, Ginny Harlan, and Alex-Steintert Evoy for pioneering a team of First Friends to help us further engage Newcomers.

Coming through COVID (and out of our reliance on COVID relief funding) meant renewed attention to our financial life and health. I'm grateful beyond measure for our relentlessly generous congregation that continues to step up and respond to seemingly every request for support! I give thanks to God for our Finance Team, especially the tremendously talented trio of outgoing Treasurer Rich Goode, Associate Treasurer Jim Cairns, and Endowment Committee Chair Laurie Burt for their careful budgeting, long-term planning, and for their bold vision of a Debt Relief Appeal which raised over \$300,000 in pledges! And for Bill Hsiao, who co-hosted a Fifth CenturyZX dinner that shared a vision and invitation for planned giving at First Church.

While we are at it, we all owe a debt of gratitude for our First Church Assets Research group, beautifully led by Vice Moderator Meredith Quinn, and for the heavy lifting of team members Moana Bentin, Peggy Bendroth, Peter Byerly, Laurie Burt, Don Johnson, Kate Judd, Lindsay Miller, and Chris Reynolds. Together and in subcommittees, and through many meetings, this group wrestled with and laid necessary groundwork for congregational discernment about how First Church can best steward some of our most significant assets. This team learned a ton about major gifts entrusted to First Church over the centuries, including our First Church parsonage, our sometimes centuries-old archives, and the cockerel weathervane. After consulting with experts in American folk art who deemed it a national treasure, and following a unanimous decision of our Executive Council in August, the over 300-year-old weathervane, designed by Shem Drowne,

Report of the Senior Minister (continued)

came down to protect it from further damage caused by extreme weather and pollution. Stay tuned for what happens next with this iconic piece of Harvard Square's history and skyline!

Thanks be to God, too, for outgoing Stewardship Chair and Hall of Fame Head Coach Joanne Paul and for the entire Stew Crew. Together, they gave us "A Future with Hope" in more ways than one. It was the theme of our Stewardship season and, with thanks to their ongoing encouragement and our other finance efforts, we were finally able to approve a first-in-decades balanced budget that wasn't reliant on Covid relief funds! Our congregational generosity, coupled with the wisdom and expertise of our financial leadership, has finally turned an ebbing tide of over-tapped resources into a flowing stream of sustainable abundance. A deep bow of gratitude as well to our Gifts Discernment & Nominating team, especially outgoing member Dave Kidder, for their patient and persistent calls and nudges as they connect our greatest resource - all of you - with our seemingly endless appetite for ministry and mission.

For First Church's ongoing passion for justice and healing in our world, and for the many witnesses and bearers of God's love and justice, again I say thanks be to God...

...for Molly Baker and our entire Mission & Justice team who, among many other things, invited 23 Harvard Divinity School scholars and Palestinian peace and justice activist Hilary Rantisi to mark the 75th anniversary of the Nakba in June and invited Churches for Middle East Peace Executive Director Mae Elise Cannon to offer a powerful and timely message and after-church talk on October 15, just one week after the Hamas Attacks.

...for the Shelter Oversight Committee and Shelter Director Jim Stewart, who, with a growing staff, has settled into a new and notably wider array of post-pandemic services for our unhoused guests and neighbors, and for the Friday Cafe leadership team and Minister of Street Outreach Kate Layzer, who continue to engage guests and volunteers in a profound practice of hospitality and community building.

...for our ongoing engagement with Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO) and for our dedicated and diligent GBIO core team leaders Phil Jones, Will Erickson, and Casey Marsh. For the chance to engage with over 1500 GBIO leaders (with at least 50 from First Church) at a rousing June housing justice action at Temple Israel in Boston that helped to deliver the great news of Governor Healey's \$1.6 billion housing bond bill. First Church "turned out" by the dozens again this fall for several In-District Meetings with state reps and senators to press for the bill's passage.

...and for our new Welcome Corps team ministry and the dedication of co-leaders Anne Holtzworth and Martha Cook! At one point, I wondered if we had the bandwidth to take on another enormous social justice endeavor that involved partnering with the government in a 90-day refugee resettlement effort for newcomers to our country, yet seeing their stellar leadership and organization and a cracker-jack cadre of First Church leaders they recruited, I now have no doubt of our commitment and capacity. I'm excited for us all to meet and greet the Somali mother and son, Nuro and Idle, who should be arriving any day.

I'm grateful to God as well for my Harvard Chaplain colleagues Rev. Rita Powell and Alden Fossett with whom I co-designed and have now co-led at least 20 Harvard and Landscape of Slavery tours which include several mentions of First Church and our legacy of enslavement. We offered the tours roughly once a week

Report of the Senior Minister (continued)

during the warmer months and recently learned there is now a 500-person waitlist of Harvard faculty, staff, students, and wider community members. The truth-telling and reparative work that we began together in 2018 continues to expand, thanks be to God. I'm grateful, too, for our deepening connections with neighbors like Pentecostal Tabernacle Church through our weekly Biblical Justice prayer calls, and the Cambridge NAACP, who honored me and First Church with their 2023 Drum Major for Justice award at their annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast in February. I thank God for grassroots reparations movement builder Dave Ragland, who we hosted to lead a "Spiritual Practice of Reparations" workshop in late November for over 50 racial justice leaders from Harvard Square congregations. And thank you, God, for guest preachers and dear colleagues like our Community Minister in Latin America, Monica Maher, who shared her ever-courageous and inspiring witness with us in June, and for Liz Walker, who preached in September! Given the spaciousness of the First Church parsonage, Nancy and I have been privileged to host Liz and get to know her as a family during several weeks-long visits throughout 2023 while she was back from Florida writing a book and co-charing Embrace Boston.

Finally, I give deepest thanks to God for our incredibly gifted, dedicated and uber-competent staff. For Kirsten, Sarah, Peter, Karen, Bruce, Kate, Jim, Ahmaad, Carla, Emma, George, Jonathan, Douglas, Steve, as well as every member of Shelter Staff and Nursery Care staff. Gratefully, Lee now serves full-time as our Facilities Manager and AV guru! Thanks be to God, too, for our long-serving sexton Kimel Williams to whom we bid farewell this summer. And heartfelt gratitude for my beloved colleague, Transitional Minister Lexi Boudreaux, who left us in August and who is now serving as Pastor at the extremely fortunate First Congregational Church of Hopkinton, New Hampshire. Suffice it to say, I could not have survived the pandemic without Lexi, and the last five years since she first arrived as a Harvard Divinity School (HDS) student would not have been nearly as much fun! Speaking of students, our dream team of current HDS MDiv's Ahmaad, Carla, and Emma, have shared warm and wonderful energy and wisdom in 2023 and helped cover the bases as we discern next steps. Year after year, our staff's dedication to helping us live out First Church's mission and values is utterly essential to our thriving. If worship and community are the heart of what we do, if service and justice are the hands, if our members are the Spirit-infused lifeblood of the place, then our staff may well be the veins that hold and direct and assure a steady flow of energy to every part! I could not be more thankful for each of their unique gifts and contributions to our overall health. The same can be said for our always faithful and wise officers, especially Moderators Moana Bentin and Meredith Quinn, and Deacons, especially co-chairs Adam Weiss and Leslie Pelton-Cairns, who have lovingly and sacrificially devoted hours upon hours every week to this robust community of faith. Thanks be to God for them all!

Friends, if all this gratitude is not grounds for hope, I don't know what is. May grace and gratitude for all the goodness that has blessed us thus far continue to feed and grow our hope for the new year ahead, come what may!

God's love and mine,
Dan

Submitted by Rev. Daniel A. Smith

Report of Pastoral Associate Ahmaad Edmund

On August 27, 2023, I formally assumed the role of Pastoral Associate under the leadership of Reverend Daniel A. Smith after a year of serving as an intern. The assumed responsibilities included: preaching/worship, committee assignments and staff responsibilities. It has been a joy to share in worship with the members of First Church in Cambridge over the year leading the service as preacher and participant. Over the course of the year 2023 I have been afforded the opportunity to share in preaching four times. Each has gifted me with a wealth of knowledge, and I have begun forming a stronger relationship with the congregation.

It is no secret that First Church in Cambridge is an ambitious congregation and doesn't eat the bread of idleness. Of the long list of committees that First Church houses, I was honored and thrilled to assist this year's stewardship committee. My interests and skills were strengthened as an administrator, by focusing on my pastoral identity and authority. As a member of the committee, we planned for this year's theme, "A Future with Hope," held sessions before and after church, and welcomed pledges that continue to be gratefully received. It was also a delight to share in preaching for the Stewardship Annual Day on November 12, 2023. As we endured one of the darkest moments in our nation's history, the reminder of hope in exile could not have come at a better time. This committee, like each committee at First Church. are hard at work making the work of Christ felt in our everyday lived experience.

This beloved community has welcomed my heart and perspective as we meet the moment weekly. Outlining services to make them intentional through the liturgical year. Although, some may read this as a small feat, its impact based on intention has made enhanced my administrative skillset transcending the pleasantries in a church context, but that will continue serving as a premier for the next. I anticipate the duration of time in this role to be mutually exciting and fruitful.

