



FIRST UNITED CHURCH

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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Our Council and Governance

CHAIR OF CHURCH COUNCIL *(Martin Settle)*

Entering 2024, the Church Council identified two broad “Living Faith Priorities”. The first was “navigating our ministerial transition” as we both celebrated and mourned the change brought by the semi-retirement of the Rev. Brian Cornelius. I would say that this has been the primary work of the Council, lived out in many ways. The securing of supply ministry is probably the most obvious. We are grateful for the gifts brought to us by the Rev. Anne Montgomery and the Rev. Dr. Alyson Huntly. Their reassuring leadership continues to open new possibilities and give stability and confidence as we look to the future.

That first priority also included “identifying and transferring the work Brian does to maintain the activities of congregational life and capture corporate memory”. This sentence captured much of our work this year. From translating understandings and practice into clear policy documents, to better defining our committees and internal relationships, to recruiting volunteers to take on newly-visible tasks, we have been immersed in administrative adaptation.

This work of administration is an often-overlooked aspect of organizational life. I want to thank Cindy Cherry, as well as the many volunteers who work behind the scenes to provide the structure we need to operate. This includes the members of Council and the Ministry and Personnel Committee, offering counters, welcoming teams, and many others. We are especially grateful to Andrew Clark, our Treasurer, for the countless hours and deep care he has given to this heavy role.

The second Living Faith Priority was to maintain engagement on the priorities that we had expressed in prior years: faithful stewardship of resources, intergenerational ministry, and celebrating diversity and promoting racial justice. These priorities can be seen in the expression of our values of inclusion and care throughout this annual report. I also see it in the dancing joy of Marg Stubington as she exhorts the voices of the choir and congregation to embrace songs of many cultures. In this AGM, our strong financial position, rooted in our faithful stewardship, will allow us to make a renewed and ongoing commitment to our intergenerational ministry, and retain the talents and enthusiasm of Nikki Nel.

I want to thank those members of Council who are finishing their terms: Chris Henschel, Catini St. Pierre, Maureen Hewitt, Ela van Sertima, and especially to Andrew Sacret, who has served as Secretary throughout his time on Council. As I leave the role of Chair, I am truly grateful for the opportunity I have had to serve, for the trust that was placed in me, and for the deep support and love I experienced throughout my term.

I am proud of the work that we have done together in this past year. I believe we now have a stronger sense of what it means to exist as a community of faith in the United Church of Canada. This work of discovering how to “be” First United remains important as we move towards welcoming a new permanent minister. There is much more to be done.

And we’ll get there, heaven knows how. Yes, we’ll get there. We know we will.

Respectfully, and in love,

Martin Settle

Council Chair

MINISTER OF PASTORAL CARE *(Rev. Anne Montgomery)*

Greetings, everyone!

It has been a pleasure to be at First United Church since September 1, sharing ministry with you primarily in Pastoral Care, and leading the occasional worship service, while you search for a new minister. It has been quite a learning curve, but with the support of everyone I met here, things became more understandable and easier to follow as time went on.

I would like to offer my sincere appreciation to:

Everyone who prepared our office, set up emails, provided directions for the copier, and more – thanks so much!

Our Staff Marg, Nikki, Cindy, Paul – who are wonderfully helpful and resourceful, and a pleasure to work with;

Chair Marti, and all the Council members – who are dedicated, inviting, and ready to address many issues;

Chair Grant, the Congregational Care Committee and Card Ministry group – who care deeply for all under our care;

Sandra, Marika, and the Attendance and Membership group – for your attention to detail and individual follow-up;

All Saints Westboro Clergy Kathryn and Chung Yan, and Staff Lauren, Janet, Iryna – in our shared partnership;

Chair Jane and all the Worship Committee members – who offer insight, leadership, and deep faith-expression;

Chair Joan and the other Ministry & Personnel (M&P) members – your work behind the scenes is so supportive;

All the audio and visual operators – for making us look and sound good;

All who look after the building (Shared Property) and the finances (Andrew & co.) – where would we be without you?

All who organize FFF, TGIF, discussions, and special events – these gatherings help us know each other better;

All who say “yes” when asked to assist in worship, light candles, offer welcome, lead music, read scriptures, provide

feedback, prepare and serve refreshments, and anything else that makes worship time at First so great;

All the kids, big and little, who trust me enough to share your thoughts with me;

All who lead and support Children’s Programs and all the other groups – you rock!

All who are or have been or will be part of various Circles of Care – you are indispensable;

All who have welcomed me to your homes, hospital rooms, or tables – I am deeply thankful for your hospitality and trust;

All who have shared hopes and concerns, worries and celebrations, joys and sorrows with me – you are a special gift to this community;

Last but not least, I would like to thank Rev. Dr. Alyson Huntly – you have made work at First a joy and a blessing!

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Anne Montgomery, Minister of Pastoral Care

MINISTER OF WORSHIP *(Rev. Alyson Huntly)*

Since Anne has done an amazing job of *thanking* you, I will simply add my thanks to hers, knowing that so many have done so much to contribute to the vibrant and meaningful life of this congregation. All of you, named or unnamed, are part of a beautiful tapestry of love and care.

There are so many things about First United for which I am grateful. This is a partial list.

1. Lively greetings and conversation, lingering over delicious food and drinks after church and such warm hospitality
2. Honest feedback graciously given
3. The way First has stepped up to the challenge of this transition, willing to risk and try new things, and to step into new roles
4. The support staff receive and the ways members of the congregation care for and support each other
5. Amazing and spirit-filled music
6. Conversations and encounters that inspire me
7. Willingness to continue to learn and grow and change
8. A web of interconnected work for justice, in the congregation, in paid work and in so many contributions that individuals and groups make in the community and the world
9. The partnership with All Saints, and their ministry leadership, a partnership that sustains both of our congregations and helps us encounter other ways of doing and being church.
10. The gifted leadership and gifts of the whole congregation – there is such an array of talent and wisdom and creativity.

First is alive and well and has what it needs to continue to thrive in the months and years to come.

I have really enjoyed sharing ministry with Anne Montgomery. I am grateful for all the care she has given to the First community and for what I have learned from her. It has been a privilege to work with the team of staff that will *continue* to offer gifted leadership after the end of this appointment. I commend Nikki's intergenerational ministry, Marg's ministry of music, Cindy's skillful administration, and Paul's care for the physical space. First is well served by its staff.

It has been a delight to be at First this past 6 months – the time has gone quickly, and I suspect the next few months will go even more quickly. I have appreciated this opportunity to serve and share leadership with this amazing congregation.

With blessings,

Alyson Huntly

MINISTRY AND PERSONNEL *(Joan Rogers)*

Since the March 2024 AGM, the members of the M&P committee have been Sandra Ballantyne, Amelia Buchanan, Sarah Orsini, Scott Radloff and Joan Rogers (chair). Committee members are paired with a staff member in order to provide consultation, support, supervision and evaluation.

In June 2024, our minister Brian Cornelius retired. In September, First United hired two half-time supply ministers—Anne Montgomery with responsibility for pastoral care, and Alyson Huntly, responsible for worship. The ministers' office was cleared out, painted, and furnished. Their covenanting service was held on September 14.

M&P is grateful for the hard work and dedication of our staff and of the Ministerial Search Committee.

