



2024 Annual Report

390th Annual Meeting
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2024 Annual Report First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

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REPORT OF THE INTERIM SENIOR MINISTER

Our first months together have been a joy for me. Since arriving as the Interim Senior Minister in August 2024, I have discovered rich faith, warm hearts, wise leadership, and, of course, a rare commitment to making our common life more consistent with the love of God, instead of easily maintaining what church has “always” been. We (and I use the third person plural not to claim any “credit,” but to signal how thoroughly you have taken me in as a new pastoral leader) strive to be guided by our vision of what God wants for this world and are willing to live on the leading edge of what that vision calls for in practice. That willingness is shown in the care we show for each other, our treasuring of everyone (without regard to the categories with which the world defines us), our struggle to seriously address the sin of white supremacy, and our commitment to doing (not just “supporting”) the work of loving our vulnerable neighbors. You may not realize what high esteem this reveals from me, but it seems to me that we are truly trying to be “church” in this time and place, as “church” is envisioned in the New Testament. Such an effort is not that common in our context today, and it’s a joy to be part of it.

Given that I am an Interim Senior Minister, let me talk “interim business” for a moment. My first few months here have been all about connecting with the congregation: getting to know you as individuals and as a congregational system; building trust; helping keep the basics of ministry running well in worship, pastoral care, staff leadership, and organizational work; and using my training and experience to analyze the situation here, and thus be helpful to you as the next interim steps unfold. The next interim step is about to begin, as we turn in the first half of 2025 to asking more directly, “Who are we now?” (with the implied meaning, in part, “Who are we now, without Dan Smith leading us?”); “What is our ministry context really like today?”; and “What leadership do we need to be the church God is calling us to be next?” The Discovery Team, soon to be created, will lead our reflection about those questions. And then, perhaps in the summer of 2025, the Pastoral Search Committee will be created and will seek to find a person whose faith, skills, priorities, character, and vision will be an inspired match for the congregation.

I want to thank the wonderful people I serve with on the staff. In the annual reports they provide in these pages, you will see the valuable and massively well done ministry they do here at First Church. Behind the words, though, are people with huge hearts, creative minds, brave souls, and a lot of patience for each other and for the congregation. To them I say: friends, you are enriching my life as we serve together.

I also want to thank Moana Bentin (Moderator), Phil Servello-Jones (Vice-Moderator), Leslie Pelton-Cairns and Casey Marsh (co-chairs of Deacons), Jim Cairns (Treasurer), and Meredith Quinn (immediate past Moderator), who make up the officers leadership team and have been fantastic conversation partners as I have come into the congregation. What Tony La Russa once said when asked what he was doing while managing a baseball game, when it looks like not much is happening, is true of ministry as well: “There’s a lot of stuff goes on.” And this team has helped me sort through it in wonderful ways.

Conscious that this Annual Report will be an official document of First Church, and may thus occasionally be read for many years to come (with a historical lens), I end with two closing comments, focusing on the very big picture of church life today:

First, while I believe there will always be followers of Jesus of Nazareth who gather together in his name and seek to embody his will and way in the world, I am not always so sure about the future of the institutional church. In an era of cultural disestablishment, we Christians are having a hard time envisioning who we are in the absence of social power. In a radical sense (i.e. at the root), all churches are in “transition,” as we try to learn how to be faithful to Jesus in a social and theological context we can barely make sense of. If God has a place for institutional churches in the future, it is going to be places like First Church that show the way.

And second, what Christianity is really struggling with in this age is an answer to the question Jesus put to his first disciples two centuries ago: “Who do you say that I am?” Since the church took on the power of Empire in the 4th century, and in the manifold ways that power has been embodied through the millennia (including now

REPORT OF THE INTERIM SENIOR MINISTER

in our country through the power of “cultural Christianity” and white supremacy), we Christians haven’t had an answer to that question that reasonably fits with the Biblical vision of who Jesus was. I believe that at one level the answer is simply, “You are the enfleshment of God in this world.” But the real trick then lies in realizing what that means for our lives. Forgive, if you must, the arcane nature of this quote, but I deeply believe that this expresses the only direction Christian faithfulness can take in the future.

From David Bentley Hart’s *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (p. 3):

As Origen observed, the marvel of Christ is that, in a world where power, riches, and violence seduce hearts and compel assent, he persuades and prevails not as a tyrant, an armed assailant, or a man of wealth, but simply as a teacher of God and [God’s] love (*Contra Celsum* 1.30). Christ is a persuasion, a form evoking desire, and the whole force of the gospel depends upon the assumption that this persuasion is also peace: that the desire awakened by the shape of Christ and his church is one truly reborn as *agape*, rather than merely the way in which a lesser force succumbs to a greater, as an episode in the endless epic of power.

The peace of Christ be with all!

Mike Solberg

Interim Senior Minister



REPORT OF THE PASTORAL ASSOCIATE

What a year it has been! In reflecting on all that this year has held in my role at First Church, I give thanks for the ways I feel God moving among us, and for all the ways that First Church collaborates with the Holy Spirit to make God's kin-dom on Earth in big and small ways. It has been a blessing to be embraced by this community.

I began 2024 at First Church in the role of Ministerial Intern, as we walked together as a community through Dan's announcement that he'd be stepping down as Senior Minister, and as we prepared spiritually, logistically, and emotionally for that transition. We sang "The Way Knows the Way" by Lyndsey Scott and leaned into trusting what we couldn't yet see. The whole church showed up to that process with such generosity, faith, and FUN even in the midst of grief – I will never forget busting a move to Bon Jovi with all of you at Dan's farewell flash mob. This is a congregation where the Spirit is alive and well!

After stepping away for the summer, I returned in late August in the role of Pastoral Associate, and to meet and welcome our new Interim Senior Minister Mike Solberg, who I've been grateful to collaborate with and learn from this fall. My role at First Church expanded to 25 hours a week, with new responsibilities and rhythms. Since August, it has been a joy to preach once a month and to help lead worship at least twice a month.

One highlight of the fall was co-planning the All-Church Retreat at Craigville with Sarah Higginbotham. Centering our time around the Regathering theme of "Room for Us All," dozens of First Churchers gathered on the Cape to worship, laugh, play, explore, and connect. Our time was full with formation sessions designed to help us know each other more fully and also to get a sense of where we felt ourselves as a church and where we envisioned going. We worshiped on the beach, we danced and sang, we listened as people of all ages offered stories and songs around a campfire. It was a beautiful weekend that made evident all the ways that God is drawing us closer together in this season of change.

Throughout this year, I have also continued to be the staff liaison to the Board of Deacons. I thank God for the faithful and diligent work of this joyous team of lay leaders! It is a blessing to work alongside them to care for and help guide the congregation. The Beloved Community Group continues to hold the work of racial justice with diligence and commitment, and while I can't join their regular meetings, I have been grateful to be part of the Reparations subcommittee and to meet regularly with Peggy Stevens to do some visioning around how to keep breathing life into the racial justice work that is so important to our life and witness at First Church. I have also served as part of the Christian Formation Committee this year and have been witness to the attunement to our community and the creativity that are present on that team as we shape formation offerings for the community in different seasons.

As we entered election season, my husband Aram (who is the pastor of a small congregation in Maine) and I wanted to make an offering to our congregations that could help us all gather, ground, and remember the ancient technologies of poetry and prayer as sustenance and companions during hard times. We met with a beautiful and robust mixed group from both congregations for four Wednesdays in November, focusing on a different poem each time and praying aloud with each other. These gatherings were a blessing and a balm for me, and I am thankful to the Spirit that moved through them and between all of us who gathered.

Finally, it has been a blessing to be able to dedicate more of my time to pastoral care starting in the fall. While I wish I had more hours to dedicate to it, meeting one-on-one with members of the church community grappling with questions, going through illnesses or facing death, or simply wanting to connect has been life-giving and deeply connective. I thank God for the chance to minister to this beautiful congregation in all of the ups and downs of our lives, and for the trust and love you extend to me with such generosity. God is good, and God is moving at First Church with our collaboration!

With gratitude,
Emma Mitchell
Pastoral Associate

REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF STREET OUTREACH

Happy Tenth Birthday to the Friday Café! From its tiny beginnings on November 14, 2014, the Café has grown into a large, bustling community with many connections to Cambridge and beyond.

The Friday Café by the Numbers

We continue to serve an average of about 90 guests a week – fewer during the summer months, and more in the winter. Our operation involves the participation of nearly 50 home cooks each week, each preparing 10–12 servings of an entrée, side dish, or dessert of their choice. That's 50 neighbors every week responding in a tangible, hands-on way to the needs of unhoused and food-insecure folks in our community! Add to that number the 37 weekly in-person volunteers who make up our Kitchen, Serving, and Resource Room crews. Ten years in, the Café has turned into quite a production, with each detail of our set-up and operation thought through to ensure that things run as smoothly as possible. New volunteers often comment on what an organized program we've got going!