Ahmaad Edmund

Report of Pastoral Associate Carla Arevalo

2023 at the First Church in Cambridge was a year of growth and grounding as a ministerial intern completing a master in divinity at the Harvard Divinity School. I was grateful for the opportunity to continue my 2022-2023 academic year as a ministerial intern, finish the year 2023 as a pastoral associate, and complete my last year of my master's degree. This community of faith poured so much love and welcoming spirits that contributed to my roles as intern and later on in the year as Pastoral Associate. Early in February, I was able to be part of a series of sessions where we went into a spiritual journey of reflection and honorification of the life of Harriet Jacobs. These sessions revealed a desire and need for communities of faith to dive more into reflecting on stories and truth-tellers that brought to life the need to carry justice throughout generations. The life and legacy of Harriet Jacobs continues to teach us of a story in which love and prayer are among the most powerful postures and actions that we can take in the face of injustice and racism. It was an honor to be part of this journey at First Church and to later on be able to unveil the Harriet Jacobs portrait who was added to the portrait collection of *"Americans who Tell the Truth"* an amazing collection painted by artist Robert Shetterly. Jacob's portrait can be now found in the Harter room and I always like to invite people to go visit this powerful portrait that reminds us of Jacob's ministry of love and freedom.

As a continuation of the work of love, justice, and antiracism, I was honored to be able to bring these important topics to the pulpit, where I had the opportunity to preach about the ways that scripture can show us the nature of justice, accountability, healing, and love that we can carry into our world today. As I entered my third year at Harvard Divinity School in late August 2023, I started my new position at the First Church as one of the Pastoral Associates alongside Rev. Ahmaad Edmund, and I could not be more happy and honored to continue in this role, and for the church, staff, and leaders to trust us to continue on this journey. Within this new role, I was able to take on new areas, including social media support, in our communications team led by Director Sarah Higginbotham. I was also very excited to spend more time with the youth of our church, as I was able to co-teach a confirmation class with Phil Jones and step into this journey of discernment and faith with an amazing group of students. I look forward to continuing to be part of their journey stepping into 2024, seeing them grow and write their own statements of faith.

This was my first year attending the All Church retreat at Craigville, where we got to reflect, meditate, and look back at our roots, both personal and congregational. We performed an exercise that guided us to trace back on our life timeline and later shared it within groups. This exercise brought back the spirit of ancestry and the importance of remembrance when entering new seasons and wanting to continue to become anti-racist communities. As the year ended, it would not be faithful for me not to leave a record of the war between Israel and Palestine. This is a heartbreaking moment for humanity, where life is lost and communities are divided. It has been a learning experience to watch leaders and ministers at the First Church address this war with the most utter care and love for both communities, while still addressing the grief of injustice and loss. Whether that was the intentional way of crafting prayer all the way to creating listening sessions after the church to talk about the history behind this war and the ways that churches can be a place to grieve the loss of life in this world.

In closing, I will underscore how I cannot be more grateful for the opportunity to be part of a congregation that received me with open arms and show me hope for all of us who are seeking spaces to keep on growing and to become better advocates, witnesses, and carriers of truth, love, mercy, justice, and a sustainable anti-racist culture.

Report of the Minister of Stewardship & Finance

Every year at First Church seems to bring us a transition of some sort. This year, it has been Lexi's call to a solo pastorate in New Hampshire, giving us a chance to build on the much-appreciated digital ministry and organization that she brought to us and to our finances. After her departure at the end of the summer, we have maintained the same rhythm of our financial operations, with Bruce Dillenbeck in the office receiving mail, recording income, overseeing check printing, and posting financial reports; Karen Fisk working mostly remotely recording expenses, finalizing payroll, and reconciling bank accounts and Pex card transactions; and myself working on the big picture: personnel, planning, policies, and procedures. Our digital system of recordkeeping and communication seeks to keep information secure in a mutually accessible place, providing backup for those times that one of us is away for a planned vacation or unplanned illness.

First Church is a thriving, living community of faith, a perennial mix of old and new: long-time members and newcomers, deeply experienced staff and the breaths of fresh air that our student ministers bring to us, recurring ministries with long histories, alongside new needs and new initiatives, deacons and committee chairs who become Treasurers, and church school students who become committee members. In it all, the gospel endures and leads us together toward new horizons.

Financial Reporting

In 2023, for the first time in our nearly 400-year history, our income exceeded \$2 million. Our expenses were under \$2 million, which means that we were able to pay off more than \$250k of our building loans, accelerating their payoff and saving interest expense. Our attention to financial sustainability is making a difference, giving us balanced operating budgets for both 2023 and 2024. That financial health and vitality will continue to be a crucial part of the future as we seek to staff the church with two full-time ministers, finish up our Frobenius organ restoration, and continue our thriving ministry to and with our neighbors. Detailed monthly financial reports are available online for lay leaders and staff, and full annual financial reports are available on the Church Finances page of our website.

Currently, one-third of our financial life supports our First Church Shelter with increased funding from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which is now more than double compared to five years ago (\$466k in 2023, compared to \$227k in 2019). Together with the temporary programs and funding that the City of Cambridge has been able to provide from 2020 through the fall of 2024, the Shelter currently employs five full-time and eleven part-time staff.

We also had transitions in some of our software and benefits. During the summer, we re-evaluated the best way for all of our employees to access the most affordable health insurance and made the shift from the Health Connector's small group market to its individual market. In November, we had to suddenly find a new app (Connecteam) to track hours and organize employment documents. Then Vanco updated their donor-interface, which gives us more flexibility. I'm currently working to understand the changes in the retirement benefits offered to our employees through the Pension Boards of the UCC. Lots of change!

In addition to overseeing financial operations, I staff the Finance, Stewardship, Investment, and Staff Policy committees as well as the financial aspects of the Shelter Oversight Committee. Many thanks to Art Anger for his many years as an Assistant Treasurer, faithfully counting the Sunday collections. My sincere

Report of the Minister of Stewardship & Finance (continued)

appreciation to Treasurers Rich Goode, Jim Cairns, and Connie Pyle, Controller Rachel Carlson, Moderators Moana Bentin and Meredith Quinn, Committee Chairs Laurie Burt, Joanne Paul, and Jan Jeffers Lo, and our hardworking staff. It is, as it has been for each of the twenty years that I have been involved with First Church, a genuine joy to work together, especially during such generally tumultuous times in our world!

With anticipation and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen".

Rev. Karen McArthur

Report of the Director of Music

2023 was a year of continued faithfulness. The First Church Choir sang beautifully Sunday after Sunday, and welcomed new members (and hopefully a future member – Wesley, son of Robb and Claire Morgan!) and lost one beloved and longtime member, Anita Anger. Unfortunately, the music for the third Sunday in Advent, postponed from last year due to my bout with COVID, had to be shelved once again due to my stay in the hospital for cardiac concerns. (I'm fine – catheterization showed no serious blockages, and adjusting medications going forward is the only result – but it was certainly good to have things checked out.) The Frobenius organ continues to shine in its newly cleaned state. All is well!

Personally and professionally, things continued much as before. I'm still teaching at three schools – Boston University, the University of Michigan, and the Juilliard School. This means Tuesdays and Wednesdays in Ann Arbor and Fridays and Saturdays in New York, and the remaining days in the Boston area. This schedule may seem crazy, and it is, but the teaching is rewarding and makes it worthwhile, for now.

It is such a pleasure to work alongside the wonderful staff here at First Church - 37 years and counting!
Hallelujah!

Peter Sykes

Report of the Director of Creative Worship & Arts

The 2022-23 church program year was the first since the pandemic hit that the Children & Youth Formation programs met in person for the entire year. While church school classes continued to have fewer students attending week to week (as was true also in 2021-22), we offered the full range of our curriculum, from Godly Play (PreK-4th grade) and Bible 101 (5/6th grade) to Our Whole Lives (7/8th grade) and Confirmation 9/10th grade). We celebrated the journey of our Confirmands in May, when all six of them chose to be confirmed and join First Church as members through our covenant. Our church school year officially ended with Children's Sunday in June, which included the successful return of the First Church Musicale, a multigenerational event full of food, music, laughter, and joy.

As we regathered in the Fall of 2023, we added the Middler Book & Bible Study class for 5th graders, alongside Godly Play and Bible 101's second year for 6/7th graders. We also resumed the pre-pandemic schedule of just one Youth class per year, offering Confirmation to the recent OWL graduates, now in 8/9th grade. Our Youth Group for teens has struggled to gain traction in recent years, and we continue to brainstorm creative ideas for including youth in First Church's formational programming.

I am so grateful to all the volunteers and staff who offered their care, attention, talent, and skill to their roles in our children & youth programs throughout 2023. Our Nursery Staff - Lily Worth, Amber Moy, and Tammi Steele- continued to provide a welcoming space in Sage Hall every Sunday morning, even as the number of children arriving for play remained quite low. Our Godly Play, Middler, and Bible 101 teachers - Lindsay McNamara, Lisa McCarty, Will Erickson, Mark Destler, Devin Hansen, Heather Stewart, Lauren Yockel, Linda Ziebell, Nate Jones, and Jan Lo - welcomed children young and old to their rooms with thoughtfulness, listening ears, and good humor. Our Youth class and program leaders - Phil Jones, Laurie Williams, Carla Arevalo, Becky Moyer, and Ahmaad Edmund - met our teens with smiles and warmth, providing a safe space for connection. And many others joined us for Creative Arts Workshops and Pastoral Care Sundays. In particular, Nancy Cyr brought her beautifully creative spirit to our crafting and art-making, always catching a child's eye with compassion and wit. And Sarah Fujiwara continued her steadfast commitment to including children in the wider projects of the church, including the embroidery project that has become *Wade in the Water*.

