

Annual Report Church Year 2023-24



Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
President's Report	2
Ministry and Worship	4
Minister's Report	4
Children's Programs	6
Worship Arts Team	6
Choir Team	6
Adult Faith Formation Team	7
Administration, Finance, Leadership	8
Treasurer's Report	8
Fund Trustees	10
Pledge Campaign/Generosity Team	10
Fund-Raising Team/Auction	13
Santa's Kitchen/Fund-Raising	13
Counting Team	13
Master Planning Team	14
Building and Grounds	16
Safe Congregation Committee	17
Leadership Committee	17
Committee on Ministry/Transition Team	18
Communications and AV and Technology Teams	19
Mission	20
The Wider UU World Team (Denominational Affairs)	20
Outreach Committee	23
Social Justice Committee	24
Sanctuary and Immigration Team	25
Found House	26
Partner Church Team	27
Community	28
Caring Team	28
Membership Team	28
Spirit Connections Team	29
Art Team	29
Men's Group	30
LGBTQ+ Community	30
Kitchen Coffee Team	31
EarthSpirit	31

St. John's Mission Statement

St. John's is committed to creating a safe and caring community, working for peace and social justice, and celebrating beliefs that respect freedom of thought.

President's Report

Melissa Rowland, President of the Board of Trustees

This has, again, been a year of many changes. Most notably, Rev. Jennifer Gracen joined us in August of 2023 as our interim minister. In the first few months of her time with us we decided to extend her contract from 1 to 2 years and then to 3 years. We are blessed to have such a skilled minister to guide us in this time of transition.

As a result of the listening circles last year, the board created goals to work towards this year. Mission, anti-oppression/anti-racism and right relations have guided our work this past year. At each board meeting we revisit these three broad goals to look for where we have made progress. We plan to do a 2024 fall listening session with the congregation because listening is important to a healthy community.

While Lyn O'Brien began the church year as Finance Director, family responsibilities required her to step down mid year. We thank Lyn for the time served. Meredith Green was appointed to be the new Finance Director. We thank Meredith for being willing to jump in mid-year.

Church services continue to be offered in person as well as live or on your own schedule from our YouTube channel. Thank you Roberto Henriquez, Claire Wagner, our online ushers and the whole AV Team.

Since last fall all board meetings have been on Zoom to open up access to many members who were previously unable to attend the meetings. The Board continued to provide time for members to address the board to share their thoughts and feelings after each meeting. We continue to encourage everyone to join the Board at regularly scheduled meetings, see how meetings run and share your thoughts with your St. John's Board of Trustees.

Thanks to the Master Planning Team – Matt Cowperthwait, Cliff Shisler, Kathy Shell, Tony Potochnik, Joetta Prost - construction was completed in the sanctuary last summer. The Master Planning Team, after taking a much needed break, is beginning to pick back up to carry us into the next phase of our building improvements.

St. John's auction had many choices of events, wine, food, and art of all kinds. We raised over \$9,000 this year and many of us will look forward to events purchased at the auction for many months to come. Thanks to Erin Zoller and her team of volunteers, as well as all who donated and purchased.

St. John's members participated in wider faith community events including bringing Deeper Than the Skin to St. Johns and First Unitarian Church for a weekend of music with a focus on racial justice. With Wanda Crawford's dedicated leadership St. John's successfully hosted unhoused families through Found House, deepening our support for Cincinnati area families struggling with housing.

Our Music Director Rob Thacker has worked with the choir to create beautiful and powerful anthems throughout the year. We are grateful to have skillful leadership and dedicated choir members. We are grateful to have Steven Variames supporting the Choir and the congregation with his skillful piano playing.

Many groups of members and friends volunteer to support our church community. Building and Grounds Team oversees all property maintenance to include building, landscaping and parking areas. The Caring Circle helps members and friends with transportation and meals during difficult times. The Outreach Committee educates St. John's about deserving community organizations that benefit from our financial and volunteer contributions. The Spirit and Connections Teams joined forces this year and became the Spirit Connections Team, to recognize volunteers and welcome new members.

I can't possibly include everyone in this one document. We are very thankful that so many of us have supported each other and our community through so many kind acts, giving of your time and talent.

We appreciate Nancy Greenlee, our dedicated office secretary. She's recently had the challenge of reordering her office after recent break-ins. Our caretaker Jeff Flanagan, who is on medical leave right now, cleans and fixes "stuff" in all areas of the building during the week and also makes cookies and coffee for us on Sunday. We wish him a speedy recovery and hope to see him again at St. John's soon.

As I have continued my presidency this year I have seen members of our community rise up when the need is great and do for each other what must be done. This has been the first full year as president for me and I am grateful for the opportunity to have served our community thus far. Next year I will take on the role of immediate past president.

This new church year will bring changes big and small as we continue the interim ministry period. We look forward to considering our mission statement. What might it look like if we update and refresh the mission statement to better represent who we are as a community? We will continue to work towards the creation of a congregational covenant. We will work to create a right relations team. These are some of the ways we are moving forward healthfully into the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you these past few years. I look forward to moving our goals forward in the next year as your immediate past president.

Ministry and Worship

Minister's Report

Rev. Jenn Gracen, Interim Minister

"Every day, we write the future / Together, we sign it / Together, we declare it / We share it / For this truth marches on / Inside each of us." - Amanda Gorman

As we reflect on the 2023-2024 church year, it is with hope and gratitude that I submit this report. Our time together has been marked by this congregation's resilience, strength, and commitment to healing and moving forward. During this transition period, St. John's has deepened our connections, exemplified by the return of potlucks sponsored by the Connections Team, our successful auction, the Chalice Circles organized by the Adult RE Committee and more. These opportunities for fellowship and spiritual deepening have reinforced the bonds within our community and provided a sense of continuity and stability.

This past year has been one of significant transition and transformation for our congregation. As your interim minister, I have witnessed the strength and adaptability of our community as we embarked on a journey of self-discovery and renewal. Building relationships and trust has been a key focus, and I have come to love St. John's deeply. We tried new initiatives, such as theme-based ministry using Soul Matters materials, which provided a cohesive framework for our services. The themes for this year—Welcome, Heritage, Generosity, Mystery, Liberating Love, Justice & Equity, Transformation, Interdependence, Pluralism, and Renewal—have resonated deeply with many of you and have guided much of our worship and community life. We also experimented with shifting the Order of Worship. Additionally, we held two intergenerational services and a joint Blue Christmas service. EarthSpirit led our Samhain service and a Winter Solstice service, while Rob and the choir enriched our congregational life with two music-focused services.

Despite significant staffing challenges, the core strength and resilience of this congregation remain strong. We faced the departure of two staff members at the beginning of 2024, although, to our delight, one has since returned. Another staff member took an extended personal leave, and recently another staff member started medical leave. These transitions, coupled with welcoming new ministerial leadership, created additional turbulence. However, the dedication of our board and congregation has helped us navigate these changes. The board and I have worked on addressing staff needs, launching searches for new staff and establishing an ad hoc benefits team. This team worked diligently through the UUA's Benefits Tune-Up Workbook to ensure our benefits policies are in line with legal, ethical, and congregational standards. As a result, the board voted on several beneficial changes, enhancing our ability to support and onboard staff effectively.

We have made progress on the goals we established with the board, including handling conflict, progressing towards being an anti-racist congregation, and ensuring our mission guides us. The content of these goals and much of the board's work stem from the listening sessions held during Rev. Alice's tenure. These sessions were instrumental in helping St. John's heal and move forward. While we are not done healing, the progress we have made is significant. Celebrating St. John's 100 years as a Unitarian congregation in April highlighted its profound impact on Cincinnati and its members, reminding us of our rich heritage and the vital role this congregation plays in the community.

Regarding our mission, we have started incorporating it more into our services and are working towards deeper engagement with our purpose and direction. The mission—creating a safe, caring community, working for peace and social justice, and celebrating freedom of thought—serves as our guide. Leadership remains a challenge due to vacancies, but we aim to support and train new leaders in the coming year. Our connections with other congregations through the UU Council of Greater Cincinnati and participation in regional and UUA activities are strong. These relationships have provided invaluable support and resources, enhancing our ability to serve both our congregation and the wider community.

