

FIRST UNITARIAN CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY IN BROOKLYN

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SOCIETY FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025



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CLERGY REPORTS

REV. MICAH C. MA, INTERIM SENIOR MINISTER

“What a Year!”

Whew...it's been quite a year since I was hired to be your interim senior minister here at the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn. In Fall of 2024 the congregation was still reeling from the sudden departure of a largely beloved senior minister, only to be hit with the results of the Presidential Election. This led to a somewhat depressed feeling winter, as cold temperatures exacerbated feelings of disappointment and confusion at the political situation.

Since then, however, the congregation has come out swinging. The building is busier than it has been in a long time, or so I'm informed, as the congregation has hosted a variety of events reaching out to the community. Justice and outreach is clearly on the congregation's mind, as we tackle everything from hosting a Transylvania Youth Choir to watering city trees to Palestinian liberation to antisemitism to trans rights. We're pushing back against a dominant narrative of cruelty and violence with one of compassion and love.

Staff

I cannot speak highly enough of the staff here at First Unitarian. Every staff person is not only highly competent, but also a pleasure to work with!

This congregation is also highly unusual in having a high staff-to-membership ratio. A 250-member congregation is typically not able to sustain so much staffing. In fact, it would be much more typical for a 250-member congregation to have one full-time minister and maybe 3-4 other part-time staff (administrator, music director, DRE, sexton; not necessarily in that order). This congregation is fortunate to have a lot of revenue from rentals, which results in a generous operating budget. (There are congregations twice as large as this one that have half the operating budget!) The high volume of rentals—in a building that is well over a hundred years old—turns right around and necessitates highly trained staff to maintain and secure the building.

That said, the shadow side of having such generous staffing is that the congregation may assume that things are fine because, you know, we have so many staff and surely they're taking care of it. In reality, there is a very “scrappy” sort of feeling behind the scenes, as staff work long hours and take on additional duties in order to keep things feeling smoothly, with a handful of super-volunteers who seem to spend more time at the church

than at home. None of this may be evident to the casual attendee, as the view from the pews is of flawless worship services in a magnificent historic building—surely everything is fine!

The Five Interim Tasks

There are five interim tasks that are meant to be executed during a transitional period such as the one that we're in. The bulk of my report will be assessing where we are on these tasks.

History

This congregation, overall, has a very solid grasp—and a lot of interest in—their own history. Longtime member (now deceased) Olive Hoogenboom actually authored a book on the subject that covered the first 150 years of the congregation's history, and another longtime member, Nancy Wolf, authored an update that covered the next 25 years. While many members are unaware of the book's existence, a fair number of members own a copy of the book and bring up historical tidbits in casual conversation. The congregation has many longstanding traditions, some of which go back over a hundred years, from the Davol Bibles to Hunger Communion to UniFair. Every worship service begins with the "Song of Hope," a doxology that may in fact date back to the congregation's founding years. The history project spearheaded by the Transition Team (and digitized by Transition Team member Peggy Schubert!) generated much interest and engagement.

The 200th anniversary of the congregation's founding will be coming up soon, in 2033...I wonder what the congregation will do? Who will the congregation be, in 2033?

Identity

This one I remain curious about, as I believe this to be the source of the congregation's most recent conflicts—and possibly *every* conflict during this congregation's rather long and storied history. It is, in fact, the same identity crisis we are going through as a denomination, and as a nation. Who are we? Are we justice-seekers? Are we bridge-builders? Are we pluralistic? What do any of these words mean? Are these terms mutually exclusive? This congregation is incredibly diverse, with many different cultures and generations represented. And, at the same time, the congregation is largely white, and largely middle to upper middle class. None of this is unusual in Unitarian Universalism, though perhaps it is unusual in New York City.

When I've asked people what they believe the mission of First U to be, virtually no one mentioned the current mission statement. I'm not sure many people even know that the congregation has one. Rather, people will say something along the lines that First U exists to be a pluralistic, multigenerational community of spiritual seekers

striving to intentionally live out their values in the world. If that is the case, then how are we living into that mission?

There's nothing wrong with being who we are...and, do we know who that is? How large is our umbrella? How large do we want it to be?

Connection

First U flings its doors open wide! This congregation is well known in the local area for opening its doors to anyone who needs it, whether that's activist groups seeking meeting space, a Transylvania Youth Choir touring the eastern seaboard for the first time in 22 years, or indie choir concerts.

Despite there being several UU congregations in the area, ties to other congregations are relatively weak and are generally clergy-driven. The Manhattan congregations never want to come to Brooklyn, and Brooklyn resents always having to go to Manhattan for everything. And forget going all the way out to Staten Island or Long Island! And, in a congregation with so much going on, it's easy to accidentally self-isolate, as just maintaining our own program requires a great deal of effort.

This is not to say that First U is an island unto itself. There is a robust OWL program spanning several age groups that attracts engagement from outside the congregation; we don't struggle to send a full slate of delegates to General Assembly; a handful of congregants are involved with the statewide justice network (NY UUs for Justice); and there has been collaboration with other congregations on worship services, choir concerts, and other programming. These ties can be strengthened in the years to come, as well as our connection to the Unitarian Universalist Association.

In bygone years, when the UUA organized congregations into Districts, this congregation may have enjoyed closer ties to the other NY Metro-area congregations. Since the UUA structure has moved into regions, "the UUA" now feels more distant and, perhaps, less relevant to this congregation. Ohio is very far away from NYC, both geographically and culturally.

Leadership

This past year has seen a real blossoming in leadership, as several groups in the congregation have risen up to seize the day. BUUJME has organized several successful events, as has the new Social Justice committee, and the Men's Group is ready to go as well. Our Board of Trustees will have three young adults on it next year—tell that to any other congregation and they will fall over in surprise!

This is actually one way in which we can strengthen our ties to the UUA, by taking more advantage of programs such as [LeaderLab](#). Congregants can meet other UUs and receive leadership training that will stand them in good stead in life, not just in the congregation.

That said, being in a position of leadership in this congregation is overall not seen as a burden, and the congregation is grateful to the Board and the staff for their service. Former Board Presidents don't burn out and drift away; indeed, a few of them return to serve on the Board again in a time of need, such as this past year when a Board member had to resign their term early. People gladly volunteered for a role on the Transition Team and the special Nominating Committee to elect the Search Committee.

Vision

I have really struggled with this over the course of the last nine months. I'm not sure what this congregation wants. It's rare that I meet a congregation that doesn't *want* something, whether it's to grow in size/numbers; become more multigenerational; become more multicultural. The sense I get from this congregation is: "We'd like for things to continue as they are." (And what is that like? What does that mean?) And, sometimes: "We don't want to fight." (Does this contradict the previous statement?)

I'll do some more digging into this over the course of the next year...maybe I just haven't been asking the right questions. Y'all have to want *something*...right?

Grief

This is the unspoken "sixth" task of the interim period: processing grief.

Rev. Ana Levy-Lyons was here for twelve years, which is a fairly long time in the lifespan of a congregation. And yet, I hear little about her from the congregation. Of course people answer my questions about her, but there's not much in the way of spontaneous sharing. There has been curiously little mourning. She was the only minister many of the people here knew; all of the current staff were hired under her auspices; she's the reason the worship services are shaped the way that they are. Maybe people are just too nice to talk about the previous minister in front of me...or is there something else going on? Are people afraid to talk about Rev. Ana, for some reason? Have we really moved on?

Taking Our Time

The congregation has, I think, ultimately made the wise decision to take our time with the transition and not rush into ministerial search. This year was difficult for many reasons, not the least of which is simply The State

of the World These Days. People are here seeking healing and comfort and some semblance of stability. I want to be sensitive to that, even as we engage in the difficult work of healing, reconciliation, and charting our common course forward. This work will bring up a lot of feelings, and people may be shocked at having different points of view. This is okay. *Conflict is an opportunity to deepen relationships.* We avoid overt conflict by staying on the surface, and in doing so we also rob ourselves of the potential for more authentic, trusting relationships.

And isn't that what community is all about?

REV. MEAGAN HENRY, ASSISTANT MINISTER OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND PASTORAL CARE

My 12th year serving the First Unitarian Brooklyn community has been a year of joy and community building, mixed with uncertainty and grief due to national and world events. The great news is that we have made it through one program year of interim ministry, and it feels like we are processing the transition in a healthy way. The congregation is busier than ever, with all kinds of activities for spiritual exploration and social justice. This is my second full year serving as your Assistant Minister of Religious Education and Pastoral Care, and I feel settled into the role, and I'm inspired to try some new things next year. One thing I would like to work on next year is offering more spiritual exploration programming for adults.

Spring/Summer 2024

Last spring and early summer, I brought in a specialist, Rev. Paul Langston-Daley, to facilitate listening circles with our congregation after the departure of our Senior Minister. It was a tender time and many of our members were feeling grief and anxiety. Rev. Langston-Daley facilitated three sessions and taught a session for facilitators. We ended up with over 15 trained facilitators and we continued to offer listening circles into the fall.

After the end of the program year, I accompanied our High School Youth group on their eighth annual service-learning journey to West Virginia from June 28 through July 5 with seven teens and my trip co-leader, Sean Sellers. I worked with Garnett to coordinate our lay-led summer services. Wendy, Garnett, and I split up summer Sundays so that at least one of us would be present for each service. Over the summer, I also utilized study leave time to attend the Faith Development Week conference on Star Island where I attended a wonderful workshop on creating non-traditional, community-based worship. At the end of that conference, I was invited to join the planning team for this year's conference, and I've been meeting and planning with the team all year. At

the end of the summer, I traveled to Italy to attend the wedding of a young adult who grew up in this congregation.

Caring Ministry / Pastoral Care

Our Caring Ministry is growing by leaps and bounds! The committee meets monthly and makes calls, writes cards, goes on visits, provides rides and serves as the connective tissue between our congregants who are able to offer assistance and comfort to our congregants in need. This was my second year holding the Pastoral Care / Caring Ministry portfolio which means that I attended the meetings led by the committee chair, Michelle Kuchuk and facilitated communication between congregants, the committee, and the staff and offered some one-to-one pastoral care. The Caring Ministry also coordinates the Lay Chapel Ministry volunteers, organized by the committee chair, Michelle. We currently have two lay Chapel Ministers and we are hoping to recruit and train a few more for the coming year.

First Unitarian's Medical Debt Forgiveness Project

This year I supported a new program adjacent to the Caring Ministry and part of our social justice work: First Unitarian's Medical Debt Forgiveness Project. This is a project led by Paula Shirk who worked with concerned members of our congregation to initiate it in collaboration with the UNDUE Medical Debt organization to raise funds for the forgiveness of medical debt. The Women's Leadership Association and the congregation collectively raised \$5,000, resulting in the forgiveness of a staggering \$500,000! Our project is now entering its next phase. Outreach and implementation will involve faith-based organizations in the neighborhood and Unitarian organizations in New York City. We have developed working relationships with six elected officials who commend us for our efforts and can offer significant resources, and we are collaborating directly with senior management from UNDUE. This project shows that the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn is gaining increasing visibility among interfaith clergy and politicians due to its initiative. First U has fostered a sense of agency and is leading the way in driving change during this political crisis.

Sunday Worship

I serve on the worship planning team and preach approximately once a month. In addition to occasional preaching, I deliver the Wisdom Story each Sunday and make arrangements for someone to tell the story if I am not available.

