

Regular Meeting of the Congregation



ANNUAL REPORT May 5, 2024



FIRST CHURCH
in OBERLIN + UCC

The First Church in Oberlin, United Church of Christ

106 N. Main Street, Oberlin OH 44074

(440) 775-1711

Firstchurchoberlin.org

AGENDA

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Call to Order | Anne Sprague |
| Opening Prayer | Rev. David T. Hill |
| Report of the 2024 Nominating Committee | Erik Andrews |
| Agenda Items from the Floor | |
| Closing Prayer | Rev. David T. Hill |

Shalom

*Shalom, my friends, shalom my friends. Shalom, shalom!
May peace be with you, may peace be with you. Shalom, shalom!*

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Nominating Committee Report to the First Church in Oberlin, UCC • April 2024
COMMITTEE CANDIDATES Agreeing to join identified in 'NOMINATED FOR POSITION' column and their term

| POSITION | CURRENT MEMBER | Term Start | Term exp. | Term Length | Eligible for re-election | Notes | Nominated for Position | Term Exp. |
|--|---------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| Moderator | Sprague, Anne | 2022 | 2024 | 2 | Y | Accept 2 nd Term | Sprague, Anne | 2026 |
| Clerk | Rebecca Bandy | 2023 | 2025 | 2 | Y | (no term limit) | | |
| Treasurer | Mike Schmid | 2023 | 2025 | 1 | Y | (no term limit) | | |
| Executive Council | Ruthann Clark | 2020 | 2026 | 3 | N | 2 nd term | | |
| | Gates, Linda | 2023 | 2026 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | | |
| | Matthews, Gene | 2021 | 2024 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | Matthews, Gene | 2027 |
| | Conway, Anne | 2018 | 2024 | 3 | N | 2 nd term | Kelley, Dave | 2027 |
| | Longsworth, Carol | 2019 | 2025 | 3 | N | 2 nd term | | |
| | Cheek, Ken | 2022 | 2025 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | | |
| Christian Education | Carl Jacobson | 2023 | 2026 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | | |
| | Marleen Caldwell | 2023 | 2026 | 3 | Y | 1 st term; | | |
| | OPEN | 2021 | 2024 | 3 | | | OPEN | 2027 |
| | Preston, Kim | 2022 | 2024 | 3 | Y | Replacement; 1 st term | Preston, Kim | 2027 |
| | OPEN | 2022 | 2025 | 3 | | | OPEN | 2025 |
| | Kepner, Val | 2019 | 2025 | 3 | N | 2 nd term | | |
| Facilities | Buck, Marty | 2021 | 2026 | 3 | Y | Replacement; 1 st term | | |
| | Jindra, Bill | 2023 | 2026 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | | |
| | Andrew Garver | 2021 | 2024 | 3 | Y | 1 st term; | Garver, Andrew | 2027 |
| | OPEN | 2021 | 2024 | 3 | | | Flood, Dennis | 2027 |
| | Andrews, Erik | 2022 | 2025 | 3 | Y | 1 st term; chair | | |
| | Heron, Jim | 2023 | 2025 | 3 | Y | Replacement; 1 st term | | |
| Fellowship <i>(Contact Deidre Gargasz for funeral / memorial receptions)</i> | Matthews, Sandy | 2020 | 2026 | 3 | N | 2 nd term | | |
| | Scotch, Denise | 2019 | 2026 | 3 | N | Replacement; 2 nd term | | |
| | Kelley, Alana | 2023 | 2024 | 3 | Y | 1 nd term | Kelley, Alana | 2027 |
| | Gueulette, Margaret | 2021 | 2024 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | Gueulette, Margaret | 2027 |
| | Colson, Sarah | 2019 | 2025 | 3 | N | 2 nd term, chair | | |
| | Sanderson, Karla | 2022 | 2025 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | | |
| Finance | Hamilton, Bill | 2022 | 2025 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | | |
| | Richards, Pete | 2023 | 2026 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | | |
| | Schaum, Anne | 2018 | 2024 | 3 | N | 2 nd term | Konkoly, Tom | 2027 |
| | Cheek, Ken | 2022 | | n/a | n/a | EC – at large | | |
| | Schmid, Mike | 2023 | | n/a | n/a | Treasurer | | |
| | Matthews, Gene | 2021 | | n/a | n/a | EC – at large | | |