Café Life

Each week we welcome both old friends and newcomers, some housed, some unhoused. Our guests represent many different ages, backgrounds and nationalities. They are men, women, and nonbinary folks, straight and LGBTQ, Black, Brown, Asian, and White, liberal and conservative, college-educated and self-taught, and all beloved. Community is at the heart of everything we do, since we have found that community has deep restorative powers for guests and volunteers alike. One exciting development over the past year has been the addition of several add-on Café services: housing navigation support provided by the City; a weekly art workshop in the chapel run by a local artist; free mending and alteration help by a neighbor who brings her sewing machine every other week or so; and most recently, 20-minute physical therapy sessions provided by a church member, who sets her table up behind a screen in Hastings Common and offers therapeutic massage and instruction on exercises guests can do on their own.

Café Finances

The Friday Café budget of \$65,000 includes 1 half-time staff position, plus operating expenses. In addition to providing administrative support, space, and utilities, the church helps fund the Café through an annual Missions & Social Justice grant of \$10,000. It is up to the Café to raise most of the remaining funds through outreach to the surrounding community, and meeting this goal has proved challenging for us. In conversation with church leaders, we are beginning to move toward incorporating at least a portion of Café expenses into the church's annual operating budget. The budget approved by our congregation in November included a line item of 5% of the Director's salary, as a first step in that direction.

Meanwhile, individual gifts continue to provide most of the Friday Café's annual revenue, another way in which we invite the community to actively support neighbors in need. Huge thanks to Lindsay O'Donovan and the Burren Pub in Davis Square for holding a benefit concert for the Café each November, and to volunteer Charles Curti, who has recently stepped forward to offer development coaching and grant writing assistance.

More Thank Yous

I can't begin to express my thanks to First Church members and staff for ten years of enthusiastic support for the work and mission of the Friday Café! We are especially grateful to Lee Prouty and Kevin Newell for their cheerful help with setup and cleanup each week, and to Sarah Higginbotham for communications support. Thanks to our hardworking food partners, Community Cooks, and to our incredibly dedicated FC core team: Dave and Pat Demme, Alex Steinert-Evoy, Devin Hanson, Mark Reynolds, and Neil Peterson. Thanks to the City of Cambridge and Cherry Russell for housing navigation help – what a huge impact that has made! – and to the Health Department for providing an annual flu and COVID vaccine clinic. Grateful thanks to artist Tom Briggs, sewist Janet Liddell, and physical therapist Rachel Wilson for sharing their gifts with our community. Most of all, thanks be to God for working in us and through us and among us in such powerful, life-changing, neighborhood-transforming ways! We can't wait for the next ten years.

Rev. Kate Layzer
Director

REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF STEWARDSHIP & FINANCE

This year has been surprisingly stable, even in the midst of transition in our ministerial leadership, wrapping up Dan's time with us; orienting Mike to our history, people, traditions, resources, and procedures; and continuing to safeguard our financial, digital, and human resources. When I think about what's different this year, compared to last year, I seem to be retrieving an ever-increasing number of 2-Factor authentication codes, which many of our vendors have added to protect financial transactions completed online. But it is well worth it to avoid the risk of fraud! The longstanding scam of "please send gift cards, but don't call, since I'm in a prayer meeting" has been joined by fraudulent emails requesting a change to an employee direct deposit or a copy of our church directory. The staff works well together to protect the resources that you entrust to our church.

In addition to coordinating our financial operations, I staff the Finance, Stewardship, Investment, and Staff Policy committees as well as the financial aspects of the Shelter Oversight Committee. My sincere appreciation to Treasurers Jim Cairns, Rich Goode, Connie Pyle and Jim Greaney; Controller Rachel Carlson; Moderators Moana Bentin and Phil Servello-Jones; Committee Chairs Winnie Yip, Laurie Burt, and Jan Jeffers Lo; and our hardworking staff. It is, as it has been for each of the twenty years that I have been involved with First Church, a genuine joy to work together, confident that we're making a difference in our community and the world!

Here are a few snapshots of the stewardship of our resources through the lens of the committees and subcommittees that I am blessed to work with:

Finance

Overall, our income and expenses once again exceeded \$2 million. Boards, Committees, and staff were diligent about monitoring their expenses, keeping us within budget on the expense side with only two exceptions: additional emergency work needed on the Tower, and some additional ministerial transition expenses. On the income side, although we received nearly \$900k in contributions for our annual budget as well as various restricted funds, there were more than a dozen departures of cherished friends in the congregation due to relocation, which resulted in a significant shortfall in pledges and gifts for our operating budget. That said, additional gifts for debt retirement and robust investment returns have resulted in an overall increase in our financial balances for 2024. Detailed monthly financial reports are available online for lay leaders and staff, and full annual financial reports are available on the Church Finances page of our website.

Financial Operations

Reliable financial reporting would not be possible without attention to the details of each of our many day-to-day financial transactions and the software and bookkeeping that keeps track of it all. In the midst of the ministerial transition, we've had stability in our financial operations, with Bruce Dillenbeck in the office receiving mail, recording income, overseeing check printing, and posting financial reports and Karen Lee working mostly remotely recording expenses, finalizing payroll, and reconciling bank accounts and Pex card transactions. This allows me to focus on the big picture: budget development and oversight, cash flow, forecasting, employee compensation and benefits, and whatever comes up unexpectedly! Our digital system of recordkeeping and communication and detailed documentation of procedures keeps information secure in a mutually accessible place, providing backup for those times that one of us is away for a planned vacation or unplanned illness, and providing access to documents for staff and lay leaders.

Stewardship

Our congregation is always very, very generous in so many ways, allowing us to be the presence of God and the body of Christ day-in and day-out through our programs, our sacred space, and our staff. The primary emphasis of our pledge campaign was to invite our members and friends to respond with their intention for giving for 2025, so that church leadership can plan faithfully and prudently. And the congregation has responded, both in the number of pledges and in increased giving! However, we still fell short of the overall financial goal for pledges and will work together to address this in the coming year. That said, an interim time is always a rebuilding and reorganizing time, as we prepare for the new energy that new ministerial leadership will bring.

REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF STEWARDSHIP & FINANCE

Planned Giving

You will find a new page in our annual report this year – the Report on our “Foundation for our Fifth Century.” The report includes bequests received this year, in addition to the names of those who have let us know that they have included First Church as a partial beneficiary of their estate planning or an IRA or insurance policy. As we have worked to launch this, it is serendipitous that the Charitable Remainder Trusts set up by Theodore and Elizabeth Stevenson in 1952 and 1964 are currently in the process of being settled, reminding us all of the difference we can each make not just in our own time, but for the future of our church. If you would like to add your name to our Foundation, please review our Planned Giving webpage and complete a Planned Giving form.

Investments

Each year, I learn from our Investment Committee and advisors. I am grateful for the guidance and expertise of Qing Yang and Jill Fopiano of O’Brien Wealth Partners, who attend our meetings each quarter and make sense of the world of investments and finance. I appreciate the collective wisdom of our Investment Committee as they invest our funds in accordance with our values and priorities. As one part of our commitment to building up our investments, we have begun to add to our Fifth Century Fund, which has grown by 50% this year through several bequests, and generates 4% each year for our mission and ministry. This is a healthy step towards greater long-term financial sustainability.

Shelter Oversight

Currently, over 40% of our financial life supports our First Church Shelter with over \$800k of funding from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the City of Cambridge. The four components of our program (overnight shelter, housing navigator, meals program, showers program) are in operation around the clock, employing 23 employees and serving the community.

Staff Policy

In some years, the SPC agenda has included a review or revision of our employment policies, but this year was an especially busy year for SPC, utilizing those policies to address extended leaves taken by four of our employees, as well as covering the time between Dan’s departure and Mike’s arrival. Together, we balanced the needs of our employees, the budget as voted by the congregation, support offered by the UCC Disability Insurance and the Massachusetts Paid Family Medical Leave programs, and fair compensation for those who covered the responsibilities during their absences.

Transition

During the summer months following Dan’s departure, and prior to Mike’s arrival, I worked with the transition team to set up Mike’s benefits through the Presbyterian Board of Pensions, and share the rotation of pastoral care coverage, along with a bit of extra preaching, which I always enjoy. Transitions are hard work, but good work, and it is a joy to do it together. All in all, we’ve had a rewarding and fulfilling year. I look forward to this next chapter in our long history.

With deep gratitude,

Rev. Karen McArthur

Minister of Stewardship & Finance

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS & CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Wow, 2024 at First Church was a year! I am not the first writer of an annual report this year to begin with remarks about TRANSITION. Senior Minister Dan Smith's announcement that he would be leaving his position came early in the year, and the first half of the year was time well spent in experiencing a "good good-bye." Dan's Farewell Sunday on June 9 was a glorious display of how our community is able to share our grief, our gratitude, and our playful joy, all together! I was honored to help prepare and facilitate the worship, program, and events that made up that day. Dan's skill in pastoring, administering, and genuinely walking with a congregation, its staff, and the wider community is truly exemplary; I will always treasure my time working alongside him.

As First Church entered this time of transition following Dan's departure, I experienced my own shift in job title, reflecting the true nature of my roles and responsibilities in an expansion of my position to full-time. My new title - Director of Communications & Christian Formation - is more accurately descriptive of what I do around here. This is helpful for the congregation as we take stock of who we are, how we operate, and what we are seeking in a future staffing model.