EASTERN ONTARIO OUTAOUAIS REGIONAL COUNCIL

The Regional Council (EOORC for short) is the body (or court in fancy language) of the church administration which sits between individual congregations and the National Office of the United Church of Canada. The Regional Council has an oversight function, and this includes assisting congregations in the process of searching for and employing ministry personnel. EOORC also provides learning opportunities and facilitates congregations to come together for ministry and mission work. Members of the Regional Council include all ministers, and lay representatives from each congregation. Coming up in June 2025, EOORC is organizing a massive worship service and celebration for the 100th anniversary of the United Church of Canada. Wendy Snelgrove is the lay representative for First to the Regional Council. Due to our size, First is entitled to two voting lay representatives, so anyone who would be interested in serving First and the wider United Church in this capacity would be most welcome. Feel free to speak to Wendy or to the Church Council.

CANDIDATES FOR MINISTRY

Joëlle Morgan, a member of First United Church, Ottawa, was interviewed and assessed by the Quebec and East Ontario Candidacy Board of the United Church. The Board determined that she demonstrates promise and suitability and approved her as a candidate for Ordained Ministry in the United Church. A celebration of Joëlle's ministry candidacy took place during morning worship at First United on December 15, 2024.

Upon completion of her theological education, Joëlle will be appointed to serve in a supervised ministry placement in the United Church prior to her ordination. Joëlle and her family—her partner Lisa Nafziger and their son Zeb—are active members of First United Church. Joëlle is currently completing her ministry formation at Emmanuel College, Toronto, and is doing a part time field placement at Glebe St. James United Church here in Ottawa. Joëlle describes herself as a part-time professor. Full-time parent. Anytime decolonial theologian and activist.

First United Church: 2024 Membership

Members	181
Adherents	180
VAMs and Retired Clergy (notes below)	12
Non-resident members	23
Total persons under pastoral care	396
Total households under pastoral care	208
Average attendance at worship	(162 in 2023)

Membership, December 31, 2024 181

Deaths/Funerals/Memorial Services: 3

Jan. 11: Gerry VanRijn

Jan. 18: Peter Cooney

Feb. 2: Sean Julien Cowieson

Member Removed by Death: 1

Peter Cooney

Removed by Transfer of Membership: 0

New Members received by Affirmation of Faith: 4

Nira Dookeran

Roshan Chislett-Dookeran

Milo Popa

Polly Varga Toth

New Members received by Transfer of Membership: 3

Sara Grimwood

Robert Grimwood

Jean-Francois Hamelin

Baptisms: 2

Feb. 18: Mae Ajayi (adult)

May 12: Hannah Rebecca Headland Jones, child of A. Jones and S. Headland

Weddings: 5

Feb. 10: C. Rose and W. Liao

May 12: T. Nagle and R. Dietrich

May 19: K. Picard and R. Stienstra

June 23: J. Armstrong and J. Arbique

July 20: J. Cabral and R. Alguire

Voluntary Associate Ministers (VAMs): 7

Ellie Barrington, Howard Clark, Catherine Gutjahr, Alyson Huntly, Grant McNeil,

Maggie Melanson, Sharon Moon

Retired Clergy affiliated with First United, Ottawa: 5
Larry Burton, Dorothy Naylor, Harry Oussoren, James Scott, Tom Sherwood

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Anne Montgomery

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 2024 Fund and 2025 Budget

The General Fund is used for the day-to-operations of the church. All unrestricted donations to First are recognized as revenues to this Fund. The year 2024 was an exceptionally positive one from a financial perspective. Congregational givings were up 8.4 % from last year to over \$279,000 - almost double our budgeted 4.5 % increase! Overall, our operational income was up 10.3 % while our expenses were up only 1.1 % from 2023 with the net result that our budgeted deficit of \$1,481 turned into an actual surplus of \$38,519!

The considerable increase in givings was due in part to the Stewardship campaign of October 2023 which led to increased givings in 2024. The other major factor was an overwhelming response to this year's Advent campaign which exceeded our target of \$33,000 by over \$13,000. A big thanks to Catini St. Pierre for leading this campaign!

A word of caution: our expenses were up only 1.1 % because our staffing costs were considerably below budget – first: because we did not have a Minister in July and August and second: because both our supply Ministers are retired so we did not have to pay into employer benefits. All told, lower-than-anticipated expenses accounted for \$31,000 of the positive \$40,000 change in the projected deficit while higher-than-budgeted income accounted for \$9,000 of the surplus.

The proposed Budget for 2025 is calling for a deficit of \$2,800 or close to a balanced budget. In order to meet this budget, Council is seeking an increase in congregational givings of 2% this year. The budget projects a yearly increase in our expenses of 7.4% but, given the Ministerial transition, there is some uncertainty around our staffing costs – particularly around the start time and the unknowable moving costs (and therefore unbudgeted) for a new Minister.

A few other things to note about the 2024 budget:

- The annual United Church of Canada Assessment is going up by almost 10% to \$16,005 this year. This amount is driven by a formula and is going up mostly as a function of our church doing relatively better than other United Churches at this time.
- As planned, the subsidy from our restricted ministry fund for the intergenerational position will fall to \$14,625 in 2025 and then to \$9,750 in 2026 with the intent that this position will be funded by regular congregational givings thereafter. Fortunately, the annual transfer from the Building and Legacy fund is expected to go up in 2025 by \$5,800 to \$71,800, reflecting the strong increase in value in our investments this year.
- The Building Improvement Fund to which All Saints and First contribute equally is, by mutual agreement, going up by \$5,000 to \$15,000 this year to meet

expected repairs and upgrades.

- The Church Council budget is exceptionally high this year to allow for the expenses of Ministerial transition including those of the Search Committee and a planned professionally-led workshop on Transition for the congregation.
- Finally, under our Partnership Ministries we are proposing to add \$500 each to our annual contribution to the Westboro Food Bank and the Multi-Faith Housing Initiative. Note: the \$2,000 budget item for Right Relations is being moved from a Partnership Ministry line item to our Program Budget in 2025 where it more appropriately belongs.

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

The First community continued to give generously to our various outreach missions and ministries. We exceeded our \$35,000 goal for 2024 for the **Mission and Service Fund (M&S)** of the UCC by over \$700. M&S contributes to the UCC ministries and outreach in Canada and the world. The proposed 2025 budget sets a 3% increase in the target to \$36,000 for the M&S fund.

First United also gave a record amount to the **Westboro Region Food Bank** raising \$23,775 of which a record \$14,176 was raised through a campaign by Joan Rogers with the residents at the Metropole Condominium. This amount is in addition to the \$2,000 First United gave to the Food Bank as part of its regular budget. \$1,548 was given to the Multi-Faith Housing initiative mostly via fundraising undertaken by the Rite-13 group. First United continues to manage a portfolio of refugee funds acting as the Constituent Group and co-sponsor with other refugee support groups in Ottawa. The United Church of Canada is the Sponsorship Agreement Holder with IRCC in support of these refugee sponsorships. As planned, the size of our refugee accounts continued to diminish throughout the year. We received income of \$92,544 for refugee accounts but disbursed \$193,759 resulting in the value of our Council's Restricted Refugee Accounts decreasing by over \$100,000 to \$159,273 by year end. (See note 8 and the 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 2024, Soul Space had an income of \$95,375 including \$47,137 in grants from the United Church of Canada Foundation and the Ottawa Community Foundation. Soul Space also received over \$38,061 in program fees from participants and received donations of \$9,805. It had expenditures of \$89,978 and ended the year with a closing equity of \$111,951 (See separate narrative report on the Soul Space program).