I'll switch hats at this point to report on my work with First Church's Communications Team. We continue to strengthen our structures and procedures for presenting timely information through a variety of channels, including our comprehensive website, the Sunday worship bulletin and pre-worship slideshow, our kiosk signage and lobby slides, and our weekly e-newsletters and periodic news blasts. First Church is a busy congregation with many, many opportunities for connecting and participating, giving and receiving. I spend time editing and formatting content provided by you and the staff to share widely, and I hope that your experience of our communications is a positive one!

With gratitude for this community of faith,
Sarah Higginbotham

Report of the Director of Operations

2023 seemed to take place in the blink of an eye, yet was full of many different projects, tasks, questions, discussions, celebrations, grief, and more. I will endeavor to capture what my part in all this was as the Director of Operations here at First Church in Cambridge.

The church building is the busiest it has been in my time here, which began in 2008. Over the course of the year an opera was performed in the sanctuary, numerous concerts took place, there are two dances and one chorus rehearsal that meet weekly in Margaret Jewett Hall, multiple 12-step groups call First Church their home, many recording projects happened in the sanctuary or chapel, and there were parties, weddings, memorial services, and other community gatherings in the building almost every week. Then of course there is Newtowne School, the preschool that has rented the church for over 40 years, and the students' laughter and songs (and sometimes crying) fill the building with the wonder of childhood. First Church continues to be a place where people from all walks of life feel welcome, and a place in which people connect with the arts, philosophy, spirituality, and each other.

The Building & Grounds Committee has had a busy year. As an ex-officio member, I was involved in the process and planning for the removal of the famed cockerel weathervane from the church tower, and the Tower Stabilization project that is scheduled to commence in 2024, as well other more mundane issues, such as dealing with leaking water during heavy rainstorms, pest control, and systems' maintenance. Facilities Manager Lee Prouty continues to be resourceful and hardworking, and is indispensable when it comes to problem solving regarding the buildings' issues and upkeep. I am thankful for his work in overseeing the church buildings, grounds, and the sextons.

Our sexton team continues to be an extremely important in the daily running of the building. From janitorial tasks to set up and take down and overseeing events to dealing with security issues, they are a big reason why so many outside groups want to come to First Church and use our space. The sextons keep the building looking clean and welcoming, and also maintain a welcoming and helpful attitude toward the building users. Thank you very much to all of them – Steve Brown, Douglas Casey, Jonathan Splaine and George Williams. And thank you also to former sexton Kimel Williams. After many years at First Church he resigned his position in 2023, to move forward with other endeavors.

Administration of church business also takes up a large chunk of my time. I continue to work with the other members of the Communications Team to make sure messaging about the church's worship, activities and events reach the congregation and wider community, through a variety of ways – the Sunday bulletin, social media, website and more. This year we installed a new phone system, and Karen McArthur and I worked hard on that project, setting everything up and training staff on how to use it. I also did my usual job of helping Sarah produce some service bulletins – special service bulletins usually fall under my purview. Sadly, this year I had more memorial service bulletins than usual to create, as the church lost three long-time members. And of course, there is the daily administrative work of the church that keeps everything moving along – answering emails and phone calls, ordering supplies, interfacing with long-term building users, to name a few. Office Assistance Bruce Dillenbeck is instrumental in keeping the church chugging along on a daily basis, and I thank him for his reliability and willingness to take on any kind of task.

Report of the Director of Operations (continued)

My work at First Church is mostly behind the scenes, but I am fortunate enough to still get to know and work with many members of this wonderful congregation. And the I cannot express how privileged am to work with the other First Church staff members. Both they and the congregation member inspire me every day with all the good, important work First Church takes on as pieces of its ministries and mission. I look forward to seeing what 2024 will bring, and thank everyone for making it a pleasure for me to come to work every day.

Respectfully submitted,

Kirsten Manville

Report of the Shelter Director

The past year saw positive outcomes for a number of the men seeking assistance and safety from the First Church Shelter (FCS) They were able secure permanent, safe and affordable alternatives to the shelter and homelessness.

As the Shelter Oversight Committee (SOC) helped communicate over the past year, those alternatives and transitions were greatly facilitated through the work of our Housing Navigator, Cherry Russell.

Everyone involved with FCS is grateful for the work done over the last several years by our Housing Navigator and the partnership with the City of Cambridge that made it possible.

Seeing and celebrating these positive outcomes it is easy to overlook and undervalue the patient service that is carried out, seven days a week, by those who are the front line workers at FCS sites and projects.

They collect and distribute the hygiene products at our shower site, collect the linen at the shelter and they make sure food is ready for guests to consume when they arrive for meal distribution. Whether it is at the shelter, the shower site or meal distribution, they do the dreary but essential tasks that make sure that all our projects are safe, healthy and stable space for everyone involved.

Denis Kaveney (36years) Steve Brown (25 years) Joe Freitas (19 years) and Kevin Benitez, 6 years, they have offered safety, guidance, encouragement and forbearance, in the name of our First Church community, to the men who are our guests.

More recently, Nathan Wilson Brown, James Gullberg, Kevin Newell, Cris Benavides, Gabe Mulcaire and Amy Flores have become involved in the work of FCS.

In addition, students from Harvard Divinity School; Erin Aslami, Mateo Thompson; Harvard Medical School; Edmund Shen and Serena Yu. Harvard College; Tyler Nilson, MIT; Jack Dirig, Edward Washington, have joined in the work being done by FCS.

36 years ago the First Church community committed to demonstrating their concern for those members of our community who lacked access to basic necessities all of us take for granted. Keeping that commitment has presented challenges and disruptions to our community. Those challenges and disruptions seem to have only deepened and strengthened our sense of purpose.

We know, acting on our own, we cannot eradicate the deprivation and demoralization we see all around us. That is why First Church has always been ready to become part of coalitions, partnerships, with other faith communities, issue groups, the city of Cambridge and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in order to bring about real, positive change for the people we feel called to serve.

Once again, on behalf of all of us who do the day to day work of FCS I want to express our gratitude to the SOC. Jan Lo, Brian Funck, Marianne Jensen, Lisa Dinardo, Claire Cocroft and Hanna Bliska continue to ensure that the work being done in the name of the First Church is consistent with the values and practices of our community.

Report of the Shelter Director (continued)

In addition to all the other matters they must attend to, Dan Smith and Karen McCarthur generously serve the SOC and the work of FCS. Our partnerships with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the City of Cambridge bring organizational and financial challenges. Karen and Dan have helped keep those challenges in perspective and minimize the disruption they cause.

In addition to sharing our Housing Navigator, FCS and the Friday Cafe continue to work in partnership; advocating for increased access to services for the individuals and families we care about with city and state officials.

There is never a week during which Kirsten Manville and Lee Prouty fail to make important, much appreciated contributions to the work of FCS. The First Church sexton team continue to extend themselves, always ready to stay a little later or do a little extra to accommodate the work of FCS.

Last year FCS was able to do much for more than a few people. Unfortunately, you don't have to scroll to far on your news feed to see that things are not going to get easier or better for poor and unhoused people anytime soon.

Access to affordable housing is at an historic low. The number of unhoused individuals and families continues to rise and very few of our elected or appointed leaders seem ready to advocate for the action necessary to address this situation.

The action needed will require modest but real sacrifice on the part of all of us who do not live "paycheck to paycheck." For example, we will need to get used to multi story/multi family buildings in our neighborhoods.

If those of us who claim to be committed to the example of crucified love demonstrated by Jesus are not willing to make those accommodations, take up the challenge, who will?

Sincerely,
Jim Stewart

Report of the Moderator

It has been an honor to serve as Moderator for this past year working alongside veteran leader Vice Moderator Meredith Quinn and dedicated Executive Council members. What a privilege to work in partnership with our committees on this incredible journey. We are blessed as a community for our exceptional staff, for their dedication, compassion, and unwavering commitment to our congregation and shared mission. My heart is filled with love and gratitude for you all. Together, we mourned losses, navigated challenges, and celebrated achievements and triumphs.

We spent time this year on creating concrete steps towards strengthening our financial health and sustainability. Our Building and Grounds in close collaboration with the Finance, Investment and Stewardship Committees spent countless hours on steps to care for the cockerel weathervane. We deployed a debt retirement appeal with a view to pay off loan payments ahead of schedule. The Archives Committee contracted a bookseller to market the non-FCC materials in our archives allowing us to further learn of First Church's role in the history of the City of Cambridge, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the nation.

With guidance and encouragement from the Beloved Community Committee, our congregation holds fast to our vision to be an Antiracist Church. By making sure our processes and committee work are thoughtfully focused on actions to combat discrimination and oppression, to continue working on reparations efforts, and for First Church to remain a leader in this space in the Harvard Square area and throughout Cambridge. We owe incredible thanks to the Missions and Social and Justice committee for all of their hard work especially as part of the Americans Who Tell the Truth exhibit and the Welcome Corps effort to welcome new Americans to our community.

This past year, we said goodbye to our beloved Transitional Minister for her 5-year dedicated and ministry. We welcomed three pastoral associates whose unique talents, energy and passion ground us. Looking ahead to 2024, I am excited to work with our new Vice Moderator Phil Jones in stewarding the well-oiled machine we have in place for First Church. As a community of faith, we'll forge a path of growth and unity, supporting one another with love and trust for new opportunities and blessings. I close with the words of David to his son Solomon in 1 Chronicles 28:20: "Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished."