Preparing for the next phase of leadership is woven throughout our work as a congregation. This includes not only developing new leaders but also ensuring that our mission and vision align with our future goals. I look forward to the next two years of this journey with you. Together, we will continue to build on our strengths, address our challenges, and navigate the transitions ahead. Your dedication, resilience, and commitment to our shared values give me great confidence in our future. Thank you for your trust and partnership in this transformative journey.

Children's Programs

Rev. Jenn Gracen, Interim Minister (Director position open)

The Children's RE program has undergone significant transitions this year. We are currently searching for a new Director of Religious Education following the resignation of our previous director in January 2024. During this transition, Rev. Jenn and the worship team have worked diligently to make the services more accessible to children and families. Several individuals have stepped in to provide Children's Religious Education in the interim, and we are deeply grateful to everyone who has helped sustain this vital part of our life together.

Worship Arts Team

Rev. Jenn Gracen, Interim Minister (Team Leader position open)

The Worship Arts Team collaborates closely with the minister to plan our services, especially when Rev. Jenn is away. Together, we brainstorm ways to enhance worship experiences and better serve our congregation. Earlier this year, Rita, a valuable member, stepped down as committee chair. Currently, Rev. Jenn leads the committee, focusing on its growth and strength. We're actively seeking a chair or co-chair, as well as additional Worship Associates.

We've smoothly navigated several transitions in worship. The Worship Associates have adjusted to working with our new minister. Under Rob's guidance, the music program successfully managed the temporary absence of our pianist. When our AV staff member, Roberto, resigned, volunteers and the temporary replacement, C.J. Hastings, stepped in admirably. We're thrilled that Roberto's circumstances shifted, allowing him to return as our permanent AV person.

We're also exploring small tweaks to our standard order of service, such as changing the chalice lighting more frequently and restructuring some liturgical elements. These adjustments aim to keep our worship dynamic and engaging for everyone.

Choir Team

Kathy Rentz, Team Leader

Other members: Randy Altenau, Meg Harman, Emily Hodges, Dave Rentz, Stephen Variames; Ex officio: Rob Thacker (Music Director). It was another successful and rewarding year for the St. John's choir owing to Rob's great leadership and the dedication of 20+ regularly attending choir members. The most challenging part of the choir year for Rob was ensuring that we had an accompanist and the church had a pianist while Stephen Variames was on personal leave for several months. But Rob rose to the challenge well, as described below, while enabling the choir to provide beautiful music on two or three Sundays a month, including two choral services, one in December and one in May, both featuring a wide variety of great choral pieces.

Topic-by-Topic Report

Accompanist: In November of 2023, Stephen needed to step away from his pianist duties for personal reasons. Rob was able to secure a temporary pianist through CCM Talent for Hire, Nikki Wei, a doctoral student. Nikki played through the rest of November and our choral service in December and then had to leave for the holidays. She helped recruit Tianyi (Vera) Lu, also a CCM student, who played for the Christmas Eve service and into mid-January. Vera was quite inexperienced, but, with Rob's guidance, she

managed well enough. Nikki returned briefly but then became too busy to continue, so Rob contacted Damon Stevens, a highly accomplished pianist and choral director who had applied for the job during the accompanist search in early 2023. Damon ably assumed the accompanist position in January and ran wonderful rehearsals when Rob had to be out of town. He stepped down when Stephen returned to the job on April 4th. We feel extremely fortunate to have Stephen back and to have had such skillful fill-ins as Nikki and Damon. Rob deserves enormous credit for doing what it took to prevent interruptions to the choir's work and the music for Sunday services, and for doing this without incurring any extra expense (the interim accompanists were paid as contractors out of the accompanist line).

Purchase of New Music: This year, \$300 was budgeted for new music, but Rob wound up spending over \$800, putting him about \$500 over budget (resolved by taking money out of the Guest Musicians budget line and the Instrument Maintenance line). Part of the problem was that the copyright/licensing fees, amounting to \$269, were charged to the music budget this year rather than to the church's operating expenses, which had been covering this expense. Rob would like to see these fees charged to the church in the future and also recommends that the budget line for choir music be increased from \$300 to \$500 (see proposed budget below). The Choir Team and choir as a whole are very pleased with Rob's selection of anthems for this past year and would like to continue to enjoy—and enable the congregation to enjoy—the same level of wonderful music next year.

Choir Events: Last October, the choir had a great day-long retreat to start preparing music for the December choral service. The retreat was held at Heritage UU Church, and Rob acquired the approval of the fund trustees and the St. John's board to use \$450 from the Music Fund account to cover the expenses. We hope to have a similar retreat next year. The choir also held two pizza parties to socialize and to try to recruit new members. We gained a few new members from these events and are looking for additional ways to attract people to the choir.

Instrument Maintenance: Stephen found a piano tuner to tune the pianos in Krolfifer and the sanctuary, at a cost of \$220. These will be tuned again before the start of the new fiscal year. Since two tunings will likely be sufficient again next year, the proposed music budget requests less money in this line than last year (down from \$720 to \$500).

Guest Musicians: Very little of this fund was used for guest musicians, as most of the guest musicians came either from Rob's family or the choir. As mentioned above, this fund did cover much of the cost of the choir's new music. Rob plans to bring in several guest musicians next year.

Music Outreach: This line in the music budget is intended to cover any costs for sharing our singing with the community, home-bound members, nursing home residents, etc. We made a start on selecting a standing repertoire for these visits this year, but the effort fell by the wayside when more urgent matters arose. The choir plans to pick up this initiative in the coming year.

Rob's Membership in the AUUMM: Last year, we added a budget line to cover Rob's membership in the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries. With the accompanist turbulence and Rob's changing work schedule, this item dropped to the bottom of the to-do list. Rob plans to join the organization this year.

Adult Faith Formation Team

Pete Asman and Diana Long, Co-Chairs

The Adult Faith Formation Team's purpose, as outlined in its charter, is to plan programs for adults in support of St. John's Mission and the UUA Seven Principles. In addition, the team may collaborate with the Religious Education Director concerning multi-generational programming. The team currently has three members, Pete Asman, Diana Long and Amy Monson.

The 2023/24 year was quite productive for the team. Below is a list of what we were able to accomplish:

- Reintroduced monthly Forums which ran from September through May. Attendance averaged 12-15 people and speakers covered a wide range of topics.
- Restarted Chalice Groups with three groups meeting and using the Soul Matters Small Group materials. There were 3 experienced facilitators who were paired with 3 new co-facilitators.
- Supported programs including presentations on UUA Article II, a speaker from the Islamic Center in December, Transforming Conflict book series with Rev. Gracen, GA Virtual Workshop on Divesting from Fossil Fuels, Workshop with Terasa Cooley author of Transforming Conflict in March, co-facilitated an 8 week series "Building the World We Dream About" open to UUs throughout the region, and more.

Administration, Finance, Leadership

Treasurer's Report

Chris Wagner, Treasurer

The Treasurer oversees the accounts and bookkeeping processes. Each month I review bank and fund statements, post adjusting entries, reconcile all accounts, and produce financial statements. I provide reports to the St. John's Board, team leaders, and members of the congregation. These reports include financial statements, pledge status reports, and detail listings for programs or administration.

Our Capital Status:

Our savings accounts and endowment funds are composed of equity funds, bonds, and cash. The overall valuations of those combined accounts rose by 4.9% this year. In fiscal years 2022 and 2023, we disbursed \$61,479 in endowment funds and used \$106,283 in cash reserves and gifted funds of \$40,472 to support a variety of major projects that included: implementing the new AV system; upgrading security; and engaging a consultant to develop a capital campaign strategy. We also hired architects to review our master plan as well as design and oversee the sanctuary wall reconstruction. We upgraded facility lighting and replaced the roof above Krolfifer. In FY 2024, no new capital projects have been approved and only \$2,883 was disbursed on projects other than the sanctuary wall. We have received \$726,765 in capital campaign pledges of \$1,014,408. Of the \$726,765 contributed, we spent \$583,363 on the new wall. We have a current balance of \$143,402.

