



FIRST UNITED CHURCH

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Our Council and Governance

Chair of Church Council _____	3
Living Faith Priorities _____	4
COVID Task Group _____	5
Minister _____	5
Ministry and Personnel _____	6
Regional Council (Eastern Ontario Outaouais) _____	7
Candidates for Ministry _____	8
Congregational Statistics _____	8
Treasurer _____	10
Donation Reports _____	13
Trustees' Report _____	15

Our Commitment to Spiritual Nurture in Community

Committee for Intergenerational, Children and Youth Ministry _____	18
Children and Nursry _____	19
Youth Ministries _____	20
Choir and Music Ministry _____	21
Communications _____	22
Duty of Care _____	22
Meditation _____	23
Retreats _____	23
Sunday Services _____	24
TGIF _____	24
Welcoming and Hospitality Ministry _____	25

Our Commitment to Healing

Healing Pathway Ministry _____	26
Pastoral Care Network _____	27
Let's Talk About Mental Health _____	27
Soul Space _____	28

Our Commitment to Social and Ecological Justice

Committee on Anti-Racism, Racial Justice & Inclusion _____	30
First Connections Luncheon _____	31
Living into Right Relations Book Club _____	31
Partnership Ministries _____	31
Refugee Ministry _____	32
Remembrance and Call to End Violence Against Women _____	33
Water Allies/Earth Group/Climate Change Action _____	33

Our Partnership with All Saints' Anglican (Westboro)

Partnership Management Committee _____	34
Property Committee _____	34
Westboro Region Food Bank _____	35
New-to-You Shop _____	36

Our Council and Governance

CHAIR OF CHURCH COUNCIL *(Martin Settle)*

“Why do you go away? So that you can come back. So that you can see the place you came from with new eyes and extra colors. And the people there see you differently, too. Coming back to where you started is not the same as never leaving.”

— Terry Pratchett, *A Hat Full of Sky*

This past year I participated in workshops and discussions focusing on the rewriting of our Living Faith Story. While the prompt for Council undertaking this task – Brian’s pending retirement – still weighs on me with unprocessed grief and not insignificant trepidation, the actual processes of reflection and conversation were illuminating to me. The sense of “home” that I feel at First United is a common feeling.

My own story with First United has a beginning, a leaving, and a returning. A big one. And also, if I am honest with myself, many smaller ones. I always come home. I know that this experience is shared by those who have moved away and return, or live away and attend, or simply move in and out of the community with the assurance that it exists; that we are not alone. This is home, and we care deeply for it.

I am constantly inspired by First United, and the life that it has – a life that is beyond the scope of any ministry staff, and any Council. The vibrancy of the congregation is on display in activities taking place every day, scheduled and public and ad-hoc and unseen. Many of these activities are described in the reports in the following pages. But even in the breadth of the reports, they are incomplete. The congregation at First United is more than activities and programs. It is a people.

This is both the same congregation I joined two decades ago, and vastly different. It is alive: growing, changing, dying, resurrecting in the pattern of all of life. It is an honour to be involved in its life, and to be held in its love. I know, with certainty, that our love is stronger than our fears.

I am incredibly grateful for the work of everyone who contributes to the stewardship of our community. I particularly wish to thank those that have served on Council this year: Sandra Ballantyne, Marilynn Brodie, Andrew Clark, Chris Henschel, Maureen Hewitt, Renée Kokonya Sullivan, Shirley Paton, Joan Rogers, Andrew Sacret, Carol Shipley, Wendy Snelgrove, Catini St. Pierre, and Judi Varga Toth. I have witnessed their diligence, passion, and wisdom extended to caring for this community.

On behalf of all of us, I extend our deepest thanks to Brian Cornelius, Marg Stubington, Nikki Nel, Cindy Cherry, and Paul Dumais for their caring presence and leadership that enables our ministries. We thrive through their care.

I know that the future is uncertain. It always is, though we are often unaware of the uncertainty. In this time of our own awareness, I thank you for the trust and support that you have given to me, the staff team, and the Church Council. It is an honour and a privilege to serve this community as we declare a radical, passionate, living vision anew.

LIVING FAITH STORY *(Church Council)*

In December of 2023, as part of the ministerial transition, First United updated and approved the Living Faith Story previously adopted in 2015. The Living Faith Story energizes congregational life by describing our values as an inclusive Christian community as well as describing our commitments and programs. This story continually informs our priorities and ongoing life. Church Council encourages all who have not read the document to do so.

As an element in living this faith story, the congregation intentionally names areas of focus for our faith community on a yearly basis that informs particular efforts in a given year.

In 2023, the congregation adopted the following areas of focus:

1. Engage the congregation in faithful stewardship of the finances, giftedness, and talent that sustain our community life.
2. Continue to welcome changes and initiatives that enhance being an intergenerational community.
3. Continue to celebrate diversity and promote racial justice through anti-racist learning and action.

In 2024, Council proposes the following area of focus for congregational discussion and approval:

1. Navigate our ministerial transition by:
 - a. supporting and trusting the Search Committee in its work of identifying and recommending a Minister of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care
 - b. identifying and transferring the work Brian does to maintain the activities of congregational life and capture corporate memory.
 - c. celebrating the ministry of Brian by ensuring that congregational feelings are held and that we have heartfelt opportunities to say goodbye, both inside and outside of ritual.
 - d. facilitating readiness for the community to welcome and integrate a new minister.
 - e. honour the giftedness of the new minister and ensure that we provide necessary support as well as have heartfelt opportunity for rituals of welcome for the new minister.
2. Maintain our intentions on the following areas of focus on:
 - a. engaging in faithful stewardship of the finances, giftedness, and talent that sustain our community life.
 - b. welcoming changes and initiatives that enhance being an intergenerational community.
 - c. celebrating diversity and promote racial justice through anti-racist learning and action.

COVID TASK GROUP

Leaders: Jane Sly, Sandra Ballantyne, Shirley Paton, Marg Stubington, Brian Cornelius, Gail Webber (May-Sept), Nikki Nel (Sept-Dec)

The COVID Task Group was an ad hoc committee established to provide/interpret public health guidance to the Minister and to the Council of First United Church. In the spring of 2023, the Group provided information to Council as the community continued to regroup following COVID. Since that time the Covid Task Group has largely disbanded. Individuals from the COVID Task Group have responded to periodic requests for information when issues have arisen related to the potential spread of respiratory diseases within the First community.

MINISTER *(Brian Cornelius)*

Penning my last report is not easy. As I shared with you in my letter last August outlining the time had come for me to begin retirement processes, I am deeply grateful for this faith community, delighting in the inclusive and loving energies embodied by First United, and have been truly blessed by the opportunity to dance with this faith community for the past 18 years as your minister. My connection reaches back to 1990 where First United was the community that nurtured my transfer of ministerial credentials into the United Church nearly 35 years ago. I deeply treasure the many relationships nurtured in this faith community.

As the Fall unfolded, I was inspired by the engagement with the Living Faith Story, marveling at the leadership and commitment from diverse members and adherents in articulating First's congregational story. To witness the energy alive in the shared vision and values of First United deepened my appreciation for this community, even as I relished meeting and visiting with many new faces joining this circle of faith.

2024 marks new chapters in our on-going faith narrative and journey.

For you, the community of First United, there will be the delight in welcoming the giftedness of another minister. I have faith in *God-with-us* animating First's spirit life as the community navigates changes within the constancy of the gracious and loving support I have known and appreciated over my thirty-year plus connection with First. This minister will be blessed to dance with your Spirit strength and commitment.

For myself, new chapters include a dance to deepen my connections with Kenya, the land of my birth. This reconnection has been a vision nurtured within me for the next chapters in my life and faith. This year, I will be spending June to August in Kenya, returning for a time to Canada as I walk through staged retirement. Though the coming years remain mostly undefined, I trust in *God-with-us*, the Presence of the Holy, journeying with that Spirit of gentleness and restlessness.

In the remaining three months, I dedicate my fullest energies to a tenderness as all of us walk this important time of transition. In February and March of 2010, I was graced with a six-week study leave. This study leave coincided with the completion of 17 years and 2 months of ministry with The United Church of Canada. Ahead were 17 years and 2 months until my full retirement in April of 2027. That 2010 midpoint intersected with a determination to deepen my understanding of narrative theology as I familiarized myself with narrative therapy.

Impacting me were the words of Thomas King, the child of a Cherokee father and a Greek mother. After noting *the truth about stories is that's all we are*, King further observed that *stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous...a story told one way can cure, the same story told another way can injure*. I love engaging with the life-giving ways of *God-with-us* through the Christ story. How our faith story is told and embodied matters. Told one way, the story sources healing and hope. Yet told in other ways, this story can injure and harm. All of us have experienced this profound truth. I am grateful for the commitment to life-fullness in First's Living Faith Story.