| POSITION | CURRENT MEMBER | Term Start | Term exp. | Term Length | Eligible for re-election | Notes | Nominated for Position | Term Exp. |
|--|---------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| Nominating | Schmid, Mike | 2022 | 2026 | 2 | N | 2 nd Term | | |
| | Gates, Linda | 2022 | 2026 | 2 | N | 2 nd Term | | |
| | Garver, Nancy | 2024 | 2026 | 2 | Y | 1 st term; | | |
| | Hayes, Ardith | 2023 | 2025 | 2 | Y | 1 st term; | | |
| | Andrews, Erik | 2021 | 2025 | 2 | N | 2 nd Term | | |
| | Jindra, Robin | 2021 | 2025 | 2 | N | 2 nd Term | | |
| | Burke, Carol | 2020 | 2026 | 3 | N | 2 nd term | | |
| | John Gates | 2023 | 2026 | 3 | Y | 1 st term; | | |
| Outreach and Service | Becky Thompson | 2023 | 2024 | 3 | Y | Replacement | Becky Thompson | 2027 |
| | OPEN | 2021 | 2024 | 3 | | | Bradley, Kathleen | 2027 |
| | Carter, Kris | 2020 | 2025 | 3 | Y | 2 nd term | | |
| | Schaum, Miranda | 2020 | 2025 | 3 | Y | Replacement, 1 st term | | |
| Personnel <i>(appointed not nominated)</i> | Sprague, Anne | | | | | Moderator | | |
| | Schmid, Mike | | | | | Treasurer | | |
| | Conway, Anne | | | | | EC - at large | | |
| | Clark, Ruth Ann | | | | | EC - at large | | |
| | Hill, Rev. David T. | | | | | Pastor | | |
| | Longsworth, Bob | 2023 | 2026 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | | |
| Stewardship | OPEN | 2024 | 2026 | 3 | | | OPEN | 2026 |
| | Thompson, Ralph | 2023 | 2024 | 3 | Y | Replacement, 1 st term | Thompson, Ralph | 2027 |
| | OPEN | 2022 | 2024 | 3 | | | Blodgett, Barbara | 2027 |
| | Peterson, Kristin | 2020 | 2025 | 3 | N | 2 nd term | | |
| | OPEN | 2019 | 2025 | 3 | | | OPEN | 2025 |
| | Bolland, Janet | 2023 | 2026 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | | |
| Witness and Membership | OPEN | 2023 | 2026 | 3 | | | Heron, Jan | 2026 |
| | Neison, Mary | 2022 | 2024 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | Slocum, Harold | 2027 |
| | Garver, Nancy | 2021 | 2024 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | Garver, Nancy | 2027 |
| | Taylor, Shirley | 2022 | 2025 | 3 | Y | 1 st term; Chair | McRae, Nancy | 2025 |
| | OPEN | 2022 | 2025 | 3 | | | Brehm, Ellen | 2025 |
| | Kelley, Dave | 2023 | 2026 | 3 | Y | 1 st term | Zwegat, Tina | 2026 |
| Worship | OPEN | 2023 | 2026 | 3 | | | Long, Frankie | 2026 |
| | OPEN | 2021 | 2024 | 3 | | | Thomas, Peter | 2027 |
| | OPEN | 2021 | 2024 | 3 | | | OPEN | 2027 |
| | Hayes, Ardith | 2019 | 2025 | 3 | N | 2 nd term | | |
| | McKibben, Jeanne | 2021 | 2025 | 3 | Y | Replacement, 1 st term | | |
| | Burke, Carol | | 2024 | 1 | n/a | No term limit | Burke, Carol | 2025 |
| Conference Rep | Burke, Carol | | 2024 | 1 | n/a | No term limit | Burke, Carol | 2025 |
| Association Rep | Burke, Carol | | 2024 | 1 | n/a | No term limit | Burke, Carol | 2025 |

Report of the Moderator

Anne Sprague

2023 - 2024

As followers of Jesus, we aspire to minister to one another, our community, and the world.

This is the new vision statement that First Church has adopted. It seems simple enough, but it is a foundation to help guide our actions and decisions as we move into the future, to use as a basis for all we do, caring for one another, near and far. Those actions have already spoken volumes. The First Church doors have been opened to everyone regardless of where they are on their life journey: on Sunday mornings, at our community events, during the meeting times for the dozens of local and county organizations to whom we offer space. The new heating system is well on its way to completion, a necessary development as the steam connection to the College ends. A proper HVAC system ensures that our historic space will continue to be a gathering place for those who impact our community and who need a home. Thanks to our ever-faithful and generous members, the loan needed to pay for this infrastructure improvement has been reduced by almost two thirds! Maintaining our facility for the use of our community as well as ourselves demonstrates our devotion to this community, and another reflection of our vision statement. We continue to navigate our new post-covid world, learning how to reconnect with one another in person, and how to use technology to continue our broad reach to members further away. We have shared our stories: the heart warming, the painful, the poignant, and the spiritual, to learn more about one another as individuals, as trusted colleagues, and as children of God. More than 20 new members have joined our ranks. And so we continue to express our extravagant welcome, and to appreciate the unique gifts each and every one of us has been given.

Anne Sprague

2024 Annual Report from the Clerk

2023 definitely brought challenges, but also exciting new opportunities. Although we continue to struggle with budgetary concerns, First Church has discovered new and meaningful ways to engage with our community. We continued discussing the use of our outdoor spaces, tentatively planning areas of welcome and play. In May, we hosted our first annual Spring Festival, in which we invited people to see what we are all about. This event pairs nicely with the culminating statement of the Visioning Committee's efforts of the last year:

“As followers of Jesus, we seek to minister to one another, our community, and the world. To this ministry, we bring our time, talents, and other resources as we are able, asking God’s blessing as we go out to love and serve.”

First Church readied for the cessation of steam-derived heat from Oberlin College by approving the installation of a new boiler system. By the end of 2023, preparation for the system was underway with asbestos abatement and the removal of the old boilers. The new boilers will be ready to provide heat by May 2024.

Resolutions April 2023 – March 2024

(2023-4) Resolved April 30 2023, that First Church authorize the project design, the purchase, and the installation of two stand-alone boilers to provide heat for its entire facility and be managed and maintained by the FC Facilities Committee. Anne Sprague called for a vote on the resolution. Second: Anne Schaum. The motion passed with one abstention.

(2023-5) Resolved April 30 2023, to authorize First Church to take out a loan not to exceed \$400,000 to fund the heating project. Anne Sprague called for a vote on the resolution. Second: Jody Kerchner. The motion passed unanimously.

(2023-6) Resolved May 23, 2023 that the Treasurer [currently Michael R. Schmid] and the Moderator [currently Anne G. Sprague], with the Clerk [currently Rebecca Bandy] as backup, be authorized to sell, assign, and endorse for transfer, certificates representing stocks, bonds, or other securities now registered or hereafter registered in the name of The First Church in Oberlin, United Church of Christ.