Our Operations Status:

Because this report reflects activity through 10 months, actual income or expense items should be at 10/12ths, or 83.3%. Using that benchmark, we're exceeding pledge income expectations (thank you!). Other income (building rentals, Luedeking endowment, interest) has been received as expected. The auction, which brought in over \$10,000, occurred in May and is not included here. Proceeds from other fundraisers and unanticipated income have been less than expected. All in all, total income to date stands at 90.2% of budget with year-end actuals expected to slightly exceed the total budget.

Personnel expenses were under budget. DRE, AV coordinator, music accompanist, and child care assistance costs were less than budgeted due to positions either being unfilled or underperformed. Office administrator, music director, and caretaker costs came in on budget. Property expense is higher than the budget due to a marked spike in utilities costs. We also sustained more repairs than expected at increased costs.

Financial Statements Summary

Fund Balances	04/30/2024	06/30/2023	Difference
Operations Account [Fifth Third]	\$260,640	\$421,037	(\$160,397)
Securities Account [Fifth Third]	\$79,614	\$76,548	\$3,066
Union Savings CDs and Savings	\$61,610	\$60,252	\$1,358
Legacy Endowment Fund	\$290,896	\$282,172	\$8,724
Miller-Lorentz Property Endowment Fund	\$246,813	\$232,246	\$14,567
Music Endowment Fund	\$115,188	\$105,809	\$9,379
Total Fund Balances	\$1,054,761	\$1,178,063	(\$123,302)

<u>Income and Expenses (Operations)</u>	through 04/30/2024	FY 2024 Budget	Actuals % of Bud
Income			
Pledges and other donations	\$273,248	\$285,700	95.6%
Fundraisers and other income	\$4,369	\$21,150	20.7%
Income from cash reserves	\$8,418	\$10,102	83.3%
Total Income	\$286,035	\$316,952	90.2%
Expense			
Personnel compensation	\$159,312	\$218,375	73.0%
Mission, Religious Development & Community	\$24,985	\$38,402	65.1%
Admin, Board & Finance	\$19,346	\$26,575	72.8%
Property	\$34,805	\$33,600	103.6%
Total Expense	\$238,448	\$316,952	75.2%
Net Income (from Operations)	\$47,587	\$0	0.0%

Capital Campaign Status	Contributions	Expenditures	Balance
As of April 30, 2024	\$726,765	\$583,363	\$143,402

Fund Trustees

Nancy Johnson, Chair; Linda Heath, Secretary; Meredith Green, Finance Director

The Fund Trustees oversee the investments of St. John's three endowment funds and ensure that the money annually available to the Board of Trustees is spent according to the charter for each fund.

The Fund Values as of 6.30.23 and the amounts available for the Board to spend during fiscal year 2023-2024 (including unspent amounts carried over from prior years) were as follows:

- Legacy:	Value \$287,613. Available \$52,001.
- Miller-Lorentz Property:	Value \$232,246. Available \$43,308.
- Music:	Value \$105,809. Available \$20,565.

The Fund Trustees met by email on October 4, 2023, and voted 3-0 to approve spending up to \$450 from the Music Endowment Fund to pay for renting space at Heritage UU for a choir retreat/rehearsal to prepare for the winter choral concert.

The Fund Trustees met on November 6, 2023. They voted 2-0 to require that Endowment Fund requests be made using an Endowment Fund Request form, to make historical records of expenditures more accessible. They also agreed that Music Endowment funds could be used to pay for having pieces arranged or composed for the choir. The Board voted in June of 2023 to spend \$15,385 from the Legacy Fund for moving expenses for Reverend Jenn. Because of lack of knowledge of procedures for using Endowment Funds, this was done without obtaining review and approval from the Fund Trustees. As a result, the Fund Trustees requested an opportunity to educate the Board about allowable uses of each Fund and procedures for authorizing expenditures. This was done at the December 20th meeting of the Board, and a document was provided that could be shared in the future with new Board members.

The Fund Trustees will meet in May of 2024, to review a request from the Board to spend up to \$5,000 from the Legacy Fund to repair damage done by a break-in at St. John's and to help safeguard against future break-ins.

The Fund Trustees began working on Legacy Giving in 2023 and will continue in 2024.

Pledge Campaign/Generosity Team

Charles Spencer, Winnie Goodridge, Joetta Prost

Pledge campaign results can be analyzed and reported in a number of ways. How many people (or households) made a pledge of support for the next church year? How much did these members and friends pledge to contribute? How do these results compare to past years?

The congregation's **GENEROSITY ACHIEVEMENTS** this year include the following:

- Scheduling the campaign for only 9 weeks and connecting the end of the campaign to an upcoming special event – St. John's 100th anniversary of joining the American Unitarian

Association – helped encourage members and friends to pledge earlier than in the past. This had two positive benefits:

- o Early data about the pledge campaign results helped the Board begin realistic budget planning.
- o It reduced the amount of follow-up work for team members.
- The Pledge Team was grateful to work closely with Rev. Jenn in planning the campaign theme – *GROWTH & TRANSFORMATION* – and the service for kick-off Sunday. Rev. Jenn’s support for the campaign was significant.
- We set an ambitious goal of asking everyone to increase their pledge by 7%. *When big goals are set, there is the opportunity for disappointment but also the possibility of inspiration!* More than 56% of households did increase compared to last year, averaging a 12% increase! We are grateful for all pledges and we know that generosity comes in all sizes.
- While St. John’s membership number has decreased post-pandemic, this year’s pledges reflect a pattern of increased average giving. An analysis of St. John’s giving patterns from 2016-2024 is provided below.

And yet we have **FUNDRAISING CHALLENGES**:

- Last year, a slightly higher number of households committed to a total nearing \$278,000. This year, the Pledge Team anticipates a similar total amount. While more than 100 households increased their pledge or maintained the same level for the coming year, it is not surprising that there were also several members and friends who declined to pledge this year for various reasons. The combination of “pluses” and “minuses” balanced out to give us approximately the same pledge income as last year: \$278,000.

How are the GIVING PATTERNS of St. John’s members and friends changing over time?

FISCAL YEAR	PLEDGE TOTAL	QTY OF HOUSEHOLDS	AVERAGE PLEDGE
16-17	\$189,901	123	\$1,544
17-18	\$191,277	121	\$1,581
18-19	\$198,699	135	\$1,472
19-20	\$200,154	167	\$1,199
20-21	\$222,735	158	\$1,410
21-22	\$239,881	156	\$1,538
22-23	\$240,419	143	\$1,681
23-24	\$275,118	120	\$2,293
24-25	\$278,000	117	\$2,376

To provide perspective about our progress over time in creating a culture of increased generosity within St. John’s, the Pledge Team completed an analysis of pledge information for the past 8 years. As of May 8, here are the results of our analysis which includes our projection for 2024-2025



We see some trends over the past 7 years that are part of the context for our commitment to growth and transformation, along with the turbulence and challenges facing all congregations:

- Since 2016-17 the number of households has decreased, but the total amount pledged has increased.
- And the average household pledge amount increased after modest decreases through 2018 and 19.
- And looking at the similar upward slopes of total pledge amount and average household pledge amount from the 2019-20 fiscal year to the current fiscal year, we can have gratitude for those impressive increases.
- Some of the increase may be a reflection of members' recognition of the impact of inflation over the past 2 years. However, the team can see a lot of strength in our congregation and beloved community as we all consider ways to move forward.

Fund-Raising Team/Auction

Erin Zoller, Chair

Regarding fundraising for this fiscal year, we raised \$11,258 from the May 11th auction. We still have some outstanding payments, but that is perfectly normal at this point and we will be working on getting that together over the next few weeks. Expenses will be ~\$160 for wine, the \$500 initial payment for the auction software, and \$275 food expense, reported by Ann Schuur. This results in approximately \$10,300 net. This is excellent and one of our highest totals raised.

We will be doing the yard sale at some point this summer and I think that will bring a fair bit of money if we can get the community around the church to come.

Santa's Kitchen/Fund-Raising

Nancy Henry, Coordinator

In 2021 I had the idea of doing a no-set-prices bake sale to raise a little extra money for the operating budget. The idea came because many of us really enjoy baking during the holiday season, but we need an outlet for our products.