As we embark on the next chapters, may we continue to be faithful in the ways we tell and embody our faith story. As Kenyan novelist and literary academic Ngugi wa Thiong'o notes, *over the years I have come to realize more and more that work, any work, even literary creative work, is not the result of an individual genius but the result of collective work*. Even as I live my story, my heart and prayers will embrace First Living Faith Story. I send loving energies as you live the collective genius as a faith community.

Finally, I am awed and grateful for the remarkable staff team I have worked alongside. The creativity and dedication and constancy of Marg, Nikki, and Cindy is an inspiration. I am confident in the gifts they will continue to share during this time of transition as well as having confidence in the support they will receive from all of you.

MINISTRY AND PERSONNEL *(Joan Rogers)*

Leaders: Amelia Buchanan, Sarah Orsini, Jane Ellis, Robert VanderBerg, Joan Rogers (chair). We thank Jane Ellis as she retires from M&P after many years of valued participation. We also thank Robert VanderBerg for his contributions as our 'policy wonk.' Amelia, Sarah and Joan will continue on the committee in 2024/2025; Scott Radloff and Sandra Ballantyne will join as of the March 2024 AGM.

Background of ministry: The roles and responsibilities of the Ministry and Personnel Committee are to consult with and support the staff of First United, and to review working conditions and performance. Each staff member has a liaison on M&P.

2023/2024 highlights: The committee developed the First United Church Leave Policy and the First United Church Professional and Vocational Development Policy; worked with staff to refine the new vacation and sick leave tool; and continued to update M&P documentation.

Emerging themes: In 2024/2025, as First United transitions from Brian's ministry to that of a new Minister of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care, M&P will continue to consult with and support all our staff. We endeavour to meet both the requirements of the United Church of Canada and the needs of staff and M&P members.

We thank our staff—Brian Cornelius, Marg Stubington, Cindy Cherry and Nikki Nel—for their dedication to the people and aspirations of First United, and for giving M&P the opportunity to work with them in an environment of trust and cooperation.

EASTERN ONTARIO OUTAOUAIS REGIONAL COUNCIL

Members: Brian Cornelius (clergy), Wendy Snelgrove (lay member), and one vacancy. We welcome interest if anyone wishes to engage with the Region.

Background of Ministry: The Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council is the governing body that exists between the National Church and the local congregation in the governance structure of the United Church of Canada.

2023 Highlights: In 2023, Eric Hebert-Daly, the new Executive Minister, initiated a strategic plan exercise and the Regional Council adopted a strategic plan at the October meeting. This plan examines ways the Region can improve effectiveness in providing resources and support to local congregations, and strategically engage with growth possibilities in the Region. Strengthening present communities of faith and developing alternative and new communities of faith was identified as a priority. The General Council is funding a Growth Animator for the Region. This animator is employed with the region 1/3 time.

This year, as required when undergoing a ministerial change, First United cooperated with the Pastoral Relations requirements, receiving both their support and approval to launch our search process. We are grateful for the support and guidance we received from Janet Nield as we updated our *Living Faith Story*.

Emerging Themes: The focus of the Region will be the implementation of the strategic plan, and where relevant, our new minister and representatives will share information with the Church Council and congregation as a whole.

The United Church of Canada makes its most important decisions through remits, a voting process which requires each pastoral charge to vote on a question, and the measure is passed if more than half the pastoral charges vote yes. Because a non-vote is effectively a no vote, the Regional Council works hard to ensure that each pastoral charge submits a remit vote. In 2023 and early 2024, a remit is before the United Church of Canada to establish a new National Indigenous Organization within the United Church of Canada, which would have its own internal structure and process, and which would not require approval by remit of the whole church for any future changes. First United Church has voted in favour of this remit.

CANDIDATES FOR MINISTRY

Presently, the two candidates for ministry through First United continue in their journey. Colleen Lowrie, until recently, has been serving as the Director of Camp Menesetung and serves as a youth and young adult minister. Claire Savage is presently employed in a community legal clinic working with victims of violence and Ontario Disability Pensions appeals while being very active in providing leadership in our programming for children at First United. Both Colleen and Claire will be meeting with the candidacy board in March of 2024 as they discern next steps.

MEMBERSHIP AND CONGREGATIONAL STATISTICS

The United Church of Canada is a democratic church. Formal membership with a congregation roots the governance of both local communities of faith as well as the Regional Councils and the General Council of the United Church of Canada.

During 2023, the Church Council appointed Sandra Ballantyne as our membership Coordinator. Under Sandra's leadership, Church Council updated our values and policies on membership; encouraged people to become members (an emphasis that did not exist during the Covid years) and contacted members not attending to ascertain their desire to continue as members. We took the time to reach out to many on the membership list who had not engaged with community life at First United to determine if they wish an on-going formal relationship.

This resulted in many changes. We updated our database lists and created new lists to track the number of Ministry Personnel who attend First United. Ministry Personnel have their membership linked with a Regional Council and not congregations. In the past, they appeared in our statistics as adherents.

Here is the statistical information on our congregation.

	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>
Membership	179	183	176	175	171	164	163
Ministry Personnel							13
Adherents	227	236	233	237	227	226	186
Adherents (under 18)	102	104	107	112	110	101	112
Total persons under pastoral care	486	508	523	518	524	491	474
Households in pastoral care	262	265	267	272	280	261	272
Identifiable givers	157	154	181	174	162	166	168
Average attendance	170	163	164	164	178	154	162

Of those actively attending First United events, 27% are below the age of 30, 21% are between 30 and 60, and 52% are 60 and above. 58% have attended First United for more than 10 years while 23% have attended between 3 and 10 years with 19% joining within the last three years.

Membership, December 31, 2022 **164 (27 non-resident)**

2023 Actions:

Transfer from United Church 12

Don Brodie
Marilynn Brodie
Caroline Crowe
Carol Dawson
Wayne Dawson
Rachel Dietrick-Thicket
Caroline Elson
Lynn Fischer
Ron Melanson
Andrea Nugent
Danielle Rolfe
Joanna Smith

Transfer from another denomination 6

Bruce Cameron
Joan Davidson
Chris Henschel
Melanie Laneville
Joelle Morgan
Robert VanderBerg

Removal by Death (1)

Removal by Transfer (0)

Removal by Request/Update (18)

Membership December 31, 2023 **163 (21 non-resident)**

Ministry Personnel 13

Total Members of the United Church **176**

Baptisms

Viola Rennie September 2023

Congregational weddings

Wallace Beaton and Lisa St. Amour July 2023
Joshua Stengel-Goupil and Francis Ferraris October 2023

Congregational Memorial services

Wuanita Whittingham June 2023
Lois Wilson (Reverend) August 2023
Kathy Southee September 2023

TREASURER REPORT *(Andrew Clark)*

NB: Please read this report as a complement to the detailed financial statements and budget provided in the Annual Report.

General Fund Results in 2023 and 2024 Budget

The General Fund is used for the day-to-day operations of the church. All unrestricted donations to First are recognized as revenues to this Fund. The year 2023 was a very positive one from a financial perspective. Congregational givings were up 6% from last year to over \$257,000 exceeding our 4% budgeted increase. Overall, our operational income was up 7.5% while our expenses were up only 2.3% with the net result that our budgeted deficit of \$15,800 deficit turned into an actual surplus of \$3,365!

The considerable increase in givings was in part due to the Stewardship Campaign which we ran in October and helped lead to a very successful Advent appeal. Our hope is that this campaign will lead to sustained increased givings in 2024.

The proposed Budget for 2024 includes a deficit of \$1,500 – essentially a balanced budget.

To achieve this proposed budget, Council is again calling for an increase in congregational giving of 4.5% just above the 4% per year increase of our medium-term financial plan. We hope to achieve this goal through a combination of increased year-over-year giving and an increase in the number of donors to our church community. The budget projects a yearly increase in expenses of 3.8% but, given the Ministerial transition, there is some uncertainty around our staffing costs – particularly around when the Minister would start and the unknowable moving costs (and therefore unbudgeted) for a new Minister.

Please note the following four elements in understanding the proposed budget.

- This budget continues the subsidy of \$19,500 for the Coordinator of Children, Youth and Intergenerational from reserves. In December, the congregation agreed to continue this subsidy until 2026 (\$14,625 in 2025 and \$9,750 in 2026) with an intent is to make this position an ongoing one sustainably funded by congregational givings beginning in 2027.
- The annual transfer from the Building and Legacy fund for this year is expected to increase by \$3,250 to \$66,000 reflecting the strong increase in value in our investments this year.
- The Building Improvement Fund to which All Saints and First had contributed \$20,000 per year is going down to \$10,000 reflecting a surplus which has built up in the account.
- A new budget item, \$2,000 for Right Relations, will provide resources for developing local initiatives and partnerships in our ongoing commitment to reconciliation. Creative ideas are emerging on ventures and ways this could be realized.

