



FIRST UNITARIAN
CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY
BR  **KLYN**
A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2023-2024

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Staff and Clergy Reports

REV. ANA LEVY-LYONS
SENIOR MINISTER
DOZEN YEAR REPORT

As I wrote in my farewell letter to the congregation, my ministry at First U over the last twelve years has truly been a shared ministry. This is a community that comes together to live its values and get things done. Everything we've accomplished, we've accomplished together. So, as I share highlights from my time as your senior minister (twelve of them, one for each year), know that most of our achievements were thanks to the work of staff and lay leaders who had the passion, savvy, and skill to turn ideas into reality. I've organized these highlights to align roughly with the elements of our strategic plan goals, but real ministry doesn't stay neatly inside categories. I think when we're doing it right it ripples out and touches everything and everyone.

Promote spiritual exploration, development, and practice.

1. *Worship:* Worship services are the primary form of spiritual practice for UU's, and we have worked hard to cultivate a worship experience that is joyful, deep, inspiring, and that brings us together across differences. In my preaching I have sought to balance pastoral sermons with prophetic sermons, classic philosophical questions with modern and postmodern concerns, theism with humanism, and the insights of religion with the insights of science and reason. Each year we've shared a worship series ranging from Biblical themes (like this year's Mystical Stories of the Bible) to folk traditions (like Fairy Tales and Greek Myths), often with creative storytelling modalities. We've celebrated all ages worship and shared a Wisdom Story with children and adults every week. We have upheld cherished First U traditions, including the Hunger Communion, the Christmas Eve candlelight service, and the Flower Ceremony, and we have introduced new rituals as well.
2. *Music:* At the center of worship at First U has been our joyful, world-class music program, especially for the decade that Adam Podd has been our music director. With Adam's skilled leadership and sensitive, heart-centered musicianship, along with our outstanding soloists and choir, the music has

brought us to tears and energized us over and over. It has brought worship to life. I've had the pleasure of collaborating with Adam to develop integrated musical and spoken ideas for each service. We have also co-written songs specifically for First U, including our Children's Recessional song, and the hymn "Grounded and Guided." Occasionally, we've created "single use" musical rituals, as in a service last year in which people wrote down their visions for Unitarian Universalism, and then our vocal soloists, in real time, wove the congregants' words into the open measures of an original song we had written for that occasion.

3. *Worship Innovation:* A hallmark of our worship life has been a willingness to experiment with different approaches and modalities in order to let the Spirit flow freely. Two years ago, we piloted a new worship format that aimed to cultivate an uninterrupted flow of energy throughout the service – less head and more heart; less of a performer-audience dynamic and more of a shared co-creation. To this end we re-sequenced the order of service, removed all rote script recitations, and added more music, including participatory gathering music and music that intermingles with spoken word. We added a prayer dimension to the sermon, and we created a new welcome song spoken and sung by all of us together – text taken from my "whoever you are" opening and music written by Adam. Our "Worship 2.0" has created a more spirit-centered worship experience for the congregation and the worship leaders. With some of the same intention in mind, Rev. Meagan and Adam started a beautiful monthly Vespers Service, with songs and readings, silence, candle lighting, and prayer. We have also innovated over the years by creating new rituals and reinterpreting old rituals. Our water ceremony became a way of making "holy water" out of the liquid gifts of the community – water that is added to each year so that it carries our history to each baby blessed with it. We created a fire ritual for Easter Sunday, lighting flash paper to let go of whatever has to go in order to make space for resurrection. We began the tradition of New Year's letter writing (and mailing people's letters back at the end of the year). And we created the Children's Recessional tradition with the original song and the rainbow archway formed by the congregation.

Cultivate a caring, welcoming community that models a just and loving world.

4. *Pastoral Care:* Along with Garnett Losak, Rev. Meagan, and others I've provided pastoral care to our community, accompanying people in times of great pain and loss, and also in times of joy. I've encouraged people to take

their spiritual lives seriously and supported them in their journeys. We have developed a team of Lay Pastoral Ministers, including a group that provides a compassionate, listening ear in the Chapel of All Faiths after each Sunday service. Rev. Meagan has started a bereavement group that was deeply meaningful to its participants. We've worked to create an inclusive space where all voices can be heard. A few years ago, we ran a series of "identity group meetings" to listen to people's experiences at First U as members of a particular group (elderly, people of color, LGBTQ, etc.). Our Queer Caucus emerged from one of these groups.

5. *Small Group Ministries:* With Garnett's astute leadership as Membership Director for eleven years, and her deep knowledge and love of the congregation, we have been able to try out many ways of strengthening community. Garnett has developed a welcoming and supportive path to membership at First U, including a "Pathways" class and a New Member Ceremony where the new members are introduced and blessed and sung to. We've aimed to help people connect to one another and keep a "small congregation" feel as we grew. We've run small group ministries, using UUA curricula and home-grown curricula. We've coordinated dinners for people who live in geographic proximity. Most recently, Rev. Meagan has initiated a Chalice Circles program to deepen people's spiritual engagement and sense of belonging.
6. *Lifecycle:* Over the last twelve years we have hosted and I have officiated at countless traditional lifecycle ceremonies – weddings, memorial services, and baby blessings – as well as adding new ones like farewell blessings for longtime members who are moving away and tree dedication ceremonies. These ceremonies not only serve the people immediately involved, but they unite the community and remind us of our mortality so that we can cherish life and focus on the things that matter most. They are occasions for celebration and for shared grief. We have also hosted several ordinations, including one for Rev. Meagan last fall!

Equip people with the skill and confidence to become change makers.

7. *Religious Education:* With the thoughtful and experienced leadership of Rev. Meagan, lifespan religious education at First Unitarian has expanded and taken new and wonderful forms. Children are given opportunities to learn, to contribute, and to explore their emerging identities with full support from teachers and staff. We've sought to educate ourselves about systemic racism

and other justice issues through our Sacred Studies program, particularly summer readings on race. And Rev. Meagan led two sessions of the anti-racist workshop, *Beloved Conversations*. I've also worked to provide adults with the spiritual grounding of justice work through workshops like the Ten Commandments (based on my book, *No Other Gods*) and *The Artist's Way* (creative empowerment based on Julia Cameron's book). We've offered classes in UU history, *Spiritual Autobiography*, and others designed to help people connect their spiritual lives with their actions in the world.

8. *Leadership Training*: Through our internship and Lay Worship Leader programs we have been equipping people of faith to become leaders in their congregations and communities. Through the internship program we became a "teaching congregation" and supported and cheered five Intern Ministers, including our current intern Rachel Schmitt, on their journey toward UU ministry. I served as a mentor and supervisor to each and helped them through the UUA credentialing process. They have each been a gift to First U in their own unique ways. Our Lay Worship Leader program has developed new leadership within our congregation. I've recruited members who were fairly new to First U to serve for one year, receiving training in worship arts, sermon-writing, public speaking. They served as worship assistants on Sundays and each delivered a homily. Many Lay Worship Leaders have gone on to board service and other leadership roles.

Become an environmentally responsible congregation.

9. *Spiritual-Ecological Teaching*: During my years at First U, I've worked hard to cultivate a spiritual-ecological consciousness in the congregation. Beyond thinking of "the environment" as a siloed issue, I've encouraged a more holistic reimagining of our (humanity's) relationship with the rest of creation. I've led workshops and experiments rooted in the ecological practices of the Hebrew Bible, including Sabbath practice, the *Shmita* (sabbatical year of letting land lie fallow) and the Ten Commandments, cultivating a sense of reverence and "enoughness" beyond extractive consumerism. I have occasionally preached specifically on ecological themes (including a climate change sermon, "The Second Best Time to Plant a Tree," from which a member used the central image of the extinct *homo sapien* in a guerilla art installation at the Museum of Natural History). But more often, I have sought to weave ecology into many sermons and into everything we do, reflecting the reality of our utter inseparability from the earth.

10. *Greening*: In addition to these efforts at culture change, we have “greened” our facilities with two substantial additions (for which I can claim no direct credit). We have begun composting our food waste (and for a time were providing a “drop off” site for the wider community) and last year we added solar panels to our rooftop. We have also participated as a congregation in climate marches and actions, including the NYC People’s Climate March for which we housed activists from out of town and sent over 130 people from our doorstep to join the crowd.

Develop and Responsibly Manage Resources

11. *Covid and Livestream*: Covid tested First U, as it did every congregation during those painful years. Although it was a struggle financially, socially, and spiritually, we came together as a community and rose to the challenge. The worship team pivoted to online worship (I was initially out on sabbatical), quickly figuring out best practices to create community and provide as much musical richness as possible from separate screens. Our zoom services and programming got many people through the isolation of the pandemic. But recognizing people’s need to gather in person, we were among the first of UU congregations to return to the sanctuary (with safety protocols in place). This has allowed us to rebuild quickly, and we are now at or above pre-pandemic numbers in pledges, membership, and worship attendance. The silver lining of this crisis was our state-of-the-art livestream. Recognizing that some congregants may never be able to return to in-person worship, a group of First U members, on a volunteer basis, researched, designed, created, and ran the livestream that we have today. Up to 30 people watch our services on Zoom and Facebook every week and it has proven to be an invaluable source of community and a great resource to the congregation. We now also have the ability to make high-quality recordings of our music and to offer streaming services to our renters.

12. *Staff*: Our greatest resource is our staff team. Every one of these brilliant people is an expert in their field, some with national UU recognition for their work. They are collaborative and care deeply about the congregation and its mission. I have worked to cultivate an environment of trust and empowerment so that each staff member has the space to lead and innovate; basically, to support them and get out of their way! I believe we have all grown together in leading this congregation over the years. This year we’ve had the joy of welcoming a new staff member, Renee Strickland, as Director of Building Operations and Events. She is already growing our rental

business and forging deep ties in the community. I am proud to have hired (directly or indirectly) each of our staff members and I am proud of their longevity with us – aside from Renee, all our current staff have been with us for between six and eleven years. It has been a privilege for me to work with this group of passionately committed and wildly talented leaders. They serve this congregation with their whole hearts and their work is truly a ministry to each of them. This congregation would be wise to continue to support each staff member’s career growth, both financially and through offering new leadership opportunities.

REV. MEAGAN HENRY
ASSISTANT MINISTER
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION & PASTORAL CARE

Overview

My 11th year serving the First Unitarian Brooklyn community has been a year of big transitions. This is my first full year serving as your Assistant Minister of Religious Education and Pastoral Care. What a full year it has been!

My first official act as Assistant Minister on July 1, 2023 was to accompany the High School Youth group on their service learning journey to West Virginia, which felt very appropriate considering I began my UU career as a Youth Ministry Coordinator. In addition, last summer I began learning how to coordinate our lay-led summer services. This is something Garnett has been doing for several years, and I agreed to take this on as part of my expanded duties in my new role (see Garnett’s report for details about last year’s summer services).