In simple advertising for congregants to bring food to sell (baked goods, breads, occasionally a savory) and explaining that one can "pay what you are willing," we made \$1174 the first year.

We had the sales on two Sundays before and after the service. People were enthusiastic in their donations and very generous in their payments. We put no prices on any item, and we learned that folks usually paid considerably more than what we might have asked.

This is an easy project; I advertise for volunteers to help set up and sell - and, of course, we ask for donated items. It's a fun time for everyone involved, and there are no costs to the church. Every dollar we get is profit.

In 2022 we raised \$1309, and in 2023 we raised \$1442. With such enthusiasm and support by bakers, volunteers, and buyers, I expect to continue to organize this on two Sundays every December.

Counting Team

Deb Potochnik, Financial Secretary

Team Members: Barb Conroy, David Strecker, Edie Holder, Emily Hodges, Karen Iwema, Kathy Shell, Patric Leedom, Rick Mitts, Deb Potochnik. We have a reliable and efficient counting team. No new members are needed at this time unless someone particularly would like to join our team. We have revised the forms used and obtained Nancy Greenlee's approval of them. Nancy posts the counting schedule in the office. Counters receive an email reminder a couple days prior to their scheduled day initiated by Barb Fowler.

Master Planning Team

Matthew Cowperthwait, Team Leader, Joetta Prost and Bill Luerssen

BRIEF BACKGROUND

Beginning in 2018, congregational leaders created a Master Planning Team to examine needed improvements to our facilities. Foremost among possible areas of attention was our sanctuary facade which had experienced leaking for some time. There were also many other ideas for how to make St. John's more welcoming and functional.

The pandemic interfered with our process, putting on hold the planning for fundraising and decisions about the possible designs that had been initially created by an architect. The Team resumed work in January 2021. Last year, that work culminated in a very successful capital campaign with pledges totaling over one million dollars and early payment of many pledges, enabling the initiation of a long awaited restoration to the Sanctuary facade.

THIS YEAR'S WORK

Work on the Sanctuary facade restoration had just begun at the time of the June 2023 annual meeting, with the removal of the existing glasswork from the Sanctuary. Significant work was put into preparing the Sanctuary for the construction, ensuring artwork was protected, and that the unique architecture would be faithfully restored.



Despite all the debris, the congregation was able to continue to meet in the Sanctuary and get a bit creative with it as we welcomed our new interim minister.



During the period of construction, members of the Master Planning team and Board continued to meet with Beischel Building Company (our contractor) and MSA (our architectural firm) on a regular basis to help guide the restoration. Some challenges were encountered along the way, such as when the original glasswork bidder backed out, and some things worked out in our favor when we were able to leverage the scaffolding to install blinds into the Sanctuary at a significantly reduced cost.

By the time the construction ended, the total cost of the Sanctuary facade restoration came to \$583,362 in expenditures, over \$60,000 below the Guaranteed Maximum Price bid of \$643,979 that the congregation had originally approved.

As the Sanctuary work concluded, the Master Planning team enjoyed a well-deserved break throughout the fall, and then started meeting again in Spring of 2024. Meanwhile, members and friends continued their payments on capital campaign pledges. As the team started looking to the future of what comes after the Sanctuary, the team has used the opportunity to reach out to a few groups to fill in potential gaps where feedback may have been missed. We have been using that feedback to help us identify potential next steps. The team met with both Beischel Building Company and MSA in April to help improve our cost estimates. In the coming weeks, we expect to receive a formal quote for several options to bring to the congregation for discussion.

NEXT STEPS FOR 2024-2025

As we move into the 2024- 2025 church year, we are excited by the possibility of how we can build our future as a congregation. We have moved past the necessary maintenance on the Sanctuary facade, and now have the opportunity to improve our Church home. As a congregation, the combination of our pledges, as well as a commitment of \$100,000 in Church resources by the board will help shape the financial portion of our next steps. Additionally, our needs and wants as a congregation – to improve accessibility, to support Religious Education, and to create a welcoming community – will help shape the other side of the coin.

As the team starts to receive feedback from our Architect and Contractor on refined costs, the team is looking forward to opportunities to share these with the board, the congregation, and discuss as a community how we would like to move forward with **building our future**.

Building and Grounds

Cliff Shisler Building and Grounds Team Leader

The Buildings and Grounds Team has three major responsibilities- Maintenance, Major Repairs and Grounds. Jeff, our caregiver, is responsible for much of the day-to-day maintenance of the building and grounds. In addition, I rely on a group of volunteers who help with projects as needed.

MAINTENANCE/REPAIRS/REPLACEMENT

In addition to the usual maintenance of the building the following was accomplished-Dishwasher repair, men's bathroom(basement) painted and refreshed, Haehnle and chapel carpet cleaned, sanctuary floor cleaned, skylight leak repaired, new nameplates for classrooms, overhead lights in Chapel changed to LED, kitchen sink unplugged, drainage from sloped roof to flat roof improved, new window screens installed in classrooms, lift bars installed in women's bathroom, handrails installed in sanctuary and chapel, lock placed on men's room bathroom in the basement, some parking lot lights replaced, windows boarded-up after break-in, window repaired and bars placed over windows, trees trimmed in parking lot, volunteers organized to clean SJ while Jeff is on leave, and Rich Overturf organized volunteers to run the kitchen on Sundays. And the boiler repairs are continuous.

LANDSCAPING

Thanks to David Terry, weeding is constant, flowers are planted around the church and plants are placed in the holder near the entrance. He has a flower garden and a vegetable garden at the edge of the playground. Vegetables from this garden are shared with the congregation. A Spring cleanup was organized and David directed the nine volunteers in weeding, mulching and trimming. Destroying lesser celandine is an ongoing battle in and around the playground. Upkeep of the grounds, including the playground, (weeding, etc) is perpetual.

PROJECTS IN THE NEAR FUTURE (within operating budget)

Clean the upholstery on the chairs in the sanctuary and elsewhere
Continue the war on lesser celandine
Paint car bumpers in parking lot
Place handrails where appropriate
Improve drainage on flat roof over Krolfifer
Replace rusted lintels over doors and windows
Begin installation of instant hot water system in bathrooms and kitchen
Repair and paint the entry stairways to the office and classrooms

PROJECTS IN THE FUTURE (if unlimited funds available)

New carpeting for the bema-\$500-1,000
Replace windows throughout the original part of the church-\$80-100,000
Replace AC units for the Sanctuary and Haehnle-\$90-100,000
Replace stove and refrigerator in kitchen-\$7-15,000
Replace the stove exhaust system in the kitchen-\$1-3,000
Replace passthrough window in the kitchen

Repair low wall on entrance driveway-\$8-10,000
Repair/replace/seal the parking lot and re-stripe-\$6-7,000
Rebuild the parking lot-\$25-30,000
Provide airflow and AC to the classrooms-\$8-12,000
Replace ceiling tiles in the rooms upstairs
Replace rusting electrical conduit on the roof
Repair the organ-\$50,000
Repair and re-seed the front lawn-\$5-7,000
Install an elevator between all floors-\$250-350,000
Install instant hot water system at all sinks and remove hot water heater-\$5-6,000
Install lift from sanctuary floor to bema-\$6-10,000
Extensive treatment and removal of trees-\$9,000

Safe Congregation Committee

Kathy Shell, Nan Fox, co-leaders

A year ago, the Safe Congregation Committee and the Security, Health and Safety Team became one committee. Then long-time Safe Congregation Chair Erna Olafson retired from the position and Nan Fox joined Kathy Shell as co-chair of the committee.

Background checks for key volunteers are being kept current, with Nancy Greenlee processing them on behalf of the Committee.

St. John's and the other area UU congregations have continued to be impacted by George Andrew Devlin, a Cincinnati resident who suffers with significant psychiatric illness and has an unhealthy/threatening preoccupation with Unitarian Universalism. Mr. Devlin was arrested in early 2023 after violating the 2019 protective order and contacting the churches again. The court mandated mental health treatment for Mr. Devlin. In March he returned to the community and remains under the restrictions of the protective order. Legal expenses related to this have been shared by the UU congregations.