Mission and Service, Directed Outreach, Soul Space and Refugee Ministries

The First community continued to give generously to various outreach missions and ministries.

- **Mission and Service Fund:** We were only \$538 short of our 2023 \$35,000 goal for the Mission and Service Fund (M&S) of The United Church of Canada. M&S contributes to the UCC ministries and outreach in Canada and the world. The proposed 2024 budget again sets a target of \$35,000 for M&S. The Mission & Service Fund previously fully funded the administrative budget of the national church but this was changed a few years ago as part of significant changes to United Church governance when these costs were incorporated into the annual United Church Assessment paid by each church. Our assessment consequently increased substantially at that time. First United's assessment this year is \$14,566 and is reflected in the proposed budget.
- **Westboro Region Food Bank:** First United also gave generously to the Westboro Food Bank, raising \$13,277 of which \$6,992 was raised through an event hosted by Joan Rogers and Peter Cooney with the residents at the Metropole condominium. This amount is on top of the \$2,000 First United gives to the WRFB as part of its regular budget. In addition, \$1,369 was raised for the Multifaith Housing Initiative, much of it anchored around the Rite 13 trivia night and bake sale organized for the cause.
- **Refugee Funds:** First United continues to manage a large portfolio of refugee funds, supporting refugees fully sponsored by First United and several other refugee support groups in Ottawa for which we act as financial administrator and on whose behalf we provide charitable receipts. As expected, the size of our refugee accounts diminished considerably as many refugee sponsorships ended this year and Council decided last year to pause the Ministry pending a review of our future commitments. Members of First gave \$12,275 this year to support our sponsored refugees. Overall, the refugee accounts received gifts of \$123,273 while making expenditures of \$344,783 resulting in a decrease of our Restricted Refugee Accounts to \$259,488 at the end of the year (See separate narrative report on our refugee ministry).
- **Soul Space** attends to the spiritual needs of street health workers and is directed by a Steering Committee accountable to Church Council. In 2023, Soul Space had an income of \$115,240 which included \$83,592 in grants from the United Church of Canada Foundation, the Ottawa Community Foundation and the Eastern Ontario and Outaouais Regional Council. Soul Space also received over \$25,000 in program fees from participants and received donations of \$4,320. It had expenditures of \$68,897 and ended the year with a closing equity of \$106,555 (See separate narrative report on the Soul Space ministry).

Memorial Givings and Bequests

During 2023, we received donations in memory of Kathee Southee and Wuantia Whittingham. We also received a generous bequest from Kathee Southee, a member of our community for many years. The bequest was in the amount of \$29,432; Church Council decided to allocate half to the intergenerational ministry restricted ministry account and the other half to the church's Building/Legacy fund.

Partnership with All Saints' Anglican Westboro (ASW) through the Building Improvement Fund and Capital Fund.

As partners in the building we share with ASW, we budgeted \$20,000 for building improvements in 2023, which was matched by \$20,000 from ASW. This year, several repair projects were undertaken and are outlined in note 5 of the financial statements.

We also budget \$20,000 a year for major capital projects, while ASW budgeted \$30,000 (see note 4 to the financial statements). This year, we undertook a major upgrade of the church kitchen to bring it up to necessary building code and public health requirements. We expect the project to be finished in 2024 with the completion of necessary electrical work. No further major capital projects are envisaged in the next few years.

Words of thanks

Many people contribute to the Finance Ministry at First.

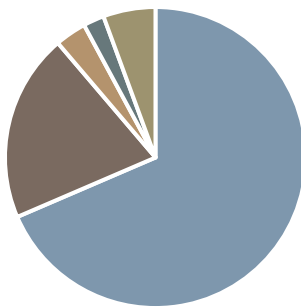
- Thanks go especially to Wendy Snelgrove and Catini St. Pierre for the work they put into this year's Stewardship Campaign.
- A special thanks also to Cindy Cherry, our Church Administrator, who keeps the books and tracks donations and who puts in extra work on the campaign.
- Thanks also to Dale Walker, our Donations Coordinator, and the faithful individuals who make deposits and sign cheques by coming into the office to be one of two signatories on all our cheques and to ensure we make prompt payments on our accounts: they are Jane Ellis, Margaret Maxted, Joan Rogers, Norman Ball and me.
- We especially thank Susan Little, CPA, for her expert accounting advice and for helping to ensure our financial statements are accurate and make sense, as well as for leading the independent internal audit team of Jane Ellis and Natalie Waugh.
- A final and heartfelt thank you to Brian Cornelius for his considerable work in this ministry over the years. The community group refugee ministry and the Soul Space ministry would not have been possible without his leadership in the financial administration of these monies.

Donations report

Leaders: Dale Walker is the Donations coordinator who reviews and ensures that the work by the Church Administrator, Cindy Cherry, is accurate.

We are grateful for the generous support of the members and adherents of First United. The operations of First United are fully funded by the members and adherents of First United. No funding is received by the United Church of Canada. In fact, 4% of our General givings is forwarded to the United Church of Canada for their operations. We also support the Mission and Service Fund of the United Church.

Your financial givings are needed to fund the \$419,174 annual budget to maintain and grow the community at First United.



- Congregational Giving Operations 61%
- Congregational Giving Outreach 11%
- Investment Income 18%
- Rental Income 3%
- Memorial/Fundraising 2%
- Special One-Time Funding 5%

2023 highlights:

Use of First Things First (pre-authorized Remittance) is the primary way people give to First United. There are 109 on this program; on an average month, this represents over 75% of our revenue. Anyone interested in joining First Things First can contact Cindy in the office.

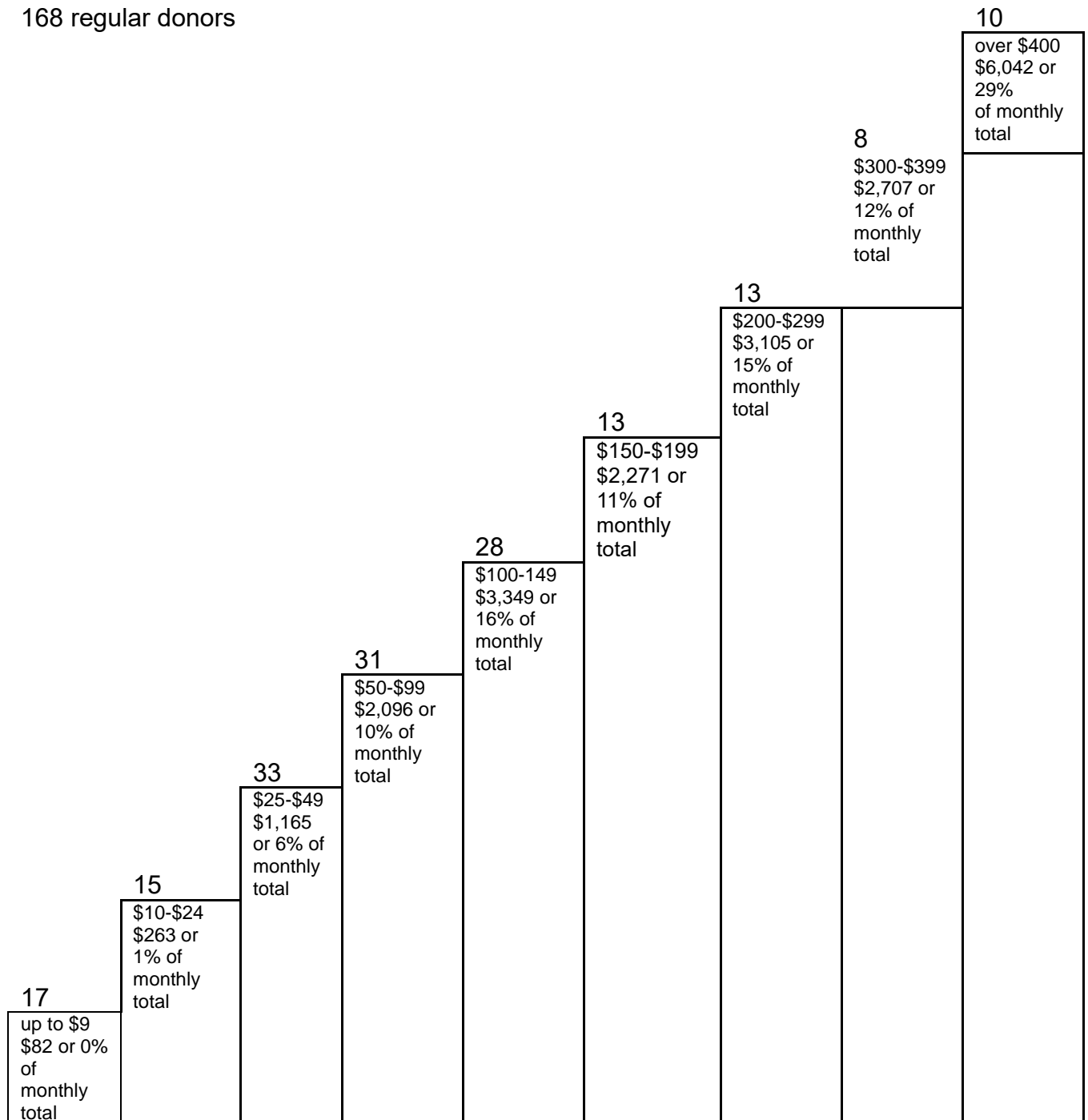
Use of e-transfer has become increasingly popular and monies are easily transferred by using treasurer@firstunitedchurchottawa.org. Please ensure that the purpose of the money transferred is identified and that the mailing address is clear for tax receipts.