In September, I began meeting with the Caring Ministry Team and coordinating the Lay Chapel Ministry volunteers. I’ve taken on additional responsibilities with worship by leading and preaching more often on Sundays and regularly co-leading monthly Vespers with Adam Podd and occasional guest musicians.

With support from Garnett, Rachel, and Rev. Ana, I created a program of Chalice Circles this year, which is something I had been hoping to start for a while, and now it’s off to a great start with over 40 participants in 5 different circles. I also led my first 6-session Bereavement Group, called Good Grief, and I plan to initiate another session next year.

It is always a pleasure to coordinate and lead Sunday services and this year has been especially joyous with our Children's Holiday Pageant, Family Christmas Eve service, Youth Led service and our upcoming Coming of Age credo service.

Ordination

In the Fall, you ordained me into the ministry at a beautiful worship service. Afterward, we celebrated with an incredible party! My ordination and celebration was a highlight of my career, and I will be forever grateful to everyone who contributed their energy, time, creativity, and financial support to the celebration. In addition to the 75 friends, family and congregants who made financial donations, several individuals volunteered their time: Becky Huffman organized the entire day and served as the ordination service "Marshall." Sean Sellers envisioned, created and executed the decorations, Julianne Hausler arranged the food, dessert, and drinks, Catalina Bertani and MariaSara Alcoff did the flower arrangements. Renee Strickland designed the order of service and Jawad Hijazi designed the invitation.

One of the exciting things about an ordination ceremony is all the people who come together to speak about the ordinand. I was blessed to have people from many eras of my life present. Rev. Taryn Strauss preached the sermon, Starling Carter said the Chalice Lighting, Kirsten Hunter brought Greetings from the Liberal Religious Educator's Association, Becky Huffman told the Wisdom Story, Rev. Verdis Robinson delivered the reading, Revs Carrie McEvoy and Verdis Robinson announced the special offering, Lisa Pacenza and Mary Huhn delivered the words of ordination, Jody Leight presented the stole, Rev. Amy Brooks-Paradise delivered the Charge to the Minister, Rev. Milly Morrow delivered the Charge to the Congregation, Rev. Peggy Clarke passed the Hand of Fellowship, and Rev. Ana Levy-Lyons delivered the prayer.

Religious Education

First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn Religious Education Mission Statement:

Offer opportunities for children, youth, and adults to grow their souls, develop their Unitarian Universalist identities, and deepen their understanding of our diverse world.

Create joyful experiences that will support families in becoming healthier and more connected, and to build a community together that nurtures and supports all children and youth in their spiritual and personal development.

Teach children, youth, and adults how to develop a strong and resilient faith and help them develop spiritual practices that will sustain and support them all their lives.

Religious Education Council Members:

Becky Huffman (Chair), Beth Evans (Board Liaison), Erin Hopkins, Sean Sellers, Emily Hockaday, RJ Carey, Keledy Kenkel, Marci Lucia, and Rachel Michael. Ex. officio members: Wendy Russell and Meagan Henry

Religious Education Staff:

- Religious Education Assistant: Wendy Russell
- Children's Choir Director: Bert Eisenstadt
- Nursery/Toddler Room Lead: Ruby Stackhouse
- Pre-Kindergarten Lead Teacher: Phylisa St. Fleur
- Nursery & Pre-K Assistants: Anna Vavagiakis (12th grade) and Prudence Parkinson (10th grade)

2023-2024 Religious Education Volunteer Teachers

- K/1 Love Surrounds Us: Eva Rogels-Weiss, Jean Shepherd
- 2/3 Moral Tales: Rachel Schmitt, Rachel Cole, Cyndi Kerr
- 4/5/6 OWL: Abby Soule, Marci Lucia, Peter Engel, Deirdre Lord
- 7 Building Bridges: Lee Ilan, Erin Hopkins, Eva Pinkley, Yuri Weber
- 8/9 Coming of Age: Becky Huffman w/Rev. Meagan and Mentors: Abby Soule, Tyrone Davis, Jr., Justin Parkinson, Taylor Murray, James Henry, Sophia Miller, Sean Sellers, Patrick Gunn
- 10/11/12 Youth Group Advisors: Sean Sellers, Beb Bero, Jules Tramontana, Kate Caudill, and Rev. Meagan Henry. Youth Group had a winter intersession of OWL offered by Abby Soule, Mark Rinzel, and Dierdre Lord.

Family Ministry

Each year, we offer ways for our families with children in the RE program to connect with one another and build new relationships while sustaining already existing ones. This year we offered a Family Retreat at Murray Grove, several Saturday Winter Dinner and Games Nights in the Undercroft, and we instituted an after worship gathering called Linger and Lunch so that families can sit and eat lunch together on Sundays. We also started a What's App Group to facilitate communication amongst families and as an additional way to communicate upcoming events and organize get togethers. We have noticed an increase in attendance from families at a number of gatherings this year, and it feels like we are finally "back" after experiencing lower participation due to the effects of the covid-19 pandemic. In addition to providing opportunities for families to connect with each other and strengthen their bonds and relationships, I meet one-on-one with children, teenagers, parents, and families for pastoral care throughout the year.

Chalice Circles

This year, we have 5 Chalice Circles, which are a form of small group ministry. These have been led by Rev. Ana Levy-Lyons, Marci Lucia, Garnett Losak, Rachel Schmitt, and me. Four of the groups meet in person and one meets online. The purpose of these groups is to give participants the opportunity to go deeper into spiritual matters and to create bonded, small communities by getting to know one another better. The groups offer a time of reflection, sharing, and deep listening. These groups will continue in some form next fall with some remaining groups who will open to new members, and some new groups will form.

Pastoral Care

In my new role as your Assistant Minister, Pastoral Care is now an explicit piece of my portfolio. I've spent the program year getting to know the Caring Ministry Team, and it's been a joy to learn all we do to care for the First U community. I had a dream that one day we would be able to facilitate the cooking of a large number of meals that could be frozen and kept on hand to deliver to congregants when needed, and after four years, we finally made this happen. Our Intern Minister, Rachel Schmitt, heard this dream and volunteered to make it happen. She worked with Spencer Brill and Taylor Murray and the three of them prepped over 50 individual meals!

When I began meeting with them in the fall, the Caring Ministry did not have a Chair, so I served in that role until we were able to find a new chair. Michelle Kuchuk joined the team in the fall and she quickly became an integral part of the committee by serving in the chapel ministry after Sunday services. She facilitated the roll out of our congregation-wide Caring Ministry survey, and she's helping us create a vision for the future of the Caring Ministry (see Michelle's Caring Ministry report). The results of our survey, combined with conversations with congregants have provided us important information to guide us moving forward. Michelle then volunteered to serve as the Chair of the Caring Ministry. Expect to see some exciting new Caring Ministry initiatives next year!

Vespers

Adam and I continued leading vespers on third Thursdays this year in October, November, December, January, March, April, and May (also see Adam's report). We first piloted this format a few years ago during one of our regularly scheduled 4PM vespers on the Sunday after Christmas. We liked it so much and we received enough positive feedback that we decided to offer a few more vespers that winter. The momentum began to build and with it becoming a popular offering, this is now funded by the budget. We are thrilled that monthly vespers have become a regular

part of our worship calendar. We continue to offer vespers in this format at the 4PM Sunday service between Christmas and the New Year.

Public and Associational Ministry

- Attended the LREDA Fall Conference in Milwaukee this past October.
- I was elected to serve on the Executive Board of the Metro NY Liberal Religious Educator's Chapter. As part of my duties on the Board, I have helped coordinate a Fall Professional Day for the Metro NY UU Ministers Association (UUMA) and LREDA chapters, and I've organized a June retreat and annual meeting for the chapter.
- I attended the UUMA chapter Winter Retreat on the theme of "Changing World, Changing Ministry." I attended the LREDA Fall Conference and I will attend Ministry Days and LREDA professional days online before the General Assembly in June.
- I co-led a Yoga and Spiritual Practices retreat in Costa Rica in March. One First Unitarian member and three local UU ministers attended, in addition to other non-UU participants.

Conclusion

I've been honored to work alongside Rev. Ana for these past 11 years. She is an inspiration to me. Ana is one of the people who supported my own call to ministry, and she cheered me on throughout that process. I had hopes and dreams of how we would work together in the future, and I am sad that she is leaving. I know the congregation will continue to thrive because this is a loving, thoughtful, dedicated community, and I am certain that a wonderful new Senior Minister will be called to serve you. I look forward to seeing what the future brings!

GARNETT LOSAK
DIRECTOR OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

I am concluding my 11th year on staff at First Unitarian and thanks to the generosity of the congregation, Renee Strickland, our new Director of Building Operations & Events, has allowed me to focus on the parts of my job that I do (and love) best (see more about Renee's first year in her report). As I am no longer responsible for managing building rentals and calendaring outside events, I have more time to work with newcomers, develop and lead programming, and upgrade our communication systems.

Membership

We welcomed 29 new members this year representing more than 11% of last year's membership total (as certified with the Unitarian Universalist Association). Of course, membership growth is never based entirely on new members and there is always a loss of members throughout the year for various reasons, including death, relocation, and other life choices. As of this writing, our membership total is 281.

Membership is only one measure of the health of a congregation. There are several other metrics that are just as important, and, in fact, are precursors of membership growth. In every key category, First Unitarian, is poised for growth over the coming years.

	2022-23	2023-24 (to date)	% Change
*RE Registration	57	79	+39%
Visitors	179	240	+34%
Sunday Attendance	154	183	+19%
**Stewardship	\$305,800	\$328,400	+7%
New Members	22	29	+32%

*see move about Religious Education in Rev. Meagan Henry's Report and the RE Council Report.

**See more about Stewardship and potential issues going forward later in this report.

Connections Committee

The First Unitarian Connections Committee works with the Director of Congregational Life to help newcomers connect deeply with the members, friends, and mission of the congregation.

Committee work includes, but is not limited to:

- Connecting personally with visitors and newcomers
- staffing the connections table during fellowship hour
- organizing activities that bring newcomers into community
- planning and organizing new member Sundays
- honoring milestone membership anniversaries
- facilitating affinity groups
- leading Pathways to Membership programs

The committee meets monthly on-line and occasionally in person from September to June.

Meeting agendas include opening/chalice lighting words, a time for check-in, updates on the previous month's activities, planning for future programs, and brainstorming ideas for fulfilling the committee's mission.

A summer retreat to plan activities for the program year is encouraged. Anyone who is interested in creating community and supporting a culture of welcome is encouraged to join us.

I am eternally grateful for the hard work and dedication of the Connections Committee, Marty Bernstein, Lauren Dohr, Michael DeSantis (Chair), Colleen Olson, Bridgette Raes, Rachel Stark, Eleanor Traubman, Robin Bossert: Board Liaison. We are sad that Michael DeSantis will be leaving us at the end of this program year, but thrilled that they will begin their clergy career as ministerial intern in Golden, Colorado.