In Christ,
– Moana Bentin, Moderator

Report of the Community Minister in Latin America

March 2024 will mark 10 years since my ordination! So, I am taking the opportunity to review the last five years, full of **unexpected beginnings** in the middle of the challenges brought on by the pandemic in 2020. I have divided the news into four sections: liturgy and spiritual formation, advocacy, education, and publications. By way of conclusion, I also note the happy endings and the 2024 aspirations.

First, I want to highlight the wonderful blessing that the pandemic provided in bringing me closer to FCC through virtual offerings. In particular, the caregivers support group was a source of great inspiration and guidance through the uncertain times, culminating in a joyful in-person meeting in May 2023 when I also gratefully preached at worship. Challenges always reinforce the need for community, and the pandemic did not fail in this respect, cultivating an even deeper appreciation for the miracle of close connection across the physical distance. Thank you, thank you for being my US spiritual home which consistently nurtures this Latin American ministry which has persistently continued to sprout new life.

Liturgy and spiritual formation

UCC worship

One surprising development of vitality was the formation of a new church! In May 2020, I was installed in an online service attended by over 70 people from 15 countries as the **Senior Minister of the United Church of Ecuador**, a faith community which emerged in 2019 with young professionals seeking a progressive congregation. We are the only publicly open and affirming church to date in Ecuador. For the first years under the pandemic, we offered weekly virtual services in Spanish which were attended by 25-30 people from 7 countries. In the last year, as folks have returned to their in-person activities, we have gone hybrid with a service every two weeks attended by an average of 15-20 people from 5 countries (Canada, Mexico, Honduras, Ecuador, Argentina). There is now interest on the part of church leaders to become a legal entity in Ecuador so we are beginning the process to become recognized by the government. In this way, we will be able to participate as a church in the inter-religious dialogues and coalitions growing in the country.

Zen meditation

In late 2018, I was installed as a Zen Sensei by Roshi Robert Kennedy, SJ, in a beautiful ceremony just outside Quito, the first of its kind in Ecuador. In 2019, we opened **Kai Pacha (Here Now)** in Kichwa in a space generously offered by the graduate school to which I have been affiliated since 2010, the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO). When the school closed under the pandemic in 2020, we moved to virtual meditations, which I offered every weekday for several years. In the last year, we have continued with two meditations per week, and I am now teaching on Saturday mornings in person at a Zendo in Quito. This year in early August, I led my first in-person silent meditation weekend retreat, which was a wonderful experience. In addition, for the last four years, I have been participating with an online international Zen community, offering talks every few months to a group of 70-100 people.

Report of the Community Minister in Latin America (continued)

Advocacy

National: Sexual and reproductive rights

Another surprising development has been the establishment of a non-profit! It is the **Ecuadorian Faith Network**, an ecumenical coalition which promotes human rights from a religious/spiritual perspective, especially sexual and reproductive rights. We are the first faith-based organization in Ecuador to do public advocacy in favor of the decriminalization of abortion and marriage equality. The Network was born in 2019 in an environment of religious hatred and extremism pushing against the advancement of the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ people. In 2020, we received funding from Planned Parenthood Global which allowed us to hire a coordinator and communications specialist. In 2022, we received legal recognition as an NGO by the Ecuadorian government and an award from Planned Parenthood Global as an organization which is making history in Ecuador! It was one of only two awards given in Latin America by Planned Parenthood Global that year. Since we are unique in Ecuador, we have reached out to similar organizations in other Latin American countries and created partnerships with colleagues in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Peru.

International: Indigenous/women's rights

In 2019, **Grail Ecuador** (which I began organizing in 2012) was accepted formally as a country by the International Grail at their General Assembly in **Tanzania**, which two Ecuadorian women attended to present our work. It was a great experience for them; they returned exuberant that Ecuador had been inducted into the International Grail. One of them was also able to attend the Training for Transformation program in **South Africa** before the pandemic began, and two others have taken the training since online.

The Grail is an international movement of women in spiritual search with a social commitment, begun 100 years ago in the Netherlands, with NGO consultative status at the **United Nations**. Grail members participate annually at the **Commission on the Status of Women** and the **Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**. We have nominated indigenous women from Ecuador to attend these meetings, which converted to online events during the pandemic.

Through the Grail, we were also able to send three young indigenous Kichwa women to an international in-person training on **Communities with a Heart** at Radboud University in the **Netherlands** in July 2023, immediately followed by an international young women's leadership training in **Portugal**. At both, they led traditional Andean ceremonies for attendees who were stunned by their wisdom.

As Board President of **United for Equity and Ending Racism** (UFER), a small international NGO based in Brussels which collaborates with the Grail at the UN, I participated at the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York in April 2023. Here, I joined the UN Representative of Pax Christi in accompanying an **Ashuar indigenous delegation** from the Ecuadorian Amazon to meetings with international human rights advocates. Under the pandemic, UFER also promoted two **humanitarian projects for**

Report of the Community Minister in Latin America (continued)

women and girls: in southern **Haiti** for girls to continue school after the earthquake, and in Odisha, **India** for rural women's food subsistence and long-term food sustainability after the hurricane.

Education

Formal/Quito

Starting in 2019, I joined the teaching team for the new Specialty in **Gender, Violence and Human Rights** at FLACSO, charged with leading the course on "Tools and Mechanisms for Promoting a Life Free of Gender Violence." The topic was broad enough to allow me to include diverse spiritualities, restorative justice and Latin American feminist theologies. There has been an average of 30 students in each class, from Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela. I have been inspired and learned so much from them!

In addition, since 2019, I have been involved in the Regional Institute for the **Study and Practice of Nonviolent Strategic Action**, funded by the International Center for Nonviolent Conflict (in Boston) and co-sponsored by FLACSO and the Catholic University of Ecuador. In the last three years, we have held the course online for 50 to 60 political activists from throughout Latin America. I lead the sessions on faith-based peacebuilding, women peacebuilders, the Nashville cafeteria sit-in case study, and resistance to corporate extractive development. The forum discussions with the students have been both fascinating and disturbing, due to their accounts of military repression, and they have created alliances of solidarity to support each other after the course.

Informal/Andes, Amazon, Coast

As part of the Ecuadorian Faith Network, I have traveled throughout Ecuador to lead **workshops with women's and feminist groups** on topics of self and collective care, faith and spirituality, and sexual and reproductive rights. This has been a wonderful new adventure for me, since I have gotten to know so many amazing women leaders in rural areas, from the Coast to the Amazon to the Andes. It has been a fantastic blessing of the pandemic, when international travel abruptly stopped.

I also have continued to lead **Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)** workshops with Kichwa women of Jambi Mascari in Cotacachi. Under the pandemic, we trained eight leaders as facilitators, offering a series of workshops, including in trauma resiliency and domestic violence. In 2022, we co-facilitated workshops in Kichwa in outlying rural communities with the new bilingual facilitators. It was a very enriching experience to meet and train many new women in isolated villages. Under the pandemic, we also supported the women who had been involved in AVP with emergency food kits for the neediest families, followed by several community gardens and two dozen family gardens. Finally, we accompanied them in the realization of their dream, as articulated in the AVP workshops, to start a **School of Ancestral Medicine/Midwifery**. Nine women will graduate from the school this month after two years of training in weekly classes and in an internship.

Report of the Community Minister in Latin America (continued)

Publications

In 2019, I had a book released in Ecuador! It is called, ***Rights, Democracy and Fundamentalisms***, for which I served as the Editor/Coordinator. It is a small volume, published by FLACSO, which grew out of an international conference I organized in 2018, attended by feminist theologians, Mary Hunt from the US and Geraldina Céspedes from Guatemala, among others.

In late 2023, I gratefully finished a manuscript on ***Religion, Sexual Violence and Peacebuilding: Feminist Practice of Intercultural Transformation***, co-edited with the well-known Latina feminist theologian, María Pilar Aquino, and the founder of the Chair in Feminist Theology at the Mexican Iberian University, María Carmen Servitje. I am thrilled to have had the opportunity to work with them in completing this book, ten years in coming, with 25 chapters by top academics and feminist theologians. It is an international, interreligious and interdisciplinary collection which will be published first in Spanish and later in English.

In addition, I have written several **articles** and book chapters in collaboration **with indigenous women leaders**, including on femicide in Ecuador (with Nemo Andi of the Amazonian Waorani nationality), Latin American ecofeminist spirituality and the Andean cosmovision (with Samay Maldonado of the Kichwa nationality), and indigenous women's civil resistance to corporate extractivism (with Sofía Chipana of the Aymara nationality).

With all the new beginnings have also come **happy endings**, as I have slowly let go of previous commitments to make room for the budding and blossoming of my ministry in unexpected directions, as I try to stay true to the leading of the Spirit.

In 2021, after five years as Coordinator of **Friends Peace Teams** in Latin America (Peacebuilding en las Américas), I turned over the work to my very capable colleagues in El Salvador, Salomon Medina, and Guatemala, Lorena Escobar. I was thrilled to be able to have Latin Americans take over this role for the first time in the history of the organization.

After serving as President of **United for Equity and Ending Racism** (UFER) since 2017, I ended my service in October 2023 at our General Assembly in Brussels. A young indigenous Kichwa woman, a former student of mine at FLACSO and Grail Ecuador member, will take my place on the UFER Board.