In May, St. John's experienced a series of break-ins into the office. The vandals broke a window, made a mess, helped themselves to food and drink, and attempted unsuccessfully to open our safe. As a result, additional motion detection sensors have been added to our security configuration. The alarm that was activated by the vandals helped the police to apprehend suspects.

Safe Congregation Committee is always available for congregants should they want to consult about safety issues.

Leadership Committee

Bill Gordon, Chair

Members: Alicia Rosselet, David Strecker, Susan Small (Board Liaison)

Important Dates:

June 2 - Annual Congregational Meeting

May 5 (4 weeks before) – Date to post list of candidates for office, in public place and in e-news.

March 24 (10 weeks before) – Post list of positions to be filled, with information about contacting the Leadership Committee if interested

Committee Meeting Dates:

- March 10, 2024 – initial meeting; discussion of process; create list of positions to fill; suggestions of people to call for various positions
- March 17, 2024 – list people to call for as-yet-unfilled positions; we have people to fill Secretary, Finance Director, and Fund Trustee positions
- April 14, 2024 – status check; many people called but no new candidates selected
- April 21, 2024 – ditto; assign prospective candidates to call in priority order
- April 15 – May 21 – Zoom meetings and text messages to finalize list of candidates, assign responsibilities for congregational meeting

Process Followed:

- Identify positions to be filled by election at the Congregational Meeting
- List people who have already expressed interest in a position
- Review People Book and list of members by date joined to notice people who have been active but are not currently holding leadership positions
- Identify, from our knowledge of members, people who would do a good job in the various positions and assign committee members to contact these people
- Continue until all positions are filled
- Continually update a spreadsheet listing people contacted by position and date, and results

Candidates Selected

- Vice President – Wanda Crawford
- Secretary – Monica Pellman (2 years, to fill unexpired term)
- Finance Director– Meredith Green (2 years, to fill unexpired term)
- Fund Trustees – Linda Heath and Nancy Johnson (2 year terms)
- Leadership Committee – Emily Hodges and Rich Overturf (2 year terms)

Committee on Ministry/Transition Team

Edie Holder, Chair

The committee is up and running. This year we added two more members to make a full complement of 6 members total. Per our bylaws, members are added with half being nominated by the Board and half nominated by the minister. For continuity, we have decided on 3-year terms with 2 folks rotating off and 2 new people taking their place each year.

With Rev. Jenn's arrival, our name and focus changed to become the Transition Team. Our purpose is to serve the congregation during this interim time, to assist the interim minister and the congregation with the necessary transitions as we move past the era of the last settled minister and to look forward to calling a new settled minister. Our most important mission is to listen to congregants. Please don't be shy about contacting Edie Holder, Greg Terhune, Gay Glasscott, Erin Zoller, Mary Newman, and Bill Luerssen with any thoughts and concerns. The biggest question that needs answering is "How do we want to be together as a church?" Therefore, we require community participation.

You will be hearing more from us in the coming year. As we hope to hear from you.

Communications and AV and Technology Teams

Claire Wagner, Communications Team Leader

Delivering Services Electronically

We continued livestreaming services on YouTube from the sanctuary and having an online “usher/greeter” helping from home or in sanctuary. We miss our part-time AV-IT professional, Roberto Henriquez, who managed the equipment, improved the AV desk set-up and streamed our services and meetings. Roberto left in December but is still available when I call for advice!

Since then, we’ve had a temporary 17-year old streaming most Sunday services, and volunteers stepping in as needed: Pete Asman, me, and Monica Pellman. As of this report, we are still figuring out a long-term solution to stream services. We would like a few volunteers to run the system!

We still store most of our service recordings on our YouTube page so that those interested, and those curious, can see and hear them.

A church Zoom account was renewed again and in addition to several staff using it, a small number of church-related programming and meeting coordinators continue to use it.

A team of volunteers including Joetta Prost, Monica Pellman, Pete Asman, Bridget Shoe and I volunteer as online ushers for services. We just recruited a few more. Ideally, a long list of volunteers makes for less frequent service this way.

Lyn O’Brien, Dirk Iwema and Bridget Shoe helped with sound sometimes during services this year.

Communications

This year I again worked with the minister (Rev. Jenn), the board and others every week on Tuesday E-news emails and other emails as needed, all sent via a free MailChimp account. At my request, we switched from weekly E-news issues to semi-monthly E-news emails in February. I now edit the E-news on the 2nd Tuesday of the month and Edie Holder does the 4th Tuesday.

I try to keep an active presence on the church website, Facebook page and St. John’s CommUUnity Facebook page for invited participation of congregants and friends, where we can share more personal and specific information than on the public-facing Facebook page. Monica Pellman as board secretary helps post items to the website. I have admin. rights on that page as well as the main church Facebook page. Our Twitter account is live but not active. I post once in a while. **I welcome help in any of these areas!**

Doing much work with streaming, Facebook and the website leaves little time for marketing of church events and programs. If anyone wishes to help in this area, please contact me.

I also take photos of church people and events for use in media and social media. Does anyone want to help with photography?

Church Website

Our website uses a UUA-developed theme (design infrastructure) on a WordPress platform (technical pieces that make the design work). Our ISP (Internet Service Provider) is DreamHost, and since switching from GoDaddy in late 2022, service and support are solid. DreamHost costs less for nonprofits.

Internet at church

We continue to enjoy good Internet access following improvements made in 2021-2022.

Mission

The Wider UU World Team (Denominational Affairs)

Joetta Prost, Team Leader

CINCINNATI UU WORLD

St. John's is an active member of the **UU Council of Greater Cincinnati**, otherwise known as UUCGC or the Council. There are six member congregations of the Council. Here are some highlights of the work of the Council:

- A major initiative of UUCGC this year has been a continuation of anti-racism programming that was begun in 2021. This year a streamlined version of the UUA curriculum titled *Building the World We Dream About* was utilized as a framework for 8 gatherings conducted on Zoom from February to April. This programming is for UUs seeking to become better anti-racists and make our congregations more welcoming. Diana Long and Joetta Prost from St. John's joined with Linnea Lose from First Unitarian Church to serve as co-facilitators of the programming this year.
 - The cross-congregational learning environment provided by the Council's Anti-Racism Circles program has proved to be very enriching for the 32 St. John's members/friends who were part of the over 80 area UUs who have participated in one or more sessions of the anti-racism programming.
 - This year we were pleased to be able to strengthen the connection between the Anti-Racism Circles and [BLUU Haven of Cincinnati](#), an organization for Black UUs & UU-adjacent folks in Cincinnati.
- In May, the Council sponsored a two-part program titled *Deeper Than The Skin* presented by musician activists Reggie Harris and Greg Greenway. On Saturday they provided a performance at St. John's and this was followed by a joint service on Sunday at First Unitarian Church. This activity supported the anti-racism work of both the UUCGC and St. John's.
- The Anti-Racism efforts of the Council have resulted in the awarding of a small grant from the UUA's MidAmerica Region to support our efforts. The grant funds helped cover expenses for *Deeper Than The Skin*, as well as provide financial support for BLUU Haven of Cincinnati and a small amount to support the continued educational efforts of the Anti-Racism Circles. The Council's report on the use of this funding, titled *Dismantling White Supremacy in Greater Cincinnati*, is available [here](#).

- St. John's dues to the UUCGC (\$4 per member) support the work of the Council and also enable the UU Council to represent UUs on the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati or [MAARC](#) which works on social justice projects in the Metro area. At the fall 2023 planning meeting, displacement/affordable housing/homelessness and community violence intervention were voted as the social concern priorities for 2024. The planning meeting included people from many of the member judicatories that make up MARCC, including UUs.
- In June 2024, UUCGC will once again have a presence at the Cincinnati Pride parade and festival, as well as at the Festival of Faiths, now called [Equasion](#). BLUU Haven of Cincinnati has invited white UUs to join their outreach efforts for Juneteenth and other Black community events.
- St. John's three representatives to UUCGC this year were Carol Fencl, Pete Asman and Joetta Prost. We are grateful that Pete is also serving as the Treasurer for the UUCGC.