This year the committee focused on three initiatives:

- Ensuring that an inviting, well staffed connections table is set up in the Undercroft during fellowship hour.
- Creating a system for more outreach to newcomers. This is a work in progress. We had hoped that after an initial contact from me, all newcomers would receive a text or email from a member of the committee. Various systems were put in place throughout the year and some visitors were reached, but it is apparent that reaching out to several hundred people might be too much to hope for.
- Launch of The Scoop, insider monthly newsletter (see more later in this report)

In addition to these initiatives, the committee hosted or led the following programs

New Member Sundays

This year, the connections committee hosted 3-new member Sundays. New members were invited to a pre-worship breakfast of bagels, muffins, juice, coffee, and tea, where they signed the membership book. Each new member was paired with a buddy, a member of the congregation whose job was to ensure they were warmly greeted and entertained during the breakfast gathering. During the service the new members were introduced to the congregation by name and with a 2-3 sentence bio. They were then welcomed into membership with a responsive litany

led by one of our board co-presidents. Buddies presented the new members with a gift from the congregation.

- November 12, 2022: 10 new members
- March 10, 2023: 13 new members
- May 5, 2024: 6 New members

Service of the Living Tradition (planned for May 19, 2024)

The following people are celebrating milestone anniversaries. They will be honored at the May 19th worship service, coinciding with the Annual Meeting, and will receive a thank you gift from the congregation.

40 Years

Kay Corkett

Maria Maida

25 Years

Debbie Barbieri

Dawn Brekke

Robert DePorto

Carolyn Ellis

Lake Wise

10 Years

Lissy DeSantis

Matt Castle

Eliza Frecon

Sam McKelvie

James Rohrbach

Pathways to Membership

We led two sessions of Pathways this year, one in December and a second in April/May. This 6-hour program is designed to provide new members and prospective members with a grounding in Unitarian Universalist and our congregation's programs, governance, and finances. Thank you to Michael DeSantis and Bridgette Raes for co-leading Pathways.

Meals and Other Events

- June Retreat: This was a fun and productive half day event of calendaring, brainstorming, and lunch held at my home!
- In-Gathering salad bar luncheon following worship (Thank you, especially to Rachel Stark for her kitchen and shopping support)
- Taco fellowship hour luncheon

Other Membership Related Activities

- Summer Picnics on the Patio: one in July and one in August. Casual brown bag dinners for fellowship and conversation.
- Sacred Studies Book Discussion: *Punch Me Up to The Gods* by Bryan Broome , October 12, 2023
- Chalice Circle: Living our Faith: 11 people registered for this 8 session small group. We met on over 10 Wednesday evenings in the library to explore theological ideas through a UU lens, Spring 2024
- First Sunday Newcomer Orientations, year-round

Communications

This year, I launched The Scoop, a monthly e-news letter with a focus on news from members of the congregation, photos of, and information about, congregational events, and milestone celebrations such as birthdays, membership anniversaries, graduations, and more. The first issue dropped in September 2023, and as of this writing, 8 issues have been sent to members and pledging friends. Credit goes to Eleanor Traubman who suggested the title, and Bridgette Raes who created the graphics.



Website

Unfortunately, any upgrade of our woefully out of date website will have to wait at least one more year as an initiative to raise funds for that project did not meet the goal. The small, but mighty team of Winne Zwick, Robin Bossert, and Jawad Hijazi, worked together in an attempt to upgrade our website as volunteers, but once again it became apparent that this is a project that is best outsourced to professionals. Nevertheless, I endeavor to update the information on the website weekly, or as needed. Thank you to Jay Lawrence for being at the ready to troubleshoot problems as they come up.

We continue to grow our social media presence and our outreach. Facebook continues to be our most used social media with Instagram as a strong second. Several direct emails are sent each week including, weekly to the full list, weekly to families (sent by Wendy Russell), occasionally to the Young Adult Ministry (sent by a YAM volunteer) and The Scoop sent to members and pledging friends monthly.

Subscriber Data

- Facebook Subscribers: 2,431
- Instagram Followers: 614
- E-News:
 - Total Audience: 1785
 - Families: 208
 - Young Adults: 245
 - The Scoop: 355

Announcements

It is a fact that spoken announcements in worship are the most effective communication tool we have. I do my best to make this part of our service as worshipful as possible.

Summer Worship

Rev. Meagan Henry and I worked together to organize a great series of summer worship services. We were incredibly proud that half of our services were led by members of our Young Adult community. Emily Gaggiano served as music director with support from Allie Lewis and Dennis Wees. Special thanks to Yuri Weber who stepped in to be worship assistant for several services. For the first time, we invited our congregation to join the Sunday worship service from the General Assembly in order to give our custodial staff a day off. We intend to make this a regular feature of our Summer worship program.

- June 18: Weaving Social Justice, Celebrating Juneteenth
- June 24: GA Service from Pittsburgh
- June 30: Queer Time, led by Parrish Turner
- July 2: Spencer Brill, The Kindness of Time
- July 9: Michael DeSantis, Under Construction: You, Me, Us
- July 16: Tasha Brownfield
- July 23: Judy Dederick, What Does it Mean to Feel Safe?
- July 30: Jean Shepherd, Practicing Gratitude
- August 6: Jocelyn Pages, Watering Your Flower
- August 13: Jan Thompson, We ARE The Microbiome
- August 20: Meagan Henry, Small Groups & Chalice Circles
- August 27: Wendy Russell & Yuri Weber, A Time for Kindness
- September 2: Rachel Schmitt

Stewardship and Fundraising

Stewardship

Our Stewardship theme this year was Celebrating Our Abundance. The campaign launched on March 3rd with a Folk and Feast celebration featuring music from Elk, My Dear (First U members and musical duo, Sean Hastings and Elena Karpoff) and lots of home made sweet

and savory pies. Besides serving as the kick-off to our stewardship campaign the event raised \$1,000 toward our operating budget.

Our stewardship program is lagging behind most other areas of congregational life. Stewardship revenue does not come close to covering staff salaries. In fact, it does not even cover the compensation packages of our two ministers and our music director. We rely heavily on building rentals which provide more than half of our operating revenue and we compensate most members our building staff far less then our worship staff.

We have struggled to find people willing to work with the stewardship team. Currently, only 4 people, not including me, are supporting stewardship. The result is that the program itself is not as robust as it should be, and many of our members are not responding to sometimes multiple requests to complete pledge forms.

And the facts prove the point. So far this year, we have \$250,000 in pledge commitments as compared to \$304,000 at this time last year. More than 70 members of the congregation have not completed pledge forms as compared to just over 20 at this time last year. It is possible that some members of the congregaton are withholding their pledges until they understand the impact of Rev. Ana's departure at the end of the program year. It is our hope that most members will come to realize that fiancial stability is one of the factors that ministers consider when deciding which congregations they may want to serve.

Thank you to our stewardship team: Lee Pardee, Catalina Bertani, Charlotte Hoogenboom, Michael Dore and Barbara Bornmann, Board Liaison.

Unifair

On a happy note, for the first time since the pandemic, we hosted a full UniFair. Thanks to Judy Dederick who got the ball rolling and recruited a fantastic team of organizers. This year's UniFair grossed \$13,062 with \$4,215 in expenses for a net of \$8,850. Unfortunately, we were forced to pay for removal of the leftover items, which caused us to have higher than normal expenses. In future years, we hope to make better arrangements for donating items that are not sold at the fair. Nevertheless, Unifair 2023 was a great success.

Auction

After Rev. Ana announced her departure it was decided to cancel this year's auction in lieu of a farewell luncheon to be held the afternoon of June 9th.

Governance and Committee Work

I worked closely with the following committees and groups of the congregation.

- **Board of Trustees** – Attended meetings, submitted monthly reports, supported congregational meetings (powerpoint exhibits, agendas, document availability, announcements of meetings as required by the by-laws)
- **Leadership Development Committee** – Attended meetings, advised on nominees for leadership positions, additional support as needed
- **Interim Minister Search Committee** – Helped to write the Congregational Record, supported weekly communications to the congregation.
- **Caring Committee** – Attended meetings, supported pastoral care with a variety of activities including organizing meals, connecting with members in need of care, providing care information, etc.
- **Young Adult Ministry** – Supported programming as needed
- **Stewardship Team** – (see more in Stewardship in my report)
- **Connections Committee** – (see more in membership in my report)

Public Ministry

- I am concluding my second two-year term on the Board of Directors of The Unitarian Universalist Association of Membership Professionals (UUAMP). This has been an extremely rewarding experience that has resulted in many professional friendships and a wonderful conduit for learning and sharing.
- I was invited to meet with the worship and membership staff of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of New Haven to share best practices in our work with young adults.
- First Unitarian once again participated in the Brooklyn Pride Parade in Park Slope. This is the best small town parade in the Big City and I look forward to bringing a big group together again this June.
- In March I attended the UUAMP Pro Day conference: Leading with Love: Shared Ministry & Adaptive Leadership, in DuPage, Ill.
- Participated in a 2024 General Assembly pre-taped presentation, “Ministers and Membership Professionals: Shared Ministry Success Stories.” Thank you to Rev. Meagan for participating with me. The program’s focus is for ministers and membership professionals to understand how working collaboratively is beneficial to their congregations. It can be seen as an in-demand program at this year’s general assembly.

Conclusion

It has been a joy working with Rev. Ana for the last 11 years. She has been a generous leader who has given me the space to do my job the best way I know how, while making herself available as a trusted advisor. Rev. Meagan, Adam, Renee, Wendy, Chris, and Bobby are an amazing staff team. Any future senior minister will be lucky to join us. Thank you to everyone who leads (and leaders lead in many ways – you are all leaders). The next years

will be challenging, exciting, interesting, and yes, fun! I look forward to experiencing them with all of you.

ADAM PODD
DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

As we approach my 10th anniversary serving as Director of Music at First Unitarian, I am proud of another great year of music-making and community in our vibrant music program.

Our dedicated volunteer choir remains the centerpiece, showing up each week with incredible generosity, trust, and musicality. We continue to grow not just in numbers, but noticeably in spirit and open-heartedness. We have continued, for a second year, opening our Sunday services with "Gathering Music" - a time when we sing together from the heart, without hymnals or lyric sheets. This has been a great platform to repeat and reinforce familiar songs, as well as learn some new ones. I have been on a mission lately to help UU's, especially our congregation, collect and retain songs they can use while navigating life and the human experience. Whether celebrating life's greatest joys, or searching for comfort in its most trying times, songs can help, and I firmly believe that if you attend services regularly, these songs should be in your back pocket when you need them.

The music team is truly a family, and I'm grateful for the outstanding ensemble of volunteer and professional musicians. Our four section leaders - Kiena, Brandon, Candice, and Dennis - continue to share their voices and support our awesome choir. We get additional leadership from Kiena and Sophia - both of whom are brilliant, compassionate, and inspired conductors. Calling on their gifts as great song-leaders even more this year, we have been able to make more use of the full sanctuary, giving me the freedom to be at the organ, or to move between the loft and the front of the church during a musical moment that requires a strong visible presence. I feel fortunate to have this fantastic team breathing life into our program week after week.