We are grateful for those who support the church through the sale of shares using the mechanisms offered by The United Church of Canada Foundation. For more information, contact the office.

In the chart below, there is a report on average monthly givings by congregants to First United for the General Fund, a total of \$254,239 or a monthly average of \$21,187.

In this chart, donations to the General Fund are averaged to a monthly amount. The averaged amount includes Advent givings, those who give periodically, and those who give through the donation of stocks/mutual funds

168 regular donors



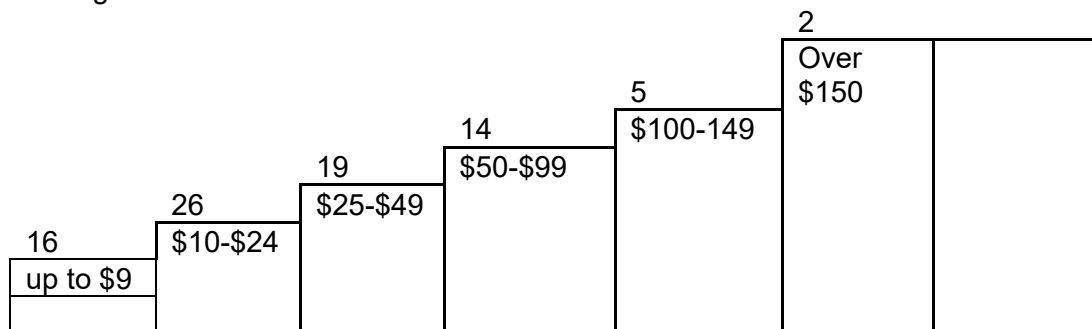
Report on the Offering to Mission & Service Fund in 2023

Donations are averaged to a monthly amount and include those who give periodically or through the donation of stocks/mutual funds

Average Monthly Giving to Mission & Service – \$2,869

Total Annual Mission and Service - \$34,422

Number of donors per step
82 regular donors



TRUSTEES' REPORT

Membership: Brian Cornelius (ex-officio), Peter Engelmann, Margaret Maxted, Martin Settle and Monique van Schie.

Every congregation in the United Church of Canada must have a Board of Trustees. The Trustees hold the real property (building and land) as well as cash investments (Building/Legacy Fund) in trust for the congregation and the wider United Church. Since we no longer own any real property, the ongoing responsibility of our Board of Trustees is to ensure the investments in our Building/Legacy Fund are well managed.

Background to the Building/Legacy Fund: The primary purpose of the Building/Legacy Fund is to provide annual income to the General Fund of the congregation to offset our building costs. The bulk of this investment comes from the proceeds of the 2007 sale of our Kent Street building.

The original investment in 2007 was \$930,000. Over the years, the Church Council designated bequests to be invested in this fund \$139,132 from Sharon Hawkins in 2018 and 2020 and \$14,716 from Kathy Southee in 2023. The total amounts invested are \$1,083,848.

Presently, the Building/Legacy Fund is valued at \$1,470,178. Because the Church Council did not need money for cashflow, the Trustees retain \$175,042 to keep invested and realize investment growth. This total of cash invested is \$1,645,220.

Policy for the Use of these Funds:

Since the establishment of the Fund, an annual contribution has been transferred to the General Fund to support the operations of the congregation. As a congregation, we originally adopted a policy of transferring 4% of the December 31 market value of the Building/Legacy Fund to the General Fund for the following calendar year. This policy allowed the congregation to realize growth in the fund, thus increasing the amount of the transfer to offset inflation and increasing budget demands. Beginning in 2022, the congregation, on recommendation of the Trustees, adjusted the transfer amount to 4.5%. The Trustees continue to recommend a rate of 4.5% for the annual transfer.

Recommendations for the 2024 Budget:

The trustees recommend:

2017. the transfer 4.5% of the market value of the Building/Legacy Fund to the General Fund and, therefore, a transfer to the General Fund in the amount of \$66,000 based on a total equity of \$1,470,178.
2. that transfers to the General Fund be enacted at the discretion of the Trustees and the Finance Committee, based on congregational cash flow and fluctuations in the value of investments.

Historical Information:

The previous transfers to the General Fund for the last seven years have been:

2023 - \$62,750 at 4.5%
2022 - \$69,200 at 4.5%
2021 - \$54,980 at 4.0%
2020 - \$49,660 at 4.0%
2019 - \$45,800 at 4.0%
2018 - \$45,500 at 4.0%
2017 - \$44,000 at 4.0%

The investment return over the last seven years has been:

2023 8.1%
2022 (4.6%)
2021 15.9%
2020 9.4%
2019 12.6% - began investing with Fiera Capital Wealth
2018 (2.2%) – invested in a Balanced Fund with Fiera Investments
2017 9.0%

As a reminder, at the 2007 Annual Meeting, the congregation approved an investment policy which authorized the Trustees to select a professional manager/firm/foundation to manage the investments with a long-term investment horizon, including investments in equities. Such an investment policy recognizes years in which there could be investment losses but, for investments to grow at a rate greater than the rate of inflation, such a policy is necessary for greater returns over the long run.

The congregation also required that the manager be guided by the ethical investment policy of the United Church of Canada. Trustees are obligated to follow the criteria set out in the Ontario Trustees Act and must exercise the care, skill, diligence and judgment that a prudent investor would exercise in making investments and are obligated to follow the terms of the United Church's Trusts of Model Deed. In addition, Trustees are not personally liable for losses on investments if they follow the prudent investor approach as asset out by the Ontario Trustees Act.

In November 2023, representatives of the Trustees met with financial advisors from Fiera Capital Private Wealth to review our investment strategy where 50% is invested in a Balanced Fund (which is a combination of alternative income and equities), 25% in Global Equities, and 25% in alternative income sources, such as loans for infrastructure developments, agriculture, real estate and green projects. This strategy has a goal of providing growth as well as stability since the alternative income sources are not impacted by stock market fluctuations. Based on this conversation, the present strategy is being continued.



An Intergenerational Choir

Our Commitment to Spiritual Nurture in Community

COMMITTEE FOR INTERGENERATIONAL, CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY: *(Amelia Buchanan and Elena Powell)*

Membership: Elena Powell (Chair), Nikki Nel (Coordinator for Intergenerational Ministry), Amelia Buchanan (M&P representative), Marti Settle, Nira Dookeran, Allegra Newman, Andrew Smiley, Judi Varga-Toth, Polly Varga-Toth, Joshua Lister.

Background of ministry: Formed in April 2022, the committee provides leadership and guidance to support the Coordinator of Intergenerational, Children's and Youth Programming and seeks to further enhance the intergenerational priority at First United.

First United commits to meeting the spiritual needs of several generations to learn and grow together, enhancing worship engagement/leadership across generations and deepening relationships across all ages.

2023 Highlights: In March 2023, 70 people of all ages joined in several discussions about how we meet the needs of and build relationships between all generations in our church. This input inspired our very successful Fun, Faith and Friendship events.

Based on what we heard, we focused our activity on:

- building relationships and community through all-ages events
- supporting volunteer recruitment
- supporting communications of church programs and events
- making space to support young adults to form/enhance community

Highlights of the past year:

- Fun, Faith, and Friendship events (April, May, October, November, February)
- church picnics (June and September)
- pumpkin carving fundraiser (October)
- assisting with welcoming lunches for newcomers
- gathering for families (February)
- Intergenerational choir: 30 singers of all ages joined the choir to sing "Give us Hope."
- developing descriptions and brochure about volunteer opportunities at First, ran volunteer fairs, table at coffee hour

Emerging Themes:

Volunteer recruitment continues to be a challenge. We have lost some members of our committee and could use more. The committee now meets every two months.

We looked into a Women's Retreat and Joy Camp. While many wanted to attend, we could not find volunteers willing to organize these events.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING *(Nikki Nel)*

Children's Program Leaders:

Lisa Gue, Melanie Laneville, Maureen Hewitt, Kerry Forbes and Joanna Smith.