STATE UU NETWORKS

Ohio's statewide UU organization is known as [UUJO](#) (**Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio**). John Kachuba serves on the UUJO Board and has provided this report. UUJO is going through a lengthy transition phase that has occupied the time and energies of the Board this past year. Several months ago, the Board hired Rev. Will Humphrey as UUJO Executive Director. After a few months in that capacity, Rev. Humphrey resigned the position, but agreed to stay on as a volunteer. In May, Rev. Humphrey resigned as a volunteer, citing lack of communication from the Board and what he perceived as the Board's unwillingness to implement some of his suggestions. This led to a series of changes in Board membership, with Rev. Kelly Kelley and Tadd Pinkston, Board secretary, resigning. Jerry Griffin was voted on to the Board as Treasurer and has been reviewing UUJO's finances. At the May Board meeting, he noted that donations to UUJO were almost half of what they were only two years ago. UUJO has approximately \$25,000 in its treasury. The planned June 1 statewide UUJO assembly has been indefinitely postponed. There is some energy on the Board to engage UUJO more fully in the UUA's "UU the Vote" (UUTV) program as the presidential election nears, but the Board recognizes that it needs to do some serious soul-searching about its mission and purpose before it can again take a leadership role in any social justice initiatives.

Launched in 2020 during the pandemic, [KUJJAN](#) (**Kentucky UU Justice Action Network**) represents the 900 UUs who live in the Bluegrass State, including St. John's members living in Northern KY. During the January – April legislative session, KUJJAN continued to work with other KY non-profit organizations to lobby for restoration of voting rights for individuals with a history of a felony in their past. The (very-part-time) KUJJAN Coordinator, Rus Funk, was actively involved in lobbying on this issue, traveling regularly to Frankfort. He also collaborated with other organizations working against the so-called "Safer KY Act" (which KUJJAN advocates dubbed the "Safer for White KY Act"). St. John's members Rick & Connie Mitts joined Joetta Prost for voting rights lobbying in Frankfort. Now KUJJAN folks are gearing up to work with the UUA's UU The Vote (UUTV) program; KUJJAN has received a small UUTV grant to support the work of voter engagement for the November 2024 election. The first-ever in-person retreat for KUJJAN is taking place on June 9 in Louisville.

UUA: The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

St. John's, one of approximately 1,000 Unitarian Universalist congregations in North America, is a member congregation of the **Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, commonly known as the UUA**. Learn more about the UUA here: www.uua.org.

Proposed Revision of the UUA Principles and Purposes in Article II

Beginning in early 2023, St. John's explored the proposed revision of our UUA Principles and Purposes, which are part of Article II of the UUA Bylaws. In June congregational delegates at UUA General Assembly (GA) voted for the first time on the proposed revision. It passed by 86%, resulting in another year of study and a final vote upcoming during June 2024 UUA General Assembly.

In January 2024, St. John's Board was asked by member Howard Tolley to consider endorsing an amendment to the Article II language that is designed to incorporate the value of Peace. After consideration and discussion with Howard and other interested members, the Board voted to endorse this proposed amendment; there were sufficient endorsing congregations and the Peace as a UU Value amendment will be voted up/down at General Assembly in June 2024.

Last year, the [Article II Study Report](#) and a [video](#) about the report were shared with the congregation in January. This year we created [this summary](#) of the Article II development, amendment, and voting processes.

St. John's Board has appointed four delegates for the 2024 General Assembly: Melissa Rowland, Nicole Stanforth, Howard Tolley, and Joetta Prost. Alicia Rosselot was appointed as an alternate delegate. This year General Assembly will be online and all are invited to learn more here: <https://www.uua.org/ga>. The 2025 General Assembly will take place in Baltimore as well as online.

What are some recent ways that the UUA has supported St. John's?

During our challenging time of ministerial transition in early 2023, UUA Regional Staff provided invaluable support for congregational leaders and our contract minister, the Rev. Alice Diebel. Then in spring 2023, St. John's utilized the UUA's Transition Office process to apply for and be "matched" with the Rev. Jenn Gracen as our Interim Minister. Rev. Gracen is fellowshiped with the UUA, is a member of the UU Ministers Association (UUMA) and is an Accredited Interim Minister. In 2025, a search committee will be formed at St. John's to facilitate the calling of a new minister in 2026, again using the UUA's Transition Office process.

An ad hoc committee was formed by the St. John's Board in fall 2023 to examine the benefits that St. John's provides for our minister and staff and determine if changes are needed. Our benefit plans for health insurance, retirement, and disability are managed by the UUA. The work of this committee was aided significantly by assistance from the staff of the UUA's Compensation and Benefits Office.

How does the work of the UUA happen?

It happens because we – the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA) – provide the necessary financial support through the [Annual Program Fund](#) or APF (which is sometimes referred to as our "UUA dues.")

St. John's has kept its commitment to our Association of Congregations by providing our "Fair Share" contribution and being designated as an [Honor Congregation](#) for the past 19 years. This commitment and connection with the Wider UU World is a something for which we can and should be proud.

Outreach Committee

Linda Heath, Chair

The Outreach Committee awards annual **Outreach Grants** totaling \$2500 to local non-profits. This year there were six applicants and three awardees.

FY 2023 – 2024 OUTREACH GRANT RECIPIENTS

Jan 2024	The Willows Project – rent assistance	\$800
Feb 2024	Community Happens Here	\$900
Mar 2024	International Center of Greater Cincinnati	\$800
Grant Total		\$2,500

The Committee also selects 10 monthly **Split-the-Plate** recipients from non-profits suggested by the congregation. Beginning Fall 2024 Split-the-Plate collections will be on the first Sunday of the month.

FY 2023 - 2024 SPLIT THE PLATE RECIPIENTS

MONTH	ORGANIZATION	AMOUNT
July 2023	No Split the Plate	
Aug 2023	No Split the Plate	
Sep 2023	Am Fdn for Suicide Prevention, Ohio	\$377
Oct 2023	Planned Parenthood of SW Ohio	\$832
Nov 2023	Equality Ohio (LGBTQ+ rights)	\$676
Dec 2023	Heartfelt Tidbits (local immigrants)	\$479
Jan 2024	Crayons to Computers	\$605
Feb 2024	Recovery Center of Hamilton County	\$442
Mar2024	Wyoming Community in Action	\$572
Apr 2024	ION Center for Violence Prevention	TBD
May 2024	Transform Cincinnati (trans youth clothing)	TBD
Jun 2024	Fairness Campaign, KY (LGBTQ+ rights)	TBD
To Date		\$3983

Six **Outreach Committee members** are appointed by the Board of Trustees to serve 3-year terms. Special thanks to Charles Spencer and Howard Tolley, who are rotating off the committee for their time and valuable input. We will be recommending two new members to the Board soon.

Charles Spencer	2021-2024
Howard Tolley	2021-2024

Anne Septic	2022-2025
Ashley Cowperthwaite	2022-2025 (chair 2024-2025)
Marty Harrington	2023-2026
Linda Heath	2023-2026 (retiring chair)

During April and May, Split-the-Plate recipients gave, or will give, presentations at the **Sunday Forums**. The April interactive information sharing by the ION Center for Violence Prevention, Covington, KY was a definite success. By mutual agreement, we'll share STP names and information for the Forum Team's consideration next year.

Social Justice Committee

John Kachuba and Wanda Crawford, Co-Coordinators

The roles of the Social Justice Co-Coordinators, Wanda Crawford and John Kachuba are to:

- Communicate with and support the various social justice teams, notably Outreach, Found House, Sanctuary and Immigration, and Green Sanctuary.
- Financially support long-standing social justice partners.
- Financially support select social justice activities that may not fall under the budget of the social justice teams.

2023-24 Activities

- On September 19, 2023, the Social Justice Co-coordinators hosted a meeting called "Reimagining Social Justice at St. John's" for all social justice teams and any other interested parties. The meeting briefly reviewed current social justice activities; discussed broad social justice goals and how the various teams could coordinate their efforts; and reviewed needs and opportunities to help the teams achieve their goals.
- On April 23, 2024, John Kachuba attended an immigration workshop at which Rep. Greg Landsman, City Councilwoman Mika Owens, and twenty-four leaders from a variety of non-profit organizations working on immigration issues came together to discuss upcoming immigration legislation and how best to collaborate on immigration issues.
- April-May, 2024 – John Kachuba and Amy Monson devised a plan to collect used tools to build toolkits for use at the sanctuary at Clifton United Methodist Church. As Co-coordinator, John worked with the Sanctuary and Immigration Team and the Mens' Group to collect the tools and build the kits.