Christian Formation

Our Church School finished the 2023-24 program year with strong with:

- a lovely presentation by our Middler class on their time connecting the story of Moses with a middle-grade novel telling a fictional story based in historical truths of the Jim Crow era in the southern US;
- the confirmation of nine young people who each wrote meaningful statements about their faith at this time in their lives;
- the performance of our Bible 101 Gospel Play in Children's Sunday Worship, highlighting how our tweens engaged thoughtfully, playfully, and personally with the Bible over their two-year curriculum;
- and lots of wondering, feasting, and praying in our Godly Play classroom!

The 2024-25 program year got off to a great start with:

- preK-4th graders engaging in Godly Play and a new cohort of 5th & 6th graders beginning their two-year journey with Bible 101;
- 7th & 8th graders collaborating with their peers from Old South Church to begin their year-long commitment to Our Whole Lives, the UCC's comprehensive sexuality curriculum based on values of inclusivity, justice, respect, and love;
- high school teens rebooting our Youth Group in a series of fun gatherings;
- an All-Church Retreat that brought together all ages in fellowship, formation, and fun;
- and a glorious return of the Family Choir and All Saints Band, singing a stirring anthem and providing the jazzy sounds in our All Saints Sunday Worship!

I am so grateful to all the First Church folks who volunteer their time and talent with our young people - thank you! You can see the list of Church School teachers and leaders under the 2025 Slate in the Report of the Gifts Discernment Committee.

Communications

My tasks and duties as your Communications Director include overseeing all the ways First Church communicates with you and with the wider community, including through the weekly worship bulletin, the weekly e-newsletters (News for First Church Families and First Glance), and other periodic e-news blasts with pastoral notes and other timely announcements. I keep the website updated with the latest news, while collaborating with other administrative staff to maintain and refresh the information stored there. And I schedule and design slides for worship and the lobby screens, as well as promotional signs for our outdoor kiosk.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS & CHRISTIAN FORMATION

As my role with Communications has come into clearer focus, the good folks of our Gifts Discernment Committee have recognized the need to reconstitute the Communications & Arts Committee in 2025; you can find the Comms & Arts Committee listed in the 2025 Slate. I look forward to working with this group as they bring their creative skill to the church's communications strategy.

As we continue to move through this time of transition, I am grateful for all my colleagues, and especially for the leadership of Interim Senior Minister Mike Solberg, as we find our way into First Church's future full of faith, hope, steadfastness, and love.

Yours in faith,

Sarah Higginbotham

Director of Communications & Christian Formation

REPORT OF THE MUSIC DIRECTOR

This was surely one of the most eventful years in my time at First Church, full of surprises and losses, to be sure, bringing both gratitude and grief.

After twenty years at First Church, our Senior Minister Dan Smith decided it was time for him to move on. This came as a surprise at first, but as time went on and we all had time to process the news, it made more and more sense as the next chapter of his life's path. He had seen us all through the pandemic – seventy church services without an in-person congregation! – and many other transitions, and prepared the church magnificently to carry on into the next chapter. I will miss him terribly both as a colleague and friend. We celebrated his ministry with a boisterous and heartfelt sending-off service in July.

In November the church at large and the choir in particular suffered two major losses in the deaths of Perry Neubauer and Carol Wilson-Braun. It's hard to imagine First Church without them – added end to end, their membership in the choir exceeded one hundred years!

It's impossible to overestimate the impact Perry has had on First Church, both in its physical and spiritual manifestations. His love of the place and its people, his generosity, his creativity and artistry, all will leave a beautiful mark forever in what we see, hear, and feel whenever we enter the building and encounter the community within. His huge heart, his boundless energy, and his no-nonsense judgement will be sorely missed.

Carol was, to my mind, the model of what lived Christianity - in action - should be like. She loved, she cared, she spoke, she acted, she advocated, she sang, all completely selflessly and always with a heart and mind focused on others. She was a pillar of the soprano section, always on pitch and always musical. I will miss her almost-weekly reports on music she had heard on the radio that she found interesting or challenging, and her steadfast faithfulness.

And, we carry on. New members have joined the Choir, and already have become part of our musical family. The Choir resumed rehearsing on selected Thursday nights in preparation for special musical services. The work on the Frobenius organ is more than half completed, with great improvement as well as much cleaner pipes! I began my thirty-ninth year as Music Director in May, and ended two years of a visiting professorship at the University of Michigan, while continuing to commute for teaching at the Juilliard School.

How can we keep from singing?

Thanks be to God!

Peter Sykes

Music Director

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

I am sure many other reports this year will start this same way - 2024 was a year of transition! It has been a whirlwind! Much of the year was spent either preparing for Dan Smith's departure, as he left his position as Senior Minister in June, or preparing for our new Interim Minister to arrive. And arrive, he did - Mike Solberg started working with the staff at the end of August and has been getting to know us as a staff, and we him.

Much of the first half of the year was filled with preparations for Dan's leaving, not only around celebrating him and his time at First Church, but also planning for life at First Church after his tenure. He and I had more than one meeting in which we discussed who would take on certain tasks of his, what institutional knowledge he had that needed to be passed on to others, and how the summer months would function - this would be a time when Dan was no longer at First Church but the new interim would not yet have started. I also helped the Interim Search Team with some administrative tasks as they went about the process of finding the person who would be our new Interim Senior Minister.

Over the summer I took on the role of Head of Staff. The 9 weeks ran smoothly with all staff pitching in and Community Ministers preaching on certain summer Sundays. By this time we knew our new Interim would be Mike, and we worked to find a balance between planning enough for the fall and start of the program year that we wouldn't be scrambling when he arrived in late August, and also leaving space for him to bring his thoughts and ideas to what we do here at First Church. I'm grateful to everyone who gave their time, skills, and talent over the summer to help keep the ship afloat, so to speak.

During the summer we also embarked on a new endeavor. We provided space in Margaret Jewett Hall for a daily Welcome Center for migrants staying in the East Cambridge Shelter. MJH was transformed into a space where people could learn English for Speakers of Other Languages, work with case managers around housing and documentation, eat, and socialize together. Toys for kids to play with were donated from a number of folks, and whole families would come to spend the day. This not only allowed the church to provide a service to the migrant population, but also provided the church with some space use revenue over the summer - a time when revenue is usually low due to lack of air conditioning in the building.

As per usual, the building was as busy as ever during the rest of the year. We have some new performance groups in our regular rotation, and it is not uncommon for there to be multiple weekends with performances on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. We also continue to provide space for community and 12-step groups, as well as dances, rehearsals, and other events. And as per usual, the Facilities Manager Lee Prouty and Sextons Steve Brown, Douglas Casey, Kevin Newell, and Jonathan Splaine are an integral part of our building rentals. From cleaning to aiding to repairing and more, there is no way we could have such thriving space use without them. I extended my gratitude to them for their continued hard work.

The building continues to be old, and we continue to address the issues that come with old buildings. A big project this year was the stabilization of the bell tower. More about this and other smaller projects can be read about in the Building & Grounds report.

The year involved the usual everyday administrative and communications related tasks. Office Assistant Bruce Dillenbeck continues to be a steadfast and reliable presence in the front office, helping with all things admin related. Many thanks to him for all he does to keep the office and church running smoothly.

With Mike's arrival in the fall, we officially embarked on the journey through this interim time. I appreciate Mike's willingness to listen and learn who we are, as well as his suggestions for ways in which we may be able to think about or do things a little bit differently. It will be exciting to see where the next year takes First Church!

Kirsten Manville
Director of Operations

REPORT OF THE FACILITIES MANAGER

As we conclude 2024, I reflect on my third year as Facilities Manager and my first year as a full-time staff member. This year has been marked by growth, challenges, and continuous dedication to maintaining our cherished community space.

Our facility has experienced a significant increase in building rentals and guest activities. From schoolchildren at The Newtowne School to choral and dance groups, community organizations, and musical ensembles, we remain committed to providing a welcoming, clean, safe, and fully functional environment for all who use our space.

In the spring, I took personal pride in revitalizing the playground walkway garden. The project included installing an upgraded water system and planting a diverse array of perennials. I carefully selected and planted hostas, liriopse, bluebells, snowdrops, lily of the valley, tulips, and daffodils. The garden promises new growth and beauty in the coming springtime, and I am excited to see how it will flourish.

The arrival of our Interim Senior Minister Mike Solberg prompted several important improvements at the Parsonage. We focused on critical maintenance tasks, including lead paint remediation, installation of upgraded fire and CO detectors, and minor deck repairs that included essential railing maintenance.

While extensive renovations in 2017 upgraded some of our systems, several facility components continue to show signs of aging. The basement hall lights are old and failing, heating system components are deteriorating with valves beginning to stick, the windows in Margaret Jewett Hall require repair, and the floor in Sage Hall is degrading. Where possible, I implement cost-effective repairs personally to avoid expensive contractor fees, doing my best to preserve and maintain our aging facility.

Our Wi-Fi system, critical for staff, Newtowne teachers, guests, and renters, has faced significant challenges. Following a complete failure in early 2020, the system has experienced persistent downtime and disconnection issues. We have recently engaged an external company to diagnose and resolve these problems, with hopes of achieving full functionality in the coming weeks.