Memorial Givings and Bequests

In 2024, we received gifts to the Westboro Food Bank in memory of Peter Cooney and a bequest from the Estate of John McGovern, a dedicated volunteer and member of First for many years, who passed away in 2021. We also received an anonymous in-memory donation to the Intergenerational Coordinator Position Restricted Ministry Account.

Building Improvement Fund and Capital Fund

As partners in the building we share with All Saints' Anglican Church Westboro (ASW), we budgeted \$10,000 for building improvements in 2024, which was matched by \$10,000 from ASW. This year several repair projects; in particular, significant electrical and plumbing work was undertaken as outlined in note 5 of the financial statements.

We also budget \$20,000 a year for major capital projects, while \$30,000 is budgeted by

ASW (see note 4 to the financial statements). This year we completed a major upgrade of the church kitchen to bring it up to building code and public health requirements. Please note we received a grant of \$25,000 from Regional Council this year for the kitchen project and Council used this money to repay the Building and Legacy Fund which is the source of our Capital Fund annual payment.

Words of thanks

Many people contribute to the Finance Ministry at First:

A special thanks to Cindy Cherry, our Church Administrator, who keeps the books, tracks donations, and put in extra work this year on the Advent Campaign.

She also has to deal with Andrew Clark on a regular basis.

Catini St. Pierre for her expertise on fundraising and leading the Advent Campaign.

Neil Knudsen who oversees the Soul Space books with Cindy.

Jane Ellis, our main person doing Bank Deposits.

Dale Walker, our Donations Coordinator.

Our cheque co-signers: Norman Ball, Joan Rogers, Jane Ellis, Margaret Maxted Carol McMurdo, and myself.

And a huge thank you to Susan Little for her expert accounting advice, knowledge of Quickbooks (our accounting software) and her assistance on various issues including completing our annual charitable return to the CRA and her leadership of the annual internal review of our financial statements.

TRUSTEES' REPORT *(Monique Van Schie)*

Membership: Peter Engemann, Alyson Huntly (ex-officio), Anne Montgomery (ex-officio), Lisa Nafziger, Jason Swan 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 \$1,595,680. Because the Church Council did not need money for cashflow, the Trustees retain \$141,042 from the General Fund to keep invested and realize investment growth. The total invested is \$1,736,722. A detailed accounting of the present value of the Building/Legacy fund is included in Schedule 7 of the Reviewed Financial Statement.

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 congregational to realize growth in the fund, and thus increase 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 2025 Budget: The trustees recommend:

The transfer of 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 \$71,800 based on a total equity of \$1,595,680.

That transfers to the General Fund are 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 eight years have been:

- 2024 - \$66,000 at 4.5%
- 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 eight years has been:

- 2024 10.1%
- 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 set out by the Ontario Trustees Act.

Our investment strategy with Fiera continues with 50% of funds invested in a Balanced

Fund (which is a combination of alternative income and equities), 25% in Global Equities, and 25% is invested 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.

Our Commitment to Spiritual Nurture in Community

COMMITTEE FOR INTERGENERATIONAL, CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY: *(Amelia Buchanan and Allegra Newman)*

Membership: Allegra Newman (Chair), Nikki Nel (Coordinator for Intergenerational Ministry), Amelia Buchanan (M&P representative), Elena Powell, Marti Settle, Sarah Grimwood

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.

2024 Highlights:

- Intergenerational services
 - June service focused on congregational priorities for Fun, Faith and Friendship events.
- Intergenerational choir
- Fun, Faith and Friendship gatherings
 - February 25th
 - April 23rd
 - October 5th
 - November 23rd
- Church picnic
- Young adult gatherings
- Welcome lunches in the spring and the fall
- Guess who's coming to dinner
- Pageant

Intergenerational events are well attended and appreciated by congregants of all ages. The intergenerational committee is looking for additional members to further support Nikki in the planning of events in the coming year.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING *(Nikki Nel)*

As I reflect on 2024 at First United Church in my role as the Coordinator of Intergenerational, Children & Youth Programming, my heart is full of gratitude for the community of First United Church. As I greet the children and youth on Sundays, or plan Fun, Faith, Friendship events, or work in my office I see the many ways that our community is a blessing to those that wander through our doors whether it is only once or every Sunday. The people are our treasures, and God meets each of us where we are.

This has been a transition year with our farewell to Brian as our longtime minister and welcoming Anne & Alyson into our community to support us through the transition. May we continue to be open and welcoming, working towards hope and love for all.

With a grateful heart,
Nikki

Children's Program Leaders:

Lisa Gue, Melanie Laneville, Kate Hoye, Rachel Dietrich

Helping Hands: Kelsey DaSilva, Shannon Headland, Adam Nevraumont, Georgia S., Mary Ann Rogers, Emily Cerantola, Aster Dusome, Sara Grimwood, Peter Moore, Brad Timmins, Bart Sullivan, Zachary Chrumka, Paige, Kerry Forbes, Carol Dawson, Joanna Smith
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 & 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 42 children attending on a fairly regular basis in the two groups. However, the number we have on any given Sunday varies a fair amount from week to week. A big thank you to our Children's Program leaders who bring many gifts and make our children feel safe and welcome in our congregation. Thank you also to our helping hands who help provide supervision and support in the programs.

Both our Rite13 (ages 11-13) and J2A (age 13-16) (Journey to Adulthood) are in the second year of their two-year cycle. Both groups have been strengthening the relationships between the youth, exploring this Faith and being human in today's world. They have also had some fun adventures doing social activities. The J2A will be going on their pilgrimage to Calgary this summer.

Our nursery space is open but we don't always have volunteer supervisors. Consequently, parents and guardians cannot assume that they can leave the children. We are hoping to re-establish a nursery team and would welcome volunteer enquiries so we can connect a new family's three little ones with others in our congregation.

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 congregations such a rich and lively space.

What were the highlights in 2024?

- Easter Egg Hunt in the chapel
- Hosted Camp Awesome the week of July 29 with 21 Campers. Thank you Natalie Waugh for your help with the snacks and lunches
- Christmas Pageant with 30+ Children & Youth & one baby Jesi, Claire Diamant. Thank you to Alyson Huntly for the script, Jason Swan and Pat Lindsey for your direction, Margaret Vant Erve & Jane Ellis for the set and props.
- Family Potlucks- March & May

We are still in need of people to commit to leading and supporting our children and youth. Our programs are very successful because we provide consistent leadership but our leaders are at risk of burning out.



CHRISTMAS PAGEANT 2024

YOUTH MINISTRY

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 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. Last year's group trip to Mexico was unfortunately canceled due to the emerging COVID pandemic. The seventh group journeyed to Vancouver in the summer of 2022.