2023-2024 Social Justice Expenditures

Ignite Peace	Membership	\$400	July 2023
2024	Annual Gathering	\$250	July 2023
UUJO	Membership	\$500	January 2024
UUSJ	Support	\$100	January 2024
OJPC	Support	\$300	January 2024
<u>Woman's City Club Nat'l Speaker Support</u>		<u>\$300</u>	<u>March 2024</u>
Total		\$1850	
Budget		\$2500	
Variance		\$ 650*	

*Funds being held in reserve as costs for a new "Black Lives Banner" are being determined.

Sanctuary and Immigration Team

Sarah Loar Seibert, Team Leader/Coordinator

Amy Monson, Liaison to the Sanctuary at Clifton United Methodist Church

Claire Wagner, Liaison to the Willows Project Food Distribution

April, 2024, marked the seventh year that the St. John's UU Sanctuary and Immigration Team (SIT) began as a part of St. John's Social Justice Ministry. We have assisted our immigrant neighbors in partnership with other organizations and as an individual congregation. We meet monthly through Zoom.

St. John's UU is a sponsor/partner of Ignite Peace, formerly the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center (IJPC) and a member of the Immigrant Dignity Coalition, a program of Ignite Peace. Sarah attends the monthly meeting of IDC. Mary Newman is the alternate attendee. Any St. John's member is welcome to attend IDC meetings (4th Wednesday of the month). <https://ignitepeace.org/immigrant-dignity-coalition/>

We have sponsored asylees who have been in sanctuary at the Clifton United Methodist Church – officially named the Sanctuary Congregation Coalition of Cincinnati (with whom we partner). Amy Monson is our liaison to this organization and has been instrumental in its operation, communication and making sure that the families housed have their needs met. It is a never-ending job when families are housed. When preparing for a new family, she cleans, decorates and makes sure that supplies are collected – including furniture and clothing, food, toiletries, etc. She can always use assistance from volunteers.

SIT has collected food, clothing and other important items from our St. John's members and friends. We attend rallies, write and call our local, state and national representatives about issues, serve in organizations and meetings to promote the well being of our immigrant friends and neighbors. There are many other important issues to which we attend and also support financially.

Under the organization of John Kachuba, the St. John's UU Men's Group collected tools for immigrant families living in the Sanctuary at the Clifton United Methodist Church. These tools are to be given to the families to keep when they leave the Sanctuary. There were enough tools to give to other immigrant families as needed.

Claire Wagner organized St. John's members (Donna Czarnecki, Pat Brown, Chris Wagner and Claire) to help distribute donated food on Fridays at two apartment complexes where mostly Guatemalan immigrants live. This is part of the Willow's Project.

<https://sites.google.com/willowsproject.org/willows-project/the-willows-project?authuser=0>

Claire can always use assistance from additional volunteers. Donna goes weekly to pick up donated prepared meals and soups from La Soupe to distribute. Claire thanks those who have supplied plastic bags – both for bagging family-size portions of donated food that comes in gross amounts, and for carrying food home.

St. John's Outreach Team also provided an \$800 check to the Willows Project last winter, which was used to help immigrants cover rent. It was greatly appreciated.

Claire Wagner and Linda Ford of our SIT team and the Mt. Auburn Presbyterian Church, updated our [Welcoming the Stranger slide presentation](#). Along with John Kachuba, Don Sherman of The Willows, and

powerful testimony from Maryam Fareed, a meaningful joint service was provided on July 9th at First Unitarian Church.

St. John's Mittens and More Tree donated many socks, hats, mittens, underwear and more to the Willows recipients and other residents from the apartments in December. All were appreciative. Claire reported that she saw hats from St. John's on heads the following weeks.

Our monthly meeting currently takes place by Zoom on the 2nd Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. John Kachuba hosts the meetings on his Zoom account. St. John's members and friends are always welcome to attend. If you would like to be on our e-mail list so that you can receive notifications, please send your e-mail address to Sarah Loar Seibert at the e-mail address above.

Found House

Wanda Crawford, Team Leader

Found House Team Members: Laura Bange, Nancy Henry, Emily Hodges, Amy Monson, Matthew Peterson, Charles Spencer

The Found House program operated on a provisional basis in 2023, with its own budget line within Social Justice. In December, after a successful first host week and a report from the team leader, the Board approved Found House to continue as a regular social justice program, hosting two weeks per year.

St. John's first week as a host congregation, Oct. 15-22, 2023 was remarkably smooth. The four guest families included 17 individuals (5 adults + 12 children ages 1-18). The families were easy to work with and considerate of each other. No volunteers got sick, requiring last-minute fill-ins.

Support from partner congregations was even more than expected. Support included volunteers on five of seven evenings, gift bags for each child, and Rae Jane Araujo of Heritage UU in the major role of week co-coordinator. Heritage was heavily involved throughout the week, and Cincinnati Southern Baptist provided an abundant, popular meal. A new connection with Our Lady of the Rosary brought an experienced family who have been involved with Found House/IHN for twenty years. First Unitarian provided bedding and other durable supplies from their program on a long-term loan basis. First UCC in College Hill lent their cots. (They are still actively hosting so we returned the cots before their next host week).

Among St. Johners, support for the program was broad. Forty St. Johners helped with preparation and take-down, from transporting cots to arranging rooms to buying groceries to doing laundry. (This number does not include the much-appreciated work of the summer decluttering team.) About 20 SJers donated items, including folks who could not participate in person. During the week, about 40 folks, including at least 6 SJ kids, provided supper, led play activities, stayed overnight and saw the families off in the morning. Some volunteered more than one evening, which helped the guests feel safe, comfortable and loved.

An essential part of our congregational preparation was volunteer training. Stacey Burge, the executive director of FH/IHN, provided training on best practices for interacting with FH guests. About 40 attended the Sept. 24, 2023 training, with several more viewing the recording afterwards. Feedback on the training was very positive; one could actually feel confidence building as participants understood more of the boundaries of their roles. Additionally, a detailed volunteer manual, developed by our program coordinator, was posted on St. John's website.

With Found House being a new and very large program at St. John's, processing our experiences in community is necessary spiritual work. Rev. Jenn led a reflection workshop on Nov. 4, 2023.

Twenty-seven adults attended, discussing their experiences during host week at tables in response to engaging prompts. Both the training and reflection included hearty snacks and plenty of tables and chairs to encourage community-building.

There were challenges during the week. Several of the guest parents worked second or third shift, so overnight hosts had to get up in the middle of the night to let them into the building. Overnight hosts knew this in advance and accepted that they would be sleep-deprived. Lack of a shower was inconvenient for the parents, whether they got dirty at their jobs or needed to care for a sick or incontinent child during the night. While we can continue to host without a shower, the FH Team hopes the board and congregation will consider it in phase 2 of building renovations.

Our budget was \$1600 for 2023-2024. About \$800 went to durable supplies (e.g. mattress and pillow protectors, toddler sippy cups, portable baby bathtub, sleeping room curtains); about \$700 was spent on groceries; and \$100 for training. We have requested \$1600 for 2024-2025.

In addition to becoming a host congregation, St. John's was a support congregation to Christ Church Glendale and First UCC College Hill in 2023, providing volunteers and a meal 1 night of their host weeks. As almost all of their host weeks were before our October host week, they were excellent opportunities for SJers to interact with FH families and see what hosting was like. In 2024, we have been a support congregation for First UCC College Hill.

Our host weeks for 2024 are July 7-14 and November 17-24. Found House/IHN asked if we could extend our November host week from 7 nights to 10, leading up to Thanksgiving, when the families go to a hotel Wed. night – Sun. morning. Staying longer with us means the families would not have to move to two locations in one week. After consulting with the Found House Team, Rev. Jenn, overnight hosts, and Rae Jane Araujo of Heritage UU, the overall response was confidence that we could recruit enough volunteers for an extended week, and the cost of an extended week should be minimal. This information plus a projected budget for 2024-2025 was presented at the Board's December 6, 2023 meeting.