We upheld the beloved Christmas Eve and Palm Sunday services, presenting new arrangements as well as staple repertoire. In my ten years so far, I don't believe we've had a single Christmas Eve service without a world premiere - something new, inspired by and created specifically for the musical community at First U - talk about a living tradition! And of course, our monthly Jazz Sundays (drawing upon jazz, roots, gospel and folk traditions,) remain popular, boosting attendance by 25% on Sundays.

These special music services are paid for by members' and friends' donations to the Julie McKinney Special Music Fund. I'll monitor donations to the McKinney fund carefully going forward, but it should be noted that contributions declined around 40% this year from the

previous two fiscal years (about \$5,700 difference.) I hope this was some kind of fluke, and not representative of a downward trend. As such, I tried to cut costs in the few places I still could by the time this information came to light, while honoring the commitments to musicians who were already in place. As such, we will end up spending more than we brought in this fiscal year. Our McKinney reserve can cover this short-term, but I'll watch the trends regarding long-term implications to make sure the fund remains sustainable. Something that may help in the future is reaching a wider network of small donors, so that when two or three big donors don't contribute as consistently in a given year, it doesn't make up such a large percentage of the total funds that I would have expected to come in.

This was our first program year to offer the new Vespers service on a monthly basis starting in the fall. It has been a consistently powerful worship service. The energy and pace are different from Sunday mornings, creating a space for breathing together, silence, prayer, and healing.

Lastly, I will point out that First U's music program has found its way into the national UU spotlight as a shining example of what worship music can be. This is in large part due to our online media presence with great videos from our worship services, as well as my own personal presence and involvement at UU gatherings such as General Assembly and the annual AUUMM Conference (Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries). Many UU's are watching us from afar to learn new ways of making their faith a joyful and musical experience.

Here's to a great year!

RENEE STRICKLAND
DIRECTOR OF BUILDING OPERATIONS & EVENTS

In my inaugural year in this newly created position, I have been learning how to balance my time and energy between the dual roles of Building Operations (facilities & maintenance) and Events (non-congregational use of the space). First Unitarian's buildings are kept humming seven days a week with events, meetings, ceremonies, gatherings, projects, and maintenance.

Taking Care of Our Building

I started in late July, at the same time that Jay Lawrence oversaw our migration to Google Office to organize our files and calendar. This has been instrumental in ensuring we keep track of the use of our spaces, by event category & room resources, and allows for migration of more of our files from paper to digital storage.

Another big change this year has been the return of Chris Johnson to oversee building maintenance. Chris agreed to come out of retirement and return to the Sextan's apartment,

and he has been training custodian Bobby Blackman on the necessary skills to maintain our building systems. Chris and I have worked closely to address and prioritize maintenance repairs and long-term projects and bring those to the attention of both the Facilities Committee and the Board. (I defer to the Facilities Committee submission to this annual report for more details on these projects and issues.) Additionally, in the coming year, I aim to integrate the full maintenance schedule into our calendar, with digital links to our files and vendor contracts, for more clarity and oversight of the process.

A change the congregation may notice is our new, much faster, Verizon FIOS fiber optic internet service, with a single First U Guest account accessible in all of our spaces. I secured a three-year contract for 1 gig for the same price we had been paying for 60 mbps of streaming speed - which allows for faster uploads of Sunday services.

Serving the Wider Community

The creation of my position underscores the importance of weaving First Unitarian into the broader Brooklyn community and strengthening those ties. We share our space with a variety of justice, arts, and community groups that align with the First Unitarian mission, and we have been able to build and expand these events, gatherings, and ceremonies in the past year. Among the groups using our space are:

Arts Organizations

- Ambient Church
- BK Treble Choir
- Brooklyn Art Song Society
- Brooklyn Chamber Music Society
- ISSUE Project Room
- Pioneer Works
- Repast Baroque Ensemble
- Voices in the Heights
- Rock Voices
- String Orchestra of Brooklyn
- World Music Institute

Education & Children's Groups

- Imagine Early Learning Centers continues to be our largest partner, operating a weekday daycare in the classrooms, the Green Room, and the Eastman Room, and using the Frances White Room and the Undercroft as supporting facilities. We are proud of the excellent, nurturing, supportive environment that Imagine has created in our space.

- Child's Play NY offers after-school theater classes, Sunday through Thursday, in the Chapel and the Sanctuary. Thanks to the split systems in our Chapel, Child's Play now also offers back-to-back theater camps all summer. The new Chapel stage lighting, installed courtesy of Voices in the Heights, has also allowed Child's Play to dazzle with bespoke lighting in their final performances. This has proven so popular that Child's Play will be adding a sixth after-school class this upcoming semester.
- Saint Ann's School has used our Chapel over the past year as overflow classrooms, during their construction, as well as for special workshops and holidays. Additionally, starting this spring, they showcased their musicians' final performances in our Sanctuary, and they have already booked their return for next spring.
- After a four-year hiatus, due to COVID, Youth Advocacy Corps is also returning to our Chapel this upcoming summer for a two-week training course.
- Noel Pointer Foundation continues their annual showcase.

Community Organizations and Self-Help Groups

In addition to the concerts hosted in our space every month, we also open our doors to many other community organizations and gatherings, including:

- Twelve-step groups (expanded from 5 to 10 groups this year, who each meet weekly)
- New Kings Democrats
- Extinction Rebellion
- Books Are Magic
- Brooklyn Heights Association
- Brooklyn for Peace
- New York Communities for Change
- Planned Parenthood
- Coop board meetings
- Pratt Institute student film

Ceremonies

While the scaffolding has kept weddings away, we have served many families seeking baby blessings and memorials for their loved ones, averaging one non-congregant ceremony a month in the past year. We also celebrated the judicial induction of Judge Linda Wilson, who had worked across the street in the Court of Appeals for many years before her election to the bench. Both Jay Lawrence and Lukas Bauer have been a crucial component to many of these special events, recording and live streaming the ceremonies and supporting the audio-visual needs of live musicians and speakers. Reverend Meagan Henry has served as officiant for almost half of these non-congregational ceremonies.

All of these rentals not only enhance our congregation's reputation as a community center, but they also provide over 60% of our operating revenue.

Governance Reports

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

So much has happened in the past year - our 190th as a congregation! Which means that in just a few years we'll be readying for our bicentennial in 2033. Seems far off, but it has already been four years since we found ourselves faced with the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic.

Yet, here we are - services in the sanctuary have rebounded to pre-pandemic numbers, and our online community remains robust and connected. Each Sunday we welcome more and more new faces, with 29 new members joining our community of 281 members and even more visitors and friends. Thank you to the Connections Committee and Garnett for creating a welcoming and inviting community.

We've been blessed with an enthusiastic and growing Young Adult Ministry, led by Michael DeSantis, Elena Karpoff, and Taylor Murray, who have helped keep us grounded in our values and purpose. Our religious education program has more than rebounded from the pandemic (read more in Rev. Meagan's report) thanks to the RE Council led by Becky Huffman.

The signs of progress on our façade repair are unavoidable – from the scaffolding and sidewalk shed that greets us on Pierrepont, to the amazing “sculpture garden” of spire pieces that welcome us outside the chapel. The Facilities Committee (chaired by John Carroll) will update further in their report, but we would be remiss to not recognize the hard work of Renee Strickland, Tom Check, Matt Castle, and the committee in getting approval from Landmarks Preservation Committee to replace the stone spires with a fabrication which is both cost-effective and long-lasting.

Speaking of Renee, it's easy to forget that Renee only started this year as our Building and Special Events manager! In addition to her responsibilities for our rentals and tenants, she's working closely with the Facilities Committee on the façade project and was key in helping navigate the transition in our facilities staff. Which brings us to another welcome addition to our team – the return of Chris Johnson as our director of facilities. Welcome back Chris!

Change has been a consistent theme for us this year. Rachel Schmitt joined us as ministerial intern for the next two years, and we said goodbye to Tasha Brownfield. In October, we marked the ordination of Rev. Meagan Henry with a joyous celebratory event and welcomed her in her expanded role as assistant minister.

We also were saddened by the announcement that our senior minister, Rev. Ana Levy-Lyons, will be leaving us in just a few weeks. We wish her well in her future accomplishments and are deeply grateful for all she has done for our community and our congregation over the past twelve years.

A search committee has already started the process of hiring an Interim Minister, who will be with us starting in August for the next two program years. Mary Huhn, Jennie Goldin, Beth Evans, and Michael DeSantis are serving on this team.

In February 2025, the Board will appoint a nominating committee to establish the Senior Minister Search Committee, who will be elected by the congregation at our annual meeting in May 2025. Between June and November, 2025 the Senior Minister Search Committee will survey and meet with members of the congregation, and begin the evaluation of candidates in January 2026. The new minister will be called by a congregational vote at our May 2026 annual meeting. We are grateful to all who have already stepped up to drive this process and look forward to the journey together!

This year's board:

- Class of '24 - Mary Huhn, Judith Sedaitis, Jay Sheth
- Class of '25 - Robin Bossert (co-president), Beth Evans, Lisa Pacenza (co-president)
- Class of '26 - Michele Ascione, Barbara Bornmann, Jake Powell
- Moderator: Patrick Gunn
- Treasurer: Lee Pardee
- Clerk: Maggie Norris

We are grateful to Mary, Judith, and Jay for their hard work as First U trustees and leaders, and to Patrick Gunn for his dedication as our moderator.

- Committee/ Board liaison
- Caring - Beth Evans
- Committee on Ministry - Mary Huhn
- Connections - Robin Bossert
- Facilities - Judith Sedaitis
- Finance - Jake Powell
- Green Team - Jay Sheth
- Immigrant Solidarity - Winnie Zwick
- Leadership Development - Mary Huhn

- Religious Education - Beth Evans
- Share the Plate – Michele Ascione
- Queer Caucus-Rainbow – Jay Sheth
- Stewardship – Barbara Bornmann
- Tech – Jay Sheth
- Weaving Social Justice - Robin Bossert
- Young Adults – Jake Powell

It's been an honor serving on the board as your co-presidents this year! We look forward to what the next few years will bring us as a community.

Robin Bossert and Lisa Pacenza
Co-Presidents, Board of Trustees

DEACONS

The By-Laws of the Society stipulate ten Deacons and provide for filling vacancies:

The Deacons nominate a member to fill a vacancy, and the nominee is then elected at a congregational meeting. This year Deacon, Marty Bernstein, resigned after moving to Maryland with his wife, Patricia. The Bernsteins have been enjoying living near their grandchildren. Deacon Bruce Wilde resigned in May having moved to Kingston with his wife Coco and their family. To succeed Marty and Bruce, the Deacons will nominate two male Deacons, to be elected at the annual meeting.