Rite 13 Leaders Report: Wendy Snelgrove, Polly Varga Toth

Rite 13 is our program for younger youth, who were in Grades 6 and 7 in the beginning of 2024, and Grades 7 & 8 in the fall of 2024. The program has active participation from approximately 10-12 youth, with an average of 7 to 8 on any given Sunday. Leadership is provided by Polly Varga Toth and Wendy Snelgrove, with assistance from Tyler Nagle and Catini St. Pierre. Every Sunday the youth gather for a time of openness, learning and sharing, followed up by games. (The youth are especially fond of Mafia). Other events have included bowling, Saunders Farm and our wildly successful Strawberry Social which raised almost \$1,000 for the Multifaith Housing Initiative.

J2A Program Leaders Report: Jillian Buckie, Ben Lindsey-Clark, Mirelle Ward-King
In 2024, we had around eight youth, ages 13-16, participate in our program. We are a small-but-mighty group that meets every Sunday morning during the church service. We spend this time exploring themes like faith and our self-identity, social justice, and how we can be part of

creating positive, meaningful change in our communities. Our group is guided by the covenant we created together as youth and leaders; some of our key values are engaging each other with respect and curiosity, cultivating a safe space where we can be ourselves, and (equally important) having fun together.

Some of our highlights from 2024 include creating a collage for our room, almost succeeding through puzzle solving in getting out of an Escape Room, and playing lots of games of Scattergories. In October, we took a weekend trip to Montreal, where we explored the Vieux-Port, saw the penguins at the Biodome, and enjoyed a Thanksgiving lunch with our host congregation.

We are now in the final months of our two-year program, which will culminate in a week-long pilgrimage this summer. The youth recently decided on Calgary as our destination! We will continue to work on fundraising and planning our itinerary over the next few months.

A big thank you to Nikki, as well as to our advisory group of former J2A leaders, Sandra Ballantyne, Mary Donaghy and Andrew Sacret, for their ongoing support. Thank you also to our wonderful youth and their parents and guardians for their enthusiasm, flexibility, and energy this past year.

CHOIR AND MUSIC MINISTRY *(Marg Stubington)*

In this year of transition, music has continued to thrive at First United. Membership in the choir is 33 singers with an average of 24-26 each Sunday. Our Thursday rehearsals are full of comradery and playfulness and we continue to support one another. As always, we sing music from a variety of styles and time periods and in several different languages as well: (Latin, French, Spanish, Zulu, Swahili, German, English...). Some of our choir members come quite a distance twice weekly – more than 30 minutes' drive each way. Thank you for your dedication!

We said farewell to Brian Cornelius on June 1st with an afternoon of celebrations. Guest performers, the Kamengo Cultural Troupe, led us all from the courtyard into the sanctuary and then performed an entertaining set. The choir sang Seasons of Love with 'alternate lyrics' (by Andrew Clark): "In Westfests, in pageants, in sermons, in lengthy segues, in prayers, in emails, in laughter, in strife". The next morning, for his final Sunday, we sang Brian's favourite choir anthem, I Dreamed of Rain (Haley Cornelius, solo) and gave an energetic rendition of Hlonolofatsa – singing and dancing simultaneously. (What a SuperChoir!)

There have been several opportunities for anyone to join the Intergenerational Choir (one song, one rehearsal) as a part of Fun, Faith and Friendship events drawing singers of all ages. In February, we learned Why Walk When You Can Fly?, in April Easy On the Earth and Marti and I led a singalong of Songs of Peace and Justice in November.

A small group of 16 choir members sang a 15-minute set as part of a fundraising event on November 16th, hosted by the Multi-Faith Housing Initiative and All Saints Westboro.

Music was enhanced by the gifts of Greg Renaud (trumpet for Easter and Remembrance), Erin Okrainec, (fiddle), Tyler Nagle (djembe), Pat Mayberry and Mike Beauchamp (guitar). We were sorry to say goodbye to Mike and Ruth Beauchamp; they moved to Ancaster on July 4th.

Thanks to Mary Blakely and Jason Swann for their singing (Family Christmas Eve), and to several members of SuperChoir who sang solos throughout the year.

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

Thank you to the members of the Worship Committee, led by Jane Sly, for steering us through the summer and then into our interim time with our new ministers.

To Alyson and Anne, I appreciate your excellent communication – clear and direct - your care and concern for this congregation and for the new ideas you have brought, along with new hymns and songs.

Nikki and Cindy, my hard-working colleagues, it is wonderful to meet regularly with you. Thanks for being steady rocks.

Thank you to Sarah Orsini, my Ministry and Personnel rep, for her support and guidance.

I am grateful to be working in this supportive community that values music so highly.

COMMUNICATIONS *(Amelia Buchanan, Nikki Nel & Cindy Cherry)*

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.

2024 highlights:

Amelia Buchanan and Nikki Nel maintain a social media presence. First has 459 followers on Instagram and 428 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*.

DRUMMING- THE MINISTRY OF RHYTHM *(Dave Henderson)*

On February 2, 2011, the first date circle was hosted at First United. From the beginning, the idea of a Ministry of Rhythm was developed. The Ministry is largely a 2 1/2 hour-jam loosely anchored off of a number of African rhythms which are known to a core of the drummers. Not only is it a great place to make some joyful noise but has proven to be an opportunity to develop and deepen friendships. All the drummers are encouraged to participate at their comfort level, the objective to maintain the song of the collective. While drums and percussion instruments are provided participants are asked to bring their own. Over the years numbers attending our twice monthly drumming jams have fluctuated. Currently we are enjoying peak involvement of participants from First United as well as the wider community. Our popularity has made it necessary to place a temporary freeze on admitting more participants until the Spring of 2025 when we can reassess. A voluntary good-will offering is collected at every drumming jam.

We are grateful to First United for recognizing us as a Ministry of the church and continuing to support us by providing space.



Just a typical night with the drummies!

DUTY OF CARE *(Carol Dawson and Cindy Cherry)*

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 (PVSC).

We thank all those who volunteer at First United. Implementing these policies is an ongoing process. Thank you for your cooperation in securing PVSCs.

ENNEAGRAM GROUP *(Dorothy Naylor)*

This group is now in its sixth year. Many members had taken a workshop in the congregation in the past; others are new to the Enneagram experience. Because of the size of our group, break-out groups are an important mode. By the end of 2024, 19 were part of the group. The Enneagram is a tool that helps us understand ourselves and our relationships more clearly, and to see the different ways we all see the world. Along with discovering more about ourselves, the Enneagram offers a path to growth. It is highly respected in the fields of psychology and psychiatry, with Enneagram scholars coming from those fields. We meet on the second Thursday of the month with each meeting led by a different team. A book is chosen each year as a guide to our learning.

SUNDAY SERVICES/WORSHIP *(Jane Sly)*

The role of the worship committee is to creatively plan Sunday and special services throughout the year. This is the primary means to realize our commitment to offer spiritual nurturance to our community as we seek to provide inspiring and compassionate worship that tends to the needs of all ages. We seek to recognize in our progressive theology inspired worship our commitment as a congregation to be intergenerational, anti-racist, environmentally conscious, justice seeking and affirming of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

Participating in the group are the minister(s), the musical director, the intergenerational ministry leader and lay members of the congregation (5-7members). 2024 was a pivotal year for the committee as we planned worship in the lead up to Brian's departure, the subsequent summer services and then worked alongside Alyson Huntly and Anne Montgomery as they took on supply ministry. Up until this year there had not been a chair of the worship committee, but with Brian's anticipated departure it was determined that a chair would be a useful position to have. Jane Sly volunteered for this position. In 2024, we created a document outlining the vision of the Worship committee, the group's responsibilities and the terms of reference. We have also created a list of key dates in the church year. The group is building a list of individuals in the community who are capable of assisting with worship in such roles as leading prayers of the people, reading scripture, serving communion. We feel it is important to have such documents on hand to assist our two supply ministers and our future full time minister.