After nurturing the **Grail Ecuador** community since 2012 and serving in the **National Leadership Team** for the past four years, I will happily release the duties to a new team this month, thrilled with the interest and engagement of the women here to step into this responsibility. I will continue in my volunteer role as the International Grail Coordinator for new countries around the world.

After twelve years teaching part-time at **FLACSO**, I have decided to take a teaching sabbatical in 2024.

Looking ahead to **2024**, I anticipate:

Focusing on my ministry with the United Church of Ecuador, the Ecuadorian Faith Network and the Ecu-

Report of the Community Minister in Latin America continued)

dorian Zen community.

Doing more writing and publishing on indigenous women's agency, feminist theologies, diverse spiritualities and peacebuilding in Latin America.

Participating as Grail faculty at the Summer School of Radboud University in Utrecht, the Netherlands in July.

Traveling as a volunteer to support new countries interested in joining the Grail (Zimbabwe, Trinidad and Tobago, and Honduras).

Continuing accompaniment of the School of Ancestral Medicine in Cotacachi.

Staying open to surprising new developments!

Profound gratitude to FCC for the outpouring of support and for serving as the vehicle of infinite grace which makes this ministry possible.

The journey together continues. ***

Rev. Dr. Mónica Maher

Report of the Board of Deacons

First Church deacons were able to fully step into their traditional roles as servants, healers, hosts and guides in 2023, given the declining need to focus on concerns of COVID logistics and remote worship. We are grateful to outgoing deacon, Peggy Bendroth for her service, and anticipate welcoming Will Erickson, Linda Ziebell and Lisa McCarty into our ranks, with Casey Marsh stepping up as co-chair of the board. Given the number of hands-on duties the deacons undertake, the board will expand to 11 from 9 in 2024.

As FCC welcomed its new ministerial interns in the fall of 2023 the deacons board has been blessed to have Ahmaad Edmund, Carla Carbajal and Emma Thomas attend our meetings. Emma will also be assisting the deacons by offering formation time during meetings. An example is her work with deacons to explore the meaning and history of communion in the church and in the UCC denomination. This formation time will be foundational to the board's work to provide home communion to the congregation's members.

At the deacons May meeting, the team worked to brainstorm a list of projects they felt called to by the Spirit, and will continue to work on prioritized projects that help to make members feel more welcome and provide opportunities for healing and connection. The group also determined that the board will go back to 90 minute in-person meetings with options for connecting remotely.

Servant

In 2023, the board carried out the traditional duties of deacons to be present and care for the congregation through service. In the Regathering Sunday service the congregation was reminded that deacons are available to answer questions and provide support to members and visitors. The board will periodically make a public announcement to encourage members to use the deacons as a resource.

Healer

Deacons elevated the role of healer this past year, focusing on the emotional and spiritual health of the congregation. Several First Church members and deacon, Adam Weiss, attended an event hosted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), aimed at helping organization provide a more welcoming and safe space for those struggling with mental health issues. It was determined that FCC will return to its pre-COVID practice of holding a healing service once per quarter. The deacons also developed a new liturgy, a self-care ritual, to the release of concerns of the congregation to the Spirit after healing services. Ongoing projects will examine how the church can share resources and communicate loving support to those in need.

Host

In their function as host, the deacons have focused on how First Church can be an even more welcoming community. Audrey Bellinger is serving as a liaison to the new First Church welcoming team, First Friends, to keep the deacons informed and in synch with this wonderful ministry. In November, a plan was finalized to oversee more regular maintenance of nametags for church members, including a different system for storage. This new system will be shared with the congregation in early 2024. Given very low attendance at online coffee hours, this fall the decision was made to stop hosting this call. Deacons also initiated the practice of keeping menstrual products stocked in the church bathrooms to provide a more welcoming environment.

Report of the Board of Deacons (continued)

Guide

Deacons provided ongoing guidance to staff and ministers throughout the year on a number of congregational matters. Deacons helped to support a healthy leave-taking of Transitional Minister, Lexi Boudreaux, as well as facilitating Lexi's formal exit interview. Deacons were involved with efforts to celebrate long-term members, as well as celebrate this year's confirmands with notes of encouragement.

The deacons look forward to their continued support of the congregation in 2024 led by the Spirit.

Blessings and Peace in 2024,
Adam Weiss and Leslie Pelton-Cairns
Deacon Co-Chairs

Report of the Christian Formation Committee

Members: Ingeborg Haug, Lindsay McNamara (partial year), Susan Reynolds (chair, partial year), Beth Spaulding, Heather Stanford, Carol Wilson-Braun

Clergy/Staff: Carla Arevalo, Lexi Boudreaux (partial year), Sarah Higginbotham, Ahmaad Jahi Edmund, Dan Smith

Christian Formation mourned the death of Hilary Hopkins on February 2, 2023. She led this committee with vigor and passion, inspired many, and is greatly missed.

Finding it convenient and safe, the Committee met via Zoom throughout the year. We met each month except for July and August. As set out in our vision statement, Christian Formation seeks to offer a banquet table and a cup by the side of the river of faith where all may be served, no matter where they may be on their journey of life and faith.

Committee meetings were devoted to reviewing recent and current programming; brainstorming ideas for formation themes and programs in upcoming liturgical seasons; identifying potential leaders (from within Christian Formation as well as from our larger FCC community) and topics for formation programs; discussions of how to make programs accessible for more people; and supporting children's and youth programs where possible.

Below are highlights of formation activities and programs in 2023 developed, led or coordinated by the Christian Formation Committee:

February: Ahmaad and Carla led Adult Formation discussions around Harriet Jacobs, one of the "Americans Who Tell the Truth" portraits installed during Lent.

February / March: Dan, Lexi, Carla and Susan co-lead a series of four Adult Formation discussions based on a community reading of This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories That Make Us by Cole Arthur Riley.

April: Formation hours were led by the Archives Committee, who shared the results of their investigations into our cockerel and our collections of pamphlets and sermons.

September: Dan, Susan, and Phil Jones led a two part Adult Formation discussion of ancestry both as a church carrying the history of the UCC, and as individuals carrying all that came before us. What Kind of Ancestor Do You Want to Be? by John Hausdoerffer was employed as a grounding text.

October: Duncan Hollomon led a two part Adult Formation discussion entitled "Deeper Dive," exploring deeply and contemplatively what it means to be a Christian.

December: Beth provided an Adult Formation presentation about the history and meaning of Advent, part of her ongoing instruction about the liturgical year.

At each Christian Formation meeting, Sarah summarized the many offerings for children and youth, from our youngest students engaged in "Godly Play," through "Bible 101" and "OWL," and including our confirmation classes. Lexi and Ahmaad reported on Youth group activities.

In addition to the foregoing, Christian Formation supported many other formation activities. Beth assumed responsibility for Faith & Life classes, and these continue to be an important part of small group

Report of the Christian Formation Committee (continued)

opportunities. Additional programs on offer include weekly Zoom meetings on parables, bible studies, contemplative practices and aging with grace; the monthly Women's Book Group; and a variety of lectures, films, walks and retreats.

We are grateful for the participation of each member of the Christian Formation Committee, and for the large number of lay leaders who step up to provide guidance, instruction and wisdom to our congregation.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Reynolds

Report of the Building & Grounds Committee

2023 was a busy year for the Building and Grounds committee. Overall, the actual day-to-day B&G expenditures for 2023 were pretty much in line with the projected budget, with an insignificant overage of \$600 +/- . However, there were some significant capital expenses in 2023: researching and performing the emergency stabilization for the stone bell tower and the demounting of the cockerel weathervane and its storage.

In January, FCC engaged Structures North (SN), a structural engineering firm, to do a targeted review of the exterior walls, including looking at window surrounds, lintels, the tower structure, some visible cracking of exterior stone facing as well as looking at the interior cracked plaster surrounding the sanctuary balcony support on the north wall. SN delivered a report on March 17, 2023, outlining their observations and listing nine areas for stabilization and repair, in descending order of priority.

Two of the most critical items on the list: 1) stabilization of the upper tower corner stones (quoins) 2) north wall support for the balcony, have been addressed in a fashion to make both areas both stable and safe. Further investigation and discussions will be undertaken to identify and address long-term solutions for both items. The tower stabilization project is presently proceeding. The Cambridge Historic Commission was apprised of this project and continues to monitor the ongoing project. The balcony seating areas have been modified to address support concerns. The other items on the list will be reviewed and addressed in the future.

Other repairs and improvements to the building in 2023 include the repair of the exterior landscape railing at the corner of Garden and Mason Streets, the installation of a handrail in the sanctuary choir area, upgrades to the Church wifi system, repairs and replacement of some plumbing fixtures and pumps, and routine repairs to the fire protection system.

There was a leak in the basement on the west side of Sage Hall during a very intense rain burst in August. The water was cleaned up and an industrial hygienist came in to perform tests and sampling for mold. These areas were remediated. A clean air report was issued by the hygienist. The Newtowne School has been apprised of all hygienist reports and repair proposals. Repairs to prevent future leaks are being undertaken.

The historic, beloved, cockerel weathervane was demounted in November and is in safe storage pending determination of next steps. The steeplejack, YSC, has recommended reviewing the existing armature and mount of the cockerel for structural soundness before reinstalling a weathervane. This admonition will be reviewed in 2024 in conjunction with the next stages of the cockerel saga.

Members of the B&G committee and the facilities manager walked the Parsonage house and grounds in August to review both exterior and interior items. A report is forthcoming.