Duties of the Deacons

As stipulated by the By-Laws The Deacons shall be available to:

- assist the Ministers in conducting any communion service:
- assist at the funeral or memorial of a Member, if so requested by the member's survivors; and
- advise and assist the Ministers in promoting the health of the Society.

Worship Services

- The Deacons assisted Rev. Meagan Henry and Rev. Michael Crumpler in conducting the solemn Good Friday Communion service on March 29.
- The Deacons also assisted at the Flower and Hunger Communions.

Memorial service ushering

The Deacons served at two Memorials: on October 15, 2023, for longtime member Bob Newsom and on March 24, 2024, for longtime member June Wohlhorn.

Additionally

- The Deacons have been serving as greeters and head ushers for all worship services.
- At the request of Assistant Minister, Meagan Henry, in March the Deacons also served as ushers for the Brooklyn Heights Association Annual Meeting held in the Sanctuary.

Green-Wood Cemetery

The Deacons oversee the management of the congregation's burial ground, Vista Hill, in Green-Wood Cemetery (see Vista Hill).

Other Service

As individuals, the Deacons also serve the Society. Currently there are:

- three Deacons in the choir,
- two Deacons on the Facilities Committee,
- two Deacons on the Immigrant Solidarity Committee,
- one Deacon on the Lay Ministry Committee,
- one Deacon on the Ministerial Relations Committee

A Deacon also serves as Treasurer of the Society and as Coordinator of Ushers and Greeters.

Submitted by, Constance Newsom, Senior Deacon

The Deacons: Robert Bero, Thomas Check, Elizabeth Davis, Laurel Lesio, Edwin Lord, Lee Pardee, Nancy Wolf

FACILITIES COMMITTEE

The 2023-2024 program year has been a year of exciting progress for the Facilities Committee. Most significantly, our plans for the repair of the Sanctuary façade are coming to fruition this year as contractors begin work.

We are grateful for the generous support by our congregants and the tireless efforts of our staff that make our committee's work possible. We would especially like to highlight the addition of our new staff member, Renee Strickland, who was hired in the new position of Director of Building Operations and Events in July 2023. Renee's experience and talent have been invaluable to our committee's work this year. We have also been delighted to have former Director of Facilities Chris Johnson back with us on a temporary basis. Chris, as always, has taken care of our buildings this year with great dedication and skill.

Projects

Work on the Sanctuary façade continued this year, including repairs of the spires, the surface below the roofline, and the three large windows facing Pierrepont Street. We engaged real estate firm Denham Wolf on an hourly basis as a consultant to advise us on how to coordinate this work.

After careful consideration of how best to repair the spires, which will include replacing the top part of the spires and most of the ornamentation down the sides of the spires, the Committee recommended that these parts be fabricated in GFRP (fiberglass) by Fiberglass Technologies, Inc. for a total cost of \$145,077. Fiberglass is a durable material that should last much longer than the brownstone material that was on the spires previously. It also has the benefit of being much lighter than conventional materials, allowing it to be installed more easily and cost effectively. The Committee selected Up Construction and Restoration to repair the spires and install these GFRP replacements for a total of \$530,938. A note for future maintenance of the fiberglass material: while we do not expect the color to fade due to exposure to the elements, it can be recoated relatively easily from a boom lift if necessary.

Notably, the use of fiberglass as a material for the spire repair was approved by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission after a series of hearings. Committee member Tom Check and staff member Renee Strickland worked with our architect, AYON Studio, to navigate our request successfully through the rigorous approval process. First Unitarian will have the distinction of being one of the first religious buildings in the nation to use fiberglass on this scale.

It was recommended that we also integrate lightning protection into the spire work. The Committee selected B&B Lightning Rod Company to install lightning protection that covers the Sanctuary building for \$18,000.

Repair work on the stone surface of the lower façade was nearly complete as of this writing. This portion of the work is being done by Excellent Contracting LLC. The work that remains after a winter pause includes an acid wash, repointing mortar joints, and installing cast stone elements at the roofline crenelation.

Committee member Matt Castle continued to lead the repair work on the three large windows facing Pierrepont Street this year. M&A Projects Restoration Inc. completed their installation of metal bracing that will prevent the windows from shifting back and forth in the wind, which had been damaging the wooden tracery and its coating. Femenella Associates is preparing to repair the wooden tracery, and Matt is working with them to determine the best finish for durability and for mimicking the original appearance.

We moved forward on installing a new fire detection system, which will include a combination of smoke, heat, and beam detectors and will provide much more

comprehensive coverage than our current system. This year, we signed a contract with Cross-Fire & Security Co., Inc. to install the system for \$176,000. First Unitarian member Kermit Beauchamp volunteered to serve as the project manager for this project and has begun coordinating with Cross-Fire to begin the installation. Committee member Matt Castle will work alongside them to oversee aesthetic decisions and ensure that any new equipment installed in our buildings will be incorporated in the most appropriate way aesthetically. We would like to thank congregants Robin Bossert and Patrick Gunn who served on the Fire Safety Team that worked with consultant Miles Fisher to design the fire detection system and select the contractor to install it.

Congregant Jay Lawrence led the installation of new lighting, sound, and live-streaming equipment in the Chapel. Jay worked with one of our renters, Dan Gottfried from Voices in the Heights, to create this system at no cost to the congregation. This was not a Facilities Committee project, but we are including it in our report to highlight Jay and Dan's generous contribution that enhances the use of our space and increases its value to the congregation and to potential renters.

Other projects that were started this year include an upgrade to the organ and a replacement of the 50 Monroe boiler. The organ upgrade consists of replacing the electronic console, which was installed in 1993, before it fails. Music Director Adam Podd has ordered this component and is waiting for it to arrive from the vendor. \$65,000 has been budgeted for this project. We have also ordered a new boiler for 50 Monroe to be installed this summer. The current boiler has a chronic leak and presents a risk of failing during next year's heating season. The new boiler is the same model but with an upgraded burner that we expect to be more efficient. The total cost should come to approximately \$80,000.

Events

We kicked off the program year in September with a volunteer work day. At this event, Facilities Committee members were joined by other congregants in activities like gardening and tidying up our spaces in preparation for our first month of worship services. Staff members Bobby Blackman, Chris Johnson, and Renee Strickland also improved the Sanctuary by installing new LED light bulbs, cleaning and polishing woodwork, and re-oiling the balcony and pews.

In October, a fundraising concert was held for the façade work. This concert featured the singing talent of Office Manager Wendy Russell and her vocal group, Those Girls. Their delightful performance of Broadway favorites made for a wonderful evening and raised \$2,500 toward the matching grant that we received from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The Committee plans to host another volunteer work day in May to prepare the Chapel for summer services.

Committee Members

We are excited to welcome David Andrew, Ellen Leach, and Elizabeth Smith onto the Facilities Committee this year. Matt Castle, Tom Check, Liz Davis, and Isuru Seneviratne continue to serve on the committee. John Carroll (chair) and Judith Sedaitis (Board liaison) completed their terms on the committee this year; we are thankful for all of their contributions during their time with us.

Submitted by, John Carroll, Chair

FINANCE COMMITTEE

The Finance Committee welcomed new members Lorna Hollander and Jake Powell (Board Liaison). David Andrew, John Carroll (Facilities Liaison), Lee Pardee (Treasurer), and Lake Wise continued as members.

This year started off on a very positive note. Similar to Fiscal Year 2021-2022, the Fiscal Year 2023 Operating Budget ended up \$56,000 under budget, which meant that we took only 63% of our planned sustainable draw from the general endowment. Coming under budget is extremely unusual and extremely welcome in our challenging economic environment, and this smaller draw helps to offset years in which we have exceeded our sustainable draw.

The FY22 capital budget also came in substantially under budget. We spent \$335,304 which was \$537,846 less than budgeted (\$873,150). This lower spending was due to expenses for the façade project coming in more slowly than anticipated and also due to two large projects (new fire alarm system, new organ console) not moving forward during the year.

The committee continued its regular work of monitoring revenue and expenses monthly and reviewing the congregation's books in detail each quarter. For the first nine months of this fiscal year operating revenues and expenses have both been slightly over budget. The last quarter of the fiscal year is crucial for meeting year end pledge and fundraising goals. In addition, quite a few expenses come in at the end of the year. But still we are optimistic that the operating budget will come in about even or possibly a bit better.

Capital revenues (\$182,643) are currently at 40% of budget while expenditures (\$584,056) are currently at 60% of budget. The additional funds needed for capital projects (\$401,413) have been drawn from the endowment (investment fund).

In November 2023, First Unitarian received a \$30,000 matching grant from the New York Landmarks Conservancy, having raised the full \$30,000 match by October 31. In addition

to generous donations from members and friends, we raised over \$4000 from our community partners, the Brooklyn Chamber Music Society, the Brooklyn Art Song Society, and the Noel Pointer Foundation and over \$6000 from three member-led performance – The Lesson, a one-person play written and performed by Tyrone Davis, Jr., a concert by Those Girls with Wendy Russell, and Awake in the Dark, a play by Shira Nayman (see Shira’s report under Program Reports) .

Our endowment has been holding steady. The Finance Committee has reviewed our investment earnings and losses as well as the rate for using our line of credit. The line of credit rate has been high every month, and so the committee has recommended using endowment funds rather than the line of credit to pay for our capital projects. Even though we have withdrawn \$500,000 from the endowment this fiscal year, the funds in our general endowment plus our capital reserve fund have gone down by only \$34,000.

In February, facing an enormous increase in the congregation’s insurance premium, the Finance Committee recommended, and the Board approved, increasing the congregation’s deductible from \$10,000 to \$25,000. By taking this step, the congregation saved about \$20,000 in the proposed FY24-25 operating budget.

In FY24 the Committee:

- Continued the budget process developed in FY20 which allowed for good communication with the board and staff when drafting the FY24 budget.
- Continued to work with the Office Administrator, Wendy Russell, and a CPA consultant to improve bookkeeping practices for the operating and capital budgets.
- Conducted monthly reviews of the congregation’s financial reports.
- Completed quarterly reviews of the congregation’s accounts for the fourth quarter of FY23 and the first two quarters of FY24. These reviews continue to be useful in ensuring accuracy in the congregation’s financial reports and assuring that the congregations’ funds are being used as intended. Reviews of this type have been identified as a best practice as new online fundraising platforms and accounts are implemented by congregations and nonprofits.
- Worked with the Board of Trustees and Staff to draft the FY24 operating budget that supports and expands the congregation’s programming while keeping the draw on the endowment to cover the operating deficit below the calculated sustainable level.
- Worked with the Board of Trustees and Facilities Management Committee to draft FY24 capital budget to finance the façade repair and continue other important capital projects to maintain our facilities in good working order.

- Conducted one online and one in-person congregational budget forum prior to the annual meeting.

Many thanks to this year's members.