As we move forward, our commitment remains unwavering: to maintain and improve our facility, ensuring it continues to serve as a vibrant, welcoming space for our community. Despite the challenges, there is a sense of pride in the care and attention we bring to this beloved building, preserving its character while adapting to ongoing needs.

Respectfully,
Lee Prouty
Facilities Manager



REPORT OF THE FIRST CHURCH SHELTER DIRECTOR

I'm sure everyone who is part of the First Church Cambridge Congregational UCC community has no doubt that, when it comes to the needs of poorest, unhoused and underserved sisters, brothers, and siblings, the last year was not filled with anything that even vaguely resembles "good news."

Individuals and families, in record numbers, cannot find and/or afford to secure shelter, and none of those who represent us - at the local, state or national level - seems willing to suggest or support the kind of significant public investment that will be necessary in order to address this problem.

At the First Church Shelter, a fortunate few of those who come to us seeking assistance have been able to find housing in and around the Cambridge-Boston area, but the supply of affordable, suitable housing is simply inadequate to meet the demand. Our shelter almost always has a half dozen guests who, in addition to being unhoused, are unable to secure the services - including medical - that they need to have safe and stable lives.

Locally, the First Church Shelter has been working with our church and non profit community partners to convince the City of Cambridge that, with the demand for affordable housing at a historic high, now is NOT the time for the city to follow through on their plans to shut down over 60 shelter beds at the Transitional Wellness Center, come the end of June. The City says that, despite a \$300 million cash surplus, Cambridge cannot afford to continue to support those beds now that federal, pandemic related funding is coming to an end.

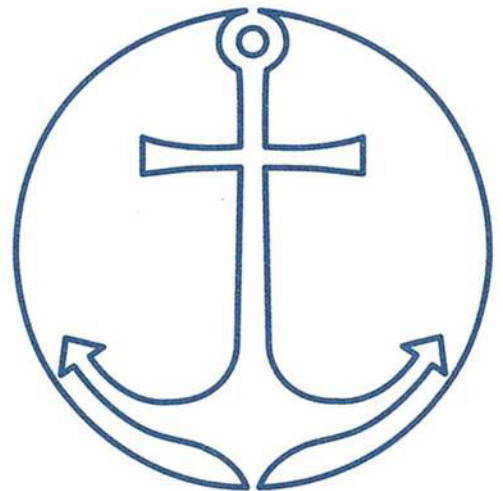
Much has been made about Governor Healey's (enacted by both the House and Senate) Affordable Housing initiative, but the total investment is widely recognized to be almost 50% less that what is required to create and support the kind of housing poor, and disabled citizens need.

There is SO much more that all of us need to be doing if we are going to impactfully share the "good news" we are charged to share with everyone in the communities in which we are located in and affiliated.

Our staff in the First Church Shelter, the public shower program, the housing navigator program, and the community meal program continue to work in the name of the people of First Church, and in cooperation with University Lutheran Church and First Parish, offering basic assistance, support, and encouragement.

The work being done in the name of First Church is overseen and well supported by our Shelter Oversight Committee, and we appreciate the opportunity to be partnered with Friday Café.

Sincerely,
Jim Stewart
FCS Director



REPORT OF THE MODERATOR

What an incredible honor to serve as your Moderator this year alongside Vice Moderator Phil Servello-Jones, as well as our amazing Clerk Laurie Friedman, whose superior listening skills and understanding of church history make capturing our business meeting notes look so easy. I am indebted to our Treasurer Jim Cairns, who has been instrumental in the financial stability and success of our congregation this year. And I thank Leslie Pelton-Cairns and Casey Marsh, co-chairs of Deacons, for their guidance as solid thought partners.

I am profoundly grateful for the incredible contributions of our talented, dedicated, and compassionate staff. Their unwavering commitment to the life and mission of our church has been the foundation of so much of what we have accomplished together. From leading worship with creativity and grace to managing the intricate details that keep our ministries running smoothly, each staff member brings a unique blend of skill, heart, and dedication to their work. Their ability to meet challenges with resilience, innovate in times of change, and consistently go above-and-beyond is a testament to their deep love for our church and its mission. We are deeply blessed by their gifts, their steadfast efforts, and their commitment to serving God and our congregation. To each member of our staff: thank you for your hard work, passion, and the difference you make in our lives every day. We are truly grateful for all that you do.

While we leaned on each other for support in mourning the losses of some of our faithful members, we also moved ahead with resilience and unity to embrace change and new beginnings. This year marked the end of an era as we bid a heartfelt farewell to Dan Smith after 20 years of dedicated ministry. His leadership, compassion, and service have left a lasting impact on our congregation. We celebrated his legacy with gratitude, reflecting on two decades of spiritual growth, meaningful connections, and community service. His departure was both a moment of sadness and an opportunity to honor a ministry that has shaped our identity.

As we navigated this transitional phase, we were blessed to welcome our new Interim Senior Minister Mike Solberg and his wife Janine. Mike has been a true shepherd in maintaining continuity, offering spiritual leadership, and preparing us for the next chapter. With fresh perspective and grace, Mike has been a wonderful guide through this season of change.

Our Fellowship Committee consistently encouraged connections, joy, and hospitality through creativity, impeccable organization, and welcoming spirit. They continue to remind us of the importance of coming together as one body in Christ.

Our Missions and Social Justice Committee, Christian Formation Committee and Beloved Community Group provided the steady hands and compassionate hearts to challenge us to examine ourselves and our systems with honesty and humility, inspiring us to embody the values of equity, justice, and inclusion. Through their workshops, conversations, and initiatives, they created spaces for growth, reflection, and action. These important ministries not only deepened our understanding, but strengthened our commitment to being a congregation that lives out the principles of love and justice in tangible ways. We are profoundly grateful for their courage and persistence.

Our Stewardship Committee's diligent and faithful work in strengthening a spirit of generosity and gratitude within our congregation reminds us of the importance of giving as an act of faith and service. This work has empowered us to meet our financial goals, retire our debt, and steward our resources responsibly.

We could not care for our church and ensuring its safety, stability, and beauty had it not been for the dedication and faithful work of our Buildings & Grounds Committee. Their leadership was especially evident in the careful stewardship of the removal and storage of the cockerel, stabilizing the tower, and managing the ongoing maintenance of our beloved building. The time, energy, and expertise they have invested in these significant projects have safeguarded the integrity of our church and preserved its history for generations to come. Beyond these major efforts, their consistent attention to the day-to-day needs of our property has provided a welcoming and well-maintained space for worship, fellowship, and ministry.

REPORT OF THE MODERATOR

Our Gifts Discernment Committee's incredible work helped us shape the leadership and ministries of our community. Their thoughtful work in identifying, encouraging, and empowering individuals to use their gifts in service to our church has been invaluable. They have ensured that each person's unique talents and callings are recognized and nurtured.

I am grateful for the work of our Homeless Ministries and the amazing work of the Shelter staff and Shelter Oversight Committee. Their compassionate leadership and tireless efforts have provided much-needed support, safety and hope to those in our community facing hardship. Their commitment to this vital mission reflects the heart and soul of our faith—serving others with love, dignity and respect.

Last, but certainly not least, I give thanks for our Deacons for their faithful service and dedication to our congregation throughout the year. Their quiet strength, compassionate care, and spiritual leadership have been a source of comfort and guidance for so many. Whether through offering prayerful support, coordinating worship, caring for members in need, or fostering connections within our community, their work has been a testament to a commitment to Christ's call to serve. They have been the hands and feet of our ministry, often working behind the scenes to ensure that every member feels seen, supported, and loved. I am deeply grateful for the countless hours they freely give, the grace with which they lead, and the heart they bring to everything they do.

As we close this chapter, we step into the new year with hope and anticipation. The challenges we've faced and the successes we've celebrated remind us of the strength and resilience of our community. Each moment of worship, fellowship, and ministry has been a testament to our shared commitment to serve God, one another, and the church. Let us continue to move forward with hearts open to God's love and hands ready to serve. Together, may we remain faithful stewards of the blessings we have received, joyfully sharing God's grace with the world around us.

Thank you to every member, leader, and friend who has contributed to making this year one of progress, reflection, and unity. Here's to a blessed year ahead!

With faith, hope and love,

Moana Bentin

Moderator

REPORT OF THE VICE MODERATOR

The Staff Policy Committee has met throughout the pastoral transition process and will continue to serve a key role in 2025 as our search for the next called Minister begins. We are delighted to have worked with the Executive Council and the Finance Committee to move Sarah Higginbotham to full-time as our Director of Communications & Christian Formation, and bring Emma Mitchell on board as a Pastoral Associate after her time as a Ministerial Intern. We are so grateful to everyone on staff for their care and dedication to First Church during this time of transition, and to the members of this committee for their continued service.