Below is a list of the services I led and sermons I preached this year:

- September 29: Climate Revival - Radical Imagination

- November 3: All Saints Service - Remembering Our Ancestors
- November 24: Hunger Communion - Quiet Generosity
- December: 22: All Ages Children's Pageant - A Brooklyn Carol - This year's Holiday Pageant was an original musical written by RJ Carey, with music from Wendy Russell and Yuri Weber, and directed by Becky Huffman.
- December 24: Family Christmas Eve Service
- January 26: Reproductive Justice - We Are the Ones
- February 23: Antidote To Despair
- May 11: Mother's Day- The Impossibility of Motherhood

Vespers

Vespers are evening candlelight worship services in the McKinney Chapel consisting of poetry, singing, prayer, and meditation. I lead these services with our Director of Music, Adam Podd and occasional guest musicians on third Thursdays this year in October, November, January, February, March, and May.

Children and Youth 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.

I'm incredibly proud of our children and youth religious education program! We have 81 children and youth registered this year, with our largest High School Youth Group (16 teens, 9th-12 grades) in my time at First Unitarian. Our community held together throughout the covid-19 pandemic, and now we are stronger and closer than ever. We regularly offer two levels of Elementary Our Whole Lives (OWL) and Middle School OWL on a rotating basis and Coming of Age on alternating years. We offer monthly multi-age Children's Chapels and our Children's Choir meets with their director, Bert Eisenstadt, on most Sundays.

Children's Chapels were held on the first Sunday of each month this year and serve children in 1st through 6th grades. Several volunteers help plan and offer the chapels. This year's themes were, Beginning the RE Year, Voting Rights, Caring for the Sick and Elders of our Community, New Year Letter Writing, Lunar New Year, Ramadan, Mother's Day.

Multigenerational Worship Services occur when all ages attend the Sunday service together. We offered six of these services this year: Water Communion, Hunger Communion, Holiday Pageant, Christmas Eve Family Service, Easter, Flower Communion

Religious Education Council Members

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

Religious Education Staff:

- Religious Education Assistant: Wendy Russell
- Youth Ministry Coordinator: Rachel Schmitt
- Children's Choir Director: Bert Eisenstadt
- Nursery/Toddler Room Lead: Ruby Stackhouse
- Pre-Kindergarten Lead Teacher: Phylisa St. Fleur
- Nursery & Pre-K Assistants: Prudence Parkinson (11th grade), Olive Benesh (10th Grade)

2024-2025 Religious Education Volunteer Teachers:

- K/1 grades - UU Values: Rachel Michael, Eva Rogals-Weiss
- 2/3 grades - UU Values: Darby Foreman, Kelly Schaffer
- 4/5/6 grades - Amazing Grace: Mark Rinzel, Robbie Economou
- 7/8 grades - Middle School Heeding the Call (Fall) Our Whole Lives (Winter/Spring): Jessamyn Lockard, Taylor Lampe, Taylor Murray, Kate Caudill
- 9/10/11/12 grades - Youth Group: Sean Sellers, Bob Bero, Jules Tramontana

Family Ministry

Each year, we offer multiple avenues 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 with our High School Youth Group included and several winter Games Nights in the Undercroft on Saturday evenings. In addition to the weekly “RE E-News,” we have an active What’s App “Community” with multiple sub-groups: Announcements, First U Families Connect, OWL Middle School Families, FUUB Middle School, Game Night 1st UU Brooklyn, Murray Grove Family Retreat. 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.

Public and Associational Ministry

- Attended the monthly luncheons for the Brooklyn Heights Interfaith Clergy Association. Through this connection, I was invited to speak at the September 11th Commemorative Service on the Brooklyn Promenade.
- Attended the Metro New York Unitarian Universalist Clergy monthly breakfast meetings.
- I represented First Unitarian at the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Two years ago, I was elected to serve on the Executive Board of the Metro NY Liberal Religious Educator’s (LREDA) Chapter. As part of my duties on the Board, I helped coordinate a Fall Professional Day with guest speaker Paula Cole Jones for the Metro NY UU Liberal Religious Educator’s Association (LREDA), Ministers Association (UUMA), UU Membership Professionals and Administrators (UUAMP), Religious Education staff, and musicians. For the second year, I’ve organized a June retreat and annual meeting for the LREDA chapter. I finish up my service on this team at the end of June.

This spring I joined a witness delegation of activists and organizers in Palestine with the Sabeel organization. Sabeel is a Palestinian Christian organization based in Jerusalem. I was invited through a connection I made when I hosted a clergy luncheon for Rev. Munther Isaac, the author and minister of the Lutheran Church of Bethlehem. Rev. Isaac was in New York City on a speaking tour and at the luncheon he invited me to come visit. I was honored to receive the invitation to join the delegation this spring. I joined six others as we met theologians, activists, and organizers in Jerusalem and the West Bank cities of Jericho, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. My trip was co-sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. I have been asked to return and to lead a delegation of Unitarian Universalist clergy and seminarians next year.

STAFF REPORTS

GARNETT LOSAK, DIRECTOR OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

This will be my final annual report to the congregation as I will be concluding my time on staff at the end of the calendar year. These past 12 years have been the most rewarding of my professional life. I hope that my legacy will be one of service to our congregation and to Unitarian Universalism.

Membership

We welcomed 24 new members this year. As of this writing, our membership total is 266, a decrease of 15 from this time last year. This is to be expected in a transition year.

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 (full year)	2023-24 (as of 5/18/25)
*RE Registration	79	82
Visitors	279	280
Sunday Attendance	184	190
Average Zoom attendance	n/a	20
Stewardship	\$301,300	\$272,700***
New Members	29	24

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

**22-23 is adjusted from what was reported in the 2024 Annual Report.

***Stewardship is ongoing and is expected to overtake the current year final. See more in stewardship later in my report.

Worship

While I participate in worship planning, other than “doing” the announcements in the worship service, my responsibilities are mostly behind the scenes – insuring that supplies for special services are available, coordinating with the welcome team when there are special instructions, helping with logistics, etc. Very special thanks to office volunteers, Lee Pardee and Thomas Richards, who weekly replace candles and welcome cards and straighten hymnals.

I am so grateful to the addition of ministerial intern, Yvonne Garrett, as our regular on-line host. Yvonne has helped to build a beautiful on-line community for our members and friends who are unable to attend services in person due to illness, disability, or distance. Yvonne also provides us with an extremely useful weekly attendance and pastoral report.

Connections Team (see more in the Connection Team Report)

I am grateful for the hard work and dedication of the Connections Committee, Lauren Dohr, Charlotte Hoogenboom (Co-Chair), Rachel Stark, Eleanor Traubman, Luke Messina (Co-Chair), Colleen Olson, Brian Elig, Maxine Schulof, Charles Lynch, and Cara Haft (Board Liaison)

I am especially proud of two initiatives this year.

Men's Group – Something surprising happened this year. Men, whether single or coupled, started to visit First Unitarian in surprising numbers. This prompted the committee to move quickly on the establishment of a men's group. A special thank you goes to Charles Lynch for helping to make this happen in record time. The group now meets regularly on the fourth Sunday of the month following worship and on the first Monday of the month in the evening. Approximately 20 men are attending with regularity and they have chosen to continue meeting through the summer!

Queer Spirituality Group – Spearheaded by Luke Messina, this group will have met three times this spring on the first Sunday of the month. See more in the connections committee 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 17, 2024: 7 new members
- February 9, 2025: 9 new members (plus one on February 26th)

- May 4, 2025: 7 new members (plus 2 on May 11th)
- One person signed the membership book on August 18, 2024

Our newest members range in age from 25 to 81 with 10 (42%) under the age of 30 and 17 (71%) under the age of 40.

Recognizing Members Reaching Milestone Anniversaries

The following people are celebrating milestone anniversaries. We are rethinking how we honor our long-term members this year. These folks will be honored at the annual meeting on May 18th.

40 Years

Derek Adler

Bob Bero

Kathy Ivans

Cyndi Kerr

25 Years

Robert Brackbill

10 Years

Alexis DePietro

Eleanor Traubman

Gloria Howard

Jessica Sasko

Pathways to Membership

I led two sessions of Pathways this year, the first in January and a second in April/May. This 6-hour program which uses James Luther Adams' essay "The Five Smooth Stones of Liberalism" as a base curriculum, is designed to provide new members and prospective members with a grounding in UU theology and history as well as our congregation's programs, governance, and finances. 10 people participated the program this year.

Meals and Other Events

- June Retreat: This was a fun and productive half day event of calendaring, brainstorming and lunch held in the Library
- In-Gathering salad bar luncheon following worship (Thank you, especially to Rachel Stark for her kitchen support)
- Movie night: *Will & Harper* a documentary about best friends after one transitions. Luke Messina led a discussion following the screening.

Other Membership Related Activities

- Summer Picnics on the Patio: one in July and one in August. Casual brown bag dinners for fellowship and conversation.
- First Sunday Newcomer Orientations, year-round

Young Adult Ministry (YAM)

While technically this group fall under the auspices of the Connections Committee, in reality the group is completely independent and self-actualized. The YAMs are led by a leadership team: Elena Karpoff, Robbie Economou, Charlotte Hoogenboom, and Taylor Murray. They meet twice monthly, once for brunch and once for a spiritual discussion. They also plan occasional outings. Last summer they planned a trip to Unirondack for the young adult weekend. Plans are under way for that event again this summer.

Communications

Website

It seems unlikely that we will have a new website by the end of this fiscal year, but significant work has been completed to make this happen. Thanks to Renee Strickland for finding a web designer with experience working with faith communities. Renee and I worked together on an extensive questionnaire that has been moved up the chain. With luck we will launch a new website in the coming year.

Subscriber Data

- Facebook Subscribers: 2,506
- Instagram Followers: 753
- YouTube (choir videos, managed by Adam Podd): 816
- YouTube Live (worship livestream, managed by tech team): 94
- E-News:
 - Weekly E-News: 1753
 - Weekly Family E-News (managed by Wendy Russell): 251
 - The Scoop, Monthly on or about the 15th of the month: 243
- Google Business: Google provides a range of analytics. From January 25 through May 25, Google reports 6,000+ interactions.

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.

Special Events

I provided additional material support to the following events this year

- **UU The Vote Letter Writing Campaign (September 22, 2024)** supported the Social Justice Committee (see more in the SJC report)
- **Drag Out The Vote** (November 1, 2024), supported the Social Justice Committee in all aspects of organizing this event (see more in the SJC report)
- **Emma’s Revolution Concert** (November 8, 2024). Coordinated with the performers and First U staff, arranged for ticket sales, publicity, hosted the performers in my home and additional miscellaneous activities.
- **Martin Luther King Day of Service** (January 19, 2025) – Publicity, shopped prepared and served lunch (baked potato bar!!), other general support
- **Transylvania Youth Choir Concert (April 22, 2025)** – Shopped and prepared a community meal, hosted 4 members of the choir at my home, helped with publicity
- **Spring Auction (April 29, 2025)** – created publicity, shopped for dinner ingredients, general support as needed (see more in the auction report)

Summer Worship

Rev. Meagan Henry and I worked together to organize a great series of summer worship services and in spite of the anxiety surrounding Rev. Ana’s departure only a few weeks before the summer season began, we averaged 69 attendees equal to that of the previous summer (average does not include Juneteenth). Once again, many of the services were led by new members and young adult members. Allie Lewis served as music director supported by Dennis Wees. We invited our congregation to join the Sunday worship service from the General Assembly on June 23rd to give our custodial and building staff a day

6/30	Parrish Turner & Friends	Pride
7/7	Josh Davidoff	Sufjan Stevens & Indie Theology
7/14	Candice Helfand-Rogers	Dispatches from a Coconut Tree
7/21	Mavis Ilan Engel	How Memes Describe Life
7/28	Ginny Fahs	Sparkling Curiosity & Cultivating a “Curious Mind”
8/4	Robert Brackbill	Modern Transcendentalism

8/11	Octavia Findley	The First Harvest as Spiritual Reservation
8/18	Mark Weiss	A.I. and the UU principal of The Interconnectedness of All Living Things
8/25	Kate Caudill	There's a Crack in Everything, That's How the Light Gets In
9/1	Jayesh Sheth	The Spiritual Transformation of Becoming a Parent

Rev. Micah is leading the effort to recruit and support this year's summer worship leaders.