If you are a member of the congregation who is interested in joining the Finance Committee, please contact Treasurer Lee Pardee, leepardee54@gmail.com.

Lee Pardee, Treasurer, for the Finance Committee Members: Jake Powell (Board Liaison), John Carroll (Facilities Committee Liaison), David Andrew, Lorna Hollander, and Lake Wise.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

“The duties of the Leadership Development Committee shall be to (i) promote the development of leadership by evaluating the potential of individual Members, identifying needs and opportunities for leadership in the Society, identifying resources to aid in leadership development, encouraging Members to use such resources to develop their leadership ability, and recommending Members to the Board for appointment to Mandated Committees. (ii) propose the names of at least one qualified and available Member of the Society for: (i) each position on the Board of Trustees to be filled at the next Annual Membership Meeting; (ii) each position as a delegate for the upcoming General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association...; (iii) each position on the Leadership Development Committee to be filled at the next Annual Membership Meeting; (iv) Clerk; and (v) Moderator. (FUUB Bylaws, section 5.3(d).

For the 2023-24 year, the elected members of the LDC were: Colleen Olson, Dawn Elane Reed, Amanda Rinzel, Yuri Weber and Michele Weisman. Significant support was provided to the committee by Garnett Losak (Director of Congregational Life) and Mary Huhn (Board Liaison). Colleen Olson, Dawn Elane Reed and Michele Weisman will conclude their terms after the Annual Meeting on May 19, 2024. Amanda Rinzel and Yuri Weber will continue to serve on the LDC.

2024 General Assembly Nominees:

Six delegates were elected at the Congregational Meeting on February 25, 2024:
Michael DeSantis

- Ian Holmes
- Elena Karpoff
- Mary Most
- Maggie Norris
- Judith Sedaitis

GA will be totally remote this year. Through the generosity of the Women's Leadership Alliance, all delegates upon application will receive \$300.

Nominees for The Board of Trustees, Class of 2027 (three-year term) Candidate Slate:

- Victoria Antonini
- Anne Calder
- Mark Weiss
- Cara Haft is nominated to replace Lisa Pacenza for the final year of her term

Clerk of the Congregation: Maggie Norris (second one-year term)

Moderator: James Goward (first term one-year)

Leadership Development Committee (two-year terms):

- Spencer Brill
- Maxine Schulof
- Judith Sedaitis

Leadership Development Committee Activities

The committee's primary focus is to nominate members of the congregation for UUA General Assembly delegates, Board of Trustees, Clerk, Moderator, and to replace its own members. We met monthly in the Francis White room beginning in September. This work took up the majority of the time of the committee.

In addition, efforts were put into identifying potential committee members in need of additional membership: Share the Plate and Stewardship.

Submitted by Colleen Olson and Michele Weisman, Co-Chairs, Leadership Development Committee

Program Reports

AWAKE IN THE DARK

A Theater Concert Work staged as an Equity Showcase benefit, Dec 14 and 15, 2023

This was a two-evening, fully produced, Equity Showcase benefit, which funded by Shira Nayman (the budget ended up being \$17,000), with all proceeds from ticket sales going to First Unitarian, in support of the façade work. Approximately \$8000 was raised.

Many members of the congregation participated in this production, some of whom were paid, and some of whom volunteered.

Dawn Elane Reed served as stage manager. She did a fantastic job and went above and beyond all expectations throughout the production. We simply could not have done this show without her. She was paid a stipend of \$800

Charlotte Hoogenboom did some work in props, and also sat in on rehearsals and other production meetings. She was paid a stipend of \$100.

Jay Lawrence gave an extraordinary amount of time in serving as tech director, in charge also of sound and lighting, and he ended up jumping in to help with building the set, and then taking it down. He appeared at 8:00 on the Saturday morning after the final show, drill in hand, and did not leave until the work was done, several very hard-working hours later.

Garnett Losak was fantastic in her support of this show. She coordinated many aspects of the detailed arrangements—juggling rehearsal schedules with façade work, and many other details. She was always so helpful and responsive—we could not have pulled this off without her. And she served as chief monetary office, was present at both nights' performances to oversee ticket sales and other front-of-house business.

Wendy Russell was also indispensable. She also helped with some coordination and patiently let our cast and crew in and out of the building and was generally a wonderful support throughout the development of the production.

Rev Ana Levy was also a great support throughout the process.

The board, especially Robin Bossert, were extremely helpful and expeditious in greenlighting this event, and also a great support throughout.

Several members of the congregation served as ushers on the night of the show, giving generously of their time.

It was a privilege and a pleasure to bring our show to 1st UU as a benefit showcase. To see the work performed in the beautiful, sacred space of the sanctuary was beautiful and meaningful for everyone in the cast and crew, and from the powerful audience response, also to the audience members.

Shira, Nayman, Producer & Writer, Awake in The Dark

CARING MINISTRY

Michelle Kuchuk became chair in March '24. Rev. Meagan Henry was the acting chair prior to this change. We typically meet monthly on Mondays.

The Caring Ministry supports First Unitarian by:

- Pastoral Care: members Michelle, Edwin, Nancy, and Michael provide pastoral care in the Chapel of All Faiths after services on a rotating basis
- Check-In Notes/Emails/Phone Calls: members send these check-ins on an as needed and sometimes ongoing basis to folks in need of emotional support, or who need someone to talk to, or are otherwise going through a difficult time
- In-person visits: members also make caring personal visits to congregants
- Meals & Other Practical Support: members of this ministry also deliver meals, visit or help congregants with doctor/hospital related needs, or provide other ongoing support on an as needed basis.

This year, we also coordinated with a meal-making initiative to get more meals out to home-bound or in-need congregants.

This year, we created and sent out a congregant-wide survey which polled people on their understanding of the caring ministry, whether or not they had utilized it, what they'd like to see in the future, and if they'd like to get involved.

In the coming program year, we'd like to expand the Caring Ministry, specifically providing opportunities for folks who'd like to help care for their peers but who, for example, may not have the bandwidth to be a core member of the Caring Ministry. Michelle & Meagan, along with support from Garnett and the other members, are helping to think through how we can expand and make this happen.

We are excited for this period of growth and change in this important ministry that attends to emotional, practical, and important community needs. This ministry is filled with extremely generous and caring members whose grace and commitment I deeply appreciate.

Submitted by Michelle Kuchuk, Chair

Caring Committee Members: Michelle Kuchuk (chair), Edwin Lord, Nancy Witherell, Judy Dederick, Michael DeSantis, Janna Amelkin, Beth Evans (board liaison). Staff: Rev. Meagan Henry, Garnett Losak, Rachel Schmitt.

GREEN TEAM

Overview & Mission

The Green Team, established by congregational vote at the 2019 Annual Meeting, has been working towards UUA certification of our congregation as a "Green Sanctuary," in keeping

with the 7th Principle: “Respect for the Interconnected Web of which we are a part.” The Green Team encourages congregants to actively engage in building a just, livable society and encourages sustainability throughout our building and congregational practices.

Events & Worship

- On Fri, April 21st, 2023 in the chapel we held “A New Tree Grows in Brooklyn,” a reforestation event featuring short films and speakers from Forests for All NYC and The American Chestnut Foundation. We followed the service that Sunday with the planting of two Chestnut trees in Prospect Park.
- Sunday, Aug 12th, 2023; Green Team chair Jan Thompson gave a homily called “We are the Microbiome,” challenging congregants to see how everything is connected and we are not “separate” from the earth, but rather part of her biome. Green Team members Robin Bossert and Colleen Olson assisted with the service.
- On September 17th, 2023, during ClimateWeekNYC our congregation joined the March to End Fossil Fuels. Over 20 members carried the First Unitarian banner and marched with other faith groups and tens of thousands of other citizens. The march ended close to UN headquarters and was timed to take place during the UN General Assembly.
- In the fall a Share-the-Plate was collected for local environmental group 350 Brooklyn. Over \$1,000 was raised.

Projects

- **Sustainable Electricity, Heating and Cooling**
 - Renewable energy is abundant in upstate New York but bottlenecks inhibit that energy from moving downstate to the nation's largest load center, New York City. Upstate New York's power mix is approaching 90 percent emission-free – whereas New York City's power is over 90 percent fossil fuel-based.
 - With the help of Laura Piraino of NYC Accelerator, we secured a “Green Jobs - Green New York Energy” energy audit, which was conducted on February 27, 2024. The audit was funded by New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). We are still waiting for the report to be delivered.
 - To offset our fossil fuel-based draw, the Green Team proposed three projects that were approved by the board and came online in 2022 and 2023. The installations were overseen by the facilities committee and are as follows:
 - 1) As of March 2023, First U added an 11-panel solar array atop 48 Monroe with an expected output of 5,049 kilowatt-hours (kWh), a 12.3% capacity factor. At that output level, considering NYSERDA subsidies, First U's investment would be repaid in about 15 years.

- 5,049 kWh would account for ~20% of 48 Monroe's electricity needs, and ~7% of First U's total.
- The electricity generation during the first 12 months of operation has been 2,130 kWh (including projected May output), a 5.2% capacity factor.

2) In the summer of 2022, a mini-split HVAC system was installed in the chapel to bring air conditioning to a space that previously had none.

- This \$77,000 environmentally-friendly heating and cooling investment has provided welcome cool air in the summer to the Chapel and Frances White Room, allowing First U to book more profitable summer rentals.
- The Green Team hopes to work with the facilities committee during the winter to test the system's heating capabilities. Using the mini-splits for heating in the winter would offset some of the draw on our gas burning furnace. Until then, the mini-splits will not have reduced our carbon footprint.
 - The dedicated sub-meter for the Chapel & Frances White Room mini-split was not working, and a new meter has been installed. However, we are lacking login access to proceed with data collection of cooling and heating energy usage.

3) Additional electric needs are to be supplemented by a contract we signed with Green Street Power -- a community solar array called "Queens 1," which is meant to offset the electricity we purchase from ConEd. (More details to come on this.)

- **Green Sanctuary Certification** - We are working on our action plan for 2024-2025.
- **The Climate Action Google Group** - This mode of email communication continues to be a place we can reach out to interested congregants regarding climate justice activities. It was started in Jan 2019; it currently has around 90 subscribers sharing information and environmental actions. We welcome more participation beyond the Green Team member postings: contact Janetelenathompson@gmail.com if you wish to be added to the group.

Submitted by Jan Thompson, chair

Committee Members: Robin Bossert, Anne Calder, Nina Gray, Lee Ilan, Mary Most, Colleen Olson, Isuru Seneviratne, Jayesh Sheth, Nancy Wolf

IMMIGRANT SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE

Background

2022 saw a huge influx of primarily Venezuelan migrants to NYC. In the following years, migrants have continued to arrive in the city in significant numbers from Latin America and, increasingly, West Africa.

Mayor Adams has struggled to respond adequately to the crisis. This year, his administration limited the right to shelter for single migrants to just 1-2 months, where it was once indefinite. Fortunately, families traveling with children still retain indefinite right to shelter in most cases.