Current members of the group include:

Alyson Huntly, Anne Montgomery, Marg Stubington, Nikki Nel, Jane Sly, Pat Lindsey, Carol McMurdo-Paton, Emily Cerantola, Aster Dusome, Milo Popa and Tara Phillips.

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, to provide support and social interaction through a combination of online and in-person opportunities. In 2024 we were forced to pivot several times to online meetings due to freezing rain and snow. The times we did gather in person were rich with story. We held a special story sharing time with Brian prior to his moving to the next chapter of his journey, we celebrated two special members, Shirley Lanktree and Lyndell Hughes, with a luncheon in the church hall in July to mark their 92 birthdays, and then in September many of our regular members joined the 99th birthday celebration for Audrey McCooye in the church hall sharing in many memories of Audrey's life and her attendance as a regular at TGIF. Other special events demonstrated the fun side of the group and we were introduced to witches and sheiks during our Hallowe'en celebration. We also enjoyed coming together for the Christmas luncheon in the hall where we had an intergenerational group of 27 people eating, laughing and playing fun games together. With personal appointments, family commitments, engagements with many aspects of our church community and particularly respecting the energy of the group, we decided to switch from meeting weekly to monthly on the fourth Friday of each month.

WELCOMING AND HOSPITALITY MINISTRY

In 2024, we held two Welcome Lunches; one in February and the second in November.

Sandra Ballantyne, Carol Shipley, Judi Varga-Toth and Nira Dookeran hosted the February lunch. Approximately 45 people attended.

In November, Shirley Paton, Jenna Griffiths, Glenys Huws, Nathalie Waugh, and Judi Varga-Toth planned, prepared and hosted the lunch. Twenty-seven people attended. The attendance was split between newcomers who began attending First United in 2024, those who had returned to First United after an extended time away and those who came in 2023 but hadn't attended the February Lunch. A special thanks to Bruce Cameron for his support in the kitchen before the meal and after with the clean-up.

Hospitality: Over the years, we have had hospitality teams to welcome persons attending the Sunday services, take up the offering, serve refreshments after worship and clean up afterwards. Members of hospitality ensure that First United's tradition of inclusive welcome continues.

Hospitality Team Leaders: Our incredible team leaders are Marilyn and Don Brodie, Bruce Cameron, Allegra Newman with J2A, Carol and Wayne Dawson, Jo-Anne Harvey, Marilyn Kehoe, Mary Ann Rogers, Lisa St. Amour, Jane Ellis and Dale Walker.

WOMEN'S RETREAT *(Tanya Middlebro')*

November 8th to 10th weekend saw a post-pandemic revival of the First United Women's Retreat at beautiful Galilee Centre on the Ottawa River in Arnprior. Thanks to Nikki Nel and Elena Powell who began planning the retreat in the summer, including accepting the invitation of Rev Chung Yan Lam to share meals and space with the All Saints' Anglican Women's Retreat. The final planning group was: Rev Anne Montgomery, Basia Mair, Tanya Middlebro' and Andrea Prazmowski. These four women offered the weekend's programming, under the theme of Reflection and Peace. A spectacular warm and sunny day, and the tradition (founded on previous post-retreat surveys) of unprogrammed Saturday afternoons, was enjoyed by all 13 participants to make art, explore Gillies Grove, 'forest bathe' and meditate outside. Thanks to the Anglican women for making us welcome at their Sunday morning worship.



Workshop led by Basia Mair - photo by Tanya Middlebro'

Our Commitment to Healing

CONGREGATIONAL CARE NETWORK

With the impending departure of our long-time minister, Church Council approved the terms of reference for a Congregational Care Committee. The Committee came to life in April 2024 and was formally introduced via First Glance and at Sunday worship in May. It is important to note that all meetings and conversations that occur among Committee members are confidential.

The Vision for the Committee as set out in its terms of reference is:

“A priority for First United is a commitment to spiritual nurture in community as well as to healing and wholeness. To embody these commitments, the Congregational Care Committee recognizes that people who know each other care for each other; facilitates formal and informal mechanisms to provide care for the members and adherents of First United.”

In the absence of ministry personnel (particularly over the June – September period), Committee members reached out to those in our community of faith in need of pastoral care. It was our goal that pastoral needs do not fall through the cracks until ministry personnel were appointed at First. By phone calls, visits and checking in at Sunday worship, we offered support to a large number of members and adherents. One member of the Committee was also present as a pastoral presence at a mental health workshop led by Jessica Ward-King in early October.

With the appointment of a half-time minister of pastoral care, we continue to work with Rev. Anne to keep her in the loop as to who might need her pastoral care and how we can support her. We are so pleased she is with us.

The Committee held one virtual meeting and three in-person meetings in 2024. Additionally, the chair meets with Rev. Anne on an irregular basis to discuss pastoral care needs in depth.

Committee members included: Grant McNeil (Chair), Laura Bonnett (with regrets, had to leave the committee in September) Rachel Dietrich-Thickett (regretfully left the committee to move into a teaching role with Sunday children’s programming) Catherine Gutjahr and Joëlle Morgan. While not members of the Committee, Shirley Lanktree offered her wisdom, and Maryanne MacDonald attends our meetings and shares her wisdom and knowledge (thank you Shirley and Maryanne). And more thanks to both Maryanne and Carol Shipley for their Card Ministry at First United who we turn to regularly.

We ask that you prayerfully listen to the Spirit calling yourself to offer your gifts to our community of faith. If you discern a call to assist with offering congregational care by serving on the Committee, please speak with Rev. Anne or a member of the committee. We’d be delighted to chat.

HEALING PATHWAY MINISTRY *(Sharon Moon)*

The Healing Pathway ministry had many active practitioners including Suzanne Allen, Howard Clark, Rosemary Clarke, Brian Cornelius, Paul Durber, Ivana Filice, Andrea Fisher, Carol Garceau, Madeleine Germaine, Julia Gordon, Carlea Knowles Pat Lindsey, Basia Mair, Pat Mayberry, Sharon Moon, Andrea Prazmowski, Hugh Robillard, Doug Stafford, Joan Stafford.

We are a ministry offering prayer with laying on of hands for physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing. Since Covid, we also offer distance healing and some of our practitioners practice mostly distance work. Everyone is welcome to receive. You do not have to be sick to come. In the past receivers have gained benefit from the Healing Pathway as they have dealt with, recovery from surgery, chronic pain, life transitions, emotional challenges, family crises, health issues, concussions, or just plain longing for balance and wholeness in their lives and support for wellness and healing on all levels.

This ministry has been ongoing since about 2002. We offer regular weekly Tuesday afternoon sessions in the Chapel, with Tuesday evening sessions every second week. This year our in person and distance practice offered 469 sessions. This does not include many sessions offered outside of the church building.