Water usage in the building has been reduced to a reasonable level, due in large part to a systematic review and repair of plumbing fixtures by Church staff and the facilities manager. Important trees:

Report of the Building & Grounds Committee (continued)

the yellow wood trees and the Washington Elm, continue to receive care.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peter Byerly", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Peter Byerly, Chair
Building and Grounds Committee

Report of the Staff Policy Committee

The major topic of the year was health insurance for staff of the church. It is a complex topic, and we are grateful to Dave Kidder and Laurie Williams for joining with Karen McArthur to assess options. After this task group's report, the Staff Policy Committee made the decision to discontinue the First Church group health plan (which we obtained through the Massachusetts Health Connector site) as of 12/31/23. Four employees were affected by this change. They will purchase individual plans on the Health Connector, and the church is providing an adjustment in compensation to account for additional out-of-pocket costs. During the year, the committee also discussed the COLA increase, provided advice and counsel on personnel situations, and endorsed the proposal to create two Pastoral Associate positions for Ahmaad Edmund and Carla Arevalo.

I am grateful for the service of committee members. Mostly, we are all grateful for the exceptional staff members who undergird all that our church does.

Submitted by Meredith Quinn, Vice Moderator

Report of the Shelter Oversight Committee

Many changes occurred again this year for the First Church Shelter, and the Oversight Committee kept a close eye on all the proceedings. We have been very thankful for Director Jim's Stewart's experience in navigating the changing contracts with the City and the State, and for constantly advocating for the needs of our Shelter guests, the unhoused people of Harvard Square and beyond. Our 24 hour shelter has returned to overnight hours only, although more winter weekend and weather day openings are planned given expanded State Contract funding. During the past year the Day Shelter and Night Shelter Coordinator roles commenced and were filled by Nathan Wilson Braun and Joe Freitas, already veteran shelter workers. This arrangement allows both administrative and day to day tasks to be spread between Jim and the Coordinators, reducing Jim's work load and creating a deeper bench of those able to manage the shelter staffing and activities. Additionally, James Gullberg took on the role of Shower Coordinator, managing this essential service that continues to be hosted by University Lutheran Church and funded by the City of Cambridge. Our partnership with the City also continues to provide 2 meals per week to the community, distributed at First Parish and from the Tower Room at First Church. Over the last year about 2/3 of the guests were helped to find housing, with outstanding assistance by Housing Navigator Cherry Russell. Fewer housing opportunities may be available going forward, as Federal funding associated with Covid relief have ended.

For the Oversight Committee, the highlight of the year has been a growing sense of fellowship and community with each other as we continue to navigate Shelter business, month to month and year to year. This was evidenced during our efforts for the Doris Beauvais Luncheon in October and the Gift Card fundraiser in December. Brian Funck's showcase video on Housing Navigator Cherry Russell's work was well received and educational for the congregation and community alike. More ideas are on tap for next year as we continue to listen to the leading of the Spirit, work together in service and love for the unhoused in our community.

A major area of work in the year ahead will be to procure funds to purchase a new van for Shelter use for transporting guests and securing supplies.

We would not be able to do our work without the dedicated Shelter Staff: Cris Benavides, Kevin Benitez, Steve Brown, Amy Flores, Joe Freitas, James Gullberg, Dennis Keveney, Nijimbere Lahayiloyi, Gabe Mulcaire, Kevin Newell, Tyler Nilson, Cherry Russell, Edmund Shen, Nathan Wilson-Braun, Serena Yu and Jim Stewart. Many thanks to them for their ongoing care and commitment to this crucial work. We also thank Karen McArthur for forbearance and expert bookkeeping and Dan Smith for support and communications.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jan Jeffers Lo for the Committee,
Hanna Bliska, Claire Cocroft, Lisa DeNardo, Brian Funk, Marianne Jensen

Report of the Friday Cafe

With most of our guests vaccinated, the Friday Café transitioned back to normal seating in 2023, with fans in the windows to keep fresh air in circulation. It was a year of many emotions. We lost two beloved old friends, Hilary Hopkins and Brian O'Donovan, and welcomed many new friends into the mix. We even received the gift of a wonderful Friday Café video, made by filmmaker John MacGibbon. It's posted on our church website, if you haven't seen it. You can get there via a shortcut: www.thefriday.cafe.

The Friday Café is a place where church and community come together. Our vision is to involve as many of our neighbors as possible – as cooks, in-person volunteers, clothing donors, and financial givers – offering them the chance to feel a direct connection with folks experiencing homelessness and food insecurity. Our partners include individuals, churches, nonprofits, universities, the City of Cambridge, and the Health Department. We are always looking to make new connections.

CAFÉ LIFE

The Café currently serves between 90–150 guests each week, some regulars, some occasional visitors, and some newcomers. The same is true of our 35 weekly in-person volunteers; they are a mix of regulars and new participants. Together, guests and volunteers create a warm community feeling on Friday afternoons, with very few “incidents” that require my intervention. Our legendary weekly meal is prepared potluck-style by church members and neighbors in their own kitchens, and it is truly delicious. Guests come for the food, but they stay for the community vibe! Volunteers also love the chance to chat with guests and get to know each other a bit. It's an aspect of our program that sets us apart from many others, and makes for a special volunteer experience.

We are especially blessed by an incredible core group of very committed and collaborative volunteers. This dream team, led by volunteer Operations Manager Dave Demme, keeps the operation running smoothly each week so that guests and volunteers can relax and enjoy the Café. Dave has also helped us to reduce our environment footprint by improving efficiency and focusing on eco-friendly supplies.

CAFÉ FINANCES

As the Friday Café has grown over the years, paying for increased staff hours and program expenses has become more of a challenge. Even with a successful fundraising event in the sanctuary, a large number of memorial gifts, a benefit concert at the Burren, and numerous individual gifts, we still did not raise our full budget in 2023. We are carrying a surplus from previous years, so we're fine for now; but we do need to seek additional sources of support. In 2024 I will be looking to forge new partnerships in the business community. I welcome your coaching and assistance! Stay tuned for more about these outreach efforts in the coming months.

THANK YOU

Heartfelt thanks to First Church members for participating in our program as cooks and in-person volunteers; for donations of hand-knitted hats, new and gently used clothing, and other essential items; and for gifts to the Friday Café fund. We also thank the Missions and Social Justice Committee for allocating a significant yearly grant to our program, and the First Church Staff for year-round administrative and building support – from updating our website to fielding outside inquiries to tracking our Café financial activity to mopping the floors after we go home. In these and so many other ways, you, the First Church community and Staff, make our work possible. Thank you.

Report of Beloved Community

Supporting the Congregation in Becoming an Anti-Racist Church

Since 2008, First Church has been on a Racial Justice journey marked by 4 interwoven streams of work, learning, and action. This report discusses efforts, progress, and lessons learned in 2023.

1. Deepening vision and commitment

In 2023, the Beloved Community group worked with the Executive Council, church committees, the congregation as a whole, and community partners to support the First Church Vision for Being an Anti-Racist Church. We strive to make the vision a reality and to become “Repairers of the Breach.” (Isaiah 58:6).

2023 was notable for the increase in our relationships, partnerships, and joint efforts on our racial justice journey with groups outside of the First Church.

We partnered on events and ongoing projects with History Cambridge, the Massachusetts Reparations Interfaith Coalition, Harvard Divinity School, Harvard Chaplaincy and other congregations in Harvard Square including Old Cambridge Baptist Church, Christ Church in Cambridge/Episcopal Chaplaincy, Harvard Epworth United Methodist Church, First Parish Unitarian Universalist, and University Lutheran Church. Events have included:

- Hosting a November workshop led by Dr. David Ragland of the Truth Telling Project on the Spiritual Practice of Reparations, a first step towards further collaborative work.
- Planning for an “Upstander Academy” with indigenous faculty to increase our knowledge of local indigenous history and further develop our relationships with local indigenous people.
- Landscape of Slavery tours of Harvard Square given by Senior Dan Smith and other Harvard Chaplains. One participant commented. “I could take this tour 100 times and still barely be able to absorb the depth and breadth of history that has been hidden in plain sight. The tour is revelation after revelation of painful, shameful reality that rocks the foundations of what I was taught as a child.”

1 In addition to work with partners throughout the community, First Church continued its internal efforts to become a more anti-racist church. This effort is led by the Executive Council with the assistance of the Beloved Community group. Each church committee is asked to report on their efforts towards being an anti-racist church. Recent efforts have included the Investment Committee’s investigating emerging trends and leadership in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) indices and principles to guide portfolio investment and screening criteria for asset managers. Another example is the Building and Grounds Committee that increased its communication with the church’s sextons, many of whom are Persons of Color, such as checking in with them about race issues that arise in their work environment with the congregation and with the many renters of our building.

Report of Beloved Community (continued)

2. Reparation and Remembrance

First Church set up a Reparations Fund in 2021 and has given away \$93,500 since that time to a group of people of African descent engaged in activism and anti-racist work. Referred to as “The Collective,” they are convened by First Church member Karlene Griffiths Sekou and direct the reparation funds to people of African descent with needs in areas such as business ventures, college education funds, and assistance with immigration status.

We are including more diverse music and visual representations in our worship life and in our sanctuary and meeting rooms. In 2023, we hosted 11 portraits of “Americans Who Tell the Truth” by artist Robert Shetterly including an unveiling of a portrait of Harriet Jacobs including remarks by scholars who have studied her life.