Through the Immigrant Solidarity Committee, First U has provided deep advocacy and case management to a group of approximately a dozen Venezuelan migrants referred to us through other nonprofit social services.

Celebrations

Since the 2023 annual report, we have helped five adult migrants win Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which allows them to work legally and open a bank account. This has provided a degree of financial independence and allows these families to build a life here in earnest. TPS for Venezuela is extended through April 2025 and will hopefully continue to be extended, as the crisis in Venezuela remains severe. It costs \$545 to apply for TPS.

We hosted a wonderful dance fundraiser in June and a celebratory taco lunch in October. We also invited our friends to UniFair, where they found an abundance of helpful clothing. Thanks to all who helped with these events.

We received awards from Share the Plate and the Minister's Discretionary Fund with profound gratitude.

Goals

We continue to support several migrant friends who are embroiled in the asylum process (which is separate from TPS). Winning asylum puts them on a path to a green card, but losing their case can open them to removal if & when TPS expires.

We are in the middle of an intake process for two teenagers in the shelter system who may qualify for a powerful juvenile status (SIJS). We are also looking for opportunities to intake additional migrants.

Proceeding with asylum or SIJS claims may require us to engage low-bono lawyers. If we move forward with these, we will likely conduct another fundraising campaign.

How you can help

As more of our friends have received work authorization (yay!), we are in critical need of entry-level job opportunities for people who may speak limited or no English. Please reach out if you have any leads.

It is much easier to do this work with the help of skilled interpreters. Several First U French speakers have volunteered to assist in supporting one or more West African migrants who have been referred to us. We continue to welcome anyone from within or outside of the congregation who has French, Spanish, or Wolof/Pulaar interpretation skills who could help us extend our capacity.

Language skills are not required to join the ISC. We can use support to coordinate coverage, navigate government bureaucracy, and hold space for our migrant friends in challenging situations.

Gratitude

Thanks to ISC committee members Michele Ascione, Tom Check, Edwin Lord, Hallie Noble, Lee Pardee, and Jake Powell, and to all First U-ers who have given their time, money, and prayers in support of our migrant friends.

Submitted by, Josh Davidoff, Chair

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COUNCIL

Our RE Council expanded this year! We are so grateful to have Erin Hopkins, Sean Sellers, Emily Hockaday, RJ Carey, Keledy Kenkel, Marci Lucia, and Rachel Michael on our team. Thank you to our Board Liaison Beth Evans. Teamwork with you is always joyful. Our RE staff was expanded by the addition of a part-time RE assistant. Thank you to Wendy Russell for all your hard work this year!

The RE Council mourned the loss of the indomitable June Wohlhorn, who died in December. We think of her each time we plan something fun for children and families at First U, which is often.

This year marked a year of growth and milestones. Meagan Henry became the Reverend Meagan Henry in October, and the RE community was closely involved with planning the ceremony and reception to mark the occasion. It was a beautiful day of celebration and connection!

Our RE program continued to grow and thrive this year. Several families joined our community, and many visitors enjoyed our classes and celebrations. We offered Children's

Chapel, once a month Multi-generational services, Children's Choir, Coming of Age (8 participants!), High School Youth Group, OWL classes for grades 4-5-6, as well as a wonderful fall retreat to Murray Grove.

This year's Holiday Pageant was Charlie Brown's Christmas. The service was dedicated to June Wohlhorn, and we continued the new tradition of a congregational "snowball" fight (using paper).

Thank you to our amazing Nursery/Pre K team: Phylisa St Fleur and Ruby Stackhouse

We are so grateful for our teacher volunteers:

- OWL team: Deirdre Lord, Abby Soule, Peter Engel, Mark Rinzel, Marci Lucia,
- Youth Group Advisors: Bob Bero, Sean Sellers, Kate Caudill, Jules Tramontana
- Elementary Teachers: Eva Rogals Weiss, Jean Shepherd, Rachel Cole, Cyndi Kerr, Rachel Schmidt
- Building Bridges Teachers: Erin Hopkins, Lee Ilan, Eva Pinkley, Peter Engel, Yuri Weber
- Coming of Age Mentors: Justin Parkinson, Abby Soule, Sophia Miller, Sean Sellers, Taylor Murray, James Henry, Tyrone Davis Jr, Patrick Gunn
- Chapel Leader: Wendy Russell
- Children's Choir Director: Bert Eisenstadt

We are really looking forward to next year! We have several fun family events planned.

- October 5-6 RE Family Sleepover!
- November 9-11 Family Retreat at Murray Grove.

We know the Holiday Pageant will have a "snowball" fight- save the date: 12/22 for a creative new take on *The Christmas Carol*

Looking forward to another joy filled year with children, youth and families!

Submitted by, Becky Huffman, Chair Religious Education Council

SHARE THE PLATE (STP)

The STP Committee is charged with soliciting beneficiary nominations from the congregation and selecting qualified organizations to receive half of the offertory collection each month. A directive from the Board of Trustees in 2021 states that at least 5 recipients be systemic change organizations.

Selection of recipients was done by committee members using rank choice voting via email. Spreadsheet nominations were reviewed, and all eligible organizations were considered. Additionally, it was requested by the ministry and board that ANERA become the November recipient to provide aid in Gaza but First U Immigrant Solidarity had already been selected. A donation for the minister's fund was made to Immigrant Solidarity to approximate the potential total of November, and the STP recipient was changed to ANERA after one Sunday. The board directed that December also go to ANERA instead of The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

Goals for 2023-24 year

Maintain 5 members - partially met

Five members began term but one committee member left the congregation in fall 2023, leaving four active members.

Requests for additional members with names given to chair in March 2024 by Leadership Development Committee. Terms are up, these members will continue and the chair will contact 3 potential members.

Julie Elting continued as chair after serving for 3 years as others were unable to step forward. She will be leaving the committee at the end of this church year.

Notify members their nominations were received and chosen - met

Chair had intermittently done this previously

Done consistently by member Eliza Frecon

Increase visibility about nomination process within congregation - met

Nominator's name added to the Order of Service to provide contact for congregation if interested in more information

A statement included in Order of Service and Weekly E-News increasing nominations

Thank yous sent to First U office shared at services as appropriate

UU = UU Mission; SC = Systemic change; DS = Direct Service

Month	Recipient	Type	Amount
May 2023	Emma's Torch	DS	1449.63

June 2023	Release Aging People in Prison	SC	1227.13
July/Aug 2023	My Dog is My Home	SC	1544.15
September 2023	Minister's Discretionary Fund	UU	373.05
October 2023	350 Brooklyn	SC	1484.79
November 2023	Immigrant Solidarity (1 Sunday)	UU	405.50
November 2023 & December 2023	ANERA (includes ½ Christmas Eve)	DS	3387.68
Christmas Eve	UUSC	UU	553.07
January 2024	Roots Ethiopia	DS	1413.72
February 2024	New Yorkers United for Childcare	SC	1563.20
March 2024	Big Creek People In Action/First U Youth Group	UU	2630.06
April 2024	Holdeen India	UU/SC	

Additionally, special collection days:			
Month	Recipient	Type	Amount

Sept 24th (day given by Rev Ana minister's fund month)	Hawaii Community Foundation's Maui Strong fund - Maui fire relief	DS	373.05
Oct 1st (5 Sundays)	High Atlas Foundation for the Moroccan earthquakes	DS	277.56

Submitted by: Julie Elting

Committee Members: Julie Elting (chair), Maxine Schulof, Greg Matloff , & Eliza Frecon,
 Board Liaison: Michele Ascione

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE (SJC)

Emily Hockaday and Ian Holmes worked to launch the Social Justice Committee (SJC) at First Unitarian Brooklyn this spring with its first calendar of programming for the summer and fall of 2024. The SJC at First Unitarian Brooklyn aims to assist the congregation in social justice efforts, including programming and actions. We plan to do this by acting as a coordinating hub for social justice efforts within the congregation. First, a congregant can come to us, and we can work with them to organize an event, project, or team concerning a specific issue or topic. Second, the SJC committee members will also work with the congregation and other bodies within First U to incorporate the SJC's theme for the year, when possible, along with programming throughout the year that is relevant to the theme. The SJC aims to have no set general membership currently. However, the committee will feature members leading programming, events, outreach, and teams.

The following are details describing the preparations made for the SJC:

Two informational meetings were held to discuss starting a Social Justice Committee at First Unitarian.

The first was held virtually over Zoom on February 13th at 6:30 pm.

The second meeting was in person on February 18th at 12:45 pm. We had over seventeen congregation members attend and speak about forming the social justice committee, including what they thought the committee's role should be and what goals they might like to see. Guest speaker John Lytle, from the Montclair UU congregation, attended the in-person meeting to share his experience with social justice programming at his congregation.

The Co-Chairs established the social justice committee's role, purpose, and structure.

The Co-Chairs worked closely with Garnett and Renee to have an official Socialjustice@firstubrooklyn.org account and schedule initial SJC events such as the informational meetings and the first congregational action.

The committee welcomed additional members to assist with programming and is still seeking at least one more. Initial committee members, except the founding Co-Chairs, include Judith Sedaitis, Anita Shepherd, Linda Guidi, and Rev. Meagan Henry.

The following are early details describing the SJC's 2024 programming work:

- The Co-Chairs, in consultation with Garnett, chose **civics** as the SJC's 2024 overall programming theme. The committee will determine future programming themes. Civics was chosen because it is a broad theme that touches on many relevant topics, current events, democracy, and it is a significant election year. Choosing **civics** as the guiding theme allows us to draw from many resources while being a new committee, including New York Unitarian Universalist Justice (NYUUIJ), UU The Vote, and NYC Votes.
- The SJC's first congregational action was decided on and will take place on Sunday, June 16th, as a letter-writing campaign for UU the Vote efforts.
- The SJC met with the NYUUIJ Program Director, Rev. Ashley DeTar Birt, and discussed future collaboration ideas. Ashley was open to presenting at First U before November on the importance of the New York State Equal Rights Amendment.
- The SJC formally nominated the Brooklyn Pride Center to receive the June Share the Plate in line with Pride Month and LGBTQ+ local community support.
- The SJC formally nominated UU The Vote to receive either the July or August Share the Plate as part of our support for civics this year.
- We are exploring whether there is an interfaith social justice coalition in Brooklyn that First U can participate in and collaborate with.

The SJC will meet with its new committee members soon to discuss further programming for the fall and collectively develop a covenant or mission statement for the Social Justice Committee at First Unitarian Brooklyn. We look forward to working with congregants on the social justice topics and issues they are passionate about.

Emily Hockaday, Co-Chair

Submitted by: Ian Holmes, Co-Chair

SUNSET PARK UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION
CONGREGACIÓN UNITARIA UNIVERSALISTA DE SUNSET PARK

The Sunset Park Unitarian Universalist Congregation has now been operating for over a year since the first service was held on February 5, 2023 in the charming chapel of Sunset

Park's Trinity Lutheran Church. Sunday evening services have continued weekly since then during the program year (October-May). This year congregants decided to change the order of the gatherings, and now they begin with a communal dinner followed by a UU service. This schedule has worked much better for families with small children.