Healing Pathway practitioners participate in several additional activities:

- 1) Anointing during regular communion services, accompanied by prayer.
- 2) Chair sessions on the third Sunday of a month after church in the chancel area.
- 3) Occasionally going to a person's home or to a hospital bedside offering Healing Pathway
- 4) Responding to group healing requests for distance energy healing e.g. when a grandchild is extremely ill, or someone is recovering from surgery.
- 5) Doing presentations on what Healing Pathway actually is to small groups, e.g. Rite 13.
- 6) Giving leadership to at least one church service a year focusing on healing and wholeness.

The highlight for many of us in 2024 is the post-COVID effect, which means that we have gone back to in-person sessions in the Chapel on Tuesdays. There are still a few receivers who continue to receive healing by distance sessions, but the majority of practitioners and receivers are thrilled to be back in-person again.

We have a robust ministry with dedicated practitioners and would welcome any who would like to learn and practice with us or who would like to receive and see what it is like. Howard, Sharon, Paul and Hugh are also involved in Healing Pathway at the national level.

LET'S TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

(Jessica Ward-King and Zachary Houle)

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. Let's Talk About Mental Health serves a core group of about 10 people.

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.

MEDITATION *(Liz Tyrwhitt and Cathy Nobleman)*

Sitting in silence, creating community.

Every Monday, a group gathers to meditate for 30 minutes in the tradition of the World Community of Christian Meditation (WCCM). We welcome everyone and provide short readings from John Main, Father Laurence and other spiritual teachers before we come into silence.

We meditate for 30 minutes, followed by a time of discussion for 10-15 minutes. We close with prayers. Cathy Nobleman and Liz Tyrwhitt co-lead the group. We look forward to when Joyce Hardman can rejoin.

We meditate on Zoom. If you would like more information, please contact Liz at liz.tyrwhitt@gmail.com or Cathy at noblemanca@gmail.com. Check out the website of the WCCM.

SOUL SPACE *(Danielle Rolfe)*

Leaders: The Soul Space Steering Committee provides financial and programming oversight for Soul Space programs. In 2024, the committee included Lynn Fischer (chair), Reverend Brian Cornelius (ex-officio), Paul Durber (secretary), Mary-Martha Hale (treasurer), Sharon Moon, Glenys Huws, and Danielle Rolfe (program director). As many committee members had generously served on the committee for 2+ years, several stepped down from the committee (Brian, Paul, Mary-Martha, Sharon, and Glenys), Andrea Prazmowski from First United, and several community members (Brenda Cleary, Neil Knudsen, Ken Hoffman) subsequently joined. Lynn Fischer continues as committee chair, and Danielle Rolfe as director. Soul Space programs were additionally supported by nine Frontline Worker Advisory Group team members, 25 community-based wellness providers, and program coordinator Kerry Forbes.

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.

2024 Highlights

In 2024, Soul Space received a one-year Community Grant (Ottawa Community Foundation) which enabled members of our Frontline Worker Advisory Group to receive honoraria for offering their expertise and leadership during Soul Space events.

Thanks to three-year (2023-2025) grant funding from the United Church of Canada Foundation, donations from generous individuals, and collaborations with community organizations (e.g., Options Housing, Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre, Centertown and Sandy Hill Community Health Centres, PLEO, and the Parent Resource Centre), the Soul Space team supported over 350 frontline workers through retreats, monthly cafes (in partnership with Bridgehead Coffeehouse), clay workshops (in partnership with Earthen Vessels clay studio), and weekly online meditation group (in partnership with True North Insight). Soul Space also supported frontline workers during Drug User Memorial Day, Overdose Awareness Day, and Working on Wellness Day.

In partnership with the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, and with financial support from the Ottawa Community Foundation, Soul Space hosted an additional “Soul Sisters Day Retreat” for Black women and Black gender-diverse frontline workers in March 2024.

Thanks to funding received from the Community Services Recovery Fund (Government of Canada), Soul Space was able to invest in rebuilding its website, developing outreach materials, and creating a Case for Support with the assistance of Rev. Trisha Elliott, CFRE. This engaging document tells the story of Soul Space, and explains why this ministry is important to frontline workers - please check it out on the ‘Donate’ section of our website.

The increasing instability on Ottawa’s streets (increasing housing and food insecurity, poverty, and lives lost to the toxic drug crisis), combined with policies that work against the critical provision of harm reduction services, has increased the need to support frontline workers. Soul Space team members will be using 2025 for a time of internal reflection, strategic planning, offering space for a collective response to our community’s grief, and increased advocacy and awareness efforts.

If you would like to support Soul Space by volunteering, making a donation, or receiving updates through our newsletter, please get in touch! Follow us!:

www.soulspaceottawa.ca

info@soulspaceottawa.ca

Facebook (soulpaceottawa); Instagram (@soulpaceottawa)

Our Commitment to Social and Ecological Justice

COMMITTEE ON ANTI-RACISM, RACIAL JUSTICE & INCLUSION

Facilitators: Pat Mayberry, Dorothy Naylor, Danielle Rolfe, Bruce Tsuji, Aster Dusome, Mae Brown Ajayi.

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. 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 neighbours;
- 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. In 2023 the Committee continued to meet and saw 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 neighbours. In 2024, we connected with those concerned with issues pertaining to being a ministry with commitments to being Affirming, Anti-Racist, Accessible, and living in Right Relations in our faith community and held two meetings. The focus of these meetings was on the spiritual nurture of individuals involved in social justice work, how to approach difficult conversations, and what actions are possible as a collective at First. Although we regarded these gatherings as successful, we lost momentum with Brian Cornelius' departure and, at the moment, are inactive.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE *(Wallace Beaton)*

This new committee emerged in Spring 2024 out of an informal meeting organized by Chris Henschel and Judi Varga-Toth. More than 25 members of the First community expressed a strong interest in environmental and climate issues as an important expression of their faith and a desire to pursue further collaboration.

The committee's work is inspired by the New Creed of the United Church that calls us to live with respect in Creation; First's commitments to right relations, anti-racism and intergenerationalism; and the efforts of the pre-existing Water Allies group at First.

Our mission as approved by Council is to promote the principles and practices of environmental justice in all aspects of the life of this faith community. This includes:

- engaging the congregation to explore environmental justice through worship and other learning activities;
- promoting calls to action from the United Church and its partners;
- supporting concrete steps to reduce First's ecological footprint;
- providing support for those experiencing eco-anxiety or grief.

Some highlights of the committee's efforts during the rest of 2024 included:

- Planning and delivering an Earth Sunday worship service.
- Organizing a "Sustainable Transportation" Sunday.
- Supporting the "Riversong II" fundraising concert to support First Nations' legal challenge of a proposed nuclear waste disposal site near the Ottawa River.
- Offering environment-themed activities at two Faith, Fun & Friendship events.
- Liaising with other committees on new initiatives to help First United green its activities related to waste/recycling and transportation (more to come 2025!).

The committee meets on the first Wednesday of the month and currently has 9 active members as well as an additional 10 supporters including Alyson Huntly (and previously Brian Cornelius).

I offer my thanks to all of them for their commitment to heeding the Creator's call to care for the Earth to the benefit of all living things.

FIRST CONNECTIONS LUNCHEON

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

First Connections was started in the early 2000s as a luncheon for the participants and workers of Project Upstream and Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) for a good meal, conversation and connection.

Those who attended 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. The last luncheon was held on May 24th. The program was evaluated by Project Upstream, the CMHA and First United Church. It was determined that the hall and kitchen would be available once a month for the Project Upstream workers and their clients. Workers set up, provide food for lunch and then clean up. This new program started in September 2024 and will continue until May 2025.