Respectfully submitted,

Phil Servello-Jones, Vice Moderator, and Meredith Quinn

Co-Chairs, Staff Policy Committee

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

I stepped into the role of Treasurer this year with great appreciation and gratitude for the efforts of the financial leadership team of First Church over the past few years to continue moving us towards a position of financial sustainability. As he steps out of the finance team after 5 years of excellent service, let me thank Rich Goode for his wisdom, skill and guidance. Deep thanks as well to Karen McArthur for her steadfast management of all aspects of our complex finance and budget realities. Discipline in holding to our 4% draw from investments and keeping our program budget level, along with solid performance in the market and the last of our COVID-era cash allowed us to celebrate ending 2023 with a balanced budget and having approved a balanced budget for 2024 as well.

However, two situations early in the year presented unexpected financial challenges. First, the timing and ultimate cost of stabilizing the church tower required transferring additional funds into the Capital Reserve beyond what had been budgeted. Second, Dan Smith announced his departure as Senior Minister, so we needed to address a range of costs related to the transition process that were also not included in the original budget for the year.

As a result, my priority throughout the year has been trying to balance two important principles – maintaining fiscal discipline and ensuring we have the staff and resources needed to support this time of transition. We have benefitted from a significant increase in building use revenue (about \$25,000 more than we budgeted), which has helped offset some major increases in Building & Grounds costs that were largely driven by higher utility and insurance rates. As we close out the year, however, we are projecting a deficit of \$152,000, which has resulted primarily from a shortfall in our “pledges and gifts” revenue of over \$100,000 along with the \$35,000 of additional capital reserve funds required to repair our church tower. The finance team is working to improve how we estimate our gifts income in 2025 so we can avoid this kind of uncertainty in the future.

We have also continued the drive towards longer term financial sustainability through two major efforts this year. First, we are in year two of the three-year Debt Retirement Appeal that is focused on paying off the Cornerstone loan that helped finance building renovations in 2017. Thanks to the amazing generosity of this congregation, \$384,825 has been pledged and \$348,630 received. These contributions, combined with the remaining pledges and the proceeds from the Stevenson Trust disbursement will allow us to fully pay off the loan in early 2025 – nine years early with a savings of over \$80,000 in interest payments. The success of this appeal means we will no longer need to cover ~\$55,000 in debt payments in the annual operating budget moving forward.

Second, we have launched a planned giving strategy alongside our “Fifth Century Fund,” which is building up our long-term investments to sustain First Church’s ministry into our fifth century. In 2024, we added over \$47,000 to the 5CF through bequests, gifts, and the sale of non-FCC archival materials, which brings the total of the fund to \$172,895. We had a wonderful example of how planned giving can be a blessing for future sustainability through the trusts set up by the Stevenson family in 1952 and 1964 that named First Church as one of the remainder beneficiaries. These trusts are now being distributed and will result in First Church receiving nearly \$200,000, which will help us pay off the Cornerstone Loan, refill our Capital Reserve and add to the Fifth Century Fund.

As we look forward to 2025, it is important that we work during this transition period to determine a plan for pastoral and staff leadership that both meets our vision for the church we want to be and can be sustained by the resources we have. It is important to note here that the operating budget approved for 2025 has a deficit of ~\$26,000, which in part reflects the higher costs of both personnel and building expenses based on the increases that occurred in 2024. At the same time, the increases in our personnel budget are only halfway to what we would need to support expanded ministerial staffing. When called upon, we have consistently proven that we are remarkably generous and faithful that God will show us the way forward. I am confident that this will continue to be true as we work to prepare ourselves for the next chapter of First Church’s almost 400-year story.

In faith,
Jim Cairns Treasurer, for the Finance Committee

REPORT OF THE ARCHIVES GROUP

In 2024, the Archives Group focused on organizing and preserving records from the more recent history of our nearly 400-year-old congregation. Specifically, Kate Judd and Jacqui Gates in weekly meetings reviewed and consolidated records from the 1960s to the 1990s. These included:

- Parish lists, bulletins, Executive Council reports, and Annual Reports; records of Missions, Social Justice, Stewardship, and other committees; records of women’s groups and women’s retreats; and Christian Education materials for children and adults.
- A collection from Carol Wilson-Braun documenting the work of First Church’s social justice committees. Carol played a leading role in the congregation’s decision in 1991 to declare itself an “open and affirming” church, one of the first churches in the United Church of Christ to do so.

All these materials have been rehoused in archival folders and boxes. There is still more material from recent decades that need to be sorted and catalogued. Volunteers are welcome to join in this and other Archives projects. In particular, we seek people with technical expertise to help complete an accessible digital catalog.

In 2023, the congregation approved a collection policy stating that the First Church Archives collects material by and about the history and people of First Church. Over the years, the Archives has acquired other items of historic interest, but with no direct connection to First Church. In 2024, David Lesser Fine Antiquarian Books sold four pamphlets from this category on consignment, for which First Church received \$2702.

The Archives has relatively fewer documents from the last 20 years, as more church business is conducted online. One challenge for the future is to develop online repositories. We have also learned to heed the advice of professional archivists to hold on to hard copies. Technology changes and earlier materials may no longer be accessible. This, unfortunately, happened with digital versions of sermons by Rev. Mary Luti, Senior Minister from 2000-2008. Fortunately, First Church members had saved hard copies of some of her sermons, and they are now in our collection.

In 2024, we bade farewell to Senior Minister Dan Smith, who served this congregation for 20 years. Bruce Dillenbeck of the church office made hard copies of all of his sermons, and they are now in our collection.

Respectfully submitted,
Kate Judd, Jacqui Gates, Lindsay Miller, and Chris Reynolds



shelves in the First Church Archives

REPORT OF THE BELOVED COMMUNITY GROUP

In 2022 and 2023, First Church's racial justice work focused on our journey to become an Anti-Racist Church. While continuing these efforts, the focus in 2024 has been on the Reparations and Remembrance strand of our work.

Growth of First Church's Reparation Fund and Expansion of Recipients

Since 2021, First Church has engaged in personal and collective wealth redistribution and the spiritual practice of reparations through programming, advocacy, and the establishment of a Reparation Fund. By the end of 2023, the church had sent \$103,000 to a group of grassroots activists of African descent who have distributed the money to other descendants for assistance with small businesses, immigration issues, education needs, and immediate disaster relief in Haiti after an earthquake. We refer to this group as the "Collective."

In 2024, at the suggestion of the Beloved Community Group, the Executive Council voted to expand the recipients of the Reparations Fund. For now, 1/3 of the money collected will go to the Collective. Another 1/3 will go to the Slave Legacy History Coalition, an organization founded by Dennis and Egypt Lloyd, direct descendants of enslaved persons in our First Church records. The Beloved Community group will make a recommendation to the Executive Council as to how the final third will be distributed. The intention is to give the money to Cambridge-based or Boston area non-profits engaged with justice for persons of indigenous or African descent. Our hope is that these will be primarily grassroots organizations with whom we are engaged in the work of racial justice.

In the summer of 2024, a donor gave a \$25,000 matching grant to the Reparations Fund to encourage first-time donations to the fund. A total of approximately \$63,000 was added to the Reparations Fund during the summer.

Remembering and Honoring Enslaved Persons in Our Church Records

In addition to monetary reparations, First Church completed a fabric art project in 2024 that honors and remembers the persons who were enslaved by First Church members and held a kind of "second class" membership in the church. The banners, called *Wade in the Water*, also honor other enslaved persons who are in our church baptismal, marriage, and death records. The artwork was an effort by members of First Church, including those of African descent, as well as others in the community who are descendants of enslaved persons. Community members were involved in all stages of the project, including embroidering the name of each enslaved person on a square. The completed *Wade in the Water* banners were unveiled at First Church's Juneteenth service and then immediately brought to the Longfellow House to display at their Juneteenth event.

Deepening Our Understanding and Commitment

For the second year, First Church hosted inspiring portraits from the "Americans Who Tell the Truth" project by portrait artist Robert Shetterly. The highlight this year was that we had an unveiling of a portrait of Harriet Jacobs that we had asked to be included among "American Who Tell the Truth" portraits. A formerly enslaved person who became an author, abolitionist and teacher, Harriet Jacobs lived in Cambridge for many years. The unveiling included words from the artist and from Dr. Melissa Bartholomew, who teaches a course on Harriet Jacobs at Harvard Divinity School, as well as from Dr. Tiya Miles, a historian at Harvard University who has won many honors including the National Book Award.

In March, First Church hosted a Sunday afternoon workshop on Reparations, the second one held in partnership with other Harvard Square congregations. Saskia Vann James, a local activist on Reparations and Racial Justice, spoke on her concept of a Reparations framework and how the City of Cambridge is approaching reparations and the establishment of a Cambridge Freedmen's Commission. Beloved Community member Paula Paris is on the advisory committee to begin the task of operationalizing the Commission and is keeping us updated.

REPORT OF THE BELOVED COMMUNITY GROUP

Three interactive learning opportunities to deepen our understanding of the Spiritual Practice of Reparations were offered to the church community during Sunday 9:30 sessions.