Helping Hands: Kelsey DaSilva, Petra Varga Toth, Adam Nevraumont, Carol Dawson, Georgia S. and Kate Hoyer.

BACKGROUND OF MINISTRY

First United Church is committed to providing a safe space for all our children and youth. This year our programs have been filled with energy, growth and learning. We have established a welcoming community that is open and accepting of children and youth as they are. We are delighted with the number of new families that have joined our already existing families to create a vibrant community.

We are currently running two children's program groups (ages 3-7 and 7-10). We have 41 children attending on a fairly regular basis between the two groups. However, the number we have on any given Sunday varies from week to week. We are very appreciative of our children's program leaders. The skills and love they bring to the program are truly a blessing. Thanks go out to our helping hands as well as our last-minute backups—Murray Angus, Lisa Nafziger and Mary Donaghy.

Our nursery is open but is not supervised at the moment. We are hoping to re-establish a nursery team. There is a computer to zoom the service into the nursery each Sunday once we establish the team.

2023 highlights: what were the key highlights for the past year?

- an Easter egg hunt in the garden
- hosted Camp Awesome in August with 24 campers. Thanks go to Brian and Shannon Headland for all your help with the snacks and meals
- Christmas pageant with 40+ children and youth along with two baby Jesi, Hannah Jones and Jabali Kokonyo.
- family potluck

Emerging Themes: We are still in need of people to commit to leading and supporting our children and youth. Our programs are so successful because we provide consistent leadership but our leaders are at risk of burning out. The children's program will soon need to split into 3 groups if we keep growing.

Thank you to the congregation for your continued support of the children and youth ministries and all our families whose children and youth make our congregation such a rich and lively space.

YOUTH MINISTRY

Both our Rite 13 (ages 11-13) and Journey to Adulthood (J2A, age 13-16) are in the first year of their two-year cycle. We would very much like to widen the leadership circles to 3 or 4. Both groups have been building bonds between the youth, exploring their faith and being human in today's world. They also had some fun adventures doing social activities.

History and Vision

Our youth programs Journey to Adult (J2A) and Rite 13 began with a vision to create a safe place, where each youth feels loved, noticed, known and cherished. We recognize the need for friendship, and support for youth as they explore their authentic selves. We prioritize curiosity and the fun aspects of exploring one's faith and place in the world.

The program runs for 4 years, 2 years in Rite 13, and 2 years in J2A. The original program has been significantly modified over the years to respond to the complexities of our youth in a rapidly changing world. The first J2A program began in the fall of 2007 and ran for 2 years, led by Joyce Hardman, Wendy Snelgrove and Murray Angus with 11 youth. The first Rite 13 group, led by Andrew Jones, Pat Lindsey and Wendy Ann Deslauriers, also began in 2007 with 6 youth.

The capstone of the program is a pilgrimage that is undertaken as a group and designed to encourage personal growth. Past groups have traveled to places such as Sedona, San Francisco, Alaska, Iceland and Ireland, while the previous group's trip to Mexico was unfortunately canceled due to the emerging COVID pandemic. The seventh group journeyed to Vancouver in the summer of 2022.

We are now beginning our eighth cycle with a half dozen attending J2A and almost a dozen participating in Rite 13. Over the years, many of our youth and leaders have formed deep bonds and continue to support each other.

Rite 13 Leaders Report: *Wendy Snelgrove, Polly Vargatoth*

We meet in room 5/6 every Sunday. We light a candle and confidentially share our concerns, highs, lows, how we feel and what prayers are needed. Mixed in with serious discussions and activities are play and enjoying our time together. Our themes include:

- giftedness: We have gifts, we need to develop our gifts, we need to share our gifts
- group formation: Learning to share ourselves, welcoming, caring for one another, behavioural covenant
- developing as Individuals: how do I care for myself, positive mindset, making mistakes is OK, protecting myself (online safety)
- connecting with God - basics of prayer and other disciplines, basics of scripture

Highlights:

- Mafia, spoons, hide and seek and other fun games
- Christmas pageant
- Saunders Farm

J2A program Leaders Report: *Jillian Buckie, Ben Lindsey-Clark, Mirelle Ward-King*

In September 2023, we began our 8th cohort of J2A. We meet every Sunday morning in the J2A room off the church hall, which we have begun to decorate and make our own. Each week, we share our highs and lows, and our prayers for our community and the world. We spend this time getting to know ourselves and each other better. We are exploring our self-identity, building healthy interpersonal skills, and learning about our faith.

Some of our 2023 highlights include:

- spaghetti dinner
- pumpkin carving fundraiser for the J2A pilgrimage
- lots of games!

We are also beginning to prepare for our pilgrimage, which will take place in summer 2025.

Choir and Music Ministry *(Marg Stubington)*

The past year of choral music at First United was rewarding and joyful as we were able to return to singing with few limitations after three years of significant restrictions. Through the months of 2023, SuperChoir gradually made its way back to a membership of approximately 32, with an average of 22-26 singers on Sundays. We are grateful to be making music together and to hear the joyful sounds of a full congregation singing along with us.

Music was enhanced by the gifts of Roshan Chislett (Advent Variety Show and Zoom solo singer), Stephen Hayward (Family Christmas Eve), Pat Mayberry, Mike Beauchamp (guitar), Greg Renaud (trumpeter for Easter and Remembrance), Marti Settle (Variety Show) and Haley Cornelius (Christmas Eve). Thank you!

Ever adaptable, SuperChoir smoothly worked in a new music genre – Rap! We had a great time with Grateful, A Love Song to the World by Nimo Patel. We also initiated an Intergenerational Choir (one song, one rehearsal), which learned Give Us Hope by Jim Papoulis following the Sunday service on December 3 and then sang in church on December 10. We had a group of about 50 voices, ages 6-88! A highly successful event, to be repeated!

The choir and congregation continue to benefit from the generosity of our volunteer sound technicians, Scott Radloff, Norman Ball and Howard Clark who spent much time and effort to make the music sounds as good as can be, both in person and on Zoom.

To Brian, Nikki and Cindy, my hard-working colleagues, it has been wonderful to meet regularly with you and to continue our creative planning for the congregation. Thank you to Sarah Orsini, M+P, for her support and guidance.

As I look back on the past 10 years of working with Brian, I am deeply grateful for the mutual respect, shared values, excellent collaboration and fun. I will miss him very much and am committed to supporting First United's transition over the coming year.

COMMUNICATIONS

Leaders: Amelia Buchanan, Cindy Cherry, Nikki Nel and Brian Cornelius

Background of ministry: Communications and Social Media is a key ministry in ensuring that information is readily available to the congregation through Friendly Reminder emails, First Glance, our website and social media.

2023 highlights:

Amelia Buchanan and Nikki Nel maintain a social media presence. First has 440 followers on Instagram and 416 on Facebook. Amelia shares words of inspiration from Sunday gatherings and Nikki shares invitations to upcoming special events. We have heard people appreciate reminders about these events on Facebook.

Cindy Cherry maintains the website and produces *First Glance*.

We had a goal of establishing a small committee to oversee our communications; this goal is yet to be realized. We hope to focus on this in the coming months, and welcome anyone who has an interest in providing oversight and creativity to this important ministry.

DUTY OF CARE

Leaders: Carol Dawson and Cindy Cherry

Background of ministry: The Church Council of First United appoints a Duty of Care Steward to oversee the implementation of *Duty of Care* policies adopted by First United (the policies are available through the church office) and to implement the process of securing Police Vulnerable Sector Checks (PVSCs).

All those participating in providing leadership in our children, youth and healing pathways ministries updated their Police Vulnerable Sector Checks.

Carol Dawson begins her term as the Duty of Care Steward after the Annual Meeting in March.

Meditation

Leaders: Joyce Hardman, Cathy Nobleman, Liz Tyrwhitt

Background of Ministry: Joyce and Cathy started the meditation group in 2005. Our tradition of meditation was initiated by Father John Main. He founded the World Community of World Meditation. His leadership was continued by Father Laurence. The community of Christian meditation has grown around the world. Meditation groups can be found in over 100 countries. Father Laurence leads the community from Bonneveaux, a restored 11th century monastery in France. The website of the World Community of Christian Meditation, wccm.org, has a vast range of resources and hosts a variety of programs. It is a wonderful resource to learn more about meditation. The WCCM in Canada also has a website and hosts a resource centre in Montreal.

2023 Highlights: Our meditation group continues to meet every Monday at 5:30 pm, on Zoom. The leadership is shared by Joyce, Cathy and Liz. The meeting lasts an hour and includes a welcome and introduction; readings from John Main, Father Laurence or other spiritual writers; a silent time of meditation lasting 25-30 minutes and using a prayer word; time for sharing questions, insights or enjoying communal silence; and ending with prayer. We support one another as we face our own and others' health issues. We meet throughout the year, including the summer months. On average, 16 of us meet weekly. We trust one another and we have significant discussions about meditation, the impact of meditation on our lives and our evolving spirituality.