Currently we are working on a lasting fabric art project called “Wade in the Water” that includes the names of the enslaved persons connected with our church history. Participants in the creation of this project include members of the church and the Cambridge community as well as a descendent of one of the enslaved members of the church.

The Spiritual Practice of Reparations Workshop with Dave Ragland in November, attended by over 60 people from 9 congregations, is the beginning of an effort to organize Harvard Square congregations to support local reparations effort. Our shared local legacies of slavery, colonization, and white supremacy call us to ground our work in ongoing learning, relationship-building, and lasting commitment. Further work is planned for 2024.

3. Ongoing learning and study

Two sessions were held before church in June on our efforts to be an Anti-Racist Church. The first was “Where have we been and where are we now?” and the second was “The Spiritual Practice of Reparations.”

Beloved Community members Abby Shuman and minister Lexi Boudreaux led a Lenten Faith and Life group on Reparations. The book *Reparations: A Christian Call to Repentance and Repair* was used as an optional resource and the focus of the group was not just on monetary reparations, but also on race and on creating a safe space for group members’ sometimes difficult questions and concerns about race, white supremacy, and reparations, and to sit with the discomfort that conversations like this engender.

Report of Beloved Community (continued)

4. Spiritual transformation

We continue to ground this work in our faith, prayer and in how the Holy Spirit can transform us individually and collectively. In 2023, we were especially moved by our “Wade in the Water” fabric art to honor the enslaved people in our church records. The work was first unveiled at the Juneteenth service and we were honored that the service was attended by the Lloyd family, direct descendants of some of these enslaved people. Egypt Lloyd was first to embroider a name onto the panel, that of one of her ancestors.

Report of the Archives Committee

The year 2023 brought important developments for the First Church Archives.

At a congregational meeting on June 25, 2023, church members voted unanimously to approve the Archives Collection Policy as recommended by the Archives Group. The policy states that our Archives collect and preserve material in two areas: records of First Church in Cambridge and material directly relating to the history, ministers, members and ministries of the congregation.

Over the years, in addition to these two areas, the Archives acquired material not directly related to First Church. These include manuscripts, pamphlets and books about the broader history of Congregationalism in England and New England. Kate Judd gave an overview of this material in a Powerpoint presentation at the 9:30 Adult Formation hour on May 7.

The Archives Group chairs, together with Peggy Bendroth, researched rare book dealers and recommended a consignment agreement with David M. Lesser, Fine Antiquarian Books, of Woodbridge, Connecticut, which Executive Council approved. In 2023, Mr. Lesser sold 12 pamphlets and First Church received \$11,529, which was donated to the Fifth Century Fund.

The Archives provided a rich source of information and illustrations for a 12-page history of the First Church Cockerel weathervane. This gilded copper cockerel was created in 1721 by coppersmith Shem Drowne for a church in Boston. It stayed in Boston for 152 years. It moved to Cambridge in 1873 to top the newly-built sixth meeting house of this congregation. It stayed there for 150 years until November 15, 2023, when the cockerel came down from its perch because of concerns about erosion of its gilding and possible effects of climate change. It is currently in storage while the congregation discerns next steps for this beloved symbol. The Archives is preserving records of this period in the cockerel's long life.

The history booklet was designed by Christine Reynolds, written by Lindsay Miller, and incorporated research by Kate Judd and Jacqui Gates. Among their discoveries was an envelope filled with black and white photos, sent to First Church in 1956 by the daughter of the chair of the church's buildings and grounds committee in the late 1930s. One photo showed the cockerel atop the church's original stone steeple, which was being dismantled in early 1938. This happened a few months before the Hurricane of 1938 might have knocked down the cockerel and tower too. Bless the daughter for sending the pictures and bless whoever saved the photos and filed them in the Archives.

In 2023, the Archives received documents from Art Anger, Carol Wilson Brown, Cathy Garnett, Gay Harter, and others concerning First Church's Frobenius organ, missions and social action projects in the 1980s, the adoption of an Open and Affirming policy in the 1990s, and ongoing work for racial justice. The Archives Group also catalogued handwritten sermons from the 18th and 19th centuries that need to be transcribed. We are seeking volunteers to help with this interesting work.

Respectfully submitted,
Kate Judd, Lindsay Miller, Chris Reynolds, co-chairs, Archives Group

Report of the Gifts Discernment/Nominating Committee

The Gifts Discernment/Nominating Committee recruits persons to fill positions as officers, and chairs and members of standing boards and committees as required by the First Church bylaws. At the request of the Moderator and/or Executive Council, we are also available to help recruit special task teams, work groups and other entities not named in the bylaws that are usually gathered for specific, short-term purposes.

One of our goals this year was reaching out to the whole congregation to ask about individuals' interests, concerns, and gifts. We hoped to nurture greater involvement of church members in nominating themselves or others to church leadership. With that in mind, we wrote a bulletin insert that ran twice in this fall. Gail Breeze also offered a ministry moment during worship.

Several people indicated interest, but many said, "not now" given the intensity of current commitments. We are indeed a busy congregation, which is our biggest challenge to recruitment.

A joy was welcoming Rose Quinn to Stewardship, increasing the generational diversity and enthusiasm of our leadership.

We wish to thank Dave Kidder for his wisdom and leadership on our committee over many, many years. As he retires from this service, he leaves us with beautifully crafted job descriptions that assist folk in understanding what they might be volunteering for, and whether the position is a good fit for their gifts and available time. Also, Dave's long-standing and wise familiarity of folks in our congregation has been invaluable! Thank you, Dave.

Beth Loomis, Mary Robinson (co-chairs); Gail Breeze, Dave Kidder, Jenny Stuart

Report of the Gifts Discernment & Nominating Committee (continued)

2024 Slate of Officers, Boards and Standing Committees Bold font means new to position

OFFICERS:

Moderator: Moana Bentin
Vice Moderator: *Phil Jones*
Clerk: Laurie Friedman
Treasurer: Jim Cairns
Associate Treasurer: Rich Goode
Assistant Treasurer: Connie Pyle, Jim Greaney
Controller: Rachel Carlson
Member at Large: Claire Morgan

BOARD OF DEACONS:

Leslie Pelton-Cairns (co-chair)
Casey March (co-chair)
Adam Weiss
Dean Eaton
Nora Willcutts
Jean Dany Joachim
Laurie Williams
Audrey Bellinger
Lisa McCarty
Linda Ziebell
Will Erickson

FRIENDS OF FELLOWSHIP:

Caitlin Anderson
Jenny Stuart
Steve La Master
Rachelle La Master

GIFTS AND DISCERNMENT:

Beth Loomis (co-chair)
Mary Robinson (co-chair)
Gail Breeze
Jenny Stuart
Bruce Hoppe

Report of the Gifts Discernment & Nominating Committee (continued)

STEWARDSHIP:

Winnie Yip (chair)
Caroline Newton
Ann McClintock
Rose Whaley
Susan Ohman
Chris Reynolds

SHELTER:

Jan Lo (chair)
Brian Funck
Marianne Jenson
Hanna Bliska
Claire Cocroft
Lisa DiNardo

CHRISTIAN FORMATION:

Susan Reynolds (chair)
Lindsay McNamara
Beth Spalding
Carol Wilson-Braun
Ingeborg Haug
Heather Stanford

MISSIONS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE:

Molly Baker (co-chair)
Kathy Williams (co-chair)
Holly Marple
Barb Hume
Alice Kidder
Sally O'Brien
Martha Mueller Cook

BUILDING AND GROUNDS:

Peter Byerly, chair
David Torrey
Jack Haskell
Don Johnson

Report of the Gifts Discernment & Nominating Committee (continued)

INVESTMENT COMMITTEE:

Laurie Burt (chair)

Marc O'Brien

Elizabeth Lovance

Treasurer (ex officio)

Stephen Weller

William Hsiao

Report of the Missions Committee

*“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.” Psalm 89:14*

This year, Missions and Social Justice Committee worked together to appropriate 10% of church funds that are designated for social justice work. In addition, the Committee collaborated with the church community on a wide variety of outreach and educational events focused on various social justice causes. The work of the Committee focused on easing the burdens of racial injustice, supporting our refugee and immigration ministry, and supporting important causes in the fight for peace in Israel and Palestine. The largest portion of our budget continues to support the Southern New England Conference of the UCC in its social justice priorities.

Racial Justice

Racial justice causes were a priority area for giving and educational opportunities this year. As was appropriated in our budget, the Missions Committee gave \$5,000 for reparations to The Collective. The Committee also contributed to the art display, “Americans Who Tell the Truth,” featuring portraits of many people of color including Ida B. Wells, Bob Moses, Denise Altvater, Maulian Dana, Betty Burkes, Bryan Stevenson, Frederick Douglas, Gladys Vega, Amara Ifeji, and Harriet Jacobs, which were on display at First Church from April to June 2023. In addition to financial contributions to the exhibit, the Committee played a role in designing and executing the programming that took place around the portraits while they were on display at First Church. During Lent, the Committee hosted a letter writing campaign every Sunday for people to write letters to policy makers about current bills to ban use of Indigenous peoples as school mascots, as well as increase funding to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous youth. The Committee also made a donation to the Harvard University Native American Program annual Powwow in the Fall of 2023. Finally, the Committee contributed to the Slave Legacy History Coalition. This is a consortium of individuals, organizations, and institutions engaged in the preservation of the history of enslaved people in the Cambridge, Boston communities and beyond.