The Beloved Community Group is encouraging both individuals and the church collectively to take action for Racial Justice by representing the church in collaborative efforts of the following organizations of which First Church is a member:

- **Slave Legacy History Coalition**

founded by direct descendants of enslaved persons in our church records

- **Upstander Academy**

Harvard Square congregations and faculty from Harvard and MIT engaged in a 5-day workshop with the goal of establishing a local cohort to build knowledge of settler colonialism and injustice towards indigenous people. Four people at First Church participated, and the “alums” of this program have begun to share programming and possible joint action as the City of Cambridge pursues Reparations.

- **Reparations Interfaith Collaborative**

This effort includes faith and ethical communities throughout Massachusetts and supports the efforts of local Black Reparations groups. One example: members of Beloved Community engaged in advocacy for State Senate Bill S.1053 to create a Reparations Commission for Massachusetts.

Working towards First Church’s Vision of Being an Anti-Racist Church

Beloved Community continues to work with church groups to bring to life First Church’s vision of being an Anti-Racist Church, first articulated in 2021. Some of our efforts in 2024 included encouraging committees to set anti-racist goals, collaborating and building relationships with groups working on reparations efforts locally and within the state, and assisting staff members in providing experiences and reflections that deepened the anti-racist understanding and practices of people in the congregation.

Peggy Stevens

for the Beloved Community Group



Paula Paris stands next to the Wade in the Water banners on Juneenth, 2024.

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DEACONS

As we reflect on this year, we celebrate our Deacons' faith and resilience in supporting the congregation through the transition from saying farewell to our beloved Senior Minister to welcoming our Interim Senior Minister.

We are thankful for our outgoing Deacons Jean-Dany Joachim and Nora Willcutts. Adam Weiss and Leslie Pelton-Cairns will also be rotating off after each serving as co-chair for two years. We welcome Lisa DiNardo, Mary Martha Thiel, and Beth Spaulding to the Board of Deacons. Will Erickson will step into the co-chair position alongside Casey Marsh. The Board aimed to replace all four members rotating off but is pleased to have 10 members, which will continue to support distribution of roles smoothly throughout the year.

After the announcement in February of Senior Minister Dan Smith's departure in June, the Board mindfully gathered to consider ways of supporting the congregation during the transitional year and celebrating our time with Dan. Several Deacons facilitated Dan's formal exit interview.

We are thankful to Emma Mitchell for frequently leading formation time during our monthly meetings and for stepping in to cover pastoral updates in her new role as Pastoral Associate.

The Board accomplished several of its 2024 goals this year, including creating a new name tag system, continuing a liaison between the Board and "First Friends," reviewing Healing Service routines and messaging to congregation, and developing Communion liturgy for visiting congregants outside of church.

The Board held a brainstorming meeting in May to discuss and prioritize areas where we felt the congregation had spiritual need and where God was calling us this year. Some of the prioritized goals included continued engagement with long-term members, integrating kids and Confirmands into Deacon work, prioritizing regular Healing Services, supporting virtual attendees, staff appreciation, supporting families and caregivers, cleaning the Sacristy, and more.

In reflection on these goals so far, the Deacons supported clergy during three Healing Services in February, July, and October. A small group cleaned and organized the Sacristy and Deacon storage. With Emma's guidance, the Board created a Communion liturgy for visiting congregants who request it. The Board recruited two congregants to lead a caregivers' support group for several weeks starting in late 2024. Deacons celebrated our Pastoral Associates Ahmaad Edmund and Carla Arevalo during our May meeting before their departures, as well as this year's Confirmands with notes of encouragement.

In late fall, the Board established a routine on Communion Sundays including a prayer while preparing the sacrament and disposing of extra bread in compost and grape juice outside in the dirt as a way to return the elements to the earth.

Deacons provided ongoing guidance to staff and ministers throughout the year on a number of congregational matters. We look forward to continuing to serve First Church's needs in the coming year with open hearts.

Casey Marsh and Leslie Pelton-Cairns
Co-Chairs, Board of Deacons



REPORT OF THE BUILDINGS & GROUNDS COMMITTEE

2024 continued to be a busy year for the Building and Grounds Committee. The actual day-to-day B&G expenditures for 2024 were over the projected budget, with an overage of \$14,946, representing a 9.3% increase. This overage was mostly due to unanticipated increases in utility costs: electricity and water, as well as necessary interior work in the Sanctuary and First Church Shelter.

The major ongoing church building projects saw varied activity this year. The demounted cockerel weathervane remains in safe storage. We met successfully with the Cambridge Historical Commission about the cockerel, and they will allow for a faithful replica to be reinstalled, if we choose to. This decision increases our options for planning the future of the cockerel, which is ongoing. The stone structure of the bell tower was investigated by a stone forensic expert, and we will continue to consult with Structures North (SN), our structural engineering firm, to create a repair program and determine a scope of work and budget for the tower repair and restoration. We will also continue with SN to investigate the balcony structural issues and to work through the other prioritized items outlined in their March 17, 2023, report.

Other repairs and improvements to the church building in 2024 include continuing upgrades to the church's Wi-Fi system, repairs and replacement of some plumbing fixtures, and routine repairs to the fire protection system. Repairs to the areas of Sage Hall and classrooms as a result of the water leaks, due to the August 2023 storm, have been completed. The systematic review and repair of plumbing fixtures by First Church staff and the Facilities Manager is ongoing. Our important trees, the yellowwoods and the Washington Elm, continue to receive care.

We welcomed Mike Solberg and his family to the Parsonage this Fall. Some exterior repairs to the outdoor deck and routine landscaping at the Parsonage have been accomplished. There was a program of lead paint abatement that was completed on all of the interiors of first and second floor rooms. The formal first floor rooms were re-painted in the color scheme proposed by Perry Neubauer, and all of the other rooms were painted as well.

Respectfully submitted,
Peter Byerly
Chair, Buildings & Grounds Committee



the "outside" view of a stained glass window on the north side of the chancel, as seen through an opening in the second floor hallway of the parish building

REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN FORMATION COMMITTEE

Christian Formation mourned the death of Carol Wilson-Braun on November 24, 2024. She was an active, insightful and dedicated member of this committee, and her contributions are greatly missed.

The Committee met via Zoom throughout the year. We met each month except for July and August. As set out in our vision statement, Christian Formation seeks “to offer a banquet table and a cup by the side of the river of faith where all may be served, no matter where they may be on their journey of life and faith. We seek ways to strengthen connections among First Church worshipers and to deepen people’s relationships with God.”

Committee meetings were devoted to sharing observations about how best to serve our congregation as we move through seasons of change. We reviewed recent programs and planned Formation opportunities for upcoming weeks and months. We considered ways to provide multigenerational gatherings, building on the popular Craigville retreat experience. We coordinated with other groups within First Church to ensure that space was made for all.

We also supported the extensive children’s and youth programs where possible, and acted as a sounding board for Sarah Higginbotham, who manages the weekly activities; Sarah reports monthly on the wide range of opportunities for younger members, from Godly Play and Bible 101 to OWL, Confirmation, and Youth Group. In the spring of 2024, we were pleased to witness nine Confirmands affirm their baptisms and join the church at the culmination of our biennial confirmation class process.

Below are highlights of formation activities and programs in 2024 developed, led, or coordinated by the Christian Formation Committee:

January and February

Emma Mitchell, Ahmaad Edmund, Martha Mueller Cook, and Linda Ziebell led sessions around reparations entitled “Call to Repair.”

February

Beth Spaulding led a session on Lent, and its place and significance in the liturgical year.

March

Staff and lay leaders led discussions around the “Americans Who Tell the Truth” portraits on display, including William Barber, James Baldwin, Pauli Murray and Leah Penniman.

April

Following Dan Smith’s announcement that he would be leaving First Church, staff and lay leaders led discussions to inform and prepare the congregation for this change.

April and May

Dan Smith led two sessions honoring longtime leaders and members, while looking back at Dan’s 20 year history with First Church.

May

Martha Mueller Cook and Linda Ziebell led a follow-up discussion of reparations.

September

Interim Senior Minister Mike Solberg hosted a meet & greet gathering.

September and October

Susan Reynolds and Beth Spaulding led two sessions inspired by Andi Andrews’ *Braving Change*.

November

The Stewardship Committee led gatherings around the theme of giving.

December

Using *Hope In the Dark* by Rebecca Solnit for inspiration, sessions were led by Emma Mitchell, Sarah Higginbotham, Susan Reynolds, and Brent Coffin about finding hope during times of uncertainty. These sessions invited multigenerational participation, and involved movement, embodied hope, artistic and creative expression, and discussion.

REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN FORMATION COMMITTEE

In addition to the foregoing, Christian Formation supported many other formation activities. Faith & Life classes were offered in the spring and in the fall, and continue to be well attended. Additional programs on offer include regular Zoom meetings on Bible Study, Contemplative Practices, Aging with Grace, Women's Book Group, and a variety of lectures, films, walks and retreats.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Reynolds

Chair, Christian Formation Committee

REPORT OF THE GIFTS DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

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

One of our goals this year was reaching out to the larger congregation to ask about individuals' interests and gifts. We hope to nurture wider involvement of church members (younger and older) in nominating themselves or others to church leadership. Not only is committee work a valuable service to the congregation, but it is also a way to get to know other church folks better!