Stewardship and Fundraising

Stewardship

Our Stewardship theme this year was *A Community of Miracles*. The campaign launched on March 2nd with a sermon of the same name by Rev. Micah.

A letter from Rev. Micah including an informational brochure were mailed to all members and friends of the congregation the week before the launch.

Several years ago, we launched an on-line stewardship form and two years ago, we added a QR Code for easy access. The QR code is in the brochure and posted in several places in the Undercroft. While some (mostly older) folks still prefer a paper form, 90% of respondents prefer to declare their pledges electronically.

This year, we revised a stewardship program from many years previous. The team recruited several families to host events in their homes over the 6 weeks of the campaign. Events included cocktail parties, dinners, and sing-alongs. During the first two weeks of the campaign, members and friends were invited to sign-up for events which took place over a 4 week period.

The response to this year's campaign is somewhat improved from last year. As of this writing one year ago we had \$245,000 in pledge commitments. This year's number is \$268,000 including \$22,000 in new pledges. Returning pledges are up 6% so far this year. The response is encouraging but, many of our members are still reluctant to complete pledge forms during the campaign. As a result, a significant amount of staff and volunteer energy is spent on follow up.

Stewardship and financial responsibility is a growing edge for our congregation and one that I hope new leadership will take up in the coming years.

Thank you to our dedicated stewardship team: Lee Pardee, Charlotte Hoogenboom, Michael Dore, Spencer Brill, Maxine Schulof and Mark Weiss (Board Liaison)

Unifair

UniFair was a huge success this year in large part due to the completely competent and stressfree leadership of Amanda Nietzel and Mariasara Alcott.

The year's event grossed \$11,400 with \$2,100 in expenses for a net of \$9,300 against a budget of \$11,000 in income and \$3,000 in expenses.

As always, we couldn't have Unifair without the support of the many volunteers who helped to sort, sell, set-up, clean-up, cook, and donate. If this is you, thank you, thank you, thank you!

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 creating membership sign-in lists, ensuring all supplies are available, announcements of meetings as required by the by-laws)

Leadership Development Committee – Attended meetings, advised on nominees for leadership positions, additional support as needed

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)

Social Justice Committee - Supported programming as needed

Finance Committee – Submitted congregational life budget for 2025-26 and monitored expenses on current year CL budget.

Public Ministry

- Although my term on the board of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Membership Professionals (UUAMP) is over, I continue to serve that amazing and supportive organization as a member. I plan to

spend time in whatever way needed at this year's general assembly and annual UUAMP professional learning day.

- Our former intern, Rev. Tasha Brownfield, invited to me to deliver the charge to the congregation and minister at her/their ordination/installation in Smithton, Pennsylvania on March 23rd
- I led worship at the UU Fellowship of Plattsburgh on Sunday, April 13th. The topic was *Revelation is Continuous*. The congregation was invited to create God timelines where they considered what God meant to them at different stages of their lives. Afterward they broke into small groups to share their timelines
- I co-led a 6-part discussion group for the Unitarian Universalist Association of Membership Professionals on Tending Congregational Life
- I am working with Sean Sellers and the Connections Team to organize this year's participation in the Brooklyn Pride Twilight March on Saturday June 14th
- Lee Pardee invited me to lead worship at the Sunset Park congregation on February 18th. This was a trial run for my Plattsburgh trip and I was grateful for the chance to practice with a friendly group

I'm Not Done Yet

While I will be wrapping up my time at First Unitarian over the next few months, there is still work to be done. This summer the Connections Committee will again host two picnics on the patio and I have committed to facilitating a 6-8 session weekly chalice circle. Next fall I will organize the first new member Sunday of the year and I hope to lead one Pathways program with a team of folks who are willing and able to take over for me in the coming years.

Nothing Gets Done Alone

In re-reading this report for the last time, it occurs to me that everything I report here is accomplished as part of a team. While leadership is one key to getting things done, every task, every program, every event has multiple, maybe many people working quietly (or loudly) to make it happen. Thank you to all the collaborators, setter-uppers, taker-downers, kitchen helpers, last minute "is there anything you need me to do-ers". Any successes that I report in this and all my Annual Reports are yours!

Conclusion

This will be an emotional few months for me. While it is my decision to leave my staff position at First Unitarian at this time, it is not without a certain amount of sadness. I have always endeavored to consider the health and well-being of the congregation first. That is the role we all take on whether professional or


volunteer. The time is right for me to take my leave. Rev. Micah will have the time to prepare the congregation to call a new minister or ministry team with a staff arrangement that is built for the future. Things may be a little rocky for bit, but we have weathered so much together already. Let this change be just one more moment in our story.

As always, I am incredibly grateful to my colleagues at First Unitarian for their guidance, support, and friendship this year and all years. This has been an amazing team that have all the skills, talents, and care need to take lead this congregation into the future.

Respectfully Submitted,

Garnett Losak

ADAM PODD, DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

 **Happy 10th Anniversary, First U!**



That's right - my very first Sunday leading worship as your Director of Music was in September of 2014, making this program year's In-gathering service our 10-year anniversary.

I'm filled with gratitude for the ways we've grown together in music, spirit, and community.

This year, my work has taken on a slightly different feel as I lead through an interim period, with much of our congregation relying on our music ministry for stability and grounding amidst uncertainty. As we navigate staffing changes and the search for a new Senior Minister, our music remains a steady and spiritual constant. Unitarian Universalism is known as a "living tradition". I work hard to balance those two aspects of our worship in my music ministry at First U - the "living" with the "tradition".

The "Tradition" part:

First Unitarian is blessed with a deep commitment to music that is present in our worship every week. Some of the traditions we continue to honor include:

Choir  **Every**  **Week:** You may not realize it (I didn't for years, even after starting this job) but most UU congregations don't have their choirs in their worship services every week. They'll have "Choir Sunday" once or twice a month usually. This is for a number of reasons I'm sure... many of them even good

reasons. Our choir meets on Sunday mornings at 9AM virtually every Sunday of the program year and sings at the 11AM service. Is it a lot of work? Yes, tons. Is there a better use of my time and energy? Simply, no. I don't know what I'd do without them, and I don't care to find out.

Jazz Sundays, Christmas Eve, and Palm Sunday: Our long-standing tradition of special music services on Christmas Eve and Palm Sunday continue to be stunning. We lean in to more of our classical repertoire, and the choir prepares ferociously the weeks before each with extra rehearsals - the only time during the program year we practice outside of Sunday mornings. Our monthly Jazz Sundays, now a beloved tradition, continue to inspire joy and vibrant expression. These services boost attendance by about 20%.

Instrumental Support: The organ and grand piano continue to elevate our services, supporting congregational singing and adding beauty throughout the liturgy. Our soloists and section leaders (Candice, Kiena, Dennis, and Brandon) remain a staple. The variety of music on constant display and rotation due to their eclectic voices is staggering. We are also blessed with additional music direction and conducting from Sophia Miller.

The “Living” part:

In addition to maintaining our rich traditions, this year has been marked by continued growth, innovation, and special events:

Growing Choir: Attendance continues to climb, with over 30 singers most Sundays. This year, I introduced a weekly practice of having one choir member share their story, answering the prompt “What brought you here, and what keeps you here?” Hearing from individuals in this way has been a great way to connect to each other in a big group where it can be hard to feel like you “know” everyone.

New Works and Collaborations: We premiered new music for worship, including “Part of It,” a song I co-wrote with Lea Morris, commissioned by the UUA for their Climate Justice Revival, which was simultaneously premiered by many other UU churches nationwide. Our choir also participated in a Gospel Music festival alongside First Presbyterian Church, Lavender Light Gospel Choir, and Essence of Joy Alumni Singers. With over 150 singers joining together, it was a night to remember. The joy and support between groups and from the audience was truly thrilling.

Music From Our Members: Great music attracts great musicians! Besides our paid professionals, our growing roster of talented volunteers continues to contribute to meaningful worship, including vocal solos, instrumental solos, and small ensemble performances. These contributions enrich our services and showcase the wide range of musical talent in our community.

Organ Keyboard Thingy: As part of maintaining and updating our pipe organ’s “brain” and main functionality, we added a MIDI controller (keyboard) that allows me, or anyone, to play the organ from the front of the church, instead of needing to be all the way up in the loft. This has allowed for more organ during services and less running up and down the stairs. Folks seem to love it!

Vespers: We held regular Vespers services for a second year in a row. The energy and pace are different from Sunday mornings, creating a space for breathing together, silence, prayer, and healing.

Live Streaming and Online Presence: Thanks to our livestream team, we have a growing high quality video library of musical highlights on YouTube, which receives thousands of views each year, inspiring other UU churches and individuals alike.

Engaging with the Broader UU Community: I’ve also continued to support the wider UU music world, offering workshops like *Hymnprov* to help UU pianists play more dynamically and expressively, and leading worship services at national UU music conferences.

The Julie McKinney Special Music Fund:

Last year at this time, the McKinney Fund which pays for our Christmas Eve, Palm Sunday, and Jazz Sunday expenses was down by 40% from the previous few years. Ultimately when the fiscal year closed it was only down by about 30% from previous years. (About \$4,000 difference) This year, we’re doing a little better than last, but not quite where we were. I’m hoping that gap closes up a bit between now and June 30th when the fiscal year ends again, and that we continue to grow our list of small/medium donors so it feels like a more stable pool of contributors and won’t be as subject to turmoil from just a few households changing their giving.

Ongoing Reflection and Growth:

As we continue to navigate the complexities of being a predominantly white space, I invited the congregation this year to reflect on our use of music from the Black diaspora in worship, encouraging greater awareness and engagement with these powerful musical traditions.

Looking forward, I am excited to see where our music ministry continues to grow. Thank you all for your ongoing support, participation, and enthusiasm as we make music together. Here’s to another year of vibrant worship and joyful singing!

With love,
Adam Podd

RENEE STRICKLAND, DIRECTOR OF BUILDING OPERATIONS & EVENTS

Taking Care of Our Building

After a stable year of facilities staffing, changes are afoot! This past year, we have been blessed to have Chris Johnson serve as Director of Facilities, while Bobby Blackman has continued capably as our lead custodian.