Homelessness and Low-Income Support

Missions and Social Justice continued to support people who are currently houseless as well as low-income individuals and families. With many of the groups working on services to the unhoused, we supported both specific projects and general programming. Organizations to which we donated were:

- Friday Cafe, which serves meals and provides donated clothing to the needy
- First Church Shelter, which provides meals and shelter for men
- Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, which sponsors a program called Clergy and Laity for Affordable Housing, which builds and renovates houses to expand affordable housing
- Solutions at Work, which supports a meals program in Cambridge and on an ongoing basis runs a center where people can get clothing and accessories appropriate for job interviews
- Harvard Square Meals Program, which feeds those in need.
- Bay State Re-Entry program, which connects citizens returning from incarceration with mentors who can help navigate a successful re-entry to the community

Report of the Missions Committee (continued)

Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO)

First Church's continued support of GBIO in both dollars and leadership time has helped GBIO to hire three new organizers this year. Their work, along with the work of the 50+ First Church members who attended GBIO events this year, has led Governor Healey to propose the largest housing bond bill ever.

International/Global

The Committee supported a variety of international causes this year, both financially and via educational events at the church. As in the past, First Church's most significant financial contributions to international causes this year was to support the Latin American ministry of Monica Maher (chiefly in Ecuador). In addition, the Committee made several donations to support causes working towards a just peace in Israel and Palestine, including to Oasis for Peace and Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP). In honor of the 75th anniversary of Nakba, the Committee hosted Hilary Rantisi from the Religion, Conflict and Peace Initiative at Harvard to speak about current events in Israel and Palestine (before the horrific events that happened there in the fall 2023). Additionally, the Committee paid for an honorarium for Reverend Dr. Mae Elise Cannon from CMEP to give a sermon in October. Coincidentally, she was scheduled to speak during church on the first Sunday after the terrible Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7th. The Missions and Social Justice Committee also supported the efforts of the group of individuals who applied for and were successful in joining the Welcome Corps. This is a program sponsored by the US government inviting groups of individuals to welcome and host incoming refugees. As a part of the program, the group of people from First Church welcomed 2 people from Somalia in December 2023.

Health and Well-Being

Several of our donations advanced the work of organizations devoted to health and well-being in different spheres of action.

- Anti-Gun-Violence: We funded the MA Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence and Cambridge's Gift Cards for Guns program.
- Transgender Rights: We donated to LGBT Asylum Task Force, which is a church ministry that welcomes LGBTQ people of all faith traditions and provides housing, food, and connection to legal, medical, and mental health resources at other local agencies.

The Committee looks forward to continuing our work in collaboration with the First Church Community in 2024. To contribute ideas and share thoughts, please reach out to co-chairs Molly Baker and Kathy Williams.

Report of the Stewardship Committee

From Jeremiah 29:10-11:

"I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For surely you know the plans I have for you, says God, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

This passage is from a letter from Jeremiah to the Israelite exiles in Babylon. The prophet is declaring the good news that God "will bring you back to this place" from exile. Thinking in parallel with our own time, God is present and active with us, challenging us to glean insights that will help us make the world a more just, loving, life-giving place.

The 2023-24 Stewardship Committee adopted this text from Salt*, a not-for-profit digital/printable church online resource that provided the theme and associated graphics. Knowing we down a skilled member (Lexi Boudreau) of the Communications Team, the theme and digital graphics streamlined some of the efforts of their work. We are grateful especially for our Sarah Higginbotham, for her gifts of vision, formatting and setting clear deadlines for the electronic messaging of our 2024 pledge season.

We are grateful for our staff liaison, Rev. Karen McArthur for her comprehensive knowledge of finances, our church's history of giving and her spiritual and biblical perspectives on money.

We thank Caitlin Anderson and her family for their enduring dedication in making delicious soups for the November 5 Stewards & Saints luncheon and kickoff. We thank Office Assistant Bruce Dillenbeck for carefully entering all financial contributions as they come our way, and the production and mailing of our print materials.

It is enjoyable to within a committee comprised of Baby Boomers, Millennials and Gen X, Y and Z (Rose Whaley-Word Cloud!). We are gifted with Anne McClintock, who is experienced in planned giving initiatives. Our communications included mid-week emails, a medium that allowed us to insert graphics and letters of testimony. We sent postcards and hosted 9:30 am gatherings and livestream Sunday worship to reach the most people possible in carrying out our theme of "A Future with Hope."

We are always asking, how can we, as a Stewardship Committee, do better in providing what people may need to know for their specific financial situation. As we look forward to 2024, this Committee, along with the Planned Giving and the Fifth Century Fund, will be undertaking the educational and logistical steps of a formal First Church Planned Giving program.

And so we sought, in partnership with the Treasurers, Finance and Investments Committees, to be a resource for members of First Church in Cambridge, that we all may be good stewards of our household finances in the ways of Jesus our brother.

Respectfully submitted,

Joanne Paul (Chair), Anne McClintock, Caroline Newton, Susan Ohman, Rose Whaley & Winnie Yip

Report of the Treasurer

We had a balanced budget in 2023. While it feels good to write that, I hope it feels just as good reading it. As of this writing, that we had not only a balanced 2023 budget, but we ended with a small surplus, without exceeding our 4% planned draw from our investments. Going into 2024 we presented another balanced budget, however in 2023 we benefitted from approximately \$65k in final year employee retention credits as well as some interest received from the IRS. We are not likely to have the additional “bonus” income in 2024. We also benefitted from another relatively mild winter last year and our old buildings held up well with only some small work needing to be done on the Tower. And we are living our values with the many ministries we support.

Our existing Cornerstone and boiler loan payments continue to make up approximately 7% of our operating budget, but through a special Debt Retirement appeal, we have received \$253k of the \$325k pledged so far. What that means is that we have been able to make \$197k in additional principal payments this year, saving \$74k in interest expense and paying off the loan more than six years early. (Additional pledges & gifts welcome!) Once our loans are paid off that will free up a good chunk of our budget for reinvestment into our longer-term vision for the church.

Looking ahead, there is still work to do in terms of achieving that long-term vision. We are currently operating with only one full-time, called Minister and we have made the decision as a congregation to also pursue a full-time Minister of Color to serve our congregation. Today, the budget simply does not support two full-time Ministers. But looking ahead, we see reasons for optimism. Our membership continues to grow, and your generosity continues to defy expectations. We are thinking long-term by thinking carefully about our assets as well as planned giving and preparing for the future with our 5th Century Fund.

For these next few years, the Treasurer’s main goals are to help model how we can support the calling of a second full-time minister while making sure that any budget we put forward supports our goals and takes care of our people. We work closely with the Stewardship and Investments committees and can develop various scenarios for how we can leverage what we have today to reach our vision of tomorrow. We also look for ways to reduce operating costs so that we can reinvest in our people and ministries.

Last year I wrote that it was my last year as Treasurer. Like Mark Twain once wrote, reports of my demise are greatly exaggerated. 2023 was actually my last year as Treasurer but I will support Jim Cairns as he steps into the role of Treasurer and I transition to the role of Associate Treasurer. I am very grateful to Jim and the energy, passion and care he brings to the finance function here at First Church and am happy to be handing over the keys to a balanced budget. No pressure, Jim. :) The truth is that we wouldn’t have a balanced budget without Jim’s tireless work ethic and pragmatic approach to our finances. Thank you, Jim, and thank you Karen McArthur for your dedication, budgeting skills and doing all the extra things we ask you to do without hesitation.

Yours in spirit,
Rich Goode
Treasurer

Congregational Roll 2023

Active Roll Reported for 31 December 2022: 402

Additions to resident membership:

New Members (by affirmation of faith): 10

Emma Duke
Owen Duke
Graham Hendren Funck
Winifred Hendren Funck
Ginny Harlan
Duncan Hollomon
Owen Alexander Jones
Ada Grace LaMaster
Campbell Kathleen Pelton-Cairns
Erik Isaiah Stauffer

Removals, by death: 4

Anita Anger
Beverley Evans
John Hildebidle
Hilary Hopkins

Removals, by letter of transfer: 2

Ariel Ackerman
Carolyn Ann Dittes

Baptisms in the Church Universal: 4

Mackenzie Dwyer
Winifred Hendren Funck
Graham Hendren Funck
Malcolm Hendron Funck

Marriages: 1

Samantha Caveny and Nick Thompson

Active Roll on 31 December 2023: 406

Communion of Saints

During 2023 the following persons completed their lives among us

Chris Alba
Anita Anger*
Jordan Bearak
Carolyn Bendroth
Rebecca Blank
Phil Brunell
Warren Chapman
Beverley Evans*
Joan Gonnoud
John Hildebidle*
Hilary Hopkins*
Pat Hoppe

Tom Karpe
Penny Kilburn
Robert Lamberts
Bob Melichar
David Moran
Brian O'Donovan
Frank Palmer
James Shearer
Shirley Smith
Michael Triplett
Alberta Rose Triplett
John J. Williams III

O Lord, you are my light and my salvation
the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

One thing I ask of you, Lord, this I seek:
to live in your house all the days of my life...

For you will hide me in your shelter
in the day of trouble,
you will conceal me in your tent
and set me high on a rock...

I believe that I shall see
the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

-Psalm 27, par.

*First Church member



FIRST CHURCH IN CAMBRIDGE, CONGREGATIONAL

United Church of Christ

11 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA 02138

617-547-2724

www.firstchurchcambridge.org