In the summer, the Ottawa community hosted a day of fellowship, prayer and inspiration led by Reverend Kevin Flynn, a professor at St. Paul University. It was well-attended, and meditators enjoyed meeting meditators from other groups in Ottawa.

What might happen in 2024? What are we looking forward to?

The Canadian WCCM is hosting a National Conference and Retreat on July 5 to 7, 2024 in Totem Park, the University of British Columbia. ***From Anxiety of Peace*** is the theme and will be led by Father Laurence with keynote speaker Kaveh Guilanpour, former senior member of the UN Secretary General's Climate Action Team.

For more information about meditation, email Liz Tyrwhitt at liz.tyrwhitt@gmail.com. Also, check out the resources of the websites of the WCCM and the Canadian WCCM.

RETREATS

Efforts to restart some of our retreats were initiated this year but to date, we have not yet been able to make it happen. Finding retreat locations that provide the services and space we need remains a challenge.

SUNDAY SERVICES/WORSHIP

Committee Members: Emily Cerantola, Aster Dusome, Pat Lindsey-Clark, Carol McMurdo-Paton, Tara Phillips, Jane Sly, Marg Stubington and Brian Cornelius

Technology Team for Sound, Zoom support, and Video production: Norman Ball, Howard Clark, Susan Little, Scott Radloff, Hugh Robillard, Martin Settle, Colin Smith, Catini St. Pierre, Polly Varga Toth.

Background of ministry: Themes and oversight of the Sunday Services are guided by a committee that meets monthly to plan Sunday Services.

2023 highlights:

We are beginning to return to our pre-Covid practices of identifying persons to join Brian in the development of Sunday services. Multiple voices strengthen our spirit experiences.

We continue to offer Zoom access to the service, and this is deeply appreciated by many unable to attend.

The Sunday services have been supported by an exceptional Technology team. Our gratefulness for their skill and dedication is considerable. To ensure that we are sustainable, we have to greatly widen the number of persons involved in supporting our Sunday services.

We are taking initiatives to incorporate more intergenerational aspects into our Sunday Services.

We are delighted with an increase in attendance beginning last Fall, and so revel in the experience of a nearly full sanctuary on Sundays.

TGIF (*Maryanne MacDonald*)

T.G.I.F—To Gather in Fellowship—is a gathering of members of our church family to share stories and life experiences, and to provide support and social interaction through a combination of online and in-person interactions.

We celebrate each other through recognition of birthdays and special events in the Christian calendar. Our gatherings are a combination of online and in-person happenings. Our Christmas potluck luncheon was enjoyed by regular attendees and invited guests. We also enjoyed a traditional summer gathering which was held this year at Shirley Lanktree's home. Attendees are involved in many aspects of the church community and TGIF provides an opportunity to deepen relationships through shared experience and storytelling.

Welcoming and Hospitality Ministry

Welcoming Team: This past year, the welcoming team hosted two luncheons for those recently attending First United, one in the Fall and one in February of 2024 with over 40 persons. We are grateful for the work of Sandra Ballantyne, Carol Shipley, Judi Varga Toth, Nira Dookeran and Shirley Paton who organize these events.

Going forward, Shirley Paton will provide leadership to this important ministry and welcomes any who would like to join her.

Hospitality Team Leaders: Liz Tyrwhitt is the coordinator. Other team leaders are Marilyn Brodie, Bruce Cameron, Carol Dawson, Wayne Dawson, Jo-Anne Harvey, Marilyn Kehoe, Mary Ann Rogers, Lisa St. Amour and Dale Walker.

Background of ministry: Over the years, we have had hospitality teams to welcome persons attending the Sunday services as well as to host conversation and refreshments.

2023 highlights: In 2023, we returned to having six teams. This is a much more manageable schedule; however, we are needing to find more members for each team in order to ensure the teams function well.

Kitchen Coordination: We are presently looking for a coordinator to work with All Saints' Westboro to oversee the health, safety, organization, and cleanliness of the kitchen. The kitchen renovation will be complete in March of 2024



Our Commitment to Healing

Healing Pathway Ministry (*Sharon Moon*)

Healing Pathway Practitioners: Howard Clark, Rosemary Clarke, Brian Cornelius, Paul Durber, Ivana Filice, Andrea Fisher, Julia Gordon, Pat Lindsey, Basia Mair, Pat Mayberry, Sharon Moon, Andrea Prazmowski, Hugh Robillard, Doug Stafford and Joan Stafford. Suzanne Allen and Carlea Knowles joined the team in 2024.

We are a ministry offering prayer with laying on of hands for physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being. And everyone is welcome. You do not have to be 'sick' to come. In the past, receivers have gained great benefit from the Healing Pathway as they have dealt with, for example, work transitions, family crises, health issues and concussions.

This ministry has been ongoing since about 2002, when it was largely organized by Maureen Kellerman, who trained some of the early practitioners like Pat Lindsey and Paul Durber. However, in the early 2010s she had to withdraw because of ill health. From about 2011, the ministry has held regular weekly sessions in the Chapel, in the daytime (with evening sessions sometimes), and those continue to this day on Tuesday afternoons. Each week we see between 6 and 8 people.

Healing Pathway practitioners participate in several additional activities:

- 1) anointing during regular communion services, usually accompanied by prayer
- 2) chair sessions on some Sundays after church in the chancel area
- 3) when circumstances warrant, going to a person's home or to a hospital bedside
- 4) doing presentations on what Healing Pathway actually is to small groups, e.g. Rite 13.
- 5) giving leadership to at least one church service a year focusing on healing and wholeness.

The highlight for many of us in 2023 is the post-COVID effect, which means that we have gone back to in-person sessions in the Chapel on Tuesdays. There are still some receivers who continue to receive healing by distance sessions, but the majority of practitioners and receivers are thrilled to be back in-person again. Another highlight is welcoming new team members: Basia, Suzanne and Carlea have all joined us very recently.

We have a robust ministry with dedicated practitioners. Sharon, Paul and Hugh are also involved in Healing Pathway at the national level. We look forward to working with a new minister who will be supportive of this ministry.

PASTORAL CARE NETWORK

Over the years, the Pastoral Care Network consisted of leaders of our Healing Ministries, who met in January and September to coordinate our healing and pastoral care ministries.

In the Fall of 2023, we recognized the need to reorganize and revitalize how we provide care within our congregational life. As a result, a working group, consisting of Pat Lindsey, Catherine Gutjahr, Maryanne McDonald, Carol McMurdo-Paton, Jan Armstrong, Jane Arbique and Grant McNeil, have been working to map out how we provide care for another, and will be focused on communicating this to the congregation in the coming months.

This revitalization is paying attention to both language and systems. Everyone is strongly encouraged to participate in a workshop on *Being A Caring Community* on April 6, 2024

LET'S TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Leaders: Jessica Ward-King and Zachary Houle

Background of Ministry: Let's Talk About Mental Health began in 2019 in response to a need for members of the First community to have a place to gather to talk about their mental health and to gain support from like-minded individuals. This group offers hour-long, confidential sessions that do not feature the intervention of a mental health professional – just peers. It quickly evolved from a monthly, in-person peer support format, where members dropped in and chatted over snacks and coffee, into a more frequently needed biweekly online peer support group when the pandemic hit. The group went strongly throughout the pandemic when need was high. When First began its return to in-person worship, Let's Talk tried to make the transition as well, but the uncertainty surrounding the return to in-person translated to poor group attendance. The decision was made to take a hiatus in July 2022. Due to personal circumstances of the leaders, the decision to resume meeting occurred in January 2024 – and what a relaunch it was! We met over a lunch of sandwiches, fruit and juice and had a great group in attendance.

Emerging Themes: We are looking forward to growing the group and, perhaps later in the year, focusing on ensuring that those in the wider First community know about the service. Peer support is an incredibly useful mental health support that can be provided for such low cost to groups at a time – it is worthwhile making this group widely accessible.

SOUL SPACE *(Danielle Rolfe)*

Leaders: The Soul Space Steering Committee provides financial and programming oversight for Soul Space programs. In 2023, the committee included Lynn Fischer (chair), Brian Cornelius (ex-officio), Paul Durber (secretary), Mary-Martha Hale (treasurer), Jan Armstrong, Sharon Moon, Glenys Huws and Danielle Rolfe (program director). Soul Space programs are also supported by a Frontline Worker Advisory Group, Alex Brownlee (Photographer) and Harley Walker (Soul Space Advisor).