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I, Anne G. Sprague, Moderator of The First Church in Oberlin, United Church of Christ, hereby certify that the foregoing is a true copy of a resolution duly adopted by the Executive Council of said First Church in Oberlin, United Church of Christ, at a meeting duly held the 23rd day of May, 2023 at which a quorum was present and voting and that the same has not been repealed and remains in full force and effect and does not conflict with the Constitution of The First Church in Oberlin, United Church of Christ.

Motion: Gene Matthews. Second: Ruth Ann Clark. The motion passed unanimously.

**(2023-7) Resolved November 28, 2023** that \$24,000 of the minister's salary for 2024 be designated as a housing allowance. Motion: Linda Gates. Second: Carol Longsworth.

**(2024-1) Resolved January 30, 2024** that the Treasurer be directed to sell up to \$100K from unrestricted funds to match donations received in support of the boiler replacement effort. Motion: Anne Conway. Second: Gene Matthews. The motion passed unanimously.

**(2024-2) Resolved February 11, 2024** to accept the slate of new and renewing candidates for Nominating Committee for a 2-year term. Motion: Ruth Ann Clark. Second: Kristin Peterson. The motion passed unanimously.

**(2024-3) Resolved February 11, 2024** that the benevolence allocation be 10% of anticipated pledges, plus special offerings (e.g. One Great Hour of Sharing, etc.) Motion: Ruth Ann Clark. Second: Prue Richards. The motion passed, with 1 opposed and 2 abstentions.

**(2024-4) Resolved February 11, 2024** that the Congregation vote to accept the presented budget as recommended by Executive Council. Motion: Gene Matthews. Second: Rollin Conway. The motion passed, with 2 abstentions.

**(2024-5) Resolved February 11, 2024** that the Executive Council prioritize divesting from fossil fuels so that our investments are aligned with our values, and to report the progress made in removing fossil fuels from our investments at the 2025 Regular Meeting of the Congregation. Motion: Martin Buck. Second: Peter Thomas. The motion passed, with 3 opposed and 7 abstentions.

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### Facilities Committee Annual Report 2023 - 2024

The Facilities Committee has been busy with tasks both large and small. Some of these include:

- New Boiler Project on-going as First Church disassociates with the OC Heating infrastructure.
  - A huge debt of gratitude to Gene Matthews for being our in-house project leader. In return, he's been awarded a lifetime honorary membership to the Facilities Committee!
  - Wright Engineering & Lucas Plumbing as primary contractors.
  - Much work; Many dollars.
  - Optimism abounds.
- Coordinated with Oberlin College regarding the geo-thermal project work required. This involved significant tree removal, transplanting, and (in future) tree replanting.
  - Parking Sign(s) and Light removal / re-installation completed.
- Negotiated new mowing and plowing agreements with Orange Blossom.

- This is a transition away from Go Green
- Yearly maintenance on the slate roof of the Meeting House. Several repairs.
  - Note: With yearly maintenance the roof has many serviceable years remaining.
  - Small painting projects as a result of roof leaks completed.
- Orienting new Facilities Team members with hands-on tours of entire Facilities and specifically planned/in-work Boiler project.
- Grade & Seed the Courtyard (completion of the sewer replacement project)
  - Decision on various sidewalk alignments deferred.
- Storm and Screen window exchanges in the Meeting House windows.
  - Performed internally in the fall; Solicited contractor support for Spring.
- Meeting House Air Conditioning repairs as needed. Unit now 17 years old.
- Replaced burned out bulbs and fixture repair for Security Lights around facility.
- Addressed Terrace Doors issues. Acquired Stops to allow doors to prop open.
- Work Days (October, November) to address minor maintenance tasks –
  - Inside and Outside cleanup;
  - Screen -> Storm window transition.
  - Flower Beds and overall property cleanup
  - Removed aged banners from façade.
  - Appreciate the support!
- Completed internal leadership transitions.
- Contemplated request for new chairs for Fellowship Hall –
  - Decision to acquire new chairs deferred.
- Minor Plumbing tasks periodically thru the year.
- Office Overhead Cabinet swap out for new whiteboard.

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### **Fellowship Committee Annual Report 2023 - 2024**

We continue to experiment with a new way to provide coffee hour after church. We are asking church members to sign up to be coffee hour hosts as families, couples, partners, friends. We are asking for a commitment to host coffee hour 2 or 3 times a year. The committee has been encouraging this by hosting coffee hours on special church occasions and offering training for anyone who would like to host. The Committee hosted a Welcome Back coffee hour in September and an Epiphany coffee hour in January. In December we provided a soup and bread lunch to accompany the Advent Workshop. Everybody's Birthday Lunch was celebrated in March with a delicious potluck and tremendous desserts.

Submitted by Sarah Colson, Fellowship Committee Chair

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### **Finance Committee Report 2023-2024**

2023 was a better financial year for the church largely thanks to better stock market performance.

Here are several financial observations gathered by our Treasurer:

During 2023, in preparation for the HVAC/Boiler project, we paid \$220,000 to close out our Cornerstone loan for our renovation project. Based on our trustworthy financial history, we won approval from Cornerstone to take out up to \$400,000 to pay for the HVAC/Boiler project. Work on this project commenced in the Fall with all milestones achieved pending a steam cut-off with the college planned in late April.