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 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 two books studied in 2023 were Meeting My Treaty Kin by former chair of church council, Heather Menzies, and Our Long Struggle for Home - The Ipperwash Story. In June the book study group made the decision to suspend the group for the time being and look for ways to take specific actions towards reconciliation, reconvening at times as appropriate.

In November, several members of the group, together with the WaterCare Allies of First United, assisted with the organization of the fundraising concert, Riversong 2. This was held in the church sanctuary and church hall. Over \$15,000 was raised to support the legal challenge of the Kebaowek First Nations against the building of the near-surface nuclear waste disposal facility at Chalk River. The facility has the potential to negatively impact the Kichi Zibi as well as all the species in the area. The WaterCare Allies collected second hand Indigenous-related books from members of the book study group and sold them to assist with the fundraising.

We were grateful for the support of church council in providing the space and also some funding and for the many volunteers from the Environmental Justice Committee who assisted at the event. As a community we continue to work together towards reconciliation.

MEN'S BREAKFAST (SUNDAY MORNING) *(Don Brodie)*

On the second Sunday of each month (September through June), men of the congregation gather at 9:00 AM for breakfast and fellowship through engaged conversation at the Newport Restaurant (corner of Churchill Avenue and Scott Street). All are welcome. A reminder notice appears in the First Glance at the beginning of each month. 6 – 8 people attend regularly. For more information contact Don Brodie at donmarilynbrodie@gmail.com.

PARTNERSHIP MINISTRIES

First United has formal partnerships to support, our 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. First United, with many United Church congregations, march in the Pride Parade and celebrate as more and more Ottawa area United Churches become affirming.

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. In fall 2024, Gloucester Housing Corp. officially amalgamated with MHI, expanding MHI's housing portfolio and increasing its reach to over 1,000 tenants across nine housing communities. This amalgamation strengthened efforts to provide long-term, affordable housing solutions in Ottawa. MHI continues to grow, with upcoming housing developments such as *Odenak Dream LeBreton* (133 homes already in construction) and *The Anchor* (84 homes, coming soon!).

PEACE FLAME DRUM CIRCLE

The drum circle meets twice a month, 2nd and 4th Monday evening. All are welcome, men, women, children and 2 spirited people from all nations. The circle is a safe space where we come together to feed our spirits, to learn from each other following the sacred teachings of courage, honesty, humility, love, respect, truth, and wisdom. We drum, sound our voices, witness and support each other, share our tears and laughter. Our songs are our prayers for our families and communities. Our circle ebbs and flows with anywhere from 5-20 people attending. The circle offers a community of like-minded people, a support system that is so important. Once or twice a year we have a potluck feast which allows for more connection. Having this sacred space to gather has been so meaningful to everyone, we are most grateful to have this opportunity.

Julie, *drum circle facilitator*

REFUGEE MINISTRY

Since 2015 First United has been involved in over 60 official refugee files either as a congregation or in partnership with Community Sponsorship Groups.

2024 highlights: The year saw a major change in our Ministry with the departure of Brian Cornelius who had led this Ministry as it relates to third party sponsorships done through First United as a Constituent Group. To prepare for Brian's departure and to examine a way forward for the Ministry, in April 2024 Church Council received a well-thought-out report from an ad hoc Refugee Working Group (consisting of Zachary Chrumka, Jamie Scott and Brian Cornelius) making several recommendations: in particular, the setting up a Refugee Advisory Committee and limiting the number of active refugee files to 10 (approximately \$250,000 on our balance sheet). Importantly, if the church were again to undertake a direct sponsorship, a larger committee of 10 to 12 people would need to be set up with a necessary understanding that such a commitment involves many years of involvement.

Accordingly, a Refugee Advisory Committee was set up in May 2024 prior to Brian's departure. Members are: Andrew Clark (committee convenor and financial manager), Norman Ball, Roger Butt, Paul DeGiacomo and Patricia Wilson. Patricia, head of the Ottawa Centretown Refugee Association (OCRA), a key community sponsor, is very knowledgeable about IRCC processes. Current Status of Refugee files: During the year, three refugee files were completed and closed: an OCRA sponsorship, the Breezehill Community and the Sycamore Refugee Groups. We also saw the arrival of 8 new refugees: 4 arriving in March, 2 in April and 2 in August. Six of these new arrivals were part of a large family reunification group led by Kinda Jabbour, one by a sole sponsor (Heidi Honegger) and one sponsored by OCRA. We are still waiting for IRCC to process 8 more applications, all of which were made several years ago prior to Church Council putting a moratorium on new sponsorships. This is clear evidence that there is a considerable backlog on IRCC refugee processing and one of the reasons the Federal Government put a hold on new refugee sponsorships in late 2024. That said, the Government did not put a hold on refugees coming through the Sponsorship Agreement Holder program like that of the United Church of Canada. Accordingly, with the limit of 10 active files in mind and the likelihood that applications can take well over a year to go through, Church Council agreed in December to work with OCRA and the national church on sponsoring three new refugee applications from Afghanis currently in Pakistan and wanted by the Taliban. These applications are currently in the UCC queue with IRCC and are not expected to be processed until 2026.

A special thanks to Cindy Cherry for her bookkeeping on the refugee file and to Brian Cornelius (up until June) for his leadership in this ministry.

REMEMBRANCE AND CALL TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Liturgical leaders and small group facilitators in 2024 Gathering: Brigitte Demers, Pat Lindsey, Nikki Nel, Jo-Anne Harvey, Nira Dookeran, Danielle Rolfe, Julie Vachon, Natalie and Ava Waugh, Liz Tyrwhitt, Mary Donaghy and Margaret Maxted.

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.

In 2024, 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.

We are grateful for the musical leadership of Marg Stubington.

We are grateful for Paul Durber, Murray Angus, Rob Vanderberg, Andrew Clark, Marti Settle, Jerome Demers, and friends, who provided hot cider and light refreshments on a cold evening.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Anne Montgomery

WATERCARE ALLIES/EARTH GROUP *(Maryanne MacDonald)*

In November, several members of the group together with the WaterCare Allies of First United assisted with the organization of the fundraising concert, Riversong 2. This was held in the church sanctuary and church hall. Over \$15,000 was raised to support the legal challenge of the Kebaowek First Nations against the building of the near surface nuclear waste disposal facility at Chalk River. The facility has the potential to negatively impact the Kichi Zibi as well as all the species in the area. The WaterCare Allies collected second hand Indigenous related books from members of the book study group and sold them to assist with the fundraising. We were grateful for the support of church council in providing the space and also some funding and for the many volunteers from the Environmental Justice Committee who assisted at the event. As a community we continue to work together towards reconciliation.

Our Partnership with All Saints' Anglican (Westboro)

PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

(Submitted by The Venerable Kathryn Otley)

The Partnership Management Committee oversees the partnership between All Saints' Westboro and First United. This committee provides a forum for resolving any issues that might arise and meets as required to advance the necessary work identified by the Joint Property Committee and to ensure the partnership agreement is being followed.