Background of Ministry: Soul Space is a ministry of First United that provides holistic and spiritual support to frontline street health, harm reduction, community and social service workers in Ottawa. This includes individuals who work within emergency homeless shelters, supervised consumption sites, community health drop-in centers and beyond, caring for people experiencing poverty, homelessness, complex substance use and mental health issues. The goal of providing support to these workers is to introduce spiritual and self-care practices to frontline workers in a group setting, offering peer support and collective care, ultimately to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue, and to support them to continue the important work they do in caring for some of our community's most vulnerable members.

2023 Highlights

In 2023, Soul Space received a three-year grant funding from a New Ministry Grant (United Church of Canada Foundation/EDGE Network), a one-year Community Grant (Ottawa Community Foundation), and a Community Services Recovery Fund Grant (Government of Canada).

This funding facilitated many programs and special events, including:

- eleven monthly Soul Space Cafés (in partnership with Bridgehead Elgin),
- seven one-day retreats,
- one weekend retreat,
- five clay workshops (in partnership with Hintonburg Pottery Studio),
- six wellness workshops,
- a Valentine's Day Giving event
(with donations and support received from First United members)
- participation at the annual Working on Wellness Festival.

Most notably, Soul Space hosted a community screening of the documentary *Love in the Time of Fentanyl* at the Bytown Theatre, an education event (in partnership with Ottawa Inner City Health, Sandy Hill and Somerset West Community Health Centres) on October 28, welcoming over 200 community members and frontline workers.

In partnership with the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, and with financial support from First United and the Ottawa Community Foundation, Soul Space hosted two Soul Sisters Day Retreats for Black women and Black gender-diverse frontline workers, including a 'rooted' workshop (mindfulness and plant/self care) led by Noire Girls Plant, wholly funded by First United.

Emerging Themes: The team of Soul Space looks forward to many programs and activities in 2024, including continuing to build trusting relationships with frontline workers, offering new Collective Care Circles (in partnership with Recovery Care Ottawa, Options Bytown and other community organizations), an encore Soul Sisters Retreat (with AIDS Committee of Ottawa), and welcoming new Program Coordinator, Kerry Forbes (also a member of First United)!

Additional Information

Attend Soul Space Annual General Meeting – Sat., April 6, 2024 at 11am (253 Echo Drive)

www.soulpaceottawa.ca

info@soulpaceottawa.ca

Follow us! Facebook (soulpaceottawa); Instagram (@soulpaceottawa)

Watch Soul Space in conversation with the United Church of Canada/EDGE Network:

<https://youtu.be/KST3lqfZqm4?si=5cD9F8lSlkYVv40i>

Picture of Soul Sisters Retreat



“Rooted” Soul Space Workshop

Our Commitment to Social and Ecological Justice

Committee on Anti-Racism, Racial Justice and Inclusion

Leaders: Pat Mayberry, Dorothy Naylor, Danielle Rolfe, Bruce Tsuji, Brian Cornelius and Ibrahim Daibes.

Background of present ministry: In October 2020, the United Church of Canada made a commitment to become an anti-racist denomination. Similarly, First United made our own congregational commitment to antiracism, which is stated on our website as follows: *“We celebrate the racial and ethnic diversity present in our community and are engaged in addressing systemic racism within and beyond our church as we listen to the calls for action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Black Lives Matter.”*

During 2021, a working group to celebrate diversity and promote racial justice was established in our ongoing commitment, along with The United Church of Canada, to be an anti-racist church. This working group meets monthly, to converse as well as imagine ways to encourage themes of diversity and racial justice in the life and work of our congregation. To guide this work, we follow the following framework:

- **Acknowledge** hard truths about our past and present, including our relationships with Indigenous people, racialized and other communities facing systemic oppression;
- Raise **Awareness** among ourselves and our communities;
- **Affirm** and celebrate our diverse identities, including but not limited to sexuality, gender, culture, ability, race and ethnicity;
- Increase **Accessibility** and create safe(r) spaces;
- **Act** as **Allies**, and adopt **anti-racist** and **anti-oppressive** practices and policies within our community
- Practice being **co-conspirators** for racial justice

In 2022, we conducted an extensive survey from which we gleaned learnings on ways to enhance this long-term goal.

2023 highlights: In 2023, we shared findings from the survey in a Sunday service and also led a workshop that wrestled with the question “Why is the United Church so White?”. During the year, we also received learnings from Rev. Junior Smith who had a part-time appointment at First United in conjunction with Glebe-St. James and Knox United.

The Committee discerned the benefit in connecting this work with other work in the congregation such as our commitment as an Affirming congregation, values of being accessible, and our on-going commitment to Right Relations with the Indigenous peoples of Canada and most especially our Algonquin Anishinaabe communities.

We are initiating quarterly gatherings to encourage these values as a community of faith as well as focus our actions both internally and externally.

FIRST CONNECTIONS LUNCHEON

Volunteers: Marilyn and Don Brodie, Carol and Wayne Dawson, Brenda Sangster and Shelly Gosse, Mailyn Kehoe, Liz Trywhitt, Grant McNeil, Bruce Cameron, Carol Alguire, Cindy Calvert, Alejandro de Maio, and others who support periodically.

Background of Ministry: First Connections was started in the early 2000s as a luncheon for the participants and workers of Upstream and Canadian Mental Health Association to gather for a good meal, conversation and connection.

2023 Highlights: Those who attend are grateful for the gathering, though the numbers attending is considerably lower than pre-COVID times. Despite challenges with the kitchen, our dedicated volunteers have provided wonderful meals with minimal stress. We are evaluating the program at this time as Upstream and the Canadian Mental Health Association converse with us about their ongoing needs. We also provide space for cooking classes and other events.

LIVING INTO RIGHT RELATIONS BOOK STUDY *Maryanne MacDonald*

The Living in Right Relations Book Study group is a collection of members and friends of the First United community who meet online bi-weekly to discuss and learn from the wisdom of Indigenous writers as well as settlers who are working at decolonizing themselves and sharing their learnings in books.

The three books studied in 2023 were *True Reconciliation* by Jody Wilson-Raybould, *The Power of Story* by Harold Johnson and *Valley of the Birdtail* by Sniderman and Sanderson. In addition to learning, the group has taken actions which include participating in worship services, writing our personal land acknowledgements, supporting book launches of Stephen Kakfwi and Heather Menzies, highlighting the LIRRC book study at a tabling Sunday after church, as well as attending educational events at Madahoki Farm, the Canadian Museum of Nature and the National Arts Centre. We are incorporating the teachings from *True Reconciliation* which is broken down into three core practices—learn, understand and act—that can be applied by individuals, communities, organizations and governments.

PARTNERSHIP MINISTRIES

First United has formal partnerships to support our of Christian witness and commitment to justice promoted in our faith tradition.

Affirm United: As an affirming congregation, we are a member of Affirm United. For many years, First United was the only affirming congregation in the city and often walked alone in the Pride Parade. This has changed. This past summer, First United joined with many United Church congregations to march in the Pride Parade and celebrate as more and more Ottawa area United Churches become affirming. This year, First United joined to block an anti-trans protest organized in our neighbourhood.

Centre 507: First United maintains a close relationship with the drop-in Centre at 507 Bank Street (where Centretown United Church is located). With the congregation's support, many people, among them the vulnerable and the lonely, find community. Each Advent, the Centre is grateful for socks filled with essentials and treats, gifted through First United. Centre 507 has adjusted its programming and being present to its clients throughout the pandemic.

KAIROS: This ecumenical ministry focuses on Social Justice issues and has taken an important lead on Truth and Reconciliation. We work to promote their events and many times they offer leadership to educational events here at First. We have formalized our membership as a congregation and pay an annual fee. The United Church of Canada is a main funder through the Mission and Service Fund.

Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI): First United is a member of MHI, a coalition of over 40 faith communities and hundreds of individuals committed to providing affordable housing to individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI) was proud and delighted when, on January 20, 2022, the National Capital Commission announced Dream LeBreton as the successful proponent to develop the 'library parcel' of LeBreton Flats. Construction of 601 new residential rental units -- 247 of them affordable -- in two towers at 665 Albert Street, is now occurring. MHI will own and operate 130 of the affordable units, which will serve the priority populations identified in Canada's National Housing Strategy: Algonquin and other Indigenous peoples, veterans, recent immigrants, women and children, and adults with cognitive disabilities.

REFUGEE MINISTRY

Background of ministry: While having a historic engagement, since 2015 First United has been involved in over 60 official refugee files either as a congregation or in partnership with Community Sponsorship Groups.

2023 highlights: Extensive work was done with the Shiehk-Mohamad families, where volunteers from First United offered considerable support to three families, helping with healthcare, English language training and employment. Although the official sponsorship year has ended, ongoing contact with the families continue. We are particularly grateful for all those who involved themselves with these families, including Norman Ball and Karen Sigvaldson, Mary Donaghy and Margaret Maxted, Jamie Scott and Druscilla Flemming, Scott Radloff, Ruth Gray-Beauchamp, Maggie Melanson, and Heather Lathe. We are deeply grateful for the work of these volunteers and many others who have stepped up to help in recent days, especially Ibrahim Daibes who provided translation services and Ayda Noofoori.