With the approval of the Executive Council, we ran a capital campaign to offset the expected charges for the HVAC/Boiler project. We successfully raised \$144,230 in cash and an additional \$19,000 in pledges. With the matching dollar from our unrestricted funds, we are now able to pay

for up to \$263,230 for the \$400,000 project as originally budgeted. Thank you for your support to keep our facilities heated and cooled.

During 2023, our unrestricted net assets increased by \$226,683. We were able to achieve this due to the strength of the stock market, additional bequests received and prudent management of our operational budget. During the first quarter of 2024, our unrestricted net assets have continued to increase by \$148,264. This increase reflects the continued strength of the stock market and the generous donations for the HVAC/Boiler project. We were able to match \$100,000 of the donations from our equity funds and still show positive growth during the quarter. All boiler expenses incurred to date have been paid.

Our operational budget remains challenged. Pledges have remained flat from 2023 to 2024 while our expenses have unsurprisingly increased due to inflation. Due to prudent operational management, an emergency request for supplemental gifts in the first quarter of 2023 and some unplanned donations, we were able to close our 2023 fiscal year without implementing the approved extraordinary withdrawal. The concern expressed in the 2023 budget was avoided, but unfortunately, continues in the 2024 budget.

We are projecting an operational deficit of \$102,000 for 2024 (this deficit excludes any impact from the Cornerstone HVAC/boiler loan). The first quarter of 2024 has benefited from the expected early gifts we have received and shows a \$28,000 surplus year to date. The impact from the Cornerstone loan for the HVAC/Boiler project has been avoided for the first six months due to the successful capital campaign. The Finance team will carefully monitor our income and expenses and report to the Congregation to determine whether an extraordinary withdrawal is needed to fund our operations.

Per the Investment Policy for First Church, we have maintained an 80% investment in equity funds with the balance invested in money, income or cash equivalents. 50% of our equity funds are in a low-cost S&P index fund. The other 50% are invested in managed funds meeting ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) and SRI (Socially Responsible Investments) standards as understood by Parnassus and the United Church Funds. 45% of the total equity funds specifically exclude energy investments.

As with all functions of our faith family, the work of the Finance Committee is reliant upon an army of volunteers and workers. I offer profound thanks to the committee members (including Ken Cheek, Bill Hamilton, Gene Matthews, Pete Richards, and Mike Schmid (Treasurer),); to our Moderator, Anne Sprague, who attended our meetings; to our Financial Secretary, Miranda Schaum; and to our Bookkeeper, Tom Taylor.

Respectfully submitted,  
Anne Schaum

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**News from the Undercroft**  
**Provided by the Oberlin Community Supporting Immigrants (OCSI)**

This has been an exciting year for Maria, Manolo, and their two children Emilia, 6, and Alexa, 3. Manolo has received his work permit and social security card, and he has a full-time job at the FEVE. Manolo has great respect and a deep sense of loyalty for the owners of the FEVE and he reports that it is a great place to work. Maria, a gracious, talented, and charming woman has hosted six birthday parties and countless gatherings in the undercroft with delicious and bounteous food for a diverse array of convivial Oberlinians! Emilia will enter first grade in August 2024 after a very successful year in Kindergarten in the Oberlin Elementary School. Alexa continues at Kendal Early Learning Center, where she has been for the last 14 months. She feels so much a part of Kendal, and in turn the Kendal residents delight in Alexa



and her classmates preparing and serving treats in the Jamison Center and the Gathering Place. Quite the athlete, Alexa can often be seen dancing down those long Kendal hallways, sometimes walking backwards, and often trying to chin herself on the handrails. Both children are fluent in English and speak English and Spanish with their friends and family.

The very exciting news for Viviana is that she is employed full-time in the Housekeeping Department at Kendal at Oberlin, a job and a work environment that she loves! This means that Viviana has not only a regular salary, but also medical insurance. Thanks to Kendal at Oberlin residents Anne Francis and Shirley Taylor, Viviana's English is improving every day. Her daughter, Luciana, 4, is finishing Pre-Kindergarten this spring at Oberlin Elementary School and will be ready for Kindergarten in August of 2024. Both Luciana and Emilia have a busy summer planned: the City of Oberlin's Summer Recreation program during the month of July; and in August Luciana will attend a week of Kindercamp, and Emilia will attend a summer class for incoming first graders. Alexa will continue attending at the Kendal Early Learning Center. Anne Elder, Becky Thompson, and John Gates provide transportation Monday through Friday to and from the Kendal Early Learning Center for Alexa. Emilia and Luciana ride the school bus!

Maria and her sister-in-law, Lidia, prepared all of the main dishes - everything but the guacamole, for the April 6, 2024 SEPA Guatemalan Dinner: 165 tamales, braised beef, black beans, rice, hundreds of tortillas, and a special hot tea made from pineapple, cinnamon, and jicama. The guacamole was prepared by Peggi Ignani. Viviana was busily involved in the clean-up after the dinner. Plans are underway for next year!

OCSI's efforts beyond Oberlin:

In January and February, OCSI was able to assist 10 Honduran immigrants living in Grafton, Ohio and being housed by the Church of the Nazarene and the Galilean Theological Center of Cleveland. OCSI provided some food and clothing, and K@O provided linens and single beds. OCSI also made an important connection with the Immigrant Workers Center (IWC) of Ohio. Jeff Stewart, director of the IWC, was able to recover some back pay that was owed to these Honduran immigrants and found work for some of the people in this group.

OCSI began its work in June of 2021, so we are approaching three years of learning how to help immigrants realize a successful resettlement. We have learned much about how to navigate the system to acquire legal documentation, work permits, social security cards, and medical treatment for people without medical insurance; and how to provide guidance on becoming a part of the community of Oberlin. Likewise, we are becoming acquainted with other groups in Northeast Ohio who share the goals and values that drive OCSI's work. We are grateful for the support of First Church, the Kendal at Oberlin community, the Bill Long Foundation, generous donors and volunteers, and the entire community of Oberlin who have all supported and contributed to the work of OCSI.