Currently there are over 60 individuals receiving the weekly e-newsletter, and regular attendance is 4-6 adults and 2-3 children. One of the hopes for this congregation was that it would be bilingual – Spanish and English. Although a professional translator helps to make some of the service bilingual, so far there have been few Spanish-speaking attendees.

First Unitarian continues to provide substantial support for this new congregation. Payments for rent, musicians, translator, supplies, and food are handled by the First U office (for a fee). Donors cover all expenses. First U interns, Tasha Brownfield and Rachel Schmitt, have both preached at Sunset Park UU as have seminarians Tyrone Davis, Jr. and Michael DeSantis. In addition, several of First Unitarian's lay worship leaders have delivered their homilies a second time at Sunset Park. Rev. Ana has made her weekly pastoral prayer available and Religious Educators Meagan Henry, Becky Huffman, and Michele Ascione provide guidance on wisdom stories. First U choir members Spencer Brill, Sean Hastings, Elena Karpoff, and Dennis Wees have provided music for services, including the same welcome song as First U, which Sunset Park sings once in Spanish and once in English each week.

Indoor services will end after Memorial Day and congregants will be invited to meet for Sunday evening picnics in the park over the summer. Indoor worship services will resume in late September or October. Stay tuned to see how the congregation develops. And of course, everyone from First U is invited to visit and join us for dinner and the service.

Many thanks to the Board of Trustees for their support and to Garnett Losak and Wendy Russell for all their ideas and ongoing help.

Submitted by, Lee Pardee. Organizer of Sunset Park Unitarian Universalist Congregation

VISTA HILL

Vista Hill, First Unitarian's burial site in Green-Wood cemetery holds the remains of First Unitarian members dating from 1845 to the present. Our congregation's deacons, together with our office staff, administer the assignment of graves to members.

Vista Hill is a beautiful site within Green-Wood with a large cherry tree at the center as well as a lovely azalea bush. Two yew bushes mark the entrance.

Beloved members who have been buried there in recent years include:

- 2022, Dale Addington
- 2020, Olive Hoogenboom, Rev. Hope Johnson
- 2019, Larry Calia

Anyone interested in reserving a grave site should read the [congregation's policy](#) on our website and contact Deacon [Lee Pardee](#).

Submitted by, Lee Pardee, Vista Hill Coordinator

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE

The FUUB Women's Leadership Alliance continues to be, primarily, a grant-making organization with members taking on programmatic initiatives. We hope to sustain the most valued, and valuable, aspects of the organization and be responsible stewards of the endowment. Maggie Norris continued her term as Member-at-Large while Janna Amelkin and Judy Dederick also joined the WLA Executive Board as Members-at-Large as did Vicki Antonini as Secretary. Julie, Nancy, Lisa, and Vicki were all elected at our June 2023 annual meeting and will be serving a two-year term. Judy will be serving a two-year term, Janna may need to step off the committee due to her relocation. Maggie is completing her two-year term in June of 2024 and will be rotating off the WLA Executive Board. We are grateful for their service and expertise.

Achievements:

1. Organizational
 - a. Continued emphasis on providing programmatic grants for events and activities that are run by, and for, WLA and FUUB members
 - b. Continued community and advocacy grants
 - c. Maintained structured request process and forms for leadership development and program grants
 - d. Nominated 3 women for the Clara Barton Award using a structured tracking process
 - e. Efficient use of Google folders that provides transparent, shared access to organized files
 - f. Clarified types of grants available: Leadership, Advocacy, Programming, Campobasso
 - g. Membership dues voluntary and directed to Campobasso fund

2. Financial
 - a. Remained below the 'prudent draw' of 4% of the endowment

- b. Met request by FUUB Board of Trustees to increase our share of administration fees
- c. Subsidize RE Coordination salary (instead of RE Assistant)
- d. Provided grants for six FUUB GA delegates for June 2024
- e. Funded 3 Clara Barton awards
- f. Financed events including Spring Social Luncheon and First Fridays
- g. UUWF contribution
- h. Provided grants as follows:

Leadership: Women in Leadership Cornell Certificate subsidized, travel stipend for Intern Minister, Certified Sex Educator subsidized tuition

Programming: First Fridays, Rev. Meagan’s Ordination, Julie McKinney Tree dedication Plaque

Advocacy: New Yorkers United for Childcare (also hosted information session), RIP Medical Debt

3/21/24	Plan FY 23-24 (needs to be updated)	Actual	% of budget
TOTAL EXPENSE	\$ 14,500.00	\$20,164	62%
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 14,500.00	\$25,516	96%

3. Other: Hosted Virtual Blood Drive

Julie Elting President; Nancy Witherell Vice President

Lisa Pacenza Treasurer; Vicki Antonini Secretary; Maggie Norris Member-at-Large; Janna Amelkin Member-at-Large; Judy Dederick Member-at-Large

Report completed by Vicki Antonini

YOUNG ADULT MINISTRIES (YAM)

This year, young adults continue to have a strong presence at First Unitarian. Several longtime UUs (~6) joined our congregation, noting that they chose Brooklyn out of other congregations in the area because our young adult group is active and strongly supported by First U. We currently host three monthly events geared towards young adults:

- a social brunch at 12:45pm the first Sunday of each month.
- an organizing meeting held 12:45-2:00 every second Sunday.
- a spirituality discussion at 12:45-2:00 every third Sunday.

This is the first year the young adults have had a monthly organizing meeting, and the second year there has been a spirituality discussion (topics included: liturgy, play, transforming anger, destiny/fatalism, care). We also hosted a hiking trip which had 13 attendees, a games night with 5 attendees, and a movie night with 8 attendees. Some of our young adults attended CER (Central East Region) events such as a social conference in Binghamton in January, and the annual Unirondack Young Adult weekend in May. In November, the Young Adults also hosted a congregational brunch in the undercroft at First U.

The organizing body is holding ongoing discussions about how we want our group to communicate. In addition to the YAM Newsletter and our WhatsApp group, we added a Discord server to our platforms. This new platform was added to make space for more watercooler-type discussion and reflection in our group, and to allow for more concrete, searchable dwellings for important documents and announcements (this is much harder in WhatsApp as new members cannot see previous messages). We also hope to utilize Discord's onboarding mechanisms to ensure people are agreeing to abide by our covenant within the space.

As our group billowed at the start of the season, with new people longing for more robust programming (social events, activism, and worship services), our group began experimenting with defining leadership roles in the group, as well as creating a regular working group meeting time, to plan events and address concerns within our group. So far we have created the co-chair role, which was initially held by three active and seasoned members of the group (Michael DeSantis, Skylar, and Taylor—with Elena added a few months later), to act as point people for new members, communicate important events with the group (mainly by making a newsletter), run the working group meetings, and handle communication with the congregational leadership and other committees. Recently, we have added a social chair role, held by Robbie. One of the main concerns of creating this new structure is a loss of spontaneity and bottom-up initiatives/events from our cohort, which we want to continue to affirm. We hope to continue refining our new roles and

defining new ones as needs arise, as well as clarifying the purpose of our group, and creating a solid foundation that will cultivate long-term membership while factoring in the perennial challenge of high turnover.

We give thanks to our current co-chairs, Taylor Murray, Elena Karpoff, Michael DeSantis and Skylar Salerno, for their leadership this year. We also give thanks to Abē Levine for his leadership in coordinating the hike as well as the letter to the board on behalf of our group, re: Israel/Palestine. We also give thanks to Robbie Economou for his work as our new social chair and for connecting us to larger organizations of young adult UUs.

Submitted by, Taylor Murray

Addenda

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO HAS SUPPORTED THE
JULIE MCKINNEY MUSIC FUND IN FY2023-2024

Sponsor \$500 and above

Bill Wasik & Monica Murphy
Connie Newsom
Maia Rosal & Seth Rosenthal
Maxine Schaffer & Sharon Fay

Friend \$250-\$499

Dirk & Julie Elting
Maggie Norris
Mark & Mandy Rinzel
Wanda Lucibello & Art Hall
David Yin
Georgia Larson
Laura Kriska & Patrick Gunn
Sarah Karstaedt

Donor \$100-\$249

Andrea & Jay Sheth
Carolyn Ellis & Lake Wise
Christine Lloyd
Kathy Ivans & Bob Bero
Michele Weisman & Paul Freitag
Bruce & Coco Wilde
Chris & Danny DiGiacomo-Singh
Garnett Losak
Sarah Seehafer
Vicki Antonini
Barbara Kennedy

Donor \$100-\$249

Barbara Ratzlaff
Becky Huffman & Andrew Bongiorno
Bert Eisenstadt & Laurel Lesio-
Eisenstadt
Colleen & Dwight Olson
Dawn Elane Reed
Edwin Lord
Elizabeth Davis
Hugh Stamper
Judy Dederick
Lauren Webb & Tommy Quesenbery
Lee Pardee
Nancy Wolf
Tom Check & Nancy Witherell

Contributor Up to \$99

Florence Maynard
Jan Thompson & Steffi Heintzeler
Julia Pane
Rita & Derek Pearl
Janna Amelkin
JAE Walsh
Michele Ascione
Lee Ilan & Peter Engel
Wendy Russell
Kate Hessel & Lee Mazur
Ken & Leslie McQueen

SENIOR MINISTER SEARCH TIMELINE

- February 2025: Board appoints special nominating committee to nominate members for Senior Minister search committee.
- February/March 2025: The special nominating committee begins process of creating search committee
- May 2025: Senior Minister Search Committee elected by Congregation at annual meeting
- June-November 2025: Search committee convenes and begins work surveying and meeting with members of the congregation
- January 2026: Search Committee begins evaluating candidates
- May 2026: Minister is chosen by search committee.
- May 2026: Candidating week and call (vote by Congregation)
- Aug. 1, 2026: New Settled Minister begins

CLERGY AND STAFF

Program Staff

- Rev. Ana Levy-Lyons, Senior Minister
- Rev. Meagan Henry, Assistant Minister, Religious Education & Pastoral Care
- Garnett Losak, Director of Congregational Life
- Adam Podd, Director of Music

Administrative Staff

- Wendy Russell, Office Manager, Bookkeeper, Religious Education Assistant

Facilities Staff

- Renee Strickland, Director of Building Operations and Events
- Christopher Johnson, Director of Facilities
- Bobby Blackman, Custodian

Music Staff

- Candice Helfand-Rogers, Section Leader
- Kiena Williams, Section Leader
- Brandon Hornsby-Selvin, Section Leader
- Dennis Wees, Section Leader

Religious Education Staff

- Ruby Stackhouse, Nursery/Toddler Room
- Phylisa St. Fleur, Pre-Kindergarten Lead Teacher