With the departure of both Chris Dunn and Brian Cornelius who, along with representatives from both churches, created the partnership agreement, it was decided that more frequent meetings are required. Anne Montgomery and Alyson Huntly, the interim ministers at First United, and I, as the new Incumbent at All Saints', needed to understand how this partnership worked to ensure its continued success and smooth operation. With that goal in mind, we are now meeting every other month or more frequently when required. This has helped members of both churches collaborate with great success and solve issues that have arisen since the departure of the two long serving originators of the agreement.

Issues to do with parking, space allocation, anticipating more opportunities to serve the community and celebrate our faith together, are some of the many topics we address. Both churches are equally represented on the committee. Membership from All Saints includes The Ven. Kathryn Otley, Ken McMillan [Senior Warden], Barbara Fisher [Treasurer], Peter Nicoll and Steve Sibbald [ASW members- at-large]. Members from First United are The Rev.

Alyson and The Rev. Anne, Andrew Clark [Treasurer] Robert VanderBerg (Council Chair), and Martin Settle [Council Chair Emeritus].

PROPERTY COMMITTEE *(Lamar Mason, Chair)*

The members of the Joint Property Committee for 2024 were Chris Kirch, Greg Snow and Lamar Mason from All Saints Westboro, and Don Brodie and Owen Savage from First United. Part way through the year, we were happy to welcome Rob Grimwood from First United to the team.

Work in 2024

Early in 2024, we finally got the power upgrade from Hydro Ottawa. This allowed us to complete the kitchen renovations and to bring the new stove and ovens online. From the use that has been made of the kitchen since then, I would say the renovations were a success. The exhaust fan that is over the stove, and was the reason we needed to upgrade, is loud when on but a necessity to meet Building Code requirements for kitchen use.

Once the electrical upgrade into the building was complete, we had to move on to upgrading the remaining electrical panels to accept the new load. We will continue upgrading panels throughout 2025 as funds become available. This work will enable us to meet current and future needs for more power within the building. Electrical work was JPC's main focus in 2024.

Other activities during the year included installation of a new backflow device to comply with the City's water requirements, regrading of the paved area outside the Chapel and west entrance off Richmond Rd to ensure better water flow away from the building, replacing burnt out lights in the Sanctuary, repainting the First United Minister's office for the new interim clergy, and installing fans in the Sanctuary to provide better air flow during the hot summer months. The wiring feeding the power outlets and light posts in the courtyard also needed to be fully replaced due to damage from rodents and age. Needless to say, there were numerous small projects that also came up throughout the year.

Looking forward

Looking forward, we will be examining options for improved garbage removal, enhanced recycling in the building, refurbishing of the altar platform, and seeking quotes for repaving the Madison parking area. We are continuing to research 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.

Appreciation

The day-to-day cleanliness and physical operation of the building depends on the hard work of our dedicated custodian, Paul Dumais. We appreciate the work he does to keep the building functioning. This year, Paul was assisted in his duties during the winter months and in his absences by Ben MacKinnon. The work that Paul and Ben do is critical to our enjoyment of our worship space and the comfort and safety of our building. Thank you to both Paul and Ben.

I would like to thank Julie Cross for her continued work in the Courtyard Gardens. I am thankful that Julie got some assistance from a few folks this summer, and the youth in the spring, but we continue to look for someone to take on this ministry. The garden and courtyard are ASW's face to the community and it takes work to ensure that face is always "smiling." Please consider if you have time to assist with this ministry. Thank you, Julie, for your continued service.

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. Often that research results in everyone pitching in to do the work ourselves at considerable cost saving to both congregations. I am very appreciative of the dedication of our current members to this work.

I also appreciate the members of both congregations who step in to help with specific projects when asked. In particular, this year Howard Clark from First United and Peter Nicoll from ASW were key in addressing some of our projects. Thank you to both of them.

How you can help

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

(Submitted by Peter Newlands, Rev Chung Yan Lam, and Martine Dore)

The Westboro Region Food Bank (WRFB) is an agency of the Ottawa Food Bank. By the terms of our Mutual Agreement with the Ottawa Food Bank, the WRFB is mandated to provide three (3) days of emergency food once a month to anyone living in our catchment area. Our borders are Broadview Avenue on the west, Dovercourt Avenue on the south, Island Park Drive on the east and the Ottawa River on the north.

This year, the staff and volunteers have been stretched beyond their abilities to keep up with ever greater numbers of people searching for food. There is even less food to go around, making it increasingly difficult to serve our clients in our little 2 room food bank. To lower the number of visits, we reduced the frequency of household visits from twice a month to once a month, beginning in October. We also began requiring appointments so that our clients can be served in a timely fashion without long, sometimes frustrating waits in the hallway. If clients don't have computer access, we make their next appointment for them at the end of their current appointment.

Due to their budget constraints, the Ottawa Food Bank has lowered the quotas on the amount of food it ships to all the member food banks. For example, the quota was reduced on the amount of milk we receive on a weekly basis. At the beginning of this year, our quota was forty-eight (48) bags a week. The current quota is thirty-two (32) bags a week or 30% less milk. This resulted in higher expenses and more shopping and shipping for us. Furthermore, staples like meat, tuna, peanut butter, canned stew and bread were also cut back. The only way we would have enough of the basics for our clients was to purchase these items weekly, while continuing to purchase the fresh fruits and vegetables which we always provide. This resulted in higher expenses and more shopping and shipping for us. Our donors are very generous, and we have used their contributions to make-up the shortfall, but their pockets are not bottomless.

Thanks to All Saints' and First United for supporting our food bank and for sharing their space. We would like to thank our donors and especially our volunteers, without whom we couldn't function.

As of the end of September 2024, Rev Chung Yan Lam and Ugochi Atasie served as an interim team to take over the coordination of the Food Bank as Peter Newlands planned to step back from his position of Coordinator. Rev. Lam and Ugochi were instrumental in maintaining service to our Food bank neighbours and general operations with the full support of Peter and Julie Newlands during the transition period. We were intentional during this interim period to update our database, review policies and procedures, and to streamline the coordination of Food Bank from the two staff person to one person of twenty-five (25) hours. It has been the intention to tighten our operational expenses in preparation of cuts from the Ottawa Food Bank and also the significant increase in food costs.

In November, a comprehensive recruitment process began with more than one hundred (100) applicants to the position of Food Bank Coordinator. Rev. Lam interviewed applicants along with Julie Newlands. Peter was to be a part of the interviewing process except he became unwell on the day of the interviews. We are grateful for Martine Dore who accepted our offer. Martine brings with her a wealth of experience. She will be a wonderful addition to our team.

At the end of December, we bid farewell to Ugochi as she returned to her studies in Kitchener. She has spent December to share her learning with Martine and it has been vital to Martine's success in heading up the Food Bank on her own in January. We are grateful for Ugochi deciding to come to All Saints' Westboro to worship and then offered her skills to serve as the Interim Assistant Food Bank Coordinator.

Rev Chung Yan Lam, *Interim Food Bank Coordinator*

New-to-You Shop (*Submitted by Barbara and Peter Robertson*)

Twenty-four talented and friendly volunteers greet customers in the New-to-You Shop on Wednesdays and Saturdays. They process new donations, arrange items artfully, and deliver many boxes of surplus clothing to such agencies as the Debra Dynes Community House. Members of the wider Westboro community drop in, and many of them become friends through conversation and sharing. The funds raised (about \$15,616 in 2024) benefit the Rector's Discretionary Fund and general church funds.