Chris has been a whirlwind. He has both single handedly, and with Bobby's assistance, taken care of dozens of maintenance and building projects, big and small, ensuring the smooth operation of our facilities, seven days a week. Chris oversaw the installation of new, more energy efficient boilers to keep our spaces warm in the winter. He has been instrumental in replacing our defunct central air conditioning system with mini splits in the spaces used by our major rental partner, Imagine Early Learning Center. Chris took advantage of this systems upgrade to make further improvements to two other areas of our building: adding a much needed storage closet where the old A/C unit was located in the 50 Monroe hall (you can never have too many closets!) and tearing out the unneeded ductwork in the ceiling of the storage hallway leading to the three-stall bathroom, thereby allowing us to open up that space for both a facelift and increase storage. Chris has also been the daily hands-on supervisor of the code-mandated upgraded fire detection and suppression system that we are installing throughout our building, ensuring peace of mind. You can read more in the Facilities Committee section of this report, but I wanted to brag a bit about Chris - his legacy will be felt in our historic building for a long time to come. Thank you, Chris, for being a true steward of our space.

Bobby has matched Chris's energy this past year. Every week, he has ensured all 24,018 square feet of our space is kept clean, in the midst of simultaneous construction projects that add an almost Sisyphean level of dust and debris to both the inside and outside every week. Bobby has also been learning from Chris, taking on a greater role in the inspection of our building systems and the annual calendar of maintenance projects. Because Bobby works in the afternoons and evenings, he is also often the greeter and point person for many of our community and rental partners, assisting attendees with the chair lift and quickly responding to last minute set up requests. In fact, Bobby's deft juggling of both physical projects and personal touches is why he is being promoted to Sexton. Bobby will be moving into the on-site Sexton apartment after Chris leaves in June and returning to a Sunday through Thursday work schedule so he can once again greet the congregants for services every week. When you see Bobby again, be sure to ask him about his recent feature in New York magazine, where he referenced the impact Unitarian Universalism and our congregation has had on his journey in life.

Meanwhile, we are actively advertising and interviewing for Chris's replacement. The role is changing a bit. Since I now oversee building operations, we are seeking a Building Engineer to round out our team. This

position will work Monday through Friday, when our restoration and construction partners are on-site. The job duties will substantially overlap with the maintenance and project-oriented focus of what Chris accomplished around here, while working closely with me to set objectives, prioritize projects, and ensure compliance.

Speaking of compliance, why did I earlier mention the exact square footage of our building? Glad you asked! Local Law 97, a key part of New York City's Climate Mobilization Act, sets emission limits on large buildings to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on a set schedule (or face stiff financial penalties). When LL97 first rolled out in 2019, it applied to buildings 50,000 square feet and above. This year, the law has been extended to buildings 25,000 square feet and larger. In anticipation of complying with this law, we had an Energy Study conducted in conjunction with New York State Energy Research Development Authority. Our pre-existing commitment to greener principles meant that we have already implemented many of the suggestions the study made for our building - solar panels, switching to LED lighting, upgrading to more energy efficient boilers. But we also discovered that we are a hair's breadth away from officially needing to comply with LL 97 this year - we fall 982 square feet short of mandatory compliance. And if you have read this whole paragraph with keen interest or at least piqued curiosity, I encourage you to join the Facilities Committee, where we routinely wax rhapsodic about our future green building plans.

Serving the Wider Community

First Unitarian Brooklyn opens its doors to the broader Brooklyn community seven days a week. On any given day, you will find artists, activists, celebrants, and civic organizations in our space, often running parallel events. These partnerships not only enhance our congregation's reputation as a center for community gathering, but they also provide over 70% of our annual operating revenue.

Among the partners using our space are:

Arts Organizations

- Ambient Church
- BK Treble Choir
- Books Are Magic
- Brooklyn Chamber Music Society
- Grace Chorale
- ISSUE Project Room
- (le) Poisson Rouge
- Noel Pointer Foundation

- 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 Center
- Child's Play NY
- Pratt Institute
- Saint Ann's School

Community Organizations

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 recovery groups
- Coop board meetings
- Center for Independence of the Disabled
- Brooklyn Heights Association
- Brooklyn for Peace
- Extinction Rebellion
- Families for Safe Streets
- Indivisible Brooklyn
- New Kings Democrats
- New York City Greenways Coalition
- New York Communities for Change

Ceremonies

Weddings, baby blessings, memorials, bat/bar mitzvahs, and inductions serve as a special category of events that take place in our buildings, marking important moments in the lives of both congregants and community

members. Jay Lawrence and Lukas Bauer have continued to serve a key role, recording and live streaming the ceremonies, and supporting the audio-visual needs of live musicians and speakers.

Respectfully submitted,
Renee Strickland

GOVERNANCE REPORTS

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Governance

The 2024-2025 Trustees of the Board have diligently led the Congregation through its first transition year following the resignation of Reverend Ana Levy-Lyons. The trustees include Vicki Antonini, Michele Ascione, Barbara Bornmann, Robin Bossert, Anne Calder, Beth Evans, Cara Haft, Jake Powell and Mark Weiss.

Co- presidents, Beth Evans and Jake Powell, formed the standing committee with Vicki Antonini. Under their leadership the Board conducted their monthly meetings, met and conferred on an as-needed basis, and called for three congregational meetings over the year including November and February special congregational meetings as well as the required annual meeting in May.

The November meeting was the occasion of a vote in support of the Unitarian Universalist Association Action of Immediate Witness in Solidarity with Palestinians and the Responsive Resolution for Support for October 7 Hostages. This followed the withdrawal of a related resolution presented and then tabled by the Young Adult Ministry at the May 2024 meeting. The February meeting, in turn, was the occasion for the congregation to vote on the ministerial search plan moving forward.

The Board began its year with a two part summer retreat. The first meeting was in June 2024 and the second part of the retreat was scheduled for August in order to include Reverend Micah Ma who began their tenure that month. The Board also held a winter retreat in January primarily to prepare the search plan.

Our Facilities

As much as our congregation and the work we do as individuals and collectively defines who we are, we would not be able to meet as comfortably and with as much inspiration as we do if it were not for the distinctive, remarkable and historic facility that is home to our Sunday services as well as so many functions and event. We

are delighted that we have space for so much spiritual, cultural and political activity, both initiated by us and welcomed in from the broader community. Every space on the First U campus, from our Sanctuary to our Chapel, from the Library to the Frances White Room, from the Monroe Place nursery classrooms to the Eastman room, and from the Office to our lovely patio is jam packed with scheduled activities nearly 24/7. None of this would have been possible without the continued diligence of our amazingly detail oriented Executive Manager of Building & Events, Renee Strickland and our Director of Facilities, Christopher Johnson. Renee's soliciting and negotiating has brought in and maintained many rental paying members of the community whose activities match our values. Our sanctuary and chapel have sung with the sounds of and often remarkable visuals of choirs, quartets, small orchestras, theater, and even sonic light shows. Important local, state, national and international issues covered by community groups, non-profits, NGOs and politicians have had their chance to be aired and debated within the walls of our sanctuary and our chapel. Boisterous and subdued weddings, memorial services, and even a bar mitzvah or two have brought families and friends together under the roofs of First U facilities.

These roofs, the spires that rise above them, the walls and the mechanicals within are receiving studious attention during the ongoing facade repair project and other smaller but important projects such as a critical fire safety system installation, a comfort conferring HVAC system expansion, and routine maintenance, cleaning, repair and painting of the four buildings that make up First U. Chris, with the help of Bobby, has kept an eagle eye on the facility, identifying problems before they escalate. Our facilities committee, under Tom Check's leadership and with Renee's assistance has kept the major projects moving along and in the hands of responsible and reliable professionals.

Listening

Fiscal year 2024-2025 could be characterized as a year of listening and learning for all of the congregation. Throughout the summer of 2024 and into the fall, the congregation benefitted from coordinated listening sessions led by trained facilitators. Rev. Meagan Henry identified the UU minister Paul Langston-Daley. Reverend Langston-Daley came to train the trainers in working with groups that were collectively processing a loss that was experienced in different ways. Rather than using the sessions called "Difficult Conversations" as an opportunity to hear what others had to say and to try to persuade them otherwise, the trained facilitators helped the congregation to hear what their fellow-congregants had to say and to sit with it. The processing helps to bring the participants into a place where they can have a better understanding of the thoughts and feelings of those to whom they are closely connected but with whom they may feel at odds.

A different set of listening sessions in the early part of 2025 found our congregation learning more about the possibilities found in different models of ministry. Now as the church year comes to an end, a joint retreat of members from the Board, the senior minister's Transition Team and the Special Nominating Committee (previously selected by the Board to serve us in our ministerial search) has led to planning for a further educational program to begin in the summer of 2025, First U Forward. This is being organized by Tom Check and Paul Freitag of the Transition Team and Cara and Vicki representing the Board.

First U Forward has calendared a series of events intended to engage and educate the congregation about alternative leadership models.

Ongoing and Ad Hoc Functions

Fund-raising

As always, the First U Board was central to the major fundraising events of the year including UniFair and the Auction. UniFair raised a significant amount of money under the adept leadership of Mariasara Alcott and Amanda Neitzel. The Board also supported the work of the Stewardship team. This year six in-home pledge-signing parties made this work extra fun both for the hosts and the congregants brought together to commit to their support of First Unitarian. We are grateful to Anne Calder, Jason Hershberger, Bill Wasik & Monica Murphy, Carolyn Ellis & Lake Wise, Bert Eisenstadt & Laurel Lesio, Yuri Weber and Erin Hopkins for hosting these events.

The Board, in its commitment to fostering intergenerational relationships, brought the Deacons and the Young Adult ministry together to organize and run the annual auction. The event has many moving parts and is an excellent example of a situation where many hands make for lighter work.

The Board is also responsible for selecting and promoting the winter appeal fund-raiser. The appeal this past year went to the Youth Group for their annual trip to West Virginia.

Committees

The members of the Board of Trustees are also blessed to share the responsibility of being liaisons to the many committees that do the important work of our congregation. The Board Members and the committees with their primary contact are listed below. This year saw the evolution of a new and very active committee, the Brooklyn Chapter of the Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East (BUUJME). The Social Justice Committee was re-energized under the leadership of Emily Hockaday and Ian Holmes and offered a rich array of well-attended and appreciated programming.

Committee	Board Liaison	Initial Committee Contact
BUUJME	Vicki Antonini	Jennie Goldin
Caring Team	Vicki Antonini	Michelle Kuchuk
Connections Team	Cara Haft	Luke Messina, Charlotte Hoogenboom, Co-Chairs
Craft Ministry (Caring Committee)	N/A	Lee Pardee, Mary Most
Deacons	Beth Evans	Connie Newsom - Senior Deacon
Facilities	Anne Calder	Daniel Walters, Chair
Finance Committee	Mark Weiss	Lee Pardee - Treasurer
Garden Committee		Catalina Bertani
Green Team	Barbara Bornmann	Jan Thompson
Immigrant Solidarity	Michele Ascione	Josh Davidoff - Chair
Leadership Development Committee	Robin Bossert	Yuri Weber, Chair
Music/Choir	N/A	Adam Podd
Religious Education	Michele Ascione	Becky Huffman, Chair
Share the Plate	Robin Bossert	Parrish Turner, Chair
Social Justice Committee	Barbara Bornmann	Ian Holmes, Emily Hockaday, Co-Chairs
Stewardship Team	Mark Weiss	
Stream Team	Anne Calder	Jay Lawrence
Ushers & Greeters (Connections)	Under Connections	Lee Pardee
Women's Leadership Alliance	Vicki Antonini	Julie Elting - President
Young Adult Ministry	Beth Evans	Taylor Murray, Elena Karpoff, Robbie Economou, Charlotte Hoogenboom - Steering Committee

Personnel

In addition to liaising with committees, members of the Board also are responsible for checking in with members of the paid staff to learn of any problems that may be arising on their jobs.