John Gates, OCSI Board Member

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### **Outreach and Service Committee 2023 – 2024 Annual Report**

First Church contributed \$28,893.25 to organizations and individuals engaged in progressive social action endeavors.

Of this, First Church contributed \$10,000 to the UCC's Our Churches Wider Mission (OCWM). Locally, recipients of benevolences included Oberlin Community Services, Ruby N. Jones Scholarship Fund, and Oberlin Weekday Community Meals. At the county level donations included El Centro, HOLA, Lorain County Free Clinic, Neighborhood Alliance, Good Knights of Lorain County, Genesis House, and Second Harvest. State entities included helping send our youth to Summer Camp at Temple Hills and Americans Making Immigrants Safe. International donations were made to SEPA Guatemala and E. Palestine Emergency Aid through the UCC.

In addition, special offerings were collected and made to One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, and the Christmas Fund. For all these special offerings, we worked extremely hard to promote these offerings to the congregation to try and get back to our pre-pandemic amounts that we were collecting and sending for each of the offerings. We got very close this year, with a total from all four of them in 2023 of \$10,183.

In the summer of 2022, Outreach and Service was approached about making a pledge to Oberlin Community Services for their capital campaign. This was a difficult decision that only came from multiple meetings, then the committee gave a recommendation to the Executive Council, who then approved our recommendation. Our plan is that we gave \$10,000 towards their campaign, in addition to our regular donations to them in 2022, then \$4,000 for the four years afterwards (2023 – 2026) with the stipulation that whatever money we have “extra” at the end of our fiscal year, we will also donate towards their capital campaign. This is for a total of \$26,000, minimum. In 2023, we were able to continue with this promise, even giving an extra \$1,000 at the end of 2023, as stipulated in our pledge!

We continue to work on updating our Outreach and Service bulletin board down by Fellowship Hall. Unfortunately, since we’re juggling so many things, it isn’t as updated as we’d like, but we’re continuously working on it.

We participated in the 2023 Engagement Fair with all of the committees in the church – what an amazing sight!

Throughout the year, we promoted various volunteer and donation opportunities to the congregation and wider community. Keep your eye on the First Things First for these opportunities!

Outreach and Service also partnered with Worship Committee during Advent to give the option of donating extra money towards the poinsettias to give to Oberlin Community Services during the holidays!

This year, First Church once again partnered with Oberlin Community Services to encourage the congregation to generously provide gifts and winter-weather clothing (mittens, hats, scarves, etc.) for a child(ren) in a family(ies) for Christmas through the Holiday Helping Hands program. The church then went on to also provide each family with a \$50 OBP Gift Certificate (which could be used at many businesses in Oberlin). We were able to provide gifts and certificates for 13 families!

We also were able to provide several organizations and individuals with reduced or (in many cases) completely waived fees for the renting of the facility. Some of these included the AARP Tax Aides and the various 12 Step Groups that meet here. We estimated this to be \$37,300.00 for 2023!

In addition, we promoted and hosted various fund raisers this year including the Back-to-School Drive for Oberlin Community Services, the Oberlin Weekday Community Meals Concert, and the Empty Mugs concert for Oberlin Community Services.

Even though we did the promoting, the members of the congregation are the ones who put time and effort into these worthy causes. For that, we thank you!

At the 2023 and 2024 budget congregational meetings, there was an important decision made that the Outreach budget would be cut in half for 2023 and 2024 only (going from 20% of pledges down to 10%) and that more budget lines would have to be funded by this 10%. Due to this, we’ve been having to make very harsh decisions about who we will donate to this year and how much we plan on donating to them.

In December of 2023, we had an Ecumenical Carol Sing. The idea for the Oberlin Ecumenical Carol-Sing was accepted in September 2023, as one of our Outreach Committee projects. This community celebration of Christmas took place on December 17th, 2023, and was made possible by the collaboration of congregants from a number of Oberlin churches and fellowships. It included the initial gathering of 20-25 participants who sang Christmas Carols out of doors in Oberlin’s downtown area. Later, this caroling group walked to Peace Community Church where it gathered with other congregants and community members - approximately 50-55+ people in total. We all then joined in singing Christmas

Carols, hearing aspects of the Christmas Story, and receiving the musical offerings of four soloists. Carol Longsworth gifted us with her flute accompaniment. Tom Bandy gifted us with his organ accompaniment.

Thank you, Carol and Tom. Finally, we moved into the PCC Fellowship Hall and shared conversation and refreshments. This was a celebrative, engaging, inspiring, and community-building experience!

We were able to maintain our obligations, and are in the process of putting together a letter to send to the organizations we partner with that we aren't able to give our "usual" amount(s) to, explaining that this is a temporary situation for this year and asking if there is any non-monetary way we can be benevolent towards their organization.

Due to this, the committee is very willing to hear any suggestions the congregation has on how we can replace our monetary donations for a few organizations (e.g., setting up an "assembly line" for hygiene kits for Oberlin Community Services) for 2023 and 2024 only.

Respectfully submitted,  
Miranda Schaum

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### Stewardship Committee Report Update: 2023 Campaign for 2024 Pledges

Members of the Stewardship Committee include Ralph Thompson, Chairperson, Bob Longsworth, Scribe, Kristin Peterson, and Linda Gates, Executive Council Liaison. Miranda Schaum, Financial Secretary, has been helpful through the year.