A number of people have indicated interest, but many have said "not now," given the intensity of current commitments. We are, indeed, a busy congregation, which is our biggest challenge to recruitment. But in these times of political complexity and deep concern, service can be a way to repair the world in small ways, offering each of us sustenance and hope, as well as resilience and strength.

Beth Loomis and Mary Robinson

Co-Chairs, Gifts Discernment Committee

The 2025 Slate of Officers, Boards, and Standing Committees

*(names in **bold** are new to the position)*

Officers

Phil Servello-Jones, *Moderator*

Moana Bentin, *Vice Moderator*

Laurie Friedman, *Clerk*

Jim Cairns, *Treasurer*

John McCarty, *Associate Treasurer*

Jim Greaney, *Assistant Treasurer*

Connie Pyle, *Assistant Treasurer*

Rachel Carlson, *Controller*

Claire Morgan, *Member at Large*

Board of Deacons

Will Erickson, *Co-Chair*

Casey Marsh, *Co-Chair*

Audrey Bellinger

Lisa DiNardo

Dean Eaton

Lisa McCarty

Beth Spaulding

Mary Martha Thiel

Laurie Williams

Linda Ziebell

REPORT OF THE GIFTS DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

Buildings & Grounds Committee

Peter Byerly, *Chair*
Don Johnson
Rachelle LaMaster
Angela Servello-Jones
David Torrey

Christian Formation Committee

Susan Reynolds, *Chair*
Brent Coffin
Ingeborg Haug
Lindsay Ludwig
Beth Spaulding
Heather Stanford

Communications & Arts Committee

Ami Brenner
Tim Brenner
David Grotrian
Bruce Hoppe

Fellowship Committee

Caitlin Anderson

Finance Committee (*all members are ex officio*)

Jim Cairns, *Treasurer, Chair*
Laurie Burt, *Investment Committee Chair*
Rachel Carlson, *Controller*
John McCarty, *Associate Treasurer*
Winnie Yip, *Stewardship Committee Chair*

Gifts Discernment Committee

Gail Breeze, *Co-Chair*
Beth Loomis, *Co-Chair*
Lindsey Baker
Bruce Hoppe
Jenny Stuart

Investment Committee

Laurie Burt, *Chair*
Chris Baker
Bill Hsiao
Elizabeth Lovance
Marc O'Brien
Stephen Weller
Jim Cairns, *Treasurer (ex officio)*

Missions & Social Justice Committee

Martha Mueller Cook, *Co-Chair*
Kathy Williams, *Co-Chair*
Barb Hume
Dave Kidder
Holly Marple
Ann McCann
Jennifer Montana

Shelter Oversight Committee

Jan Jeffers Lo, *Chair*
Courtney Crummet
Arthur Downey
Brian Funck
Steve LaMaster
Alex Steinert-Evoy

Staff Policy Committee

Moana Bentin, *Vice Moderator, Chair*
Peter Byerly, *B&G Chair*
Jim Cairns, *Treasurer*
Laurie Friedman, *Clerk*
Jan Jeffers Lo, *Shelter Oversight Chair*
Laurie Williams, *Deacon*

Stewardship Committee

Winnie Yip, *Co-Chair*
Chris Reynolds, *Co-Chair*
Anne McClintock
Caroline Newton
Rose Whaley

REPORT OF THE GIFTS DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

Groups and Teams not Named in Our Bylaws

(not voted on as part of the slate)

Archives Group

Kate Judd
Jacqui Gates
Lindsay Miller
Chris Reynolds

Beloved Community Group

Karlene Griffiths Sekou
Stefanie Haug,
Dave Kidder
Amy Matias
Claire Morgan
Martha Mueller Cook
Paula Paris
Susan Redlich
Abby Shuman
Peggy Stevens,
Marieke Van Damme
Linda Ziebell

Church School Teachers

Godly Play: Will Erickson, Sarah Higginbotham,
Lisa McCarty, Lauren Yockel
Bible 101: Marianne Jensen, Jan Jeffers Lo,
Lindsay Ludwig
Our Whole Lives: Laurie Friedman, Phil Servello-Jones,
Laurie Williams
Youth Group: Lindsey Baker, Phil Servello-Jones,
Heather Stewart

Discovery Team

Moana Bentin
Andy Clark
Bill Hsiao
Martha Mueller Cook
Curt Nickisch
Meredith Quinn
Mike Solberg

First Friends

Gail Breeze
Courtney Crummet
Will Erickson
Ginny Harlan
Bruce Hoppe
Barb Hume
Jane Matthews
Lindsay Miller
Jennifer Montana
Martha Mueller Cook
Susan Neubauer
Mary Robinson
Alex Steinert-Evoy
Lauren Yockel

GBIO Leadership Team

Arthur Downey
Will Erickson
Casey Marsh
Phil Servello-Jones
Adam Weiss
Kathy Williams

Pastoral Care Teams

Team A - Dave Kidder, captain

Hanna Bliska
Ami Brenner
Dave Kidder
Alex Steinert-Evoy
Mary Martha Thiel

Team B - Marian Smith, captain

Dean Eaton
Devin Hansen
Beth Loomis
Holly Marple
Linda Ziebell
Gaylen Morgan

Team C - Audrey Bellinger, captain

Audrey Bellinger
Gail Breeze
Henry Gates
Kate Judd
Jan Jeffers Lo
Liz Williams

Team D - Susie Neubauer, captain

Courtney Crummet
Kerry Maloney
Susan Ohman
Mary Robinson
Faith Ross
Jenny Stuart
Abby Shuman
Winnie Yip

We also acknowledge with gratitude the coordinators of our small group ministries and fellowships, including Aging with Grace, Contemplative Practices, Faith & Life Groups, Men's Breakfast, Women's Community Book Group, and more.

REPORT OF THE INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

The Investment Committee's report will be added to the online version of the Annual Report when it becomes available.

REPORT OF THE MISSIONS & SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

This year, the Missions & Social Justice Committee appropriated the 10% of church funds that are designated for social justice work. The work of the Committee focused on easing the burdens of racial injustice, homelessness/food insecurity and supporting important causes in the quest for peace in Israel and Palestine. The largest portion of our budget continues to support the Southern New England Conference of the UCC in its social justice priorities. In addition, the Committee collaborated with the church community on a variety of outreach and educational events focused on various social justice causes including:

February: A presentation by Back from the Brink on preventing nuclear war.

August: Sewing Opportunities, Inc. about their program in Guatemala in which local families are taught to grow food in greenhouses.

August: Congo Peace School about the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We welcome ideas from FCC members and friends for further presentations in 2025.

Racial Justice

Racial justice was a critical area for giving and educational opportunities this year. As was appropriated in our budget, the Missions & Social Justice Committee gave \$5,000 for reparations to The Collective.

Homelessness and Low-Income Support

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

- **Friday Café**, which serves meals and provides donated clothing to the needy
- **First Church Shelter**, which provides meals and shelter for men
- **Solutions at Work**, which supports a meals program in Cambridge and on an ongoing basis runs a center where people can get clothing and accessories appropriate for job interviews
- **Harvard Square Meals Program**, which feeds those in need
- **Bay State Re-Entry program**, which connects citizens returning from incarceration with mentors who can help navigate a successful re-entry to the community

Greater Boston Interfaith Organization

The Missions & Social Justice Committee supports and advocates for the causes sponsored by GBIO each year. This year brought a focus on advocacy for Affordable Housing.

International/Global

The Committee supported a variety of international causes this year, both financially and via educational events at the church. We focused on supporting organizations working toward a just peace in Israel and Palestine. Organizations included Mutual Aid Gaza, Palestine Red Crescent Society and Palestine Children's Relief Fund. As in the past, First Church's most significant financial contribution to international causes this year was to support the Latin American ministry of Monica Maher, chiefly in Ecuador.

Health and Well-Being

Several of our donations advanced the work of organizations devoted to health and well-being. For example, we funded the MA Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence.

Alternative Christmas Fair

The Committee organized the Alternative Christmas Fair which took place on December 8. We hosted 9 vendors: First Church Shelter, Friday Café, Friend of Mantenwah (Haiti), South Sudanese Enrichment for Families, Congo Peace School, LGBT Asylum Task Force, Equal Exchange, Thread of Hope (Guatemala), and Solutions at Work - all of whom raised money for their respective causes. The committee also organized and delivered donations of children's clothes and toys to Coat Boston and the Holiday Shop.

The Committee looks forward to continuing our work in collaboration with the First Church community in 2025. To contribute ideas and share thoughts, please reach out to Co-Chairs Kathy Williams and Martha Mueller Cook.

REPORT OF THE SHELTER OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Highlights of 2024

- 4 Shelter guests, 1 First Church employee, and 15 community clients have moved or will soon move into permanent housing this year.
- After 27 years of devoted service, Dennis Kaveney shifted to part time, per diem work at the Shelter. Dennis was recognized at the Doris Beauvais Luncheon, which included the Cambridge Mayor presenting him with a Citation from the City Council naming him a Son of Cambridge.
- Director Jim Stewart will begin to reduce his hours during 2025. Responsibilities will be taken on by current Shelter staff members.
- Work Force Training and Retention Bonuses have been provided to State contract staff.
- The Shelter was again awarded a grant from Citizen's Energy Corporation to help pay for energy usage.
- In the spring, the Shelter supported the launching of art lessons with Tom Briggs during the Friday Café.
- Meal distribution continues at First Parish on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. the Shelter supports the staffing for those events.
- Public showers continue to be available at University Lutheran Church.
- Housing Navigator Cherry Russell continues to guide many unhoused people into permanent housing.
- The Committee hosted the Doris Beauvais Luncheon and Mitch Snyder Awards In October. Attendees were amazed and appreciative of the hard work and passion for caring and justice that the Mitch Snyder Awardees highlighted in their work.