The Board also has the important job of seeing that changes in personnel happen smoothly. In a major change of ministry, we welcomed Rev. Micah as our interim senior minister. The Board was also instrumental in helping Rev. Micah choose their Transition Team. The team includes Amanda Almond, Kate Caudill, Tom Check, Paul Freitag, Amit Mehta, Tom Kennedy, and Peggy Schubert. We were also happy to provide a worksite for a volunteer intern minister, Yvonne Garrett, who has paid special attention to the needs of our online congregants.

Sadly, but with tremendous appreciation for their dedication to our congregation, the Board is overseeing the retirement of our devoted and long-serving Director of Congregational Life, Garnett Losak and our eminently qualified Director of Facilities, Christopher Johnson.

We are happy to report, though, that Bobby Blackman will be serving as our sexton moving forward (beginning at the end of June), taking on some of Chris' responsibilities, occupying the apartment above the offices on Monroe Place, and shifting his schedule to Sunday through Thursday. We will also be hiring a live-out building engineer. The Board will continue the work of planning for how to cover the many responsibilities Garnett has gamely handled.

The Search

An important job under the auspices of the Board of Trustees this past year has been to assure that the ministerial search process moves along towards its goal. The Board was responsible for identifying a Special Nominating Committee. It also presented to the congregation a detailed presentation of the plan for the search process here at First U. According to the UUA procedure, the Search phase should be planned to be of no more than a one-year duration. To enter the formal Search process in FY25-26 would require that a Nominating Committee be convened in February 2025 in order that a Search Committee slate can be presented for election at the Annual Membership Meeting scheduled for May 18, 2025. Starting the Search in FY26-27 gives more time to convene a Nominating Committee. The Board recommended to the congregation that we extend our interim period to an additional third year. The congregation approved the extension in a vote at the February Special Membership Meeting.

Policy & Practices

Over the course of the year, the Board discussed a number of policies and practices. Conversations on these topics are ongoing. These include:

- The development of a Staff and Personnel Committee;
- The establishment of a working group, represented by Religious Education; Facilities, and members of the Board to develop a safety policy;
- Establishing dedicated space in the Undercroft where congregants with limited mobility could watch the services and easily get to a restroom if needed;
- Continued work on a social media policy; and,
- Continued investigation of use of a communications channel such as Slack that would afford more privacy of the records, better archiving of discussions, and systematic organizing of threads.

In the course of the year, the Board evoked an existing policy to confer lifetime membership on two congregants who met certain criteria of long-time membership and service to the congregation, Sandy Foutz and Jeannie Wing.

It was a very full and inspiring year for all of us who served on the 2024-2025 Board of Trustees. We give thanks to our outgoing Clerk, Maggie Norris, without whose diligent note taking, a written record of the discussions and decisions of the Trustees would be lost in time. The Board welcomes congregant Sarah Morgan who will assume the role of clerk in the new fiscal year.

The Board remains in good hands with the six skilled and dedicated Trustees who have not yet finished out their terms (Barbara, Michele, Jake, Vicki, Anne and Mark) and a new and promising cohort of three additional congregants (Julie Elting, Luke Messina and Amanda Neitzel) who are about to begin their three-year term.

Respectfully submitted, on behalf of the Board,

Beth Evans & Jake Powell, co-presidents

DEACONS

The Deacons: Senior Deacon, Constance Newsom, Robert Bero, Thomas Check, Elizabeth Davis, Beth Evans, Patrick Gunn, Laurel Lesio, Edwin Lord, Lee Pardee, Nancy Wolf

Deacon Nominations

The By-laws 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.

Following this procedure, Patrick Gunn and Beth Evans were elected in 2024 to fill the vacancies left by Marty Bernstein and Bruce Wilde.

Greeting and Ushering

The Deacons share head ushering responsibilities with members of the Congregation.

At the request of a decedent's family Deacons are available to serve as ushers for memorial services. At the request of his wife, Rita Pearl, on October 13, 2024, the Deacons served for the memorial of Derek Pearl.

Several Deacons attended the Memorial for long time member Barbara Kennedy. Assistant Minister Meagan Henry spoke, and Deacon Bob Bero provided piano music for the memorial held in the Frances White Room.

Special Event

On April 26 the Deacons partnered with the Young Adult Ministry on an Auction to raise money for the Congregation. Part of the proceeds were donated to charity.

Good Friday Commemorative Communion

In accordance with the Congregation's By-Laws and tradition, the Deacons assisted at the solemn Good Friday Commemorative Communion, celebrated by Interim Senior Minister Micah Ma and Assistant Minister Meagan Henry.

Green-Wood Cemetery

The Congregation owns Vista Hill, a burial ground in Brooklyn's Green-Wood Cemetery. The Deacons oversee the management of Vista Hill. In April, 2025, Interim Senior Minister, Rev. Micah Ma, led a group including several Deacons to Vista Hill to perform a traditional Chinese grave-site ceremony and to pay respects to members buried there.

FACILITIES COMMITTEE

The 2024-2025 fiscal year has been a rollercoaster of a year for our historic building. In addition to the regular maintenance and the many projects to come, quite a bit has been going on!

Facade Restoration

A lot of progress has been made this year on the biggest project we have before us.

Tom Check and Renee Strickland have been integral in keeping this project on track. As new information has come in, the finish date has had to be revised. We were hoping to have the entire project complete by this coming Christmas. Our GFRP (Fiberglass replacements for our sandstone spires) manufacturer will not be able to finish the work by that target date. We are now working to ensure that the work on the two tallest spires is complete by the end of this year and the remaining work is finished by the end of the coming fiscal year. When Spires 2 & 3 (the tallest) are complete, the uppermost levels of scaffolding will start coming down, and we'll be able to start to see the front of the Church again!

Window Restoration

Matt Castle has been working with Fermanella to bring this project to its completion. The window tracery in the front of the church has been repaired with Spanish Cedar which is similar to Mahogany and used as a long lasting rot resistant wood. The Windows have been reinforced structurally to ensure that vibrations caused by the wind will be lessened and, so, add longevity to this repair. The tracery has been primed and it will soon be painted, bringing the window element of the facade restoration to completion.

Fire Detection System

Renee Strickland and Chris Johnson have put a lot of time and effort into getting us up to date with our Fire Detection System. I'm sure many of you have noticed the red wires and new conduit popping up everywhere. This project is nearing completion and will ensure that we are safe from fire and make it possible for us to retain Imagine Daycare as a reliable renter in our space.

Other Projects

Improvements were made to our trash holding area south of 48 and 50 Monroe this year. Thank you to all who helped make this happen. Special Thanks to our Youth Group who dug up some gnarly root systems and removed a literal truck load of dirt to make way for the crushed gravel and pavers installed by Chris Johnson

and Bobby Blackman. We now have a sturdy, clean area to house our brand new NYC collections compliant trash cans.

The pass through to the three-stall bathroom adjacent to the undercroft has had its ceiling replaced and is in the process of being reorganized to be more useful to us and to our renters. Our boiler was replaced last year. It has been put through its paces by Chris Johnson and will keep us warm for years to come. We are in the process of improving the A/C systems in the Chapel and Classrooms.

Upcoming projects

Although we've had to defer many projects as our budget is currently dedicated to the aforementioned projects, there are quite a few projects that we're hoping to get to in the coming year. The fire ANSUL system in the kitchen, sound mitigation in the undercroft, skylight replacement in the three-stall bathroom and the bathroom adjacent to the staff break room, planting of a hedge to mask our trash holding area, refinishing of the floor in the Francis White room... Just to name a few/there's quite a bit to do.

Thanks to Renee Strickland, Chris Johnson, and Bobby Blackman for keeping up with the general maintenance of the building. A lot of painting, cleaning, inspections, and keep-up with the normal wear and tear of a well-loved and well-used space is always going on!

Thank you to all the Congregants who participated in our cleanup days! Thank you to the members of the Facilities Committee: David Andrew, Elizabeth Davis, Elizabeth Smith, Ellen Leach, Isuru Seneviratne, Anne Calder (Board Liaison); Matt Castle (Leader: Window Restoration) Tom Check, (Leader: Facade Restoration) Chris Johnson (Director of Facilities), and Renee Strickland (Director of Building Operations)

The Facilities Committee meets monthly on Wednesday evenings in the church building. Anyone interested in historic structures, architecture, or building maintenance is welcome to join us.

Submitted by Daniel Walters, Facilities Committee: Chair

FINANCE COMMITTEE

The Committee welcomed new members Jason Hershberger and Mark Weiss (Board Liaison). David Andrew, Lorna Hollander, Lee Pardee (Treasurer), and Lake Wise continued as members.

This year started off on a relatively positive note. Like the last three fiscal years, the FY23-24 Operating Budget ended up under budget, but just barely. And, since we had approved a budget with a \$9000 deficit, we still had a deficit, but just \$7000 after using our full sustainable draw from our endowment.

The FY22 capital budget expenses also came in substantially under budget. We spent \$695,000, which was \$600,000 less than budgeted. However, we received only \$231,000 in revenue. The remaining \$464,000 in expenses was paid out of the endowment. \$625,000 of expenses were for the façade project. The remaining \$70,000 paid for portions of the new fire alarm system, new organ console, and new boiler.

We have one off-budget item – Rev. Ana’s employment release payment. We expect this to total \$175,000.

This 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 have been slightly over budget and expenses have been slightly under 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.

In the fall the Finance Committee recommended and the Board approved drawing \$300,000 from the congregation’s line of credit to pay for some of the work on the façade. After January, on the recommendation of First Unitarian’s financial advisor, we sold enough equities in our endowment (investment account) to create a cash reserve sufficient to cover façade expenses for the rest of the calendar year. Overall, our endowment has been holding fairly steady and is down only \$150,000 since July 1 in spite of using nearly \$400,000 for the façade and other capital projects and \$40,000 of our sustainable draw for the operating budget.

In the fall, the Finance Committee proposed, and the Board approved, a policy for all newly hired staff to be offered the same insurance benefits (health, dental & vision, disability, life), with the congregation paying 80% of the premiums (50% for family members).

In FY25 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 FY24 and the first two quarters of FY25. 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 FY26 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 FY26 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.

Respectfully submitted by Lee Pardee, Treasurer, for the Finance Committee - Members: Mark Weiss (Board Liaison), David Andrew, Jason Hershberger, Lorna Hollander, and Lake Wise.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (LDC)

“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 2024-25 year, the members of the LDC were: Amanda Rinzel, Yuri Weber, Judith Sedaitis, Maxine Schulof, and Mary Huhn (appointed by the board and then elected at the February congregational meeting to replace Spencer Brill). Significant support was provided to the committee by Garnett Losak (Director of

Congregational Life). Mary Huhn, Amanda Rinzel and Yuri Weber will conclude their terms after the Annual Meeting on May 19, 2024. Maxine Schulof and Judith Sedaitis will continue to serve on the LDC.

2024 General Assembly Nominees:

Six delegates were elected at the Congregational Meeting on February 25, 2024: Vicki Antonini, Ian Holmes, Lisa Pacenza, Lee Pardee, Rachel Stark, Jan Thompson

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

Nominees for Leadership Positions to be presented at the 2025 Annual Meeting

Board of Trustees, Class of 2028 (three-year terms) Julie Elting, Amanda Nietzl, Luke Messina

Clerk of the Society: Sarah Morgan

Moderator: James Goward (second term)

Leadership Development Committee (two-year terms): Edwin Lord, Beth Evans and Sean Hastings,

We thank all of these folks for agreeing to serve our congregation in these important leadership positions

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 for the Share the Plate and Stewardship committees.

transition team

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE REPORTS

AUCTION COMMITTEE

2025 saw First Unitarian finally returning to a full-fledged auction. Trustee Beth Evans persuaded the Deacons and Young Adult Ministry (YAM) to take on producing this event together. The planning team was made up of Deacons Connie Newsom (Senior Deacon), Bob Bero, Tom Check, Liz Davis, Beth Evans, Patrick Gunn, Laurel Lesio-Eisenstadt, Edwin Lord, Lee Pardee, and Nancy Wolf and YAM leaders Taylor Murray, Octavia Findley, and Skylar Salerno.