This year, under the campaign theme, "Promises Made, Promises Kept", members faithfully pledged a total of \$291,524.00. We had 9 new pledges, 31 increased pledges, 6 decreased pledges and 40 pledges that stayed the same.

Details of the campaign can be seen along with previous years' data in the chart below.

| Year        | Amount Pledged   | # of Pledges | # of New Pledges | # of Increased Pledges | # of Same as Previous Year Pledges | # of Decreased Pledges |
|-------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>2024</b> | <b>\$291,524</b> | <b>86</b>    | <b>9</b>         | <b>31</b>              | <b>40</b>                          | <b>6</b>               |
| <b>2023</b> | <b>\$316,429</b> | <b>102</b>   | <b>11</b>        | <b>41</b>              | <b>38</b>                          | <b>12</b>              |
| <b>2022</b> | <b>\$312,701</b> | <b>93</b>    | <b>10</b>        | <b>39</b>              | <b>23</b>                          | <b>21</b>              |
| <b>2021</b> | <b>\$272,441</b> | <b>95</b>    | <b>17</b>        | <b>24</b>              | <b>41</b>                          | <b>13</b>              |
| <b>2020</b> | <b>\$279,776</b> | <b>91</b>    | <b>8</b>         | <b>36</b>              | <b>39</b>                          | <b>8</b>               |
| 2019        | \$303,671        | 100          | 14               | 53                     | 25                                 | 8                      |
| 2018        | \$294,122        | 100          | 14               | 53                     | 25                                 | 8                      |
| 2017        | \$303,859        | 103          | 6                | 50                     | 35                                 | 12                     |
| 2016        | \$299,165        | 103          | 5                | 37                     | 40                                 | 21                     |

On April 14th a crowd of interested members enjoyed a delightful and inspiring presentation by Laurel Price Jones about the first ten years of the history of First Church. This gave us a connection to the Finney Tent Society, an important emphasis of our Stewardship committee.

We learned how our church was an early leader in abolitionist activity as well as a beacon for educational and musical development in our country during the 1800's. Thanks Laurel!!

We also appreciate the faithful giving of all of our members, as well as those friends and out-of-town folks who contribute to the ministries First Church.

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### **Witness & Membership Annual Report Spring 2024**

Members of the Witness & Membership Committee (Nancy Garver, Janet Bolland, Mary Nelson, Ken Cheek – Executive Council Liaison, Shirley Taylor Chairperson) met monthly with Pastor David Hill. Important accomplishments included

- Identifying congregational pastoral concerns. Addressing many of these concerns with calls, notes, and visits.
- Identifying prospective new First Church Members and holding Inquirers' sessions to help them learn more about First Church. Intake sessions were held on July 2, 2023, November 9, 2023, and March 24, 2024. Twenty new members joined.
- Over the summer The Instant Church Directory, an online membership directory, was rolled out for the congregation. The directory now includes many pictures (with more needed). Many folks report that this is a very useful tool for getting to know and contact other folks in the First Church Community.
- Beginning in the fall, Janet Bolland signed up people for the Welcome Table as greeters each Sunday. A diverse group of people agreed to be greeters. Procedures were developed for the Welcome Table so that greeters would know how to find materials and provide an organized presence.
- On March 20, Shirley Taylor presented "The Conversation Project" as the final event in the Lenten Series "Another Day Older". David Hill also gave an overview of the First Church document – "My Final Wishes".
- Members of the committee participated in the fall Opportunity Fair.
- The committee sponsored a fall event where Tom Bandy and Randy Wagner (Master Organ Builder) demonstrated and explained the workings of our First Church Organ.
- Advent and Lenten devotionals were ordered through the UCC and distributed at the Welcome Table. Copies were delivered to Kendal folks in Health Care.

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### **WORSHIP COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024**

**The Worship Committee and larger Worship Team:** David Hill, Pastor; Thomas Bandy, Organist and Director of Music; Linda Gates, Executive Council Liaison; Prue Richards, Chancel and Meeting House Arrangements; Alana Kelley, Volunteer and Note-taker; Ardith Hayes, Chair; David Kelley, Elaine Orr, (through January '24), Jeanne McKibben.

**In fulfilling our assigned responsibility to "support regular and special worship activities",** we owe special thanks to the dedicated volunteers from the larger congregation who usher, serve as liturgists, and prepare and help serve communion. Anne Sprague, Becky Thompson, and Karla Sanderson respectively enlist these teams and keep the calendars. Sandy Matthews and Joann Dakos prepare the elements for communion. Margaret Ann Ellis bakes the bread. Seasonal liturgical decor in the Chancel and Meeting House speak to the creativity and skill of Prue Richards.

**Our mission also includes working "with the Minister and the Director of Music to provide worship services that honor the myriad ways that people worship."** Monthly meetings typically have found their focus in conversation with the Pastor about the upcoming liturgical season, generally in response to his invitation to generate ideas for themes, special liturgical resources, congregational

participation, and music. Occasionally a small task group was spun off to meet with him and help to plan a specific service or liturgy, as was the case with World Communion Sunday and Advent. Totenfest, Blue Christmas, Music Sunday, Storytelling led by the Visioning Task Force, are some examples of services planned with the committee's input.

The Committee worked closely with Prue Richards in planning the arrangements for Chancel flowers and decor for both Advent/Christmas and Easter, and also, at Prue's request determining the disposal or reassignment of various outworn vestments.