The Work Ahead

- Due to the public health need to provide more spacious housing, reconfiguring the internal Shelter space has been considered. We have delayed this project due to First Church's ministerial transitions.
- The proposed development at 3-5 Phillips Place could be a major disruption to the First Church Shelter, Friday Café, and other building users. First Church leaders are hopeful that changes to the building plans can be negotiated.
- The City of Cambridge plans to eliminate over 60 shelter beds across the city by June 2025 despite the ongoing lack of emergency shelter in Cambridge.

We are ever grateful for the good hands and hearts of the shelter, shower, and meals program staff. They daily represent First Church's prayers and care for those in dire need. Thanks to Kevin Benitez, Steve Brown, Sofia Estrada, Joe Freitas, James Gullberg, Dennis Kaveney, Nijimbere Lahayiloyi, Kevin Newell, Tyler Nilson, Cherry Russell, Edmund Shen, Mark van de Fliert, Nathan Wilson-Braun, Eunice Zhang, and Director Jim Stewart. Thanks also to Minister of Stewardship & Finance Karen McArthur and Senior Ministers Dan Smith and Mike Solberg for an abundance of patience, expertise, and wisdom.

Jan Jeffers Lo

Chair, Shelter Oversight Committee



REPORT OF THE STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

The Stewardship Committee is deeply appreciative of the commitment of the many members and friends of First Church, who give generously and consistently for our common ministry and mission year after year. We are blessed to have a congregation that cares deeply about our church, our community, and our world, and is willing to make the financial gifts necessary so that we can be the church for all those who enter our wide-open doors.

As the year began, our committee considered the challenge of stewardship in a time of transition and change. We reviewed our recent history of pledges and gifts and set the goal of increasing the number of people who responded by sharing their intended pledges and gifts for the year to come. This has two benefits: it helps church leadership to plan our budget, and it helps individuals to have a goal for their year of giving.

We decided to simplify our campaign: “The Household of God in this Time of Change.” Special thanks to newlyweds Angela and Phil Servello-Jones, long-time member Mac Howland, and recently relocated Joanne Paul for their Stewardship testimonies that animated our message, and to Caitlin Anderson and her crew for a fabulous Stewardship season luncheon that fed us and gave us the space to celebrate our congregation.

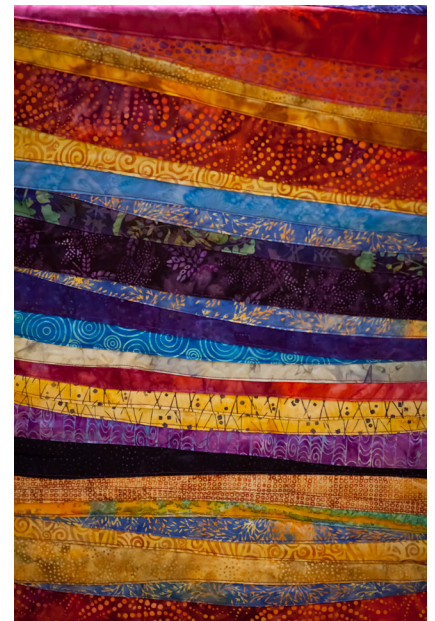
Throughout the year, each person played a vital and appreciated part in our committee work this year. Thanks to Susan Ohman for her creative ideas and scripture connections, to Winnie Yip for her hospitality and delicious committee dinners and her persistent focus on our task at hand, to Caroline Newton for her dedicated note-writing, to Joanne Paul for her institutional knowledge of our past stewardship campaigns, to Chris Reynolds for her artistic and graphic design, and to Rose Whaley and her idea to set up a playlist to explore our theme of change through music. Bruce Dillenbeck prepared the mailing and recorded the pledges and gifts each week. We also launched our Planned Giving campaign, which is detailed in a separate report, thanks to the professional expertise of Anne McClintock and the focused persistence of Jason Whaley.

So what were the results of the campaign? We are happy to report that we have received a greater number of pledges than last year, including many from people who had given faithfully, but hadn't made a pledge. Those who responded increased their giving by an average of 17% over their pledges and gifts last year. However, even with the increases, we have fallen short of our ambitious goal. The past two years especially have been a time of much more change than usual. A significant number of long-time members and friends have moved away, some beloved friends have died, and others are facing new health or financial challenges. Change is hard. But it also offers new opportunities. We are grateful for the many new pledges from new members and new friends, and we are looking at new ways of being the church together over the distance via our livestream and Zoom connections. We are the Household of God together!

Respectfully submitted,

Winnie Yip

Chair, Stewardship Committee



REPORT OF THE STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

Foundation for our Fifth Century

First Church has been blessed with many gifts from those whose financial giving and bequests in the past have provided the abundant resources that have allowed us to do more together than we ever could do on our own. During 2024, we received several such gifts, some of which were initiated more than 75 years ago. Some people were active long ago, and others much more recently. For all, First Church was an important part of their lives, and they are an enduring part of ours.

Bequests were received from:

Rebecca M. Blank
Rev. Leonard G. Clough
Pauline Fennel
Peter C. Halloran
Brian S. James
Elizabeth Ratcliffe Sloane Stevenson
Theodore Einer Stevenson

As our 400th anniversary in 2033-36 appears on the horizon, we have begun to build a “Foundation for our Fifth Century” so that we might do the same for those who follow us.

The following members and friends have indicated that they have included the church in their estate planning, such as naming the church as a partial beneficiary of an IRA or life insurance policy, or including First Church in their will, or setting up a charitable gift fund or charitable remainder trust.

Peter Wistar Ambler
David C. Dow, Jr. (d. 1999)
William C. Hsiao
David Kidder
Rev. Karen McArthur
Rev. Beth Spaulding
John Schultz
Peggy Stevens

Together we can reinforce the strong and solid foundation of our church for the new life and ministry of the centuries ahead. Further information is available on the church website, including a response form. If you have questions, or would like to add your name to our Foundation, we would be happy to talk with you.

Faithfully yours,

Jason Whaley, Anne McClintock, and Rev. Karen McArthur

Planned Giving Subcommittee of Stewardship

CONGREGATIONAL ROLL & COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Active Roll Reported for 31 December 2023: 406

Additions to Resident Membership

New Members: 24

received May 2023

Bold Black Ballerina
Sophia Bishop-Rice
Samantha Caveny
Jack Haskell
Jennifer Petrallia
Angela Servello
Nick Thompson

received 2024, by affirmation of faith

Chris Baker
Lindsey Baker
Judah Coffman
Elizabeth Gates
Carol Anne Grotrian
David Grotrian
Mackenzie Joy
Liz Williams

received 2024, by confirmation

Christian Searcy Baker, Jr.
Amelia Grace Clark

Malcolm Hendren Funck
Imogene McManus Goode
Carter Massa Lee
Leo Peter Neurath
Callum Lawton Pelton-Cairns
Nicholas Daniel Stauffer
Rosalia Clair Whaley

Transferred from inactive list to active: 1

Removals from Active Membership

Removals, by death: 3

Alice Kidder
Perry Neubauer
Carol Wilson-Braun

Removals, by letter of transfer: 2

Lynne Hansen
Richard Hansen

Unreported removals in previous years: 54

Removed by member's request: 18
Moved to inactive list: 25
Removals, by death: 4
Correction of count: 7

Active Roll Reported for 31 December 2024: 372

Baptisms in the Church Universal: 8

Christian Searcy Baker
Molly Fatherley-Cyr
Leah Fatherley-Cyr
Elizabeth Gates
Franklin Cyr Kolasch
Ada Grace LaMaster
Sophia Revett
Rosalia Clair Whaley

Marriages in the Church Universal: 2

Angela Servello and Phil Jones
Emma Thomas and Aram Mitchell

Communion of Saints

During 2024 the following persons completed their lives among us:

Peter Brenner
Ann Curby
Oliver Edwards
Javier Hernandez
Norma Hill
Hank Hinckley
Phil Ingersoll
Solveig Ingersoll

Alice Kidder*
Lucinda Kidder
Scott Kenney
Anne Layzer
Robert Layzer
Jean Rimmel Little
Perry Neubauer*
Nancy Newton

Jim Rae
Barry Shuman
Lynda Soderquist
Phil Wendelin
Ken Wible
Carol Wilson-Braun*

**First Church member*

*O Lord, you are my light and my salvation, the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
One thing I ask of you, Lord, this I seek: to live in your house all the days of my life...
For you will hide me in your shelter in the day of trouble, you will conceal me in your tent,
and set me high on a rock... I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

- Psalm 27 par.