Close to 70 attendees enjoyed an evening of socializing to the jazz stylings of Bob Bero on the piano followed by a delicious meal organized by chef and First U member Anthony Silvestri. In the chapel, which had been beautifully decorated by Becky Huffman to reflect the spring picnic theme, guests were entertained by MC Dawn Elane Reed and two show-stopping auctioneers: long-time member James Goward and newcomer/young adult Ben Crocker. Many thanks also to Patrick Gunn and Skylar Salerno for soliciting donations, Tom Check for organizing the space setup, the Men's Group for lots of help in setup and food prep, Lee Pardee for catalog and sign preparation, Bert Eisenstadt for bartending, Nancy Wolf, Laurel Lesio-Eisenstadt, and Lee Pardee for check-in and checkout, and everybody for cleanup.

We tried something new this year for the silent auction. Thanks to the efforts of Beth Evans, Patrick Gunn, and Skylar Salerno, all of the bidding for the 50 or so items was conducted online through an app called GiveButter. This new format worked successfully for most participants – both those participating in person and those participating only online. The team is still evaluating the results and considering how to make improvements for next year.

Another innovation this year was adding low-budget seats – chosen by lottery – to several of the evening's very popular dinners.

We also included a "Share the Plate" auction item – a donation to the First Presbyterian (Brooklyn Heights) Food Pantry. Over 30 attendees "bid" to add a \$5 donation to their tab with the result that we made a \$155 donation to the Food Pantry.

In addition to providing a wonderful community gathering for many congregants, the event raised close to \$10,000! This was by far our best result since before COVID!

The Deacon/YAM team is developing a step-by-step Auction Plan for whoever wants to take on this fun event next year.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS FOR JUSTICE IN THE MIDDLE EAST (BUUJME)

Overview & Mission

Brooklyn Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East (BUUJME) is committed to advancing justice, equity, and liberation for the Palestinian people by challenging systems of oppression and promoting collective action.

Grounded in principles of anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism, and human rights, we work to end U.S. support for Israel's military occupation and apartheid regime while advocating for the total liberation, self-determination, and right of return for Palestinians.

Through education, solidarity, and action, we challenge systems of violence and work towards a future of freedom, dignity, and equity for all people.

Events, Fundraising & Education

- January - Sponsored screening of "Where the Olive Trees Weep." Representatives from Brooklyn from Peace were in attendance. We raised an estimated \$1200 which was split between the producers and Gaza Soup Kitchen.
- March 8th – Sponsored Parent's for Palestine event
- April 16th – Sponsored discussion along with PARCEO: "Anti-Semitism from a Framework of Collective Liberation." This event focused on the basic understanding of what antisemitism is and is not and considered what challenging antisemitism can look like from a framework of collective liberation. Suggested donations will go back to PARCEO to pay the facilitator.
- May 4th – Book Discussion Suzanne's Ross' book "Born Jewish in Nazi Europe – My Journey to become Anti-Zionist".
- May 10th – "Voices for Peace: a Discussion on Anti-Semitism from the Personal to Geopolitical". This is a panel discussion with Suzanne Ross and Ellen Issacs to learn about their experiences and how they are related to today's geopolitical and economic landscapes. Suggested donation to Meca and/or private families in need in the Gaza.
- June 1st – Rev Meagan is presenting a session detailing her experience in Gaza earlier this year.

- TBD – We are working with Rev Micha to schedule a Brave Conversation to integrate Middle East Justice into the conversation.

Projects and Collaborations

We are part of the greater UUJME national chapter and looking forward to collaborating with them in the future.

We send a representative to the First U Social Justice Council meetings to identify any opportunities for collaboration and to keep communication transparency between the different social justice groups at First U.

We are creating and fostering relationships with external organizations who have the same goals. These would include vendors, community and social justice groups, as well as potential interfaith organizations.

Ideas for potential future projects include film screenings, book discussions, cultural events, speakers, and teach-out sessions. These would be designed to offer further education and fundraising opportunities.

Submitted by Kate O'Day and Jennie Goldin

Committee Members: Mariam Bardakas, Bob Bero, Julie Bero, Matthew Billman, Jennie Goldin, Skye Miller, Kate O'Day, Tess O'Day, Rita Pearl, Yasmine Weil-Pourfard, Eva van Dok Pinkley, Michael White and Winnie Zwick, Staff Liaison – Rev Meagan Henry, Board Liaison – Vicki Antonini, An additional 45 members stay informed via email.

CARING COMMITTEE

Members:

Core Members: Michelle Kuchuk (Chair), Isabel Leonard-Rose, Daniel Walters, Eva Rogals Weiss, Nancy Witherell, Vicki Antonini (board liaison). Staff: Rev. Meagan Henry, Garnett Losak, Rachel Schmitt.

Support/Ad-Hoc Members: Edwin Lord, Nika Lomazzo, Barbara Ratzlaff, Spencer Brill, Taylor Murray

Meetings & Communication:

- Core Members meet every 4-6 weeks throughout the program year.
- Core Members also communicate consistently via email between meetings, as Caring Ministry tasks and needs occur consistently and regularly.

- The Chair communicates with Support/Ad-Hoc Members on an as-needed basis, particularly for extra or unique support.

The Caring Ministry 24-25 Program Year Highlights:

The Caring Ministry supports First U by:

- Pastoral Care: Michelle, Nancy, Edwin, Daniel, Nika, and Rachel provide pastoral care in the Chapel of All Faiths after services on a rotating basis
- Check-In Notes/Emails/Phone Calls: we send these check-ins or reach out 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, or who could use further follow-up (i.e., after a staff member flags an issue, or after an initial reach out, or after a pastoral care session).
- Grief Support: members send cards and/or reach out via phone to convey condolences
- In-person visits: members also make caring visits to congregants.
- Meals, Medical, & 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.
- Strategizing and Responding to Unique Needs: members of this ministry have worked with staff to respond to unique needs from the community (i.e., an unhoused person who needed support, members of the community who had unmet basic needs)
- Deepening First U's Relationship with Topics Adjacent to Caring (i.e., planning your memorial, Medical Aid in Dying Act, active listening)

This year, we expanded the Caring Ministry to include both core members *and* support/ad-hoc members. We identified the need for this last year; some people in our First U community would love to help, but can't commit to meetings, and/or are not members of First U. The Caring Ministry now includes both. The Core Members are the folks that do the bulk of the work for the Caring Ministry. They must attend most meetings, and must be members of First U. The Support/Ad-Hoc Members help us out by filling in when there's a lot of need, and/or when a unique or particular need is warranted.

This year, the Chair (Michelle) has incorporated discussion topics into the core meetings with the hope of supporting the members of the ministry themselves, in a new way. Discussion topics have included: Balancing Compassion & Responsibility for Others and Compassion & Responsibility for Self, Medical Aid in Dying, and Self-Care & Boundaries. Michelle has also debriefed with, and provided additional training for, prospective caring ministry members who would ultimately serve in the pastoral care role.

This year, we created a working Resource List with resources & referrals for various community needs.

In the coming program year, we will have another Meal-Making Initiative. (We didn't have the need this program year.)

In the coming program year, it is our aim to have more events to deepen First U's relationship with Topics Adjacent to Caring.

The Caring Ministry is made up of extremely generous, thoughtful, and caring individuals, both staff and congregants. It is my honor to work with such committed and warm-hearted people.

Submitted by Michelle Kuchuk, Chair

CONNECTIONS TEAM

Mission Statement

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

Summary

The Connections Committee works to welcome and connect folks to all of the different ways to get involved with the congregation. We manage and staff the welcome table, conduct outreach to new members/recent visitors, sponsor events, and support the development of affinity groups.

Members

Luke Messina (co-chair), Charlotte Hoogenboom (co-chair), Elenor Traubman, Taylor Murray (stepped down 4/27/2025), Charles Lynch, Lauren Dohr, Colleen Olsen, Maxine Schulof, Rachel Stark (stepped down 4/16/2025), Garnett Losak (staff liaison).

Special Thanks

Carolyn Haft (board liaison), Brian Elig, Jennifer Goldin, Sean Sellers, Lee Pardee.

Major Accomplishments

- **Men's Group:** We helped launch an affinity group for those identifying as men. This group has monthly main meetings, as well as auxiliary sessions. These meetings have drawn anywhere from 10-30 people through April of 2025.
- **Queer Spirituality:** We helped launch an affinity group for those who are queer identified, to discuss the intersections of queerness and spirituality. There are three planned meetings in the 2024-2025 congregational year.
- **Movie Screening:** We sponsored a movie screening of 'Will and Harper' for the congregation. This is a documentary film about the relationship between Will Ferrell and his friend Harper Steele, who had recently come out as a trans woman. About ten people attended, with refreshments provided. There was a discussion after the film, about people's thoughts and perspectives.

Committee Structure: Luke Messina and Charlotte Hoogenboom were named co-chairs in August of 2024. We have created three subgroups: Affinity liaisons, Outreach, and Events.

Connections Table: We have developed a schedule and protocol for staffing the welcome table in the undercroft after Sunday service. This ensures someone is always present to answer questions, welcome folks, and collect welcome cards. We have also worked to add a sign up for table shifts to the sign up-link used to fill shifts for ushers.

Pride Month: We are working with the congregation's Brooklyn Pride representatives (led by Sean Sellers) to attend the 2025 Brooklyn Pride march and help recruit people for the event. We will also work to promote the pride service, and interfaith service. Much of this is TBD at the time of writing this report.

Usher/Greeter Program

This year the First Unitarian Usher/Greeter Program has expanded to include summer worship services. Over 50 congregants serve as usher/greeters. Throughout the year, they welcome congregants, assist with worship elements as needed, and collect the weekly offering. Deacons and experienced ushers serve as Head Ushers, training new usher/greeters and handling a list of regular tasks. Ushering and greeting is a wonderful way for people to welcome congregants, newcomers and visitors into First Unitarian from the moment they walk in.

Plans for 2025-2026

Foster more affinity/covenant groups: We have a men's group, women's group, and queer spirituality group that we support. There are more groups that have interest though. We tried to help get a Christian heritage, Jewish heritage, and Pagan affinity group off the ground. We would like to continue to pursue this in the new year.

In community outreach: We would like to have more of a presence in community events that go on throughout Brooklyn. This will help us boost the profile and work of the congregation, and welcome more people into our community.

Recent member events: The committee discussed an event to engage recent members to the church, to help build a sense of community. We were not able to plan this event, but it might be good to pick the idea back up in the Fall.

Meetings

Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month, at 6:30pm. Meetings rotate between in person and on Zoom. The committee co-chairs facilitate and take notes. The agenda is crafted collaboratively through email, where members add points. All of our meeting notes are saved and can be furnished upon request.

A luncheon is planned for Memorial Day Sunday to thank everyone who participated in our culture of hospitality throughout the year. Everyone who has served as an usher or greeter or served on the Connections Team is invited.