**Other Activities included:** Participation in the Committee Engagement Fair on November 19; Review of Worship Committee budget; authorizing the design and selection of offering boxes placed in the back of the Meeting House; participation in deliberations about ways to include the offering in the service while acknowledging support of the church's ministries; staying informed about the music program, being supportive as needed and appropriate.

**Concluding Observations:** Given the small number of elected members, the Worship Committee has provided, in effect, a **Task Force model of organization** that has worked very well.

**Collaboration** is one reason for its success. We worked as a team of elected members, staff, volunteers, and an E.C.liaison. We met with members of Finance, Stewardship and Facilities Committees in dealing with concerns about the Offering. Streaming Worship services connects us to the Tech Support team. Other committees and individuals participate in leading worship. Lastly, we owe a big thank you to the previous Worship Committee for leaving us with a **strong organization of task groups**. We are looking forward to welcoming new members to the committee this coming year and the gifts they will bring to our work together.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ardith Hayes, Chair

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### PASTOR'S REPORT 2023-2024

What do you do for your living?  
Are you forgiving, giving shelter?  
Follow your heart  
Love will find you  
Truth will unbind you  
Seek out a song of the soul

"Song of the Soul" – Cris Williamson

For over a year now, our Executive Council has opened its meetings with one or two persons sharing "soul stories." A soul story is a brief recollection of a particular time or circumstance in which one felt one's soul was fed and nourished. It is often an experience of what mystics refer to as a "thin space" – a place in time where the space between heaven and earth grows thin and the sacred is more immediately accessible. Through the regular sharing of soul stories, the primary leadership body of the church has sought to tend to its spiritual health amidst the institutional work of the church. The result of this practice has been an amazing spirit of joy, trust, and blessed assurance when facing the challenge of seemingly contradictory values and priorities.

Our Association's recent Spring Vitality Festival featured Lisa Withrow as the keynote speaker. Lisa spoke about "generative conflict," which entails viewing conflict as an opportunity for bringing folks closer together if they can conduct themselves in ways that are respectful and curious. In part of her talk, Lisa discussed common polarities found in congregations. "Polarities" in this sense, refers to conflicting priorities that cannot be resolved but can only be managed. These priorities reflect underlying values. For

example: Tradition AND Innovation; Spiritual Health AND Institutional Health; Management AND Leadership; Strong Clergy Leadership AND Strong Lay Leadership; In-reach AND Outreach; Nurture AND Transformation; Discipleship as an: Easy Process AND Challenging Process; Call AND Duty. I would add: "Welcome AND Safety" to this list.

Polarity management involves "learning to live in the positive side of what appear to be opposites." It is a dance that acknowledges that "anything overdone becomes a liability." Institutional health is critical to sustaining a church's ministry and mission. If buildings, finances, staff, and volunteers are not cared for and supported, the church may cease to exist. Focusing too much on institutional health, however, can lead to preserving a soul-less organization that is no longer grounded in its reason for being. Likewise, spiritual health is an essential element for a faith-based institution. If regular spiritual practice and engagement is neglected the church becomes but one more social club or identity group. On the flip side, tending to spiritual health to the exclusion of institutional health results in "pie-in-the-sky" thinking that has no basis in reality. The ministry of the church suffers because there is no structure to carry out the vision or answer God's call. Overdoing either aspect of church undermines the faith community's ability to soulfully care for itself and others.

The church post-COVID continues to evolve as previous patterns of being the church are revisited, re-evaluated, and re-imagined. I don't think anyone has clarity on how best to "do church" these days but I think a key element is feeding people's souls. This is something that communities of faith are uniquely gifted and prepared to offer. It takes but a passing glance at the daily news to be reminded that we are living in a day and age were much that is unfolding within our society and around the world is nothing short of "soul sucking." Conflicts abound and there is a general propensity to objectify any person or group with whom we disagree. As we debase others, we dehumanize them as well as ourselves. We are living in an era of soul impoverishment. How can the church respond to this crisis?

Our recently determined vision statement proclaims, "As followers of Jesus, we aspire to minister to one another, our community, and the world." Soul nourishment is at the core of this ambitious ministry. As we strive to minister beyond ourselves, let us be guided by the soul-tending we have found helpful. What feeds your soul? How does the church nourish and enrich your soul? What are the soul stories you've experienced in your life? How might you share them with others? How might we, together, draw upon our own encounters with the sacred in which our souls have been fed to feed a soul-hungering world?

Grace and Peace,  
David

### **Community, College and Wider Church Involvement:**

**Firelands Program District** (Lorain County): UCC Clergy Group  
**Living Water Association:** Chair, Committee on Ministry; Member; Oversight Working Group; Participant, Community of Practice  
**Heartland Conference:** Pro-Racial Equity Network (formerly, Antiracism Network); Fitness Review Response Team  
**Lorain County** – Race Forward Planning Committee, Lorain County Racial Equity Center  
**City of Oberlin** – Climate Adaptation Task Force; Oberlin Community Services Rental Policy Task Group.  
**Oberlin College/Community:** Community Connections (recently formed group to strengthen and foster college/community relations)  
**Oberlin Business Partnership,** Vice President, Board of Directors

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### **Annual Report 2024 - Faith Formation Director**

The last year has been a time of challenge and change in Faith Formation!

We ended last program year by putting the finishing touches on the Rocket Room for our youth. The space has a reading and hangout space, several large games (pingpong, air hockey, and foosball), a place for tabletop gaming, and a living room/ kitchen setup for times where we watch videos and have discussions. My thanks to everyone who helped make the space what it is - most especially the youth!

I also participated in some “First Church firsts” as the program year ended: We held our first Festive Showcase, participated in our first Big Parade, and held a coffee hour instead of a picnic to honor our grads and Children’s Church teachers.