The congregation has been very supportive of the program, and as more of us engage with it, interact with our guests, and learn more about the particular housing challenges low-income families face, our confidence and skills will grow.

Partner Church Team

Emily Hodges, Edie Holder, Mary Lynn Schuster, Team Co-leaders

The Partner Church committee has had a successful year with five Soup and Bread lunches bringing our account up to \$2,256.00 in funds that will be sent to our partner church in Nyaradszentlaszlo, Transylvania, Romania for use by their congregation.

For many years we supported a bread program to support elderly in the congregation as many had no pension. That was successful, that need was accomplished. Last summer, we sent funds to support repair and maintenance of a building.

There has been some difficulty in communicating with the congregation. They are in a time of change as well. Their settled minister has left to serve a congregation closer to his hometown. Bela-Botond Jakabhazi has been named the interim minister. He now has several congregations in the Nyarad valley.

(They, like the UUA, also have a minister shortage.) Bela speaks excellent English, has studied in the U. S., and has visited Cincinnati on two occasions in past years. We plan to meet by Zoom soon to discuss how the congregation intends to use the funds as well as explore ways to revitalize and regenerate our 30+-year relationship.

The UUA no longer officially supports the partnership program, but St. John's partner church committee and our contacts there want to maintain our friendship. To maintain this successful program, we need to engage more St. John's members. We want to invite others to an upcoming Zoom meeting (date TBD) and welcome questions.

We plan to continue the soup and bread lunches in the 2024-25 season. We feel that in addition to serving as a vehicle to raise funds for them, they serve as a wonderful community activity for our congregation.

Community

Caring Team

Sharon Loeb (Team Leader), Kathy Laufman, Ann Schuur, Nina Tolley

There are four active team members who communicate via email and meet via Zoom as needed.

We continue to send birthday cards, sympathy, get well and congratulations as we learn of congregant's life events through Joys and Concerns.

Our volunteers provided meals and transportation to families and individuals who had needs. Volunteers continue to be supportive, flexible, and generous.

We assisted with all memorial events through our budget and our time. We provided information about the memorial garden.

Membership Team

Ann Schuur, Board Liaison to the Membership Team

Although we signed nine new members since 7/01/2023, we have lost members through resignations, deaths and inactivity. We reviewed the Friends listed in the People Book and the E-News subscribers and removed some who had not come for a very long time, and added some.

The Membership Committee has struggled this year, as the Team leader has resigned and no new leader has been identified. Program Director, Ann Schuur, has been acting team leader. Greeter's team is going strong with nine members and they do a good job of welcoming potential new members. We encourage all members to take an active role in membership by engaging new people and participating in new member activities sponsored by the Spirit Connections team. We are looking for new Membership Team members. Our membership statistics follow:

167 active members
1 member emeritus
40 friends
11 resigned
2 died
17 removed due to inactivity

Spirit Connections Team

Gay Glasscott, Team Leader

St. John's Spirit Team (led by Lyn O'Brien) and the pre-Covid Connections Team (led by Gay Glasscott) happily merged and became The Spirit Connections Team. Our first meeting was held on Sunday, December 3, 2023, where interested, enthusiastic folks showed up with ideas on how to blend the two previous teams. We went through the usual introductions, including why each person was interested and felt they had something to offer.

We reviewed the purposes of the other teams and started thinking seriously about what our purpose and objectives might look like. It felt wide open, challenging and exciting for us all. The "all" I am referring to....Emily Hodges, Dot Wehrmeyer, David Strecker, Nancy Henry, Mary Lynne Schuster, Kathy Shell and me.

Our combined dream was to provide and promote numerous opportunities for anyone (members and non) to connect with each other and the amazing activities St. John's has to offer. We also wanted to acknowledge the volunteers who support our church and community, and to do that publicly.

Almost immediately, priorities surfaced. We wanted to bring back 2 old favorites, "Potluck Suppers" and "Circle Suppers". Our first Potluck Supper was held on Friday, March 15, 2024, and it was a wonderful success/well attended. Our second Potluck will occur on Saturday, May 18, 2024. We are hopeful that it will, also, draw a wide variety of St. John's....new and seasoned.

Our first (of many to come) Spirit Award went to Erna Olafson on March 17th, 2024, for her dedication in chairing the Safe Congregation Team and her countless behind the scenes acts of leadership and guidance.

Our new team continues to be open and inviting; we are always exploring new ways to creatively engage folks; we recognize that we are all in community together, as it should be.

Art Team

Anne Endress Skove, Team Leader

Sandra Geiser stepped down as gallery coordinator at the end of 2023. Anne Skove joined the team, starting in December of 2023. Since then, we have had several exhibits:

February: "Fuzzy: a touchable art show." Eight artists took part. They hailed from Ohio and Kentucky. We had an opening that was well attended. Participating artist Charlotte Reed, of [Art Equals](#) in Covington, created QR codes so that all the signage was accessible to people living with visual impairments. Another

participating artist, Karen Boyhen, brought artists from her workplace, [Visionaries + Voices](#), on a field trip to the exhibit.

March: The [Photography Club of Greater Cincinnati](#) had a beautiful show from March-April.

April: We exhibited work by St. John's members in what we call the "St. John's Invitational."

May-June: In late May, we welcome [Jim Slouffman](#). He will do an artist talk as well as exhibit and opening.

June: Wildlife photographer and poet [Constance Lee Menafee](#) will bring her amazing views of the wild in our own backyard.

Men's Group

Howard Tolley (Coordinator), Steering Committee members: Tom Darner, John Kachuba, Jim McDonough

Over its 37 year history the St. John's Men's Group has continued monthly dinner meetings at the church and an annual retreat. The October 2023 retreat at Twin Towers in College Hill began with a morning chair yoga lesson prior to a program on friendship and a late afternoon walk to enjoy fall colors and landscaping on the senior living community campus.

In early 2024 the group recorded predictions for political, economic, athletic, and other outcomes in the coming year to permit a scorecard tally in January 2025. Spouses joined for the May 2024 dinner at church and a program on Laughing Yoga. In 2023-2024 several newcomers discovered the group's fellowship of food and programs of interest. Those seeking to attend need not fear expensive dues or a membership commitment — none assessed, and walk ins are always welcome whether or not signed up for the mailing list.

LGBTQ+ Community

Joetta Prost, Coordinator

In years past, there have been times when St. John's had an active LGBTQ group known as "Interweave." That group, which had its roots in a national UU Interweave organization from the 1970's, has been inactive since prior to the pandemic. In early 2024, there has been an effort to 'reboot' the LGBTQ+ presence at St. John's. This grew from a sense that while LGBTQ+ folks are clearly welcomed by our congregation, the lack of visibility makes it harder for new congregants to feel included and meet other LGBTQ+ St. John's members and friends.

We are now in a re-building phase for the St. John's LGBTQ+ Community. We began by inviting those who identify as LGBTQ+ to join two "pizza and conversation" gatherings. Ideas for other fun activities are being discussed and we will be participating in PRIDE events, along with other UU congregations in Cincinnati.

All LGBTQ+ activities will be publicized in the St. John's E-News and CommUnity Facebook page.

Kitchen Coffee Team

Mary Darner, Kitchen Coordinator

The kitchen has been used regularly for partner church lunches, men's group dinners, newcomer's potluck, and by other medium to small groups. There have been some large celebrations with memorials and the church Auction. We've only needed to make one purchase of replacement glasses. We are still in need of a new Kitchen Coordinator, a new stove, and some remodeling to improve the kitchen, keep items hot, and accommodate large events. We are unable to get replacement parts for the old stove.

EarthSpirit

Shannon M. Tubb, Douglas Striker, co-leaders

EarthSpirit led a Samhain Service in October with an ancestor altar for photos of loved ones. We also hosted an evening Yule celebration in December with a bonfire and crafts for all ages.

Ravensong stepped down as leader after several years of organizing, serving as worship associate and crafting EarthSpirit rituals. Douglas Striker & Shannon M. Tubb, co-leaders, are in process of regrouping.