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

- August 2024: ***Stop the Money Pipeline action*** at Citibank to protest Citibank’s funding of fossil fuel projects. Faith leaders blocked Citibank's main headquarters and kept hundreds of employees from being able to enter work that morning. [23 faith leaders were arrested](#) and we were there holding signs, chanting, and cheering them on.
- February 23, 2025: **Isuru Seneviratne** presented a **Campus Energy and Climate Update** on behalf of the Green Team at our Congregational Meeting, covering energy use breakdown of our 4 buildings,

GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions, rooftop solar performance, energy and climate costs of a new boiler vs. ASHP / VRF. This detailed study was the basis of Isuru's Master's thesis; we are grateful for his in-depth research and clear explanation.

- February 25, 2025: ***Align Your Money with Your Values* seminar** co-sponsored with Green Faith and 350 Brooklyn. Participants learned more about:
 - Socially Responsible Investing (SRI) and Environmental Social and Governance (ESG)
 - Responsible investment options
 - Tips for finding a financial advisor passionate about sustainable investing.
- April 19, 2025: **Earth Day Summer of Heat march** for Climate and Immigration, About 6 congregants met at the chapel and went to the NYC Public Library where we marched to Central Park in solidarity with immigrants and the climate.
- May 4, 2025: **Adopt a Tree event**. District 33 Council Member Lincoln Restler spoke during worship service announcements to encourage people to adopt a street tree. After service, members of the Green Team and the councilmember's aid Sophie were in the Undercroft signing people up in his district and offering the URL for the Parks Department's Tree Map for those outside the district (which allows you to "favorite" a tree, but not adopt it). At a minimum congregants are encouraged to choose a tree near their building and water it, particularly in times of drought. Young trees require 10-15 gallons a week of water!
 - <https://www.lincolcrestler.nyc/tree-plan>
 - <https://tree-map.nycgovparks.org/tree-map>
- May 23, 2025, 6:30pm: **Pandora's Promise**. A documentary screening of a film on nuclear energy will be held in the chapel, followed by Q&A with Oscar- nominated director Robert Stone. The Green Team is exploring the dilemma of "The Tale of Two Grids" and whether nuclear energy is a viable solution to help make our dirty downstate energy grid more comparable to the 90% clean energy grid in upstate New York. Register here: <https://lu.ma/rn7myi0p>

- June 1, 2025, 12:30pm: **Bio Blitz event.** Come frolic in the greenery of a nearby park after service, where we will spread out to document the existing plants and insects that live there to help scientists understand the loss of biodiversity. A BioBlitz is a form of “citizen science” whereby a large group of nature enthusiasts set out to document as many species as possible within a region, with the goal of advancing science and knowledge of that region’s ecology. No prior knowledge of biology is needed to participate; we’ll use the iNaturalist app to help with species identification.
 - Event invite: <https://partiful.com/e/IdUIjzhUEVSEHAuItU07>

Projects

- Sustainable Electricity, Heating and Cooling

50M Community Solar

First Unitarian signed up for a subscription to a community solar project with a 20-year fixed price contract starting at \$202/MWh with a 2% annual escalation and no upfront capital (Green Street Power Partners, 2023). The provision of low-cost electricity is essential to many decarbonization efforts, and sufficient scale deployment to serve 50M is available at the ‘Queens 1’ project. The price would be 39% lower vs. 2023, and 28% lower vs. 2021. Were all of 50M electricity covered under this contract, the annual savings would be \$7,434 vs. 2023. First Unitarian has the right to unsubscribe at any time (with 60 days’ notice) with no penalties. However, the contract explicitly excludes energy attributes, including environmental benefits such as renewable energy credits or carbon offset credits (clauses 2j and 4b). This measure will not contribute to First Unitarian’s decarbonization per GHG Protocol Scope 2 Guidance ([World Resources Institute, 2015](#)).

◦ Window Insulation

The stained-glass windows and frames at the Sanctuary all have high air leakage. First Unitarian is undergoing a year-long façade repair, which includes improving heat insulation. In 2023, First Unitarian will seal air leakage through the existing windows on the south façade of the Sanctuary (three large windows fronting on Pierrepont Street). Currently the large center window frame has a stained-glass window inside and protective tempered glass panes outside; the two side windows have only clear glass windows inside. Leaks in all of these existing windows will be sealed, but no additional glazing will be installed. While the latter would increase the insulation, its cost would go beyond the current project scope.

The expected energy and cost savings from this measure has not been quantified.

- **48M Rooftop Repair and Solar Installation**

In 2022, First Unitarian initiated a rooftop repair project at 48 Monroe Place to pave the way for a rooftop solar installation. The entire roof was replaced with much higher insulation. This measure should improve heat retention, reducing the need for warming in the winter. The reflective white coating will reduce the need for cooling in the summer.

An array of 11 solar panels (425-Watt Peak, W_p) was installed on 48M roof (maximizing available space) and started generating power in May 2023. After a competitive bidding process, Kamtech Solar Solutions was chosen to install Maxeon SunPower panels on InvisiMount racking (Kamtech Solar Solutions, 2022). Beyond offering the best price, Maxeon's supply chain was deemed to have the least exposure to forced labor, a practice inconsistent with the First Principle of Unitarian Universalism (affirm and promote "The inherent worth and dignity of every person.") 42% of the global solar-grade polysilicon factory capacity was in China's Xinjiang province, where Uyghur, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh laborers worked forcibly in solar industry mines, workshops, and factories ([Wang & Lloyd, 2022](#)).

While the project's total cost was \$26,180, the vendor has secured a 21% rebate from New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), reducing First Unitarian's upfront capital outlay to \$20,570. In addition, First Unitarian qualifies for a New York City Real Estate Tax abatement of \$4,114, received in quarterly installments over four years, reducing the net capital outlay further to \$16,456. However, since First Unitarian is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit religious organization, and as such is exempt from federal, State and City income taxes, it does not qualify for a federal Investment Tax Credit of \$6,807 or a New York State Income Tax Credit of \$5,000.

The solar array was expected to generate 5,049 kWh in the first year, and degrade by 0.25% per year (13 kWh) thereafter. The total output in the first year of operations covers 20% of 48M's electricity usage, and 7% of First Unitarian's.

Assuming \$220/MWh grid power, it was to take 18.5 years for First Unitarian to recover this measure's upfront capital (13.6 years at \$300/MWh electricity price). However, with the NYC Real Estate Tax abatement, the capital payback period was to be reduced to 14.8 years. These installations are estimated to have a "carbon debt" of 3.4 tonnes, which would be repaid in 1.3 years.

Shaded by neighboring buildings, 50M's roof is not a viable candidate for solar installation.

New York City has some of the most stringent historic preservation rules in the country, and First Unitarian is a historic landmark. This prevents solar on other areas of First Unitarian.

- **LED Lighting**

Some of First Unitarian’s lighting fixtures contain tubular fluorescent lamps, compact fluorescent lamps, or incandescent bulbs. A recent proposal of a modern energy-efficient LED solution could cut lighting electricity use by 66% (INF Associates, 2023), with a commensurate decrease in emissions. While the project –spanning both 50M and 48M– costs \$30,831, First Unitarian has been paying into an energy efficiency fund with ConEd. The vendor would interface with ConEd to secure incentives, bringing First Unitarian’s capital outlay to \$21,954. This measure would save \$3,819 annually, assuming a grid electricity price of \$220/MWh. The simple payback of this project would be 5.7 years. At an electricity price of \$300/MWh, annual savings would be \$5,208, shortening the payback period to 4.2 years. This is one of the potential projects we would like to get approved in the coming year.

- **Chapel and FWR mini-split Air-Source Heat Pump (ASHP)**

In 2022, First Unitarian installed a mini-split ASHP for ecological heating and cooling for Chapel & FWR for \$ 77,175. Cooling from this ASHP benefitted the Congregation, which uses the Chapel for worship each Sunday in the summer, and allowed expanded usage from three-season to year-round by a community group that operates an arts and music program primarily for children from low-income families.

The dedicated electricity sub-meter was never properly set up, and the energy use is not known.

This ASHP was not used for heating the Chapel and FWR during winter 2022/2023 or 2023/2024 due to cost concerns, and the facility manager’s low level of comfort about the reliability of this new technology. Using the ASHP for heating vs. the gas boiler should reduce associated emissions by a quarter.

- An important note when using electric powered heating and cooling downstate: while 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.

- Green Sanctuary Certification

We are considering whether to continue pursuing this certification as it requires a lot of documentation and participation in environmental justice projects. While we occasionally participate in marches and actions with Green Faith, 350 Brooklyn, or New York Renews that fall within this category, we have yet to determine an ongoing project of our own. Rev Meagan proposed the [Shinnecock Kelp Farmers project](#) which we are still discussing.

- 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

Robin Bossert, Anne Calder, Nina Grey, Mary Most, Colleen Olson, Isuru Seneviratne, Jayesh Sheth, Nancy Wolf

IMMIGRANT SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE

In the midst of profoundly xenophobic and hateful attitudes towards immigrants at the highest levels of our country's government, First U's Immigrant Solidarity Committee (ISC) had a busy year:

- We continued to support a small group of migrant friends with their asylum claims, work authorization permits, and other critical bureaucratic procedures.
- We established and strengthened partnerships with peer advocacy organizations:
- The Ark Immigration Clinic at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah
- Fifth Avenue Committee
- Immigrant Legal Resource Center
- Food Fight Mutual Aid
- We mobilized in support of migrants evicted from a Bushwick men's shelter. We raised and deployed more than \$8,500 in support of our migrant friends and partner organizations.

We worked to engage the First U congregation:

In January, we organized the morning session at Rev. Micah's MLK Day of Service and hosted a representative from The Ark at CBST to share a policy update and ways for the congregation to get involved.

In April, we partnered with the Social Justice Committee (SJC) to produce a letter-writing event in support of a suite of state- and city-level policies designed to protect immigrants in New York from federal ICE overreach. We hosted representatives from State Senator Andrew Gounardes's office and from the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, and participants sent off dozens of letters to their government representatives.

Structural update:

The ISC has decided to merge with and become a part of the SJC in an attempt to grant renewed, lasting energy to First U's support for immigrants and engagement with social justice writ large. As such, though I and other ISC members plan to continue our existing activities under the auspices of the SJC, this contribution to the annual report will be my final formal act as committee chair.

My profound gratitude to Tom Check, Lee Pardee, Michele Ascione, Hallie Noble, and Edwin Lord for their work on behalf of immigrants.

Submitted by, Josh Davidoff

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COUNCIL

Our RE Council had a wonderfully productive year. We are so grateful to have Erin Hopkins, Sean Sellers, Emily Hockaday, RJ Carey, Keledy Kenkel, Marci Lucia, and Rachel Michael on the Council. Thank you to our Board Liaison Michele Ascione. This year Rachel Schmitt was our new Youth Group Coordinator. We are so glad to have her in this important position!

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 Chapels, occasional multi-generational services, Children's Choir led by Bert Eisenstadt, High School Youth Group (16 teens!), and OWL classes for grade K/1 and Junior High. We had a lovely retreat at Murray Grove, which included a Polar Plunge at the local beach.

This year's Holiday Pageant was an original musical, "A Brooklyn Carol" written by RJ Carey, with music by Wendy Russell and Yuri Weber, directed by Becky Huffman. We continued the now time-honored tradition of a congregational "snowball" fight (using balled up paper).