Summer brought our Summer Storytime series - with many added volunteers in the Children’s Church space. We highlighted the stories of women this summer, with an emphasis on women in the Bible. Because of our excellent volunteers, I was able to be away several Sundays to complete a summer project for my Discernment program on the subject of Evangelism. I traveled to UCC churches across Ohio, listening and learning from pastors and congregations about how they reach out to the community around them, and model being disciples of Christ to their neighbors. I also worked alongside our church’s visioning group as they grappled with the questions: Who are we as church? Who is our neighbor? and What are we called to be and to do? I submitted my paper to the Living Water Association in August, and gave a presentation about my experiences in the fall for a Sunday Adult Education session.

We did some restructuring over the Summer in Faith Formation, as there were new people joining the Christian Ed. Committee, as well as some challenges in volunteer staffing we’d noticed over the previous program year. Carl Jacobson has been ably serving as our coordinator for Second Sunday Adult Ed. programming, and has brought informative and engaging speakers to educate and challenge our congregation on various issues. Carl’s work has made it possible for David and I to focus our efforts on Wednesday night Adult Ed. series. Many thanks to Carl for his efforts.

We also restructured our Youth Fellowship events, as finding volunteers on Friday nights had been difficult in the past. For the fall, we moved both Fellowship events to Sunday evening, with a short break between them, and hired one of the childcare workers to be the second adult in the space. This worked wonderfully for the fall.

From the last week of August through the first week of January, I was enrolled in the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program at the Cleveland Clinic. Classes were on Tuesdays, and my hours on the patient wards were typically scheduled for Friday and Saturday, with occasional overnights from 4 pm Sunday until 8 am Monday morning. Because I knew that CPE would take up a large part of my time this fall, I wrote the entire fall curriculum during the summer, using resources available in the “Spill the Beans” curriculum. I also leaned heavily on the able assistance of our Children’s Church helpers: Rebecca Bandy, Sarah Colson, Carol Burke, and Val Kepner. Also invaluable were our the members of our fall childcare staff: Sydney Paunan, Ariana Daney, and Nina DiValentin.

In September, I was part of the planning team that planned and ran the Heartland Conference Annual Gathering. The event went well, and I was able to connect with several members of our national staff, including our new president, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson. I thank First Church for the ability to volunteer my time for the enhancement of the ministry and mission of the wider church!

The fall also saw the debut of a Thursday Night film series, focusing on animated films that had a mental health focus. We screened Inside Out in September and Soul in October. Numbers were low for the possible screening of Encanto, which was scheduled for November, so we simply held the potluck.

The youth’s pumpkin roll fundraiser was, as usual, very popular, and over \$300 was raised for our Holiday Helping Hands purchases. I provided eco-friendly Christmas crafts for our Advent Workshop, and we held an improvised Christmas pageant on the morning of December 24th.

The beginning of 2024 brought changes in the Childcare area. Ariana and Sydney both left Oberlin for study abroad. Laura Bandy and Milo Page, who had been working in the childcare area as substitutes, are now alternating weeks and joining Nina DiValentin as permanent workers. Molly Caldwell-Kepner and Claire Wilburn have stepped up as our new substitutes.

We held our final Family Camp at Tempel Hills on the weekend before Martin Luther King Day. Our numbers were slightly reduced due to some inclement weather, but two dozen of us played games, enjoyed some wonderful meals courtesy of the camp staff, and were even able to watch the Browns in the playoffs! We also held some vesper services in which we were able to bid goodbye to our beautiful UCC camp. A survey recently went out to the congregation to gather input about future possibilities for the Winter Retreat.

Youth events this winter and early spring have been mostly off-site: we held a bowling event at Park Lanes in Amherst, and a skating event on Presidents' Day at the Elyria Ice Arena. Both events had all ages having a good time together! We were also fundraising in February: The Souper Bowl fundraiser collected \$685 for community food assistance; our Shrove Tuesday pancake supper raised \$225 for camp scholarships.

Our Adult Ed. series for Lent was called "Another Day Older," and focused on the topic of aging and ageism. We ended with a discussion hosted by Shirley Taylor on "The Conversation Project," which deals with end-of-life care. Our Second Sunday Adult Ed. also dealt with this topic - Dr. Supriya Mahajan's presentation on Advance Directives and end-of-life decision making was very well-attended.

I also was consulted by members of the Executive Council regarding the redesign of our Safe Church Policy. The policy was state-of-the-art when adopted originally; but it was failing to address some safety concerns, including the challenges of remote programming and Zoom meetings. My thanks to David and the EC for being willing to listen to my input on issues of safety in the church, especially in the children's area.

I spent the early spring attending a number of webinars and trainings. I attended the Living Water Association's Spring Vitality Festival on Zoom about Generative Conflict, as well as webinars on Public Grants Available to Congregations, The Decline of the Western Church, a three-part series on Safe Church, and a discussion of how UCC churches are using Marcia McFee's Worship Design Studio Resources. In-person trainings included Adult/Infant/Child First Aid & CPR Training; the Heartland Conference's Faith Formation Event, "Worship as Faith Formation;" and the Healthy Practices for Ministry event on Cultural Humility featuring Dr. James Knight.

Future projects include working on bringing a Mental Health First Aid course to the church, creating more Messy Church experiences, and coordinating with the officers of Community Action To Save Strays (CATSS) as they run a six-month trial program in one of our upstairs classrooms. My sincere gratitude to all who work and worship at First Church for the opportunity to serve this welcoming faith community and its families!

Respectfully submitted,  
Jen Bertoni