We are grateful to Cindy Cherry and Brian Cornelius who help to oversee the financial tracking and reporting to government officials. This is part of the ministry our staff offers, not only to the sponsorship group at First United but to all the community files as well.

Emerging themes: The Church Council has appointed a working group to review our Refugee ministry with a view to make recommendations on how the ministry is supported in coming years. This is necessary since both the United Church of Canada and Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) have modified their sponsorship and reporting requirements,

Presently, we have 15 active files with a hope that all of these files will be in the settlement process sometime in 2024.

We have continued our moratorium on initiating new files until after the review.

REMEMBRANCE AND CALL TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Liturgical leaders and small group facilitators in 2023 Gathering:

Brigitte Demers, Pat Lindsey, Nikki Nel, Jo-Anne Harvey, Nira Dookeran, Mary Donaghy and Margaret Maxted

Background of ministry: Ever since 1989, First United has held an annual service to remember the fourteen young women who were murdered at l'École Polytechnique in Montreal, murdered because they were women. This event sparked a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, a day set aside to mourn those killed in gender-based violence, to express solidarity with all those who suffer violence, to encourage survivors of violence, and to provide support for those who work to end violence.

2023 highlights: In 2023, we gathered utilizing the format adopted in 2021 where, in addition to the candlelight liturgy, we engaged in conversation, allowing us to tell and hear stories as well as name the ways in which we remain committed to action.

WATERCARE ALLIES/EARTH GROUP

Leaders: Maryanne MacDonald, Judith Miller, Joyce Hardman, Nira Dookeran

Over the years, this group has lifted up our commitment to ecological justice, especially around the care for the Kitchissippi watershed and the Ottawa River with members attending and representing First United at public hearings about the radioactive waste plant proposed at Chalk River.

Members of WaterCareAllies were involved in World Water Day and, during conversation and refreshments, invited congregants to create water messages through word and art and to pledge to protect our water. We also handed out the blue heart-shaped Nibi, Water, L'eau buttons.

Judith Miller compiled a book *Seasons of the River and Me: Celebrating Kichi Zibi*. This book combines minimalist prose by Judith Miller with art work by Maciek Kozlowski as an act of sacred activism.

Our Partnership with All Saints' Anglican (Westboro)

PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Partnership Management Committee oversees the partnership between First United and All Saints Anglican.

Leaders: Chair of Church Council Martin Settle, Treasurer Andrew Clark, and our Minister, Brian Cornelius

Background of ministry: The partnership between First United and All Saints Anglican began on April 1, 2007 initially as a five-year project but is now an open-ended agreement. A Memorandum of Understanding guides the partnership. It outlines our shared ministries as communities of faith within the Christian tradition and addresses the use of and maintenance of building, sharing of costs, and relationship between staff.

2023 highlights: During 2023, ASW bid farewell to their priest for the last 14 years, Chris Dunn, and welcomed their new priest, Kathryn Otley. We joined in both the farewell celebrations and the welcoming celebrations. A good working relationship has been established with Kathryn.

PROPERTY COMMITTEE *(Lamar Mason, Chair)*

The members of the Joint Property Committee for 2023 were Chris Kirch, Steve Sibbald and Lamar Mason from All Saints' Westboro, and Don Brodie and Owen Savage from First United. Normally, we would have at least three representatives from each church, but we are currently short one member.

The main focus of 2023 was the renovations to the church kitchen and the upgrade of the electrical system. This is a major capital project with approved funding of over \$150,000. Work began well with the kitchen renovations but have stalled since June because of the inability to complete the electrical upgrade. Just as this work was scheduled in the first week of July, Hydro Ottawa went on strike for almost three months. To date, the outside work required by Hydro Ottawa has not been rescheduled. All electrical work that can be done inside has been completed. However, until our power is upgraded, we cannot complete the fire suppression system for the fan or install the new stove and other appliances. We are doing everything we can to try to move this project forward.

Other activities during the year included painting all of the trim around the outside of the church, regrading the Richmond Road grassed area for better drainage, repainting the Chapel, rebuilding and painting the storage shed, and numerous small projects. Looking forward, we will be focused on completing the kitchen project, complying with the City's regulations for backflow devices on our water supply, and regrading the hard surfaces in front of the Chapel door and to the west side of the building to prevent ice buildup on walkways and water accumulation along the foundation.

We will also continue researching lighting options in the Sanctuary as our current lighting system is not cost-effective in the long term. This project will represent a significant capital project.

I would like to thank Julie Cross for her continued work in the Courtyard Gardens. I am thankful that Julie got some steady assistance from a couple of folks this summer, but she is always happy for assistance. I encourage anyone with an hour or so to reach out to Julie and provide help with the garden. It is a mission that serves not only All Saints' and First United, but our entire community. Thank you, Julie, for your continued service.

The day-to-day cleanliness and physical operation of the building depends on the hard work of our dedicated custodian, Paul Dumais. Paul is always receptive to the small projects that JPC finds to fill in any spare time and is constantly shifting his planned schedule to fit in unexpected requests. We appreciate his flexibility and hard work.

This year, David McGeachie, who has served as our part-time custodian in the winter months and during Paul's vacations, retired. He will be missed. Our new part-time custodian is Ben Mackinnon, and you can find him in the building on Mondays and Tuesdays until noon.

Much of the work of the Joint Property Committee is invisible to the congregations at large, but it is essential. Our congregations are fortunate to have such dedicated JPC members who spend considerable time researching the right solutions to the many issues that crop up in a building of this age. I am especially appreciative of the hands-on approach that our current members take to address some of our smaller projects, saving both congregations funds that can be directed to other projects.

The Joint Property Committee is always happy to receive comments or suggestions from members of the congregations. Let us know if there is something you think we might be able to improve around the building. In addition, if you have any skills, from carpentry to lighting, and would be willing to lend a hand or your expertise, please reach out to a member of the JPC. We would be happy to hear from you.

WESTBORO REGION FOOD BANK

(Graham Robertson and Peter Newlands)

The Westboro Region Food Bank (WRFB) is an agency of the Ottawa Food Bank. By the terms of our Mutual Agreement with the central food bank, the WRFB is mandated to provide three days' worth of emergency food once a month to anyone living in our catchment area. The borders of our area are the Ottawa River on the north, Island Park Drive on the east, Dovercourt Avenue on the south and Broadview Avenue on the West.

This has been a year of significant changes at the food bank. This is the first full year of extended service hours. We have added Tuesdays, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. to supplement the hours on Mondays, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Thursdays, 4 p.m. to 7pm.

We have also increased the number of days between client visits from seven days to 14 days. The previous 7-day space between visits was a measure adopted at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 to make food more available. As the number of client visits grew, so did the demand for additional shopping trips and everything else it takes to keep a food bank functioning.

This is also our first full year of having two paid part-time staff. Graham came on-board during a time of steadily rising numbers of clients. I appreciate Graham's consistency and his work at the registration desk which is the most challenging job in the food bank. Statistics are useful but they don't give an idea of what the food bank can look like on a Thursday afternoon at the end of the month.

Statistics do help us see how much the food bank has grown. During 2020, we served 1370 households which represents 3,724 people. During 2023, we served 2234 households, representing 6,116 people. This is a 60% increase in use of the food bank over a period of four years.

The food bank relied on private and business donors to help purchase groceries which were not on the OFB list and items out of stock at the OFB. In 2023, we spent \$36,380 to supplement or replace what we were given by the OFB. \$22,491 of this total was for dairy goods, \$10,409 was for produce and \$3,470 was for miscellaneous (feminine hygiene, non-dairy beverage, etc.)

By comparison, the total spending in this category was \$75,000 in 2022. The lower total in 2023 was the result of deliberate cutbacks in the quantity and variety of supplemental groceries due to budget limits.

We would like to thank the parishioners and staff at All Saints' Westboro for their continued support of the food bank. We would also like to thank our community supporters - individuals, schools and businesses. Last but not least, thanks to the many volunteers who serve our clients with respect and enthusiasm.

New-to-You Shop *Peter Robertson (for the Shop's Management Team)*

Throughout 2023, the Shop assisted a number of refugee families with clothing and household goods as they settled into Ottawa, and provided regular support to the Debra Dynes Community House, as well as to The Oaks, the Shepherds of Good Hope and Managed Alcohol Program supportive housing facility. A big thank you to all the generous donors and to the many dedicated volunteers for their support of this outreach ministry! The Shop's revenue in 2023 was \$12,500; ten percent of revenue is contributed to the Rector and Discretionary Fund, and the balance is contributed to the General Fund.