Thank you to our amazing Nursery/Pre K team: Phylisa St Fleur and Ruby Stackhouse, ably assisted by youth, Olive Benesh and Prudence Parkinson

We are so grateful for our teacher-volunteers:

OWL Jr. High Team: Jessamyn Lockard, Taylor Lampe, Kate Caudill, Taylor Murray

OWL K/1 team: Amanda White, Marci Lucia, Rachel Michael

Youth Group Advisors: Bob Bero, Sean Sellers, Jules Tramontana, with Rachel Schmitt

Elementary Teachers: Eva Rogals Weiss, Rachel Michael, Darby Foreman, Kelly Schaffer, Mark Rinzel, Robbie Economou

Chapel Leader: Wendy Russell

Children's Choir Director: Bert Eisenstadt

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

In Fellowship, Becky Huffman

SHAWL MINISTRY

After the 2024 annual meeting, the Shawl Ministry gave shawls to our four graduating youth: Daniel Bongiorno, David Jobin, Anna Kosanke, and Sarah Wolf Schwartz. During the program year the Shawl/Crafts Ministry has met twice monthly – First Thursdays on-line and third Sundays in the undercroft during Fellowship Hour. The ministry is coordinated by Lee Pardee, Mary Most and Michele Ascione. We held a workday in the fall to organize all the shawls, baby blankets, throws, scarves and other crafted items in the Shawl Ministry Cupboard. We found that we had a good number of completed shawls, and subsequently members brought in more. We have added tags to the shawls to let recipients know the creator, the type of yarn, and how to care for their shawl. The Shawl Ministry continues to provide community for its members and pastoral acknowledgement to its recipients.

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Committee Members: Ian Holmes (co-chair), Emily Hockaday (co-chair), Kate Caudill, Sophia Uerhara, Judith Sedaitis, Mitch Stripling, Andre Tirenin, Susan May, Barbara Bornmann (board liaison), Josh Davidoff (joined with ISC), Lee Pardee (ISC), Edwin Lord (ISC), Hallie Noble (ISC), Michele Ascione (ISC), Tom Check (ISC)

The Social Justice Committee celebrates its first full year in this new incarnation. For programming starting 2025, we chose the theme of safe harbor and what it looks like to focus on New York as a sanctuary. We

completed our 2024 theme of civics. We also recently merged with the Immigrant Solidarity Committee and are excited to see what we can accomplish together.

This year the social justice committee:

- From June to October held three letter-writing GOTV events, sending around 300 letters encouraging voter turnout.
- Held our Drag Out the Vote fundraiser on November 1st with a bar and four drag performers. We split proceeds between our performers, the nonprofit Ride Share 2 Vote Aware, and the Social Justice Committee's self-raised budget.
- Ian, Emily, and Kate attended the NYUUIJ conference in Albany on 11/16 to connect with other social justice UU groups and learned about:
 - RAPP
 - Medical Aid in Dying
 - Housing Justice for all
 - Climate Justice: TH!RD ACT

Applied to the NYSCU grant to fund four social justice teach-in events over the next year. We received a grant in the amount of \$2600 to fund this series

The Immigrant Solidarity Committee & Social Justice Committee made the decision to merge

The newly merged committee agreed to regularly meet the second Tuesday of each month at 8 pm going forward.

Held our first teach-in event on Immigrant Solidarity:

- Ace Sutherland from NYIC spoke.
- Carlos Calzadilla from Senator Gounardes' office spoke.
- Josh Davidoff moderated & around 38 folks attended.

We wrote approximately 100 letters addressing four bills in state senate and the New York City Trust Act in city council.

We collected 6 large bags of donated underwear, socks, and diapers that Kelly Schaffer distributed with her mutual aid group.

Is currently planning our Pride Drag Brunch fundraiser to take place on June 1st after service. This will raise funds for the SJC & ISC for the coming year.

Looking forward:

We are planning three more teach-in events with different justice themes during the grant award period. We will be choosing themes and dates soon.

We'd like to thank the congregation and staff for their support, notably Reverend Micah Ma, Garnett Losak, Wendy Russell, Reverend Meagan Henry, Renee Strickland, Tong Galaxy, Anthony Silvestri, Jay Lawrence, Kelly Schaffer, Raymond Carey, and many others.

SUNSET PARK UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST, CONGREGACIÓN UNITARIA UNIVERSALISTA DE SUNSET PARK

The Sunset Park Unitarian Universalist Congregation has now been operating for over two years 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). Gatherings begin with a communal dinner followed by a UU service. This year we added a religious education component: First Unitarian youth Abigail Rogals-Weiss teaches our two regular children, ages 6 and 8.

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. Several of First Unitarian's lay worship leaders have delivered their homilies a second time at Sunset Park. First U choir members Sean Hastings, Elena Karpoff, and Dennis Wees have provided music for services which including the same welcome song as First U, which Sunset Park sings once in Spanish and once in English each week.

Currently over 70 individuals receive the weekly e-newsletter, and regular attendance continues to be 4-6 adults and 2-3 children. There have been a few new attendees, but attendance remains low. 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.

Indoor services will end after Memorial Day. There may be options for picnics in the park over the summer as well as Friday evening discussion groups at a local coffee shop/bar.

After two years, the congregation remains extremely small. This summer will be a time to assess whether Sunset Park UU has long-term viability for growing Unitarian Universalism in Brooklyn.

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

Lee Pardee

Organizer of Sunset Park Unitarian Universalist Congregation

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE

Julie Elting President; Nancy Witherell Vice President; Lisa Pacenza Treasurer; Vicki Antonini Secretary; Cyndi Kerr Member-at-Large; Mary Most Member-at-Large; Wendy Russell Member-at-Large

During the current leadership, the First U Women's Leadership Alliance continues to be 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. Julie continued as President, Nancy continued as Vice-President, Lisa continued as Treasurer and Vicki continued as Secretary. Three new Members-at-Large joined the WLA Executive Board: Cyndi Kerr, Mary Most and Wendy Russell.

At our Annual Business Meeting in June 2025 election of new officers will occur. All four officers have completed their two-year terms (President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer). As Treasurer, Lisa will stay on for one more year to stagger, but the other four roles will be filled after the June election.

Many thanks to Vicki, Nancy, Lisa, and Julie for providing leadership as the executive board over the last few years. The contributions and insights of Cyndi, Mary, and Wendy this last year were much appreciated.

Achievements:

Organizational

- Continued emphasis on providing programmatic grants for events and activities that are run by, and for, WLA and First U members
- Continued community and advocacy grants
- Maintained structured request process and forms for leadership development and program grants
- Nominated 4 women for the Clara Barton Award using a structured tracking process
- Efficient use of Google folders that provides transparent, shared access to organized files

- Clarified types of grants available: Leadership, Advocacy, Programming, Campobasso
- Membership dues voluntary and directed to Campobasso fund

Financial

- Remained below the ‘prudent draw’ of 4% of the endowment
- Met request by First U Board of Trustees to increase our share of administration fees. Starting this fiscal year, fees are deducted from our balance up front rather than funded separately through a line item. We are calculating both income and fees proportionally to our share of the endowment.
- Financial picture (as of March 2025)
- Campobasso balance: \$1195
- WLA balance: \$13,554
- Endowment balance: \$536,415
- Income YTD —\$21,976
- Expenses YTD—\$14,340
- Subsidize RE Coordination salary (instead of RE Assistant)
- Provided grants for six First U GA delegates for June 2025
- Funded 4 Clara Barton awards
- Financed events including Spring Social Luncheon and First Fridays
- UUWF contribution
- Provided grants as follows (as of March of 2025)
- Leadership: Certified Sex Educator subsidized tuition (remainder from last year)
- Programming: First Fridays, Inaugural Women’s Retreat, WLA Luncheon/Annual Meeting
- Advocacy: New Yorkers United for Childcare. Remaining advocacy funds will be distributed per the membership’s decision making in June.

Transformation

By all accounts, the Women’s Retreat was a success and hopefully will be a yearly tradition. While WLA did not facilitate the retreat we did provide a near \$1000 grant to subsidize the cost for participants. Four members of the WLA Executive Board attended the retreat. There is energy for WLA members to take on the planning for the retreat and in so doing, there is support for the idea that the WLA by-laws could be amended so that each of the 3 members-at-large have a focus/responsibility to lead different aspects of member interest which included:

- Social justice/advocacy - special interest and collaboration with other First U organizations
- Social/support meetings - monthly or bi monthly
- Retreat planning – yearly

Report completed by Vicki Antonini & Julie Elting

APPENDECES

MISSION STATEMENT AND RIGHT RELATIONS COVENANT

*Purpose Statement: The First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn
is a joyful, loving, religious community that inspires and empowers people to
Grow spiritually, Care for one another, and Work for social justice and stewardship of the earth
Adopted by the Congregation - May 17, 2015*

Right Relations Covenant: We are mindful that, as individuals and members of this spiritual community, we are each accountable for our words, deeds, and behavior. Therefore, whenever we worship, work together, or relate to one another, we agree to follow the following behavior covenant. I will strive to:

- **Respect and cherish** diversities of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual and/or affectional orientation, identity/gender expression, age, ability, beliefs and ideas.
- Assume good intentions. Trust in and speak well of one another. Give the benefit of the doubt. Examine my own intentions.
- Foster an environment of compassion, generosity, fellowship, and creativity. Smile and be welcoming. Share in the responsibilities of congregational life. Actively support the congregation's activities, and pledge financial support.
- Express appreciation and gratitude for the rich variety of gifts and talents shared among us. Empower others.
- Speak the truth as I experience it with kindness, care, and respect.
- Make decisions democratically through agreed-upon processes. Promote fairness and decency. Speak out against injustice.
- Face others directly in agreement or disagreement. Act with respect and humility when I disagree with others.
- Be mindful that words and actions may cause unintended pain.
- Seek out understanding and wisdom in the presence of conflict. Resolve conflicts through intentional compromise and collaboration and, when necessary, request mediation. Understand that sometimes it is necessary to take "no" for an answer. Be forgiving.
- Practice self-care.
- Be open to hope.

LIFECYCLE EVENTS

Births

- Ayaan Bero-Chatrath (February 7, 2025) Son of Julie Bero and Rishi Chatrath, brother of Nico Bero-Chatrath

Blessings

- NoraRose Sheth (February 22, 2025) Child of Jay & Andrea Sheth
- Zoe Rose Ogin (April 5, 2025) Child of Tamara Dottin & Todd Ogin

Deaths

- Barbara Kennedy (November 13, 2024)
- Alfred Kohler (January 30, 2025)
- Derek Pearl (September 18, 2024)
- Maria Petulla (July 5, 2024)
- Rev. Patrick O'Neill (February 10, 2025)

Marriages

- Allison Derevensky & Adam Thomas (August 24, 2024)
- Ari Eisenstadt & Lauren Dunlap (August 31, 2024)
- Matt Billman & Kelsey Lange (September 22, 2024)

JULIE MCKINNEY MUSIC FUND DONORS

Patron (\$1,000+)

Jason Hershberger
Sponsor \$500-\$999)
Maggie Norris
Dirk & Julie Elting
Rick Smigielski
Wanda Lucibello & Art Hall

Friend (\$250-\$499)

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Mark & Mandy Rinzel
Mike & Sara Alcott
Cara Haft
Sharon & Tom Kennedy
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Kali & Asher Sosinsky
Bill Wasik & Monica Murphy
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Marci Lucia & Amit Mehta

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Contributor (up to \